

D U S T

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A HOWLING DUST STORM.

Opaque brown air thins to reveal a rundown farmhouse. Atop the roof, a WEATHERVANE spins faster, faster, faster.

A shutter SMACKS open. The newly exposed window has been boarded up strangely ... FROM THE INSIDE.

Feet sink, ankle deep in dust. Grains of sand lodge in barely parted eyelashes.

The hazy outline of a WOMAN against the horizon. The skirt of her dress FLAPS violently as she stumbles away from the house, blinded by whipping dust ... LOST.

A sudden, GASPING INHALE as she is CONSUMED BY THE STORM.

MAN (O.S.)

Margaret?

TITLE OVER: DUST

CUT TO:

AN OPEN MOUTH

Straining. Neck muscles taut like rope. The woman blinks -- Then, her POV: dust motes glimmer in the morning light.

The woman sits up, smooths her hair. One fluid motion. This is MARGARET BELLUM. She is pristine, controlled.

Her husband, HENRY BELLUM, half asleep, turns to her --

HENRY

Margaret, they're fine.

But it's too late. Margaret is up and moving down a

DARK HALLWAY

She stops before a closed door. Dances her fingers across the top lip of the DOOR-JAMB, finds a HIDDEN KEY. The door CREAKS open to reveal

ROSE (16) and OLLIE (7),
Small facsimiles of Margaret, asleep in their beds.

Margaret fixates on the RISE AND FALL of her daughters' bodies as they SLEEP. Then, suddenly --

Henry is behind her, waving a hand in front of her face.

HENRY (O.S.)

You awake?

Margaret turns, startled.

MARGARET
Of course.

HENRY
Better get to it.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - MORNING

CUH-CRACK! Margaret deftly breaks open a RIFLE; Henry hands her two SHELLS to load.

HENRY
Take it with you at night. Coyotes are skittish, unless they're hungry. Same with people. Also --

He holds up a spool of TWINE.

HENRY (CONT'D)
-- Keep some by all the doors.

Margaret crosses to Henry. Instead of taking the twine, she touches his face, smiles.

HENRY (CONT'D)
What?

MARGARET
You keep saying. About the twine.

HENRY
Just got this knot in my stomach.

MARGARET
We're ready. I just need to keep on top of everything. Look after the garden and the--

HENRY
Will you look after yourself?

Margaret takes the twine ... she's heard this before.

HENRY (CONT'D)
You could come with.

MARGARET
I won't put them in a tent. Lose what little we have.

She moves to the WINDOW.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
And I won't leave her out there...
All alone.

Outside, beneath a DYING TREE, is a lone GRAVE MARKER.

EXT. FARMHOUSE, PORCH - MORNING

The front door pushes through a mound of DUST to reveal:

HENRY. Opening and closing the door for effect. Margaret looks on, smoothing Rose's hair, Ollie on her hip.

HENRY
Switched the hinges so the wind can't
push the door in, but don't stay in
too long either. That dust can
swallow a house easy. Understand?

Margaret looks out and we CUT WIDE to

AN OCEAN OF DUST

Surrounding the farmhouse. Sand drifts swallow lengths of fence, swell towards the front porch.

TITLE OVER: OKLAHOMA PANHANDLE, 1933.

CUT TO:

Margaret carrying water to a homemade, waist-high greenhouse in the GARDEN.

As she moves, Rose and Ollie hop behind her, whipping Margaret's apron strings like reins, matching their own feet with their mother's FOOTPRINTS in the dust. A homemade game.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Rose! Still need to show you a few
things.

Margaret watches Ollie trot off to a nearby

DUSTY FIELD,
And begins spinning in circles ... imitating a Dust Devil.

INT. BARN, STALL - MORNING

Rose watches Henry approach the cow, GEORGIA, with a RAG.

HENRY
Love on her some while I do this.

Rose pats Georgia as Henry wipes dust from the cow's nose.

ROSE

Like this?

HENRY

That's it. Don't have to be shy with her. Gotta do this every so often. Dust turns to mud in their nose. Drowns 'em.

ROSE

Mom knows.

HENRY

Need you to know now too. Lot more for you to do while I'm gone.

ROSE

Like what?

HENRY

Like help with chores, and --
(quietly)
Make sure your mama's sleeping.

Rose avoids her father's stare, watches the cow's nostrils EXPAND with each shallow breath, struggling for air.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Hey ... hey --
(when Rose looks up)
You know why, right?

CLANG! Rose jumps as Georgia SLAMS her hoof into the wall. Henry stops, listens -- the WIND has picked up.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Always feel it before we do.

EXT. DUSTY FIELD - MORNING

Ollie stands stock still, DOLL held limply at her side. She stares into the distance, intense, hair dancing in the wind.

EXT. GARDEN - MORNING

Margaret looks up, squinting -- the WEATHERVANE changes direction. She turns to the

DUSTY FIELD,
But this time ... Ollie is gone.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Margaret scans the horizon for Ollie. NOTHING. Strangely, though, she doesn't call out.

Instead, she lifts a piece of BROKEN MIRROR, angles it until sun GLINTS off the glass.

Bright flashes of light dance across the dirt near Ollie's ABANDONED DOLL.

Margaret lowers the mirror. In the distance, she spots a FIGURE APPROACHING, Shimmering in the heat waves. "Who is that? WHAT is that?"

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Henry grabs a BUCKET of water, turns to Rose.

HENRY
You think a storm's moving in, wanna
get all the food and water you'll
need from the kitchen... Go ahead.

Rose opens the PANTRY, grabs a neatly labeled JAR of food.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Carry it around to the main house.
Otherwise you'll have to go outside
during the storm.
(then)
Shoot.

Rose follows Henry's EYELINE to the KITCHEN WALL.

There's a CHALK OUTLINE where a DOOR should lead from the kitchen to main house, but the renovation was never completed.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Wanted to get that door put in.

He grabs a ball of TWINE, opens the kitchen door.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Worse comes to worse, tie yourself
off here. Easy to lose your way.

EXT. FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN ENTRANCE - MORNING

Henry and Rose exit the kitchen. Lug food and water around the SIDE OF THE HOUSE ... towards the FRONT PORCH.

EXT. DUSTY FIELD - SAME

Margaret is still nervously searching for Ollie. Just as she lowers the MIRROR... BAM! Ollie POUNCES on her from behind. Margaret turns and tickles Ollie.

Strangely, Ollie SQUIRMS, but doesn't make a sound.
Rudimentary SIGN LANGUAGE accompanies Margaret's words.

MARGARET

Look.

[NOTE: Italicized dialogue is both spoken and signed.]

OLLIE FOCUSES, SCANS ACROSS--
Margaret's LIPS and POINTING HAND to the horizon. From shimmering heat waves, a LONE COYOTE takes shape.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Don't wander, Little. Not safe.

A strong wind blows and Ollie hides her face in Margaret's dress as we CUT TO:

QUICK MONTAGE:

Hands WRENCH water from fabric. A finger smears VASELINE below nostrils. A WET BANDANA clings to Ollie's face.

As Ollie breathes, the material DRAWS into her mouth.

EXT. DUSTY LANE - DAY

All donning homemade DUST MASKS, Henry BREAKS THE WIND for Margaret and the girls who walk behind him like ducklings. They trudge past an

ABANDONED FARM

Where a CHILD stands atop a SAND DUNE. The ROOF of a COLLAPSED BARN barely visible beneath it.

The child spins the WEATHERVANE like a top.

EXT. DUSTY CROSSROADS, CHURCH - DAY

Near a one room CHURCH, a handful of MEN bid farewell to their tired WIVES, toss BAGS into the packed bed of an

ANCIENT FLATBED TRUCK,
Which idles at the intersection of two lonely roads.

HENRY (O.S.)

Remember what I said?

Rose nods. Steals a look at Margaret as Henry wraps the girls in a tight embrace, furtively slips Rose a book:

"GHOST TALES OF THE AMERICAN PLAINS"

HENRY (CONT'D)

Don't tell your mama.

Henry stands and removes his HAT, uses it to block the wind from his and Margaret's face.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Kitten for Ollie, books for Rose.
What's first for us?

MARGARET
Just the house. A passway to the kitchen, curtains.

Margaret smooths Henry's worn BLUE CANVAS JACKET, glances down at his FEET, laughs --

HENRY
What?

MARGARET
And new shoelaces. Matching ones.

Henry looks down -- his shoelaces are indeed MISMATCHED. Margaret pulls him close. Then, quietly --

MARGARET (CONT'D)
I'll keep them safe.

HENRY
I know.

Margaret squeezes tighter, GRIPS the back of Henry's neck.

MARGARET
I love you.

HENRY
Gonna love me to death here, sweetheart. Sweetheart?

Margaret finally lets go. Henry turns to reveal bright red CLAW MARKS on the back of his neck.

Margaret looks down -- finds BLOOD beneath her fingernails. She quickly begins to rub them clean.

MARGARET
Must have snagged one in the garden.
I'm so sorry.

HENRY
I think I'll make it. You'll stop in on my sister?

Margaret nods. As the truck ROARS to life, Henry slips TWO COINS into her palm.

HENRY (CONT'D)
That's the last of it. In case you
need the train.

Henry hops aboard as the truck pulls away. Ollie runs after
to wave, but Margaret nervously pulls her back.

MARGARET
Stay close.

Margaret watches WIVES fall apart as they bid their HUSBANDS
farewell. She smooths her dress, checks her posture.

Seeing this, Rose straightens her shoulders too.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Margaret and the girls move past SHERIFF BELL (40s), a big
man with kind eyes, as he wrestles the wind to hang a POSTER.

When he stops to wave, wind RIPS the poster from his hands.
Sends it tumbling across the ground.

Margaret plants a foot on the poster. As he retrieves it --

SHERIFF BELL
Hell, that's ruined. Want it, Rose?
Somethin' to draw on?

Rose checks in with her mom. Margaret nods: "Go ahead."
Rose shyly takes the poster, which portrays a DUST-MASKED
FAMILY waving from behind a window, and features the slogan:

"KEEP INSIDE. FIGHT THE DUST."

SHERIFF BELL (CONT'D)
So how long's papa gone for?

MARGARET
Three months.

Sheriff Bell WHISTLES.

SHERIFF BELL
I'll check in. I know it can get
lonesome out there.

MARGARET
We'll be fine. Thank you.

SHERIFF BELL
Wish all these gals had y'all's grit.
Anyway, I don't mind.
(MORE)

SHERIFF BELL (CONT'D)
State's making me fill out reports,
kinda keep track of things since
that tragedy in Calabash.

MARGARET
Sheriff.

Sheriff follows Margaret's EYELINE to Ollie and Rose.

SHERIFF BELL
I'm sorry. Lord. Point being, this
weather can wear ya down.

MARGARET
You can't blame everything on the
dust.

SHERIFF BELL
True, true. Some people just got
rats in their attic.

He TAPS his temple. Another POSTER rips from its post.

SHERIFF BELL (CONT'D)
Dammit all. Excuse me.

ROSE
What's "rats in the attic"?

EXT. SMITH HOUSE - DAY

Margaret blocks the wind for the girls as they near the rundown house. ESTHER SMITH (weary beyond her years) waves.

Nearby, Esther's son JACOB (15) nods, keeps shoveling dust.

ESTHER
How'd my brother get off?

MARGARET
Well. There were quite a few heading out.

ESTHER
The last men standing.

INT. SMITH HOUSE - DAY

Seated at the table with Esther, Margaret leans her back away from the chair, uneasy in this MESSY one-room house.

ESTHER
Minnie! Put your cousin down. You'll get her dirty!

Nearby, Esther's daughter, MINNIE (8), tries to lift Ollie.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
I don't see how you keep everyone so nice, Margaret. Y'all seem to float.

Margaret forces a smile as Esther's youngest child, THOMAS (3), mid COUGHING FIT, crawls onto Esther's lap.

MARGARET
Will we see you at the sewing circle tomorrow?

ESTHER
(yawning)
Sorry. He's been at it all night.

MARGARET
That cold that was going around?

ESTHER
Started out like that, but it's gotten worse. Pneumonia they say.

Margaret stiffens, fixates on Thomas' RED FACE... Then, on Rose and Ollie. Esther notices.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Oh, it's not catching. Doctor says it's just too much dust in the air.
(bemused)
What are we meant to do about that?

Margaret notes the DUST covering EVERY SURFACE of the house.

MARGARET
It's a battle.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Margaret watches the girls run to the house. We slowly PAN OFF her face, across the parched field, over the dusty porch, and back onto Margaret. She tightens her jaw, DETERMINED.

I/E. FARMHOUSE - SERIES OF IMAGES

- Fibers of a BROOM fling dust across the floorboards.
- Heavy curtains ripple, snap TIGHT. Loosened dust SHIMMERS in the window light.
- Margaret performs each chore with steady precision. She whisks her hand across the girls' bed, smooths pillow cases.
- Then, she SUDDENLY STOPS... horrified.

MARGARET

Oh, my God.

- A DINGY HALO OF DUST radiates out from a clean WHITE CIRCLE where Rose's head blocked her pillow from dust.

- RIP! Margaret STRIPS the sheets.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Lips blow dust from a TEACUP. MILK pours into the cup, Margaret quickly places a saucer ON TOP of the cup.

Margaret catches Rose MIMICKING the procedure.

MARGARET (O.S.)

Heavenly Father, preserve those who travel...

On the table, NAPKINS are folded OVER the cutlery. PLATES are turned UPSIDE DOWN over the napkins.

VIEW ON MARGARET

And the girls seated at the table, heads bowed --

MARGARET (CONT'D)

... Bring them in safety to their journey's end. Amen.

Margaret lightly touches Ollie's back: "Prayer's over."

MARGARET (CONT'D)

(to Ollie)

Hungry?

Ollie nods eagerly. They flip over their PLATES, dish out food. Margaret runs her hand over the WHITE CIRCLES where the plates protected the cloth from dust.

EXT. GARDEN - DUSK

Rose and Ollie bathe in two WOODEN BARRELS. Margaret tenderly scrubs their ears, noses, necks --

MARGARET

There we go.

Margaret dips a BUCKET in the bath water, carries it to:

THE LONE GRAVE. Tenderly pours water over the HEADSTONE; dust melts away to reveal the inscription:

ADA JUNE BELLUM

"I will sleep until you come to me."

MARGARET
There we go.

The girls watch Margaret, who seems to dote on the grave.

ROSE
(re: the grave)
Remember her?

Ollie shakes her head: "No."

INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON the girls as Margaret SQUEEZES them tight. Then, she FREEZES. Eyes something off-screen.

ROSE
What's wrong?

Margaret stands. Wedges a rag into a CRACK beneath the windowsill where DUST has seeped in.

MARGARET
I asked your daddy to patch this
before he left.

ROSE
You think he'll see Pennsylvania?

MARGARET
No, too far east.

ROSE
Do the building lights twinkle like
stars or just... kind of glow?

MARGARET
I don't remember. But the stars
here are much brighter.

ROSE
I wanna see it. Meet grandma and--

MARGARET
They want to meet you too. Maybe
next summer. If the crops come in.

Margaret quickly moves to the door. Clearly a sore spot.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Lock this behind me.

CLOSE ON Rose's hand, turning the lock as we CUT TO:

THE HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

CLUH-CLANK. The girls' door LOCKS. Margaret moves down the corridor, melting into DARKNESS as we --

TRANSITION TO:

A DARK INK ETCHING. The OUTLINE OF A MAN is just barely discernible in a scrawl of BLACK LINES.

Rose reads a ghost story aloud by lamplight. Ollie nestles close, half-covering her eyes as she skims the TEXT --

ROSE

The Grey Man locked his lovely wife and five children in the bedroom, then gathered embers from the fire. He wanted to burn the six angels up, but fate had one more victim in mind. When he dropped the burning embers into the room, his baby girl reached for him, gripping his shirttail before he closed the door. The flames leaped higher, and the man realized... his shirt was caught. He grabbed the doorknob, but it seared his palm. It was no use. The flames consumed him. Now, during a dust storm, the Grey Man's ashes blow back together, and he walks the night. If you don't wear your dust mask, you'll breathe him in and he'll make you do terrible things.

Horrified, Ollie SIGNS to Rose.

ROSE (CONT'D)

We can't lock him out.

(beat, watching Ollie)

Because ... he can come apart, and sleep in through the cracks.

Ollie holds her breath, slams the book shut, SIGNS --

ROSE (CONT'D)

Don't say that. Mommy isn't the Grey Man.

(beat, watching Ollie)

Because, she didn't stop you breathing. She was upset about Ada, and she wasn't sleeping.

(beat, watching Ollie)

Stop it! She was trying to make the bed!

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Seated at her VANITY TABLE, Margaret opens a MEDICINE BOTTLE. Takes two pills with a neat sip of WATER, and moves to the bed. She glances down -- beneath

HER BARE FEET,
A thin layer of DUST has begun to collect on the floorboards. She grabs a RAG ... then, FIGHTING AN URGE, she stops ...

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Eyes SNAP OPEN. Margaret sits up, places her feet on the floor ... CRUNCH. Dust has BUILT UP during the night.

CUT TO:

QUICK MONTAGE:

Margaret sweeping, dusting, smoothing sheets.

INT. BARN, STALL - MORNING

Margaret heaves water into Georgia's trough. She turns over the BUCKET to use as a stool as she milks the cow.

Hearing FOOTSTEPS above, Margaret looks up through a HATCH in the ceiling to the HAYLOFT. Dust wafts down.

MARGARET

Rose?

A beat. Rose suddenly leans down, through the hayloft.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Toss down some hay, sweetheart.

EXT. BARN - DAY

As Margaret knots TWINE around the barn doors, wind whips her hair. She eyes the WEATHERVANE ... it spins faster.

EXT. DUSTY LANE - DAY

CLOSE ON the dust-masked faces of Margaret and the girls. They move strangely, seeming to LURCH with each stride.

CUT WIDE to reveal they are walking BACKWARDS to avoid the dust-filled wind.

EXT. SMITH HOUSE, PORCH - DAY

As Ollie climbs the porch steps, Margaret and Rose are surprised to see Esther's

SKINNY WHITE MARE

Hitched to a SMALL CART overstuffed with belongings.

Minnie trots onto the porch, barefoot and wearing a grotesque homemade HALLOWEEN MASK with dark gaping eye and mouth holes.

MARGARET

Minnie, where's your mother?

Jacob bustles outside, plucks the mask from Minnie's face.

JACOB

She's inside. Been packin' all night.

Hi, Rose.

ROSE

Hi.

Shy, Rose looks down, tucks in closer to Margaret.

INT. SMITH HOUSE - DAY

Pulling a JAR OF MILK from her bag, Margaret spots Thomas, faced away on the bed, COUGHING deeply as Esther packs.

MARGARET

You're not leaving? The wind's terrible. Must be a storm coming.

ESTHER

There's always a storm coming.

MARGARET

But where will you go?

ESTHER

Doesn't matter. Anywhere.

MARGARET

You'll be exposed in that cart, Esther. Unprotected.

(then)

Listen. All you need to do is make sure Thomas stays inside. Seal it up more.

ESTHER

Even so, it seeps. Through everything. I find it in the oddest places.

In a daze, Esther rubs her ears, feeling for dust.

Thomas COUGHS LOUDER. Margaret fixates on the boy's sinewy back -- muscles constricting with each GASPING COUGH.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Last night, he wouldn't stop coughing
and--

MARGARET
Couldn't.

ESTHER
How's that?

MARGARET
He couldn't stop coughing.

Esther pours milk into a TEACUP for Thomas.

ESTHER
Of course... And I had this dream
where I stuffed handkerchiefs into
his mouth, over and over until he...
(sotto)
...Stopped. Margaret, he... I--

MARGARET
Here.

Margaret interrupts to place a saucer ON TOP of Thomas' cup.

ESTHER
Oh, thank you... I just hope you
know all you done to keep us going.
Our very own Seraphim.

MARGARET
It's just a bit of milk.

ESTHER
Well. It got us through.

Just then, Ollie appears and tugs on Esther's dress.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
(slowly, loudly)
WANNA MAGIC TRICK?

MARGARET
Not now, Little.

ESTHER
It's okay.

Esther takes the HANDKERCHIEF from Thomas' mouth and makes it DISAPPEAR into her hand. As she moves to make it RE-APPEAR behind Ollie's ear, Margaret SNATCHES the fabric away.

MARGARET
We should let you get going.

ESTHER
Guess we'd better. The air... it's
poison.

EXT. ESTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Uneasy, Margaret TIGHTENS the bandana around Ollie's face.

ROSE (O.S.)
Mom? Mom.

Suddenly, Ollie BITES Margaret's hand through the dust mask.

MARGARET
Ow!

ROSE
It was too tight.

MARGARET
Sorry, Little.

INT. ONE ROOM CHURCH - DAY

Bent, arthritic fingers push a NEEDLE through fabric. Several WOMEN, including Margaret, encircle a QUILT-IN-PROGRESS.

Most of the women seem to have risen from the dust itself -- tan skin, straw hair, dirty clothes -- while Margaret's dress, speech, posture, stands apart.

BIRDIE BELL (late 30s, tiny with a PREGNANCY BUMP) and BERTHA BELL (70s, sturdy) -- question Margaret in tandem:

BERTHA
Just left?

MARGARET
Thomas has been poorly--

BIRDIE
But still.

BERTHA
Well... I'll be praying for them.

MURMURS of affirmation from the group. Margaret glances out the window -- Rose and Ollie run by, playing in the cemetery.

BERTHA (CONT'D)
It's good you brought the girls,
Margaret.

MARGARET

Why is that?

BIRDIE

Suppose you haven't heard about
Calabash?

The women exchange looks.

BERTHA

Drifter waltzed into this house while
the family were just outside.

BIRDIE

Ransacked the pantry. Found him
eating crackers over their baby.

BERTHA

No, Birdie, he'd already eaten the
crackers. He was just looking at
the baby.

BIRDIE

Oh...

JANIE, a wisp of a woman, timidly chimes in:

JANIE

He must've been hungry.

BERTHA

Hunger doesn't explain starin' at a
baby like that.

BIRDIE

Just starin'.

BERTHA

And it certainly doesn't explain
what he did after ... Killed everyone
but the mama. Said he was makin'
the children--

BIRDIE

Ghosts.

BERTHA

No. He said angels, Birdie.

JANIE

My Lord. I can't keep up with chores
as it is, how am I supposed to watch
out for fiends too?

Margaret clocks Rose eavesdropping by the OPEN WINDOW.

MARGARET

Easy. You just keep your guard up.
Always. People are monsters when
they're desperate.

Beat. Birdie glances at Margaret's QUILT SQUARE.

BIRDIE

Well I hate you, Margaret! What a
fine hand you have.

MARGARET

Oh it's our dream for the house.
I'll shade it in of course.

Bertha checks it out -- Margaret has stitched an elegant
outline of the BELLUM FARMHOUSE in black thread.

BERTHA

Fancy. You learn that stitch in
Philadelphia?

The women trade looks.

MARGARET

From my mother.

BIRDIE

You should have the center square!

BERTHA

We'll put it to a vote when the time
comes.

A long beat.

JANIE

They ever catch him? That drifter?

BERTHA

Not yet.

BAM! The window shutter suddenly SLAMS CLOSED. Margaret
starts, PRICKING her finger with the sewing NEEDLE.

A drop of BLOOD mars the pristinely stitched farmhouse.

MARGARET

Goodness.

BIRDIE

(looking out the window)
Goodness is right.

EXT. DUSTY LANE - DAY

With Ollie on her hip, and Rose behind her, Margaret RUNS.

OLLIE NERVOUSLY WATCHES--

The approaching dust storm BOUNCE with her mother's strides.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - QUICK MONTAGE

Rose checks the barn doors. BAM! Margaret shutters the house. Ollie grabs laundry, sees the DUST STORM upon them.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Margaret grabs a BUCKET of water. Rose opens the PANTRY.

ROSE

How many?

MARGARET

A couple, in case it's a long one.

Rose waves a jar of PEACHES next to her smiling face.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

We're saving those.

ROSE

Can't I just taste one?

MARGARET

ROSE!

ROSE

Sorry.

MARGARET

We'll celebrate with the peaches
when your daddy's back, okay?

Margaret takes the jar, moves to the pantry.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Where's the other one?

ROSE

I don't know.

MARGARET

There were two jars.

ROSE

Maybe dad took one for his trip?

On Margaret, unconvinced. She RE-CHECKS THE LOCK. Loops TWINE around the door handle.

Meanwhile, Rose SIGNS to Ollie --

ROSE (CONT'D)
*Bet the Grey Man ate the peaches.
 He's out here. Don't breathe.*

Ollie flings open the door, and takes off... Margaret PANICS --

MARGARET
 What did you say to her?!

ROSE
 I was just teasing.

Margaret unwinds the spindle of TWINE. Follows Ollie
 OUTSIDE

The air is opaque, but Margaret spots Ollie rounding the side of the house. Heading inside.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Margaret stops in the doorway -- a line of tiny DUSTY FOOTPRINTS leads to the STANDING WARDROBE.

The wardrobe door opens to reveal: OLLIE. Huddled beneath hanging clothes. Kneeling down, Margaret SIGNS --

MARGARET
Hi.
 (beat, watching Ollie)
I know you want daddy. Where is he anyway? Circus? White House?

Ollie smiles, makes an ARCH SIGN with her hands.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Work on a bridge. Right. Look.

Margaret unfolds a POCKET KNIFE, carves two NOTCHES on the inside of the wardrobe door.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Ninety, okay? One for every day.

She hands the knife to Ollie, who sets it down, SIGNS --

MARGARET (CONT'D)
*Bad guys? I'll shoot 'em. Coyotes?
 I'll... bite 'em.*

Rose reaches past, pulls a WEDDING DRESS from the wardrobe.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Hey.

ROSE

Can't I just try it on?

MARGARET

It'll be yours one day, then you can
try it on all you want.

ROSE

It's so pretty.

Rose stands in the mirror, holds up the dress, beaming.

Margaret reaches for Ollie, who scoots back, unconvinced.

MARGARET

What? What else is scary?

Ollie stares at a SMALL HIGH WINDOW on the bedroom wall.

As Margaret approaches the imperfect glass, her reflection
MORPHS, becomes GROTESQUE -- eye dripping, mouth contorting.

Ollie SIGNS again. Margaret turns to Rose --

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Who's the Grey Man?

INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Margaret's HAND runs over the ink etching of THE GREY MAN.
Her eyes scan the text:

"SEEPS THROUGH CRACKS" "BREATHE HIM IN"

ROSE

It's just a ghost story. I said he
ate the peaches.

Margaret closes the book, tucks SIGNS of Ollie:

MARGARET

Not real, okay?
(then, to Rose)
I'm taking this.

Rose GLARES at Ollie. The house GROANS like the hull of a
ship as the storm intensifies. Windows WHISTLE and CHATTER.

ROSE

Tell about the wheat.

Ollie presses the side of her face against Margaret's chest, feels the PURR of her mother's voice and watches

DARK SHADOWS SLITHER

Down the walls as Rose slides her fingers down the LANTERN.

MARGARET

The first year we planted, it just took hold. When the wind blew, the wheat would wave like the ocean. One day your daddy was late coming in, so I went to the field, and in some parts the wheat covered my head. I got so turned around I had to jump, and try and see the house--

FLASH TO: Margaret's JUMPING POV of the house appearing and disappearing behind UNDULATING WHEAT.

ROSE

Think it'll be like that again?

MARGARET

I do.

ROSE

Why?

MARGARET

Because it was before.

On Ollie, signing. Margaret nods.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Everyone started coming. They tore all the grasses up to plant. And it didn't rain, and it didn't rain.

ROSE

I heard Birdie saying there's an end of summer dance, but she doesn't think any families will be left by then ... should we leave too?

MARGARET

Like Aunt Esther?

(off Rose's nod)

Why would we do that?

ROSE

... I think Ollie's scared.

MARGARET

What about you?

ROSE

I'm not scared, but...maybe we should?

MARGARET

Do you remember why Aunt Esther came here? What happened?

ROSE

Uncle John's sleeve got caught in the machine.

MARGARET

That's right. Ever since Esther's been sort of ... helpless. She never made a garden like us. Let their cow wander off. Rose, they're likely headed for a tent. Crowded in and working for nothing. It wasn't smart to go, understand?

Margaret stands. Smooths the WET SHEET that now hangs over the window --

MARGARET (CONT'D)

This should help with the dust, okay?

ROSE

Mom? What about that man? The drifter?

MARGARET

Don't listen to those hens, Rose. They can make anything into a calamity, given enough time to cluck.

INT. FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Margaret strides to the front door. Double checks the lock.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Margaret opens her VANITY DRAWER, moves aside the coins from Henry and drops in the BOOK of ghost stories.

She swipes unseen DUST from the table, eyes the BROOM in the corner. Then, fighting the urge to keep cleaning, she instead takes one of her PILLS and climbs into bed.

MARGARET'S SIDEWAYS POV--
Of the bedroom door begins to SOFTEN.

CUT TO:

MARGARET'S SIDEWAYS POV--
Of the bedroom door RE-FOCUSSES as Rose SHAKES her awake.

ROSE

Mom? Mom!

Margaret sits up with a SUDDEN GASP.

MARGARET

What? What's wrong?

ROSE

Someone's outside.

INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - MORNING

OLLIE NERVOUSLY WATCHES--

As Rose presses her ear to the wall. Motions for her mother.

But Margaret is distracted by a DARK STAIN on Rose's pillow.

MARGARET

What is that? Blood?

ROSE

Shhh!

Just then, a SCRATCH TAP TAP TAP along the outside wall.

Margaret rips down the WET SHEET covering the shuttered window, peers through

A SUN-FILLED CRACK in the wall. SOMETHING DARK strobes past.

Margaret jumps back. Rushes to the door.

MARGARET

Lock this behind me. Don't open it no matter what you hear.

ROSE

Wait! Mom?!

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Margaret cracks open the RIFLE. Her trembling hands betray a calm voice --

MARGARET

It's okay, sweetie. Probably Sheriff Bell checking on us.

EXT. FARMHOUSE, PORCH - MORNING

Margaret shoulders the door through a MOUND OF DUST.

SILENCE. Hands clenched tight on the rifle, Margaret edges along the porch, peers down the side of the house to the girl's bedroom window ... nothing ... then, a CREAK from

THE BARN

Margaret approaches nervously. Touches the TWINE securing the door handles ... it's LOOSE.

INT. BARN, STALL - MORNING

Georgia paces anxiously. As Margaret turns to exit,

THROUGH CRACKS IN THE WALL,
We see SOMEONE or SOMETHING outside the barn.

INT. HAYLOFT - MORNING

Margaret climbs into the hayloft and scans each... shadowy... corner... but the loft is EMPTY.

EXT. BARN - MORNING

Margaret turns to find

A RIDER-LESS HORSE in her path. She laughs, relieved, but quickly realizes... This is Esther's WHITE MARE.

EXT. DUSTY FIELD - MORNING

Margaret ties Esther's mare to a fence. In the distance, a small CROWD encircles something UNSEEN.

On Margaret, arcing around the ONLOOKERS. Between the spaces of their legs, she spots a BODY buried in the dust -- a hand, a shoulder... boots with MISMATCHED LACES.

Margaret pushes closer to the body. Sheriff Bell uses WIRE CUTTERS to untangle it from a barbwire fence.

MARGARET

Excuse me. Sorry...

SHERIFF BELL

Back up, y'all. Just back on up!

Everyone moves except for Margaret who fixates on the BOOTS.

SHERIFF BELL (CONT'D)

Margaret? Ya alright?

Upon closer inspection, Margaret sees that the laces are NOT MISMATCHED. One is simply dustier than the other.

MARGARET

I'm sorry ... I thought his shoelaces
were mismatched.

SHERIFF BELL

I'd say he's got bigger problems
than that.

Bell turns the body's head -- dust pours from his open mouth.
Bertha MURMURS: "It's Jacob, Esther's boy."

Near an OVERTURNED CART, Birdie clutches Esther's CHILDREN,
turns so they can't see the body.

SHERIFF BELL (CONT'D)

Shoot. Must've got tossed in the
storm, hung up in the wire here.

MARGARET

Where's Esther?

SHERIFF BELL

Don't know. Little ones were under
the cart. Probably put 'em there
before she went looking for Jacob.

Bell goes to lift the boy, but Jacob's hand is entwined with
ANOTHER HAND. Suddenly,

ESTHER IS BIRTHED FROM THE DUST.

She LURCHES to a sitting position, SUCKS IN AIR, COUGHING...
Margaret covers her mouth, horrified.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Ollie, a black ARM BAND tied around her sleeve, carves a
NOTCH in the wardrobe door -- Day 15.

PREACHER (V.O.)

By the sweat of your brow, you shall
eat bread until you return to the
ground from which you were taken for
you are dust...

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - DAY

Sheriff Bell shovels dust onto Jacob's COFFIN.

PREACHER

...And to dust you shall return.

Esther is being held upright by several DISTRAUGHT WOMEN as
Thomas clings to her leg COUGHING and COUGHING.

PUSH IN on Margaret as she endures the unceasing sound. COUGH. She CLENCHES her jaw. COUGH, COUGH. Her breath quickens. Thomas HACKS blood onto Esther's dress.

Margaret's POV: Blood crawls through the cotton fibers of Esther's dress.

ROSE

Mom?

Margaret realizes that her fingers DIG INTO Rose's shoulder. She loosens her grip, smiles apologetically.

INT. SMITH HOUSE - DAY

A GROUP OF WOMEN encircle Esther; her body is limp with grief as Thomas sits in her arms STILL COUGHING.

As the women console Esther, Margaret busies herself with sweeping and re-sweeping --

BERTHA

He works in mystery.

BIRDIE

But he's a wise provider.

ESTHER

If Thomas goes too ... I'd just...

Bertha pats Esther's hand.

BIRDIE

All you can do, all anyone can do,
is hold faith.

BERTHA

Faith that He has a plan for Jacob
and Thomas. A plan more important
than we may ever understand.

ESTHER

Some things are just out of our hands,
I guess?

Margaret turns her attention to the state of the house -- DUST in the corners, GAPS in the walls.

MARGARET

And some things aren't.

(then)

You can't just have faith that He'll
do something, that it's "part of the
plan" ... or they'll die. We'll all
be buried.

BERTHA
Sounds like pride to me.

MARGARET
Pride can be an admirable quality.

BERTHA
Unless you step into God's realm.

Margaret sweeps faster.

MARGARET
Better than burying another child.

ESTHER
I tried to leave--

MARGARET
In a storm.

ESTHER
I can't change the weather. Can't
make it rain. What should I do?!

MARGARET
You might try sweeping.

Esther is floored -- tears spill over her eyes. Margaret
sweeps the pile of dust to the front door.

BERTHA
Just look in your wake, Margaret.
Is it any different?

As Thomas COUGHS, Margaret looks down and we CUT TO --

MARGARET'S FEET

And her DUSTY BEDROOM FLOOR beneath them. She eyes her
REFLECTION in the VANITY MIRROR, debating... then --

She suddenly opens her mouth. Spits out her SLEEPING PILL.

I/E. FARMHOUSE - SERIES OF IMAGES

Margaret cleans ALL NIGHT. She sweeps dust past the girls'
door. Scrubs the floor. Flings dust off the porch. Only
stopping as the SUN RISES...

Red-eyed with exhaustion, Margaret once again comes to a
stop in front of the girls' BEDROOM DOOR.

The floor is already dusty again.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Margaret whips open her VANITY drawer, pushes aside the ghost story BOOK to reveal: The COINS that Henry gave her.

INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Rose GASPS awake. Margaret looms over her.

ROSE

Mom? Are you awake?

MARGARET (V.O.)

We'd better hurry. We'll meet up with your father. Just until the drought breaks, and the dust calms...

And during the above dialogue we see --

A QUICK MONTAGE:

ROSE closing shutters. OLLIE gathering hay for Georgia, nervously eyeing the DARK CORNERS of the hayloft.

As MARGARET cleans Ada's headstone, she continues --

MARGARET (CONT'D)

...We'll come back of course. The train's much safer. Less exposed.

EXT. DUSTY LANE - DAY

Dressed to the nines, travel BAGS in hand, Margaret begins to hop. The girls hop behind her. Playing their old game. Then, in the far distance, a TRAIN WHISTLE.

ROSE

Did you hear that?

Margaret nods. Rose SIGNS to Ollie and they take off running.

MARGARET

Careful!

Margaret eyes a SPEEDING TRUCK approaching the intersection. Then, a light wind tousles her hair, and she looks away to the sky, worried.

As the girls run, Ollie's face grows RED; veins BULGE from her neck. Rose tackles her beside the road, SIGNS --

ROSE

Don't breathe the Grey Man in. Or he'll come with us. He's right here. Look.

Ollie refuses to inhale as Rose pins down her arms tickles her, and we see the

TRUCK. Hurdling closer, wheels GRINDING, dust in its wake.

ON MARGARET, distracted, eyeing the DISTANT TOWN on the horizon, the FARM in their wake. Checking the sky again.

Then, as the truck careens past the girls, a SCREAM. Margaret snaps to attention, but... a cloud of DUST, stirred up by the truck, obscures her view--

MARGARET

Rose?!

Ollie suddenly slams into Margaret's legs -- her face is BLOODY, her dress flecked with red dots.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

What's wrong?! Where are you hurt?!

Ollie flails, too rattled to answer as Margaret, increasingly FRANTIC, struggles to find the source of blood.

ROSE (O.S.)

Mom! MOM! It's me.

Margaret looks up -- Rose moves her hands away from her face to reveal ... a NOSE BLEED.

MARGARET

Oh my God.

Margaret presses a HANDKERCHIEF to Rose's nose.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

What happened? Did you fall?

ROSE

It just started coming out.

MARGARET

You're okay. You're okay. You're--

FLASH TO: Thomas hacks blood onto Esther.

ROSE

Mom! I can't breathe!

Margaret loosens her grip, FIXATES on the handkerchief -- blood crawls through the fibers of the cloth.

ROSE (CONT'D)

It's just a nosebleed. Let's go.
Please.

FLASH TO: Dust pouring from Jacob's mouth.

Torn, Margaret gauges their distance: TOWN OR HOME?

INT. DOCTOR COX'S HOUSE - DAY

CLOSE ON the curve of Rose's bare back, taking a DEEP INHALE.

Margaret looks on as DR. COX (67), cigarette dangling from his lips, moves his STETHOSCOPE from Rose's back to Ollie's.

DR. COX
Fit as a couplet fiddles.

MARGARET
It just poured blood. It wouldn't stop.

DR. COX
Air's dry. That's my guess.

MARGARET
Your guess?

ROSE
I feel fine, mom.

MARGARET
Rose. Would you mind?

Once the girls are gone --

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Esther mentioned something about the dust making Thomas ill? The air--

DR. COX
That's a different ballgame with Thomas. We're talkin' about constant exposure.

MARGARET
After Ada I just ... I worry. I told Henry she was feverish, but he said to wait. It would pass.

On Dr. Cox, registering Margaret's concern.

DR. COX
They're pricey, but got some masks for sale might help. Goggles too.

MARGARET
We were going to leave.

DR. COX

People packed together in those camps?
I'm tellin' ya true when I say it's
worse. Had one family, lost five
boys in three days to diphtheria.
You've got your garden here, your
house. Some control.

(then)

You're taking the sleep aid?

Margaret nods.

DR. COX (CONT'D)

Good. Good... You want my advice?
Keep the house sealed best you can,
wear those masks and relax.

HOLD on Margaret. Then, CLINK CLINK. She places the COINS
from Henry near a jar of COTTON SWABS, looks up nervously.

EXT. DOCTOR COX'S HOUSE / DUSTY CROSSROADS - DAY

Margaret (in her old mask) and the girls (decked out in new
expensive looking masks) exits. Rose tugs at the mask --

ROSE

It's sunny.

MARGARET

You wear them always now. Every
time we're outside. Understand?

Margaret re-tightens Rose's mask, feels her forehead.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

How do you feel?

ROSE

(muffled)

Mom, it's too tight.

MARGARET

It HAS to be tight.

INT. FARMHOUSE, MARGARET'S BEDROOM - DAY

The room is shuttered, dark. An OIL LAMP illuminates the
still-packed TRAVEL BAGS on the bed beside Margaret.

Sunlight slices through a CRACK IN THE WALL. Glints off
Margaret's eye. Dust motes flutter in the light beam.

Margaret blows out the LAMP. With no interior light source, every crack in the walls GLOWS WITH SUNLIGHT. An idea occurs.

CUT TO:

Fabric RIPS. Margaret wets the cloth, hands it to Rose.

MARGARET

Anywhere you see light ... fill it.

Water drips onto Margaret's focused face as she patches crack after crack in the walls.

Then, Margaret's POV: The SPECKS OF LIGHT remain infinite.

ROSE (O.S.)

Mom, don't! PLEASE!

CUT TO:

The WARDROBE DOOR lurches back and forth as Rose struggles against Margaret to keep it closed.

MARGARET

It's the only extra fabric we have.

ROSE

Stop!

Rose jerks back in pain, discovers a SPLINTER in her hand.

MARGARET

Let me see.

Rose runs out. Margaret takes her WEDDING DRESS from the wardrobe ... then bites the lace fabric and RIPS.

INT. FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Rose scratches at the SPLINTER in her hand.

Behind her, Margaret single-handedly drags Ollie's BED across the hallway, and into her own bedroom.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - DAWN

The room is now crammed with Margaret's AND the girls' beds.

Rose lies awake; Margaret finishes patching walls with LACE.

ROSE

Aren't we still going?

MARGARET

Not until your father writes. I
spent our travel money.

ROSE

Why?

MARGARET

Because you were sick.

ROSE

It was just a nosebleed.

(beat)

We're not even supposed to sleep
with you.

MARGARET

I needed to patch the walls, and
there was only enough fabric to seal
one room.

ROSE

I want to go. You're supposed to
take your medicine, you're supposed
to be sleeping!

MARGARET

(sudden intensity)

Don't you understand?! We are stuck
here. For now. And the dust seeps.
Through every opening. That is why
Thomas is sick. That is why he is
dying.

Rose is taken aback.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

When your daddy sends more money, we
will leave. Alright?

ROSE

Promise?

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

Margaret nervously smooths Rose's pillow, STOPS... IT'S CLEAN.

She sinks onto the edge of the bed, RELIEVED as we CUT TO:

OLLIE. Carving a new NOTCH MARK -- Day 22.

ROSE (PRE-LAP)

Play explorer? To the church?

EXT. ONE ROOM CHURCH - DAY

Ollie SPINS, her eyes covered by a BANDANA. Rose stops her.

Feeling the sun on her face, Ollie orients herself, and takes tentative steps through the GRAVEYARD ... towards the CHURCH.

INT. ONE ROOM CHURCH - DAY

Margaret quietly stitches with the sewing circle, uneasy.

BERTHA

Haven't you even checked on her?

MARGARET

Not since the funeral... we were packing.

Birdie interrupts the tension --

BIRDIE

Well that's a vibrant hue!

-- Peeks at Margaret's QUILT SQUARE. She has stitched a verdant field of GRASS surrounding the farmhouse.

BERTHA

Packing for what?

MARGARET

We were hoping to meet Henry, to leave, but... Has anyone had a letter from the work crews? We haven't had one yet.

BERTHA

Guess you didn't hear.

(then)

Dust built up so much a train in Woodward skipped clear off the tracks. Kilt everyone aboard 'cept one donkey in the freight car.

BIRDIE

You're stuck with us, looks like.

Margaret tries to hide her concern. Then --

ROSE

Mom?!

EXT. ONE ROOM CHURCH - DAY

Margaret, followed by the women, rushes outside to find:

ESTHER'S DAUGHTER, MINNIE,
Dressed only in filthy underwear and the grotesque HALLOWEEN
MASK -- dragging a BUCKET half her size towards the church.

BIRDIE

Oh my Lord.

BERTHA

Birdie. Go get the sheriff.

MARGARET (O.S.)

Just talk to her?

I/E. SHERIFF'S TRUCK / DUSTY LANE - DAY

Sheriff Bell puts the truck in park. Margaret, the girls, and Minnie (now donning Sheriff Bell's jacket) are squeezed into the cab beside him.

SHERIFF BELL

Maybe you could get a sense of whether this is short term grief kinda aberration or... more serious. I'd ask Birdie, but she gets so frazzled. You're the only one kept it together at Jacob's burial.

Margaret and Bell exit the truck.

Inside the truck, Rose watches Bell wait on the dust-covered porch as Margaret DISAPPEARS into the dark, open front door.

INT. SMITH HOUSE - DAY

Margaret takes in the shuttered, DARK ROOM. She approaches

ESTHER,
Who lies facing away, still as a corpse on a SHEET-LESS BED.

MARGARET

Esther? It's Margaret.

(beat)

I know I was... harsh at the wake,
and I'm ... I was... it's so dark.

Margaret moves to the window. Opens the shutter illuminating the FILTHY ROOM.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Remember when Ada passed? For a long while, I thought I might just join her. But you have to think of the other children. Their health.

Esther rolls over to face Margaret.

ESTHER

The man has been looking after them.

MARGARET

The man?

ESTHER

Or was that a dream?

Margaret looks up. Clocks Sheriff Bell by the door, listening, concerned. She pours a small CUP of water.

MARGARET

Have some water. Just a sip.

Esther sits up -- she wears a dusty BLACK DRESS.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Are you still ... dressed from Jacob's funeral?

Esther tries to speak mid-sip, CHOKES. As she doubles over, the back of her dress OPENS to reveal...

The beginnings of BED SORES running down her spine.

CUT TO:

Margaret getting SICK beside the house.

Sheriff Bell hands her a HANDKERCHIEF. Margaret pats her lips, spots MINNIE faced away, eating something.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Minnie?

Minnie turns and smiles. Brings a handful of DUST to her mouth. Margaret grabs her hand.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

NO!

Margaret locks eyes with Sheriff Bell.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

She's not fit.

SHERIFF BELL

You sure?

Margaret considers -- nearby Thomas continues to COUGH.

She nods. Bell picks up Minnie, moves her to the TRUCK.

Meanwhile, Esther ambles onto the FRONT PORCH, and wraps Margaret in a TIGHT EMBRACE.

ESTHER

Oh, Margaret. Thank you for visiting.
Does me good.

MARGARET

It's all right. You just have to be
strong. That's all.

ESTHER

Right ... strong. You're right.

MARGARET

(suffocating)
Esther? That's enough! Stop!

Margaret jerks away -- Esther has left DUSTY HAND PRINTS on the back of Margaret's dress.

ESTHER

Look what I've done now.

Esther tries to clean the spots. Makes them worse. She follows Margaret's EYELINE to Bell as he places Thomas in the TRUCK with Minnie and the girls.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

What's going on?

SHERIFF BELL

It's just for a little while.

ESTHER

What's for a little while?

MARGARET

Until you get back on your feet.

ESTHER

You knew, Margaret? But you're my
kin. My sister.

Margaret moves to the truck. Esther pursues.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

You're no different than me. You
know that? No different at all!
You always THOUGHT you were! That
you married down, but you'll be just
like me.

Bell intercedes, places a hand on Esther's shoulder --

SHERIFF BELL
Let's just take a moment here.

Rose adjusts the SIDE MIRROR, notes the way Sheriff Bell PATS Esther as if she might break.

Bell and Margaret climb into the truck, briefly making audible the sounds of Esther SCREAMING --

ESTHER
SHOW YOU WHAT IT'S LIKE, MARG--

-- Before they SLAM the doors shut.

ROSE
(re: the children)
Couldn't they stay with us?

MARGARET
I can't feed them, Rose.

SHERIFF BELL
They'll be fine, sweetheart. There's a real nice home next county over.

CRACK! Everyone JUMPS as Esther SLAMS her hand into the window, SCREAMING into the glass as the truck pulls away --

ESTHER
(muted)
YOU'LL BE JUST LIKE ME!

While Margaret watches Esther in the

REARVIEW MIRROR,
SCREAMING, face twisted with rage, dress slipping down ...
Rose's eyes dart between her mother and her cousins, who are now half crying, as they begin to understand what's happening.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DUSK

Margaret scrubs Esther's HANDPRINTS from her dress. As Rose SULKS by, donning her new MASK --

MARGARET
Tie the barn doors up for me, okay?

Margaret eyes the horizon, scanning for threats.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Margaret notices several PLANTS have been damaged. Then, she sees the barn door is open. CREAKING in the wind.

MARGARET (PRE-LAP)
Didn't I ask you to tie this?

CUT TO:

Margaret shows Rose the TWINE that should have held the barn doors closed.

ROSE
I did.

Rose starts to move away; Margaret catches her arm.

MARGARET
That cow, that garden are keeping us alive. Understand? We nearly lost both in one night.

ROSE
I did tie it!

MARGARET
Then it has to be tighter!

Ollie tugs on Margaret's dress, points to the hayloft WINDOW.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
STOP! No more Grey Man, understand?
(beat, watching Ollie)
Rose didn't say that.

Margaret turns to Rose, intense:

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Did you?

ROSE
It's true. Sheriff Bell could take us away.

MARGARET
Sweetheart, Aunt Esther isn't well--

ROSE
Because of Jacob. I know what "rats in the attic" means. Aunt Esther went cuckoo, because her child died. Like yours.

MARGARET
I am not Esther.

ROSE
But when Ada--

Margaret SLAPS Rose. Rose grabs her cheek.

MARGARET
I'm sorry... But you have to know
that I would never let anyone separate
us. Understand? Never.

ROSE
When's he going to write?

MARGARET
Soon...
(then)
I don't know.

Rose pulls her arm away. Starts off with Ollie at her heels.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Rose! Stay close!

INT. BARN, STALL - DAY

Margaret leads Georgia to her stall. Goes to milk her, but only manages to EKE OUT a cup or so.

MARGARET
What is it? You hungry?

INT. HAY LOFT - DAY

Margaret takes a small portion of HAY and divides it in half. Drops it down to Georgia's stall.

Before leaving, she notices that the window is SLIGHTLY AJAR.

CUT TO:

BANG, BANG, BANG! Margaret nails the window shut. When she stops hammering, she hears a THUNK on the roof.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Margaret exits, stops mid-stride. Then, her POV: A vibrant, incongruous BIRD. Dead in the dust.

Margaret looks skyward, searching for signs of a storm. Looks clear, but Georgia MOOS uneasily in the barn --

MARGARET
GIRLS!

On a nearby SAND DUNE, Margaret sees the girls start towards her, and moves off to prepare for the storm.

EXT. DUSTY FIELD - DAY

As the girls walk, Rose SIGNS to Ollie --

ROSE
*You saw The Grey Man? What'd he
look like then?
(beat, watching Ollie)
Red eyes and bones? Liar.*

Then, Rose stops, clocks something UNSEEN. She eyes the sky --

ROSE (CONT'D)
Nothing's even happening.

Rose pulls AWAY from the house despite Ollie desperately trying to stop her as we CUT TO:

A FULL STORM.

Margaret rushes from window to window, slamming shutters.

She scans the horizon, realizes ... she can't see the girls -- the dust is blowing too hard.

MARGARET
Please, please, please--

EXT. DUSTY LANE - MOMENTS LATER

Margaret covers her mouth and nose with her dress.

MARGARET
(muffled)
Rose?!!

Unbeknownst to Margaret, a FIGURE MATERIALIZES in the opaque air behind her. As it approaches, we see that it's Esther, walking directly towards Margaret.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
ROSE?!!

Without breaking her stride, Esther

RAMS HER SHOULDER
Into Margaret as she passes. Margaret turns, startled --

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Esther?

Esther, dead-eyed, continues walking.

MARGARET (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Did you see the girls? Esther?!

Esther finally stops ... turns back. The women seem to be on opposite sides of an IMMENSE MIRROR.

ESTHER

They should be home, Margaret. The air ... it's poison.

On Margaret, terrified, as Esther turns and walks away into the ENVELOPING HAZE. Just then--

THE GIRLS EMERGE

From a sand dune *behind* Margaret. Margaret is about to walk into the storm to search for the girls when Rose calls out:

ROSE

Mom!

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - DUSK

Margaret cleans dust from the girls' ears, scalp, neck.

MARGARET

You have to play in my sight from now on. We can never be separated.

ROSE

We were coming right back.

MARGARET

I thought you were lost. Where did you go?

Ollie points to a pile of clothes that begins to UNDULATE and SQUIRM. Margaret grabs the girls, thinking a SNAKE lies in wait until ... out pops a DUSTY KITTEN.

Margaret tries to lighten up, but she's shaken.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Name?

(beat, watching Ollie)

Henry? Like dad?

Margaret turns the kitten around, lifts its tail.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Henry's a Henrietta.

(showing Rose)

Like an exclamation point, see?

Rose nods, COUGHS. Margaret eyes the empty water BUCKET.

Beat. Margaret stands, grabs a BANDANA and TWINE.

ROSE
Where are you going?

MARGARET
I didn't get the water. Went looking
for you.

Just then, a shock wave of dust SLAMS into the house.

ROSE
Please don't go.

MARGARET
You need it, Rose. We all do.
There's some right in the kitchen.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DUSK

Unable to see more than a few feet in front of her, Margaret un-spools twine as she walks around

THE SIDE OF THE HOUSE

Georgia begins to MOO and FUSS, obviously distressed.
Margaret edges away from the house, tries to focus on the
BARN. The dust thins enough for her to see

A SHADOW PASS

In the hayloft window. Margaret COVERS HER MOUTH. And then
a realization ... her hands are EMPTY. The TWINE is gone.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Rose presses her ear to the shared wall with the kitchen.
She KNOCKS, waits ... no answer.

INTERCUT MARGARET / THE GIRLS

MARGARET takes small steps, arms extended, desperately trying
to orient herself.

Inside, ROSE climbs onto the seat of a CHAIR. Slides up the
glass on the TOP WINDOW, unlatches the shutter.

She almost loses her grip on the shutter, catches it JUST in
time. Rose squints against the blowing dust, calls out --

ROSE
Mom? MOM!

MARGARET thinks she hears Rose calling out, pulls down her
MASK to answer, but wind RIPS it from her grasp.

Inside, the chair SLIPS and ROSE loses her grip on the shutter, which flings out, then in, SHATTERING GLASS onto the girls.

The break in the window pane creates a SUCTION EFFECT; dust pours into the room.

MARGARET follows the sound of the whipping shutter -- WHAM, WHAM, WHAM -- towards the house.

As she walks, she trips over something, FALLS. Margaret blindly searches the ground ... finds the ball of TWINE.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Margaret drops the WATER and FOOD, can't see through the WHIRLING DUST --

MARGARET
GIRLS!?

She uprights the chair, and closes the shutters. MUFFLED COUGHING leads her to THE BED. Where the girls have crawled under the sheet, which is now covered in a layer of DUST.

The outline of their entwined bodies resembles the POMPEII LOVERS EMBRACE.

Margaret whips off the sheet; the girls are huddled beneath, shaken, COUGHING. Rose leaps into Margaret's arms.

ROSE
Sorry.

MARGARET
Okay, it's okay.

CUT TO:

A PILL in Margaret's palm. Before taking it, she surveys the room -- everything is covered in a THICK LAYER OF DUST.

In the VANITY MIRROR, Margaret spots Rose watching at her.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Put your nightgown on, sweetheart.

Rose pulls her NIGHTGOWN over her head. She turns back to the mirror just as Margaret flicks her head back, swallows.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - DAWN

Clutching the RIFLE, Margaret shoulders the door through a MOUND OF DUST and steps into the amber dawn light.

I/E. BARN - QUICK CUTS

Margaret checks the barn doors -- they're still TIED TIGHT. She eyes the barn window -- it's closed and NAILED SHUT.

Margaret milks Georgia. She's drying up, only a cup or so in the BUCKET...

As she stands, Margaret spots a CUT MARK slicing through the cartilage of Georgia's ear... Odd.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Rose wakes with a GASP. Then, her sideways POV: The room is SPOTLESS. Ollie's washed DOLL sits on the POLISHED floor.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MORNING

Rose and Ollie step outside -- THE CHORES ARE DONE. Clearly exhausted, Margaret approaches with the milk.

ROSE

How'd you do all this?

MARGARET

Just woke up early.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Lost in thought, Margaret divides the scant portion of milk between TWO TEACUPS.

MARGARET

Rose? Did you see anyone here yesterday? During the storm?

ROSE

I don't think so. Why?

MARGARET

I think something's been getting into the barn. Maybe a coyote or...

Instead of placing the saucers ON TOP of the teacups as always, Margaret leaves them UNCOVERED.

Rose follows Margaret's gaze to the CHALK OUTLINE of the door, which should lead to the main house.

ROSE

Mom? Here.

Rose covers the teacup with the saucer.

MARGARET

Shoot!

Margaret grabs the cup, tosses the milk out.

INT. BARN, STALL - DAY

Margaret desperately tries to milk Georgia again --

MARGARET

Come on, girl. Come on.

-- But there's only a DRIBBLE, and she's SORE from the effort as we CUT TO:

MARGARET dropping the empty bucket, staring down at the AXE in the CHOPPING BLOCK --

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Rose and Ollie look up as a frazzled Margaret enters clutching the AXE.

ROSE

What are you doing?

MARGARET

Move back.

As the girls shuffle backwards, Margaret SLAMS the axe into the wall where the door should be. She chops again. BANG!

MARGARET (CONT'D)

This way, we can get to the kitchen when we need to. We won't have to go out during the storms.

ROSE

But Dad was gonna--

MARGARET

Dad's not here, Rose.

The girls watch Margaret grimace and CHOP, finally breaking through to the HALLWAY. The last bits of plaster give way to reveal Margaret and the girls.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Just makes it easier on us.

Sweaty and panting, Margaret crosses through to

THE HALLWAY,

Reaches back for Ollie and Rose ...

MARGARET

Come on.

The girls don't move. Mother and daughters stand on opposite sides of the hole as we CUT TO:

The flick of a KNIFE. Slicing open an ENVELOPE.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM

Ollie JUMPS to grab the LETTER, but Margaret hands it to Rose instead.

MARGARET

Next one, Little.

Rose empties the envelope. Blades of DRIED GRASS, a MUSSEL SHELL and a COIN spill out along with the LETTER.

ROSE

(reading)

Dear Girls. My first hope is that you can de...

Rose shows the letter to Margaret:

MARGARET

Decipher.

ROSE

(reading)

...Decipher my chicken scratch. My second hope is that these blades of grass will still be green by the time they reach you. Just know that when I picked them, they were the brightest thing you ever saw.

Ollie pulls blades of DRIED GRASS and a MUSSEL SHELL from the envelope. She ties the grass, which is VERY BROWN by now, around her wrist like a BRACELET; Rose helps.

Margaret takes over the reading:

MARGARET

We're building a bridge over the river where I found this shell. Being away, I know even more what I've left. Enough of these smelly men. Counting the days my Loves.

ROSE

Will it be enough? When the trains start again?

MARGARET
... Not quite.

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Just as Margaret finishes sweeping the porch, a gust of WIND immediately re-coats it in dust.

Wind keeps blowing, and Margaret keeps sweeping until she screams through CLENCHED TEETH --

MARGARET
Stop it, stop it.

A tear runs down her cheek. She slaps the tear away, HARD, as we CUT TO:

THE FRONT ROOM - SAME

Through distorted glass, Rose watches her mother, worried.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - LATER

The storm ROARS outside. Margaret pins green fabric, and pieces of leftover lace to a SEWING FORM, consoles Rose --

MARGARET
Pretty isn't it?

Rose nods.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
We'll be fine. We'll get dressed
up, and dance. Remember how to waltz?

Ollie jumps onto the bed, and Rose spins her.

Margaret fixates on the DUST MOTES rising from the bed.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Stop, stop that!

Rose freezes, but Ollie is late to catch on.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Where's it getting in?
(beat, to the girls)
Put these on!

Margaret grabs the girls' DUST MASKS --

ROSE
Inside?

-- Then notices BROWN CIRCLES where they breathed dusty air.

MARGARET
Wait. Don't breathe!

Margaret drops the masks, and RIPS sheets off the bed. She drapes the fabric over the girls' heads.

ROSE
Mom?

Then, feeling it isn't enough, Margaret pours WATER over the fabric. Rose JUMPS --

ROSE (CONT'D)
It's cold!

MARGARET
Stay still. This will help.

Rose and Ollie SHUDDER as the fabric becomes transparent, clings to their faces.

CUT TO:

TICK, TICK, TICK. Water drips onto the floor.

Rose, Ollie and Margaret each sit with a wet SHEET draped over her head ... THREE LITTLE GHOSTS.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
That's better, isn't it?

ROSE
I can't breathe.

MARGARET
It filters out the dust, sweetie.
The air ... it's poison.

ROSE
Mom?

MARGARET
Rose, let's just be--

ROSE
Mom! Help!

Margaret rips off her own sheet. Then, her POV: splotches of RED STREAK and EXPAND across the wet sheet covering Rose's face... Another NOSEBLEED.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Get me out! Please!

Rose flails, desperately trying to escape the WET SHEET, but the more she fights, the more the fabric CLINGS to her.

Margaret tries to help, but Rose is SUFFOCATING, a vortex of fabric swirling into her open, gasping mouth...

A long beat. RIP! Margaret slices open the fabric with the KNIFE. Rose is panting, her nose BLOODY, her hair wet.

CUT TO:

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Margaret in bed, wide awake. Then, her POV: Roses' BACK ... breathing in ... breathing out.

Rose quietly wakes. Seems to feel Margaret watching her and rolls over ... but Margaret quickly closes her eyes.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Rose finds Margaret seated at the kitchen table. She seems to have been awake for some time.

ROSE

I can't hear the storm anymore.

MARGARET

It stopped.

Rose goes to open the door.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Rose. We're not going out yet.
We're going to wait a while.

ROSE

Why?

MARGARET

Even when you can't see it, can't
hear it, it's in the air.

ROSE

I'll wear my mask.

MARGARET

No. We'll wait.

ROSE

For how long?

MARGARET

Just ... longer.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM, WARDROBE - MORNING

Rose counts as Ollie carves a NOTCH in the wardrobe door.

ROSE
Forty-six, forty-seven.

After checking that the coast is clear, Rose pours Margaret's remaining SLEEPING PILLS onto the vanity table and counts.

The numbers seem to match. Rose lets out a SIGH of relief.
It seems like Margaret HAS been taking her medicine.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - DAY

Rose is draped over the side of Margaret's bed, head hanging down, bored and crawling out of her skin.

HER UPSIDE-DOWN POV: Ollie carving a NOTCH in the door -- 49 days; Margaret moves past the door, sweeping and sweeping.

ROSE
That's long enough.

INT. FRONT ROOM - MORNING

Margaret and Ollie follow Rose to the front door.

MARGARET
Where are you going? Hey.

ROSE
We have to go out eventually. Or
the garden will die. The cow.

On Margaret, debating...

MARGARET
Masks on.

Rose and Ollie put on their dust masks.

Margaret unlocks the door. The wood GROANS when she touches the handle, but it won't open. She BUMPS into the door a few times ... it's hitting something, stuck.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Must be a sand drift.

CUT TO:

QUICK MONTAGE:

Margaret and Rose opening various windows, STRUGGLING to push open the shutters ... none of them budge.

Rose tries the kitchen door. It's STUCK too.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Climbing onto a chair, Margaret pushes open the shutters on the top high window. The girls SQUINT against the sunlight.

Dust WATERFALLS over the window ledge. Margaret struggles to SQUEEZE through the tiny window, but her shoulders -- no matter what angle -- won't fit.

She peeks OUTSIDE -- dust dunes ENGULF the house.

ROSE

We stayed in too long.

MARGARET

Just try, will you?

Rose steps onto the chair, tries to squeeze through the window. It's closer, but she won't fit either.

ROSE

What about Ollie? She'd fit.

MARGARET

It's over her head by the house.
She could fall right through. No,
somebody will check on us.

ROSE

Mom, it's been days already.

CUT TO:

Ollie spinning as TWINE loops around her waist.

Margaret DOUBLE-KNOTS the twine encircling Ollie, checks that her DUST MASK and GOGGLES are tight.

MARGARET

Love you.

Ollie SIGNS back, slides easily through the window.

The twine runs through Margaret's fingers. It reaches the end of the spool, pulls TAUT.

Margaret peeks OUTSIDE -- Ollie is nowhere in sight.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Oh, my God.

Margaret grips the twine, pulls hard ... SNAP! It breaks loose, and she falls back ... HARD.

CUT TO:

SLAM! SLAM! Margaret repeatedly RAMS into the front door.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Come on, come on!

Rose sees that Margaret's head is WOUNDED, drips BLOOD.

ROSE
Mom, your head.

Margaret keeps SLAMMING into the door. Over and over. Rose takes off running towards --

MARGARET'S BEDROOM

She FLINGS open the vanity drawer. She spots a clean CLOTH, whips it out and PILLS SCATTER EVERYWHERE.

Rose grabs an ERRANT PILL, realizes -- Margaret's been hiding her sleeping medicine.

MARGARET (O.S.)
Rose! Please, she could be drowning!

INT. FRONT ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Rose rushes in. Shoulders the door with Margaret. It finally BUDGES. Sand spills over their feet as they scramble onto

THE FRONT PORCH

Where Ollie happily digs, moving dust away from the door.

Margaret scoops Ollie up, pulls her into a desperate embrace, smearing her little face with blood.

MARGARET
Sorry, Little.

Rose hands Margaret the HANDKERCHIEF, but she's more concerned with cleaning Ollie's face, than tending to her own wound.

ROSE
You're bleeding bad, mom.

MARGARET
Heads do that, sweetie.

On Rose, worried, as Margaret moves away.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Margaret unties the TWINE. Glances at the CLOSED WINDOW.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

The girls unearth PLANTS from the dust. Nearly all of them are CRUSHED, DEAD.

ROSE

We killed them. Let them stay buried.

Ollie runs to a MOUND OF DUST, and unearths the homemade GREENHOUSE. Inside, a few SPROUTS survive.

INT. BARN, STALL - DAY

Margaret sits beside an EMPTY MILK BUCKET.

She stands. Woozy. Leans her own WOUNDED HEAD against Georgia. A NEW CUT slices along Georgia's flank.

MARGARET

What's getting you, girl? Hmm?

EXT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

Margaret exits the barn, freezes...

A LINE OF FOOTPRINTS leads directly to the KITCHEN ENTRANCE. Margaret runs to the GARDEN.

MARGARET

Girls! Did you see someone?

ROSE

Where?

MARGARET

There are footprints leading right--

Margaret leads Rose to the KITCHEN. The dust is smooth, NOT A FOOTPRINT IN SIGHT.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

The wind must have covered them.

Margaret follows Rose's EYELINE to the WEATHERVANE. It's completely still.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

They were JUST here. They led right to the door, but not away. He might be inside.

Rose checks the door.

ROSE
The door's locked, mom.

Margaret touches her head -- BLOOD runs down her arm. She squints, scans the HEAT WAVES: *Is someone out there?*

MARGARET
Cuts on the cow. Food disappears.
The garden. Someone has been here.
(then)
Rose? Why are you looking at me
like that?

ROSE
You need a doctor.

MARGARET
What do you mean?

ROSE
...Your cut. It's deep.

MARGARET
I'm saving that money. In case we
can leave.

Rose turns away. Mulls over the hidden sleeping pills.
Thinking fast, she PINCHES Ollie's neck HARD.

Ollie grabs at her neck, pitches a fit.

ROSE
(for Margaret)
What's wrong? Throat hurt?

INT. DOCTOR COX'S - DAY

Ollie gives Rose the EVIL EYE, takes a deep breath. Dr. Cox moves his STETHOSCOPE to a new location on her back.

DR. COX
Don't sound good.

Margaret swallows.

DR. COX (CONT'D)
Sounds great.

MARGARET
Ollie was touching her neck like it
hurt. And Rose had another nosebleed.

DR. COX
Be my guest.

He hands Margaret the stethoscope. Rose watches Margaret slide the EARTIPS in --

DR. COX (CONT'D)
See how easy the air moves?

Margaret closes her eyes and LISTENS. The only sound is her DAUGHTER'S BREATH. In. Out. In. Out.

DR. COX (CONT'D)
Fall asleep there?

Margaret pulls the stethoscope from her ears.

ROSE
(quietly)
She never sleeps.

MARGARET
Rose.

ROSE
And she cut her head earlier. Bad.

MARGARET
She's exaggerating.

DR. COX
Saddle up, partner.

Dr. Cox slaps the table. He pushes Margaret's hair back to reveal her HEAD WOUND.

DR. COX (CONT'D)
Lord, you do need a little mending'.
Girls, would you mind?

EXT. DOCTOR COX'S HOUSE - DAY

Ollie SIGNS to Rose, upset.

ROSE
I HAD to fib. Mom's not taking her medicine, Little. Besides, you fib about Grey Man.

Ollie freezes ... points over Rose's shoulder.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Very funny.

Just then, a DARK SHADOW looms over Rose, and she turns --

INT. DOCTOR COX'S HOUSE - DAY

Margaret grimaces as Dr. Cox stitches her head.

MARGARET

It's only some times I don't take
the medicine.

DR. COX

What times?

MARGARET

When I don't finish my chores, it
can put ... pictures in my head.

DR. COX

What kinda pictures?

(off her silence)

Margaret?

MARGARET

Their lungs, struggling for air.
Their hearts slowing down. Someone
trying to hurt them.

DR. COX

Don't get your rest, even one night,
it's easy to feel off. Let alone
multiple days. Remember?

MARGARET

Yes, but--

Suddenly intense, Dr. Cox stubs out his CIGARETTE.

DR. COX

Let me ask you something. When was
your last moon?

MARGARET

My moon?

DR. COX

Just a question of sensitivity is
all.

EXT. DOCTOR COX'S HOUSE - DAY

Margaret exits. The girls are GONE. From

THE CHURCH

Across the road, she hears COUGHING. Margaret starts towards
a SCRUM OF WOMEN and runs smack into Rose.

MARGARET
Where's your sister?

Margaret follows Rose's EYELINE to Ollie, who sits with a WOMAN crouched over her. The crouched woman is...

ESTHER. And she's straining to pull SOMETHING from Ollie's mouth. Margaret steps closer. It looks like INTESTINES, SLICK WITH BLOOD, UNCOILING FROM OLLIE'S OPEN MOUTH.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Stop. Stop it!

Margaret SHOVES Esther. Tries to CRAM the innards back into Ollie's mouth, which GAGS her...

ROSE
Mom!

Rose intervenes, pulls a HANDKERCHIEF out of Ollie's mouth.

MARGARET
Wait, she was...

Margaret inspects the handkerchief: *It looked like intestines moments ago.* Esther touches her shoulder --

ESTHER
It's just magic, Margaret.

Esther smiles -- HER TEETH ARE PINK WITH BLOOD.

FLASH TO: The cow's cut marks. Margaret GASPS, backs the girls away.

MARGARET
It's you. You're the one sneaking in... You stay away from them, Esther.

BIRDIE
Margaret?

MARGARET
Something's wrong with her, she--

BERTHA
She's mourning, that's all. You ought to know what that's like.
(then)
Imagine if they took the others too.
At your own sister's request.

MARGARET
You didn't see the filth.

BIRDIE
(easing the tension)
Well I can't judge. I clean with a
shovel most days.

MARGARET
Just look at her teeth!

Esther covers her mouth shyly.

BERTHA
Don't mind her, Esther. No one's
good enough.

MARGARET
(to Esther)
I don't know what you're up to, but
I won't let it happen again.

On Rose, concerned, watching the women WHISPER.

INT. BARN - DAY

Margaret and the girls watch as Sheriff Bell climbs the ladder
into the hayloft.

SHERIFF BELL (O.S.)
Ye-lllo? Anybody there?

A sudden TUSSLE. Hay dust sprinkles down from the CEILING.
Margaret backs the girls up, nervous.

SHERIFF BELL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Found this intruder lurking.

Sheriff Bell emerges with Ollie's KITTEN. Suddenly, Henrietta
claws Bell, scrambles back to the hayloft.

EXT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

As Margaret and Bell move past, Ollie fixates on the WINDOW
in the barn's hayloft.

She tugs on Rose, who shrugs her off--

ROSE
Quit, Little.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Bell dips his arms in water, rinses the cat SCRATCHES.

SHERIFF BELL
Feisty little thing ...

MARGARET

I told you she wouldn't be there.
She does it at night.

SHERIFF BELL

Just don't see how anyone could get
past tied doors and nailed window.

MARGARET

Me either, but--

SHERIFF BELL

And why would Esther cut the cow?

MARGARET

Because she holds it against me.
What we did. Taking the children.

SHERIFF BELL

So she bit its ear?

MARGARET

Maybe she's finding ways to starve
us? Hurt the girls? Ask anyone in
town. They saw her.

SHERIFF BELL

What was she doing with Ollie again?

MARGARET

A magic trick, but she had blood on
her teeth. And there were footprints.
They led right to our kitchen, but
they didn't lead away.

SHERIFF BELL

And what's that from?

Sheriff Bell stares at the CHOPPED HOLE in the wall.

MARGARET

I already told you that's so we don't
have to go out in the storms.

(getting his point)

Don't make me seem... Wait, that's
it.

SHERIFF BELL

What?

MARGARET

Esther wants me to look crazy like
her. I helped take her children and
now she's coming after mine. You
have to stop her.

SHERIFF BELL
Let's just take a moment here.

Sheriff Bell puts his hand on Margaret's shoulder. Rose notices -- he did this EXACT GESTURE to Esther.

ROSE
I saw them too. The footprints.
Went right to our kitchen.

Margaret turns to Rose, surprised. Bell nods, glances back at Margaret ... still concerned.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DUSK

RIFLE in hand, Margaret scans the horizon. Rose approaches.

ROSE
Aren't you coming to bed?

MARGARET
Not until I figure out how she's
getting in.

Then, clocking Rose's concern:

MARGARET (CONT'D)
You didn't see them, did you? The
footprints?

ROSE
No.

MARGARET
Why'd you tell Sheriff Bell you did?

ROSE
Because. He talked to you the way
he talked to Aunt Esther that time.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Darkness. The sound of Georgia MOOING. A lantern GLOWS TO LIFE. Illuminates Margaret's vigilant face.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Margaret enters, scanning the darkness. The sound of APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS behind her.

She turns to the open door, spots the dark outline of ESTHER, CLUTCHING AN AXE...

MARGARET
Esther?! What are you doing?

Margaret aims the rifle. She takes a deep breath, eases her finger towards the trigger.

Just then, Ollie emerges from the darkness and stands DIRECTLY NEXT TO ESTHER.

ESTHER
You'll see. You'll be JUST like me.

Esther starts to SWING THE AXE at Ollie. Ollie speaks --

OLLIE
Mom? Help me.

On Margaret: *Ollie can't speak. She tries to run to Ollie, but her feet SINK DEEP INTO THE DUST.*

She opens her mouth to YELL, but MUD POURS FROM HER MOUTH as we CUT TO:

MARGARET. Gasping awake. Immediately eyeing the BARN.

INT. BARN - MORNING

Nothing is out of place. When Margaret turns back, A GLINT OF LIGHT outside catches her attention.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The AXE has been moved from its usual spot on the chopping block, and is now half buried near ADA'S GRAVESTONE. On Margaret: *Why on earth is it there?*

INT. HAYLOFT - MORNING

Ollie climbs into the loft, walks towards the eaves. She stares into the BLACK SHADOWS, smiles, steps forward.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MORNING

Margaret moves the axe aside, wipes down ADA'S GRAVESTONE.

Just then, the sound of muffled COUGHING. Margaret leans closer to the grave.

It sounds like the COUGHS are coming from underground ... like Ada is choking in her grave.

Rose trots up to find Margaret oddly posed, kneeling, her ear pressed to the ground.

ROSE

Mom?

MARGARET

Were you coughing?

Rose shakes her head. Margaret stands, dusts off her dress. Then, another COUGH. She checks with Rose --

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Did you hear that?

Rose nods. Another COUGH.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Ollie.

CUT TO:

Margaret and Rose find Ollie on all fours just outside the BARN. Her face REDDENS, and she THRASHES as she coughs.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

What's wrong?! Are you sick?!

Tears pour down Ollie's face as she SIGNS --

ROSE

She can't breathe!

Margaret HITS Ollie's back until she COUGHS UP a piece of CANDY. Rose and Margaret stare at the candy, confused.

MARGARET

Where'd you get that?!

Beat. Ollie slowly points ... to the HAYLOFT.

INT. BARN, HAY LOFT - MOMENTS LATER

TRACKING BEHIND Margaret as she climbs into the hayloft, RIFLE leading the way...

MARGARET

Esther? Are you there?

The sound of CRACKLING HAY. Margaret whips around and --

ROSE

Mom!

-- Lowers the gun at the last possible second.

MARGARET

I told you to stay downstairs.

ROSE
We're scared.

MARGARET
Where, Little? Where?

Ollie points down at her feet. Margaret looks down, confused. There's nothing there -- just scraps of hay.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
I'll burn the whole thing down,
Esther. I swear to God.

WHAM WHAM WHAM. There's a KNOCKING on the floor beneath Margaret's feet. She backs the girls up as two floorboards begin to tremble ... then ... POP UP.

A dusty hand emerges, then another as WALLACE GRADY (30s, malnourished), squeezes out from his hiding place between two floorboards.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Who are you?!

Wallace stands. His eyes are BRIGHT RED from the dust, his lips are covered with VERTICAL CUTS from dehydration.

WALLACE
Name's Brother Wallace Grady. I
don't mean you any harm. Truly.
Just needed shelter, and ... Henry
said y'all had this barn.

MARGARET
... Henry?

WALLACE
Don't ya recognize his jacket?

Margaret glances at Wallace's jacket -- it's Henry's.

MARGARET
Did you hurt him?!

WALLACE
Course not. Got my word on that.
I'm a man of the cloth. I stopped
through the Works detail. Brother
Henry give me this, asked me to check
in on y'all. He's a good man.

MARGARET
Why not just knock on the door?

WALLACE

I was gonna. After I had a chance
to recover. Got caught in that storm
on account of my limp. Thought I
looked too poorly. Might scare your
girls, scare you.

Margaret trembles, her finger still on the TRIGGER.

MARGARET

Did you cut our cow?

WALLACE

You trapped me in here. Had to drink
something when y'all locked me up
during the storms, so I just give
her a little nick or two. She's out
of milk, and that's the only thing
that'll really kill you... Thirst.

He looks to Rose, who peeks out from behind Margaret.

WALLACE (CONT'D)

Rose, right? And you're Margaret.

MARGARET

Henry would've told me.

WALLACE

Mail's slow-going with the weather.

MARGARET

You hid in the floor?

WALLACE

First I just kinda followed the
shadows around. Then I made this
little hide out.

MARGARET

You have to go. Now.

WALLACE

Sorry I gave you a fright, but I
could earn my keep. People need the
word of God right now.

MARGARET

People need rain.

WALLACE

One follows the other.

MARGARET

Just get out!

Wallace gathers his BAG, the BIBLE that sits nearby, and limps towards the stairs before pausing --

WALLACE

It's just ... your cow's starving,
which means you're about to be, right?

Margaret is shaking now: *It's true.*

WALLACE (CONT'D)

Specially if that train's out for a while. Garden's gone. Milk's dried up. I could get her producing again--

MARGARET

Did you take food? The pantry? The garden?

WALLACE

(spotting something)
Oh, darlin'.

Margaret follows Wallace's EYELINE to Rose, who now cups her hands beneath a full-fledged NOSE BLEED.

MARGARET

Okay, you're okay.

Margaret's torn: *Help Rose or keep the gun on Wallace?*

WALLACE

Ma'am?

MARGARET

Stay back!

WALLACE

I can help her, but I'd need to touch her.

MARGARET

(trembling, desperate)
Why?

WALLACE

I lay hands. Truly. If you don't believe ... what could it hurt?

A beat. Margaret glances back at Rose, considering...

She nods and Wallace limps to Rose. He grips one hand on the nape of her neck, hovers the other over her face as blood BUBBLES from her nose.

Wallace SPEAKS IN TONGUES, conjuring some unseen power.

Rose glances at Margaret, baffled. Suddenly, Wallace lurches Rose back and presses HARD onto her upper lip.

MARGARET
You let her go!

Wallace releases his grip, dropping Rose as they both collapse onto the floor.

Margaret runs to Rose, helps her sit up.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
What'd you do to her?!

ROSE
Mom, look.

Rose drops her hands -- the bleeding has CEASED.

Wallace stands to go, then immediately falls ... swooning, drained of energy.

WALLACE
I'll go soon. Just have to rest.

MARGARET
... You said you could get the cow producing. How?

WALLACE
Just gotta feed her, ma'am.

MARGARET
We're running out of hay!

WALLACE
I know it. Everyone is. But listen, lock me in here, search my bag. I just wanna help. Let me stay and I'll show you how to feed her. Keep your girls healthy and strong. I'm not asking for any favors that I can't match.

EXT. DUSTY FIELD - DUSK

SILHOUETTED against the pink sky, Margaret, Rose and Ollie chase blowing TUMBLEWEEDS across the dust.

Nearby, Wallace watches, drawing water from the WELL.

INT. BARN - DUSK

Water splashes into a LARGE TUB containing tumbleweeds.

Margaret eyes Wallace suspiciously as she steps into the tub, mashing down the giant brambles with her feet.

WALLACE
Tumbleweeds'll soak that water right up, yield a lot of feed.

Margaret WOBBLES and Wallace tries to help, but she recoils.

MARGARET
I've got it.
(beat)
People will talk if I let you stay.

WALLACE
I could keep outta sight for a bit.
Stick to the barn.

MARGARET
I sleep with a gun, which I know how to use. Do you understand?

WALLACE
I'll bear it in mind.

Ollie looks up to Wallace; he WINKS.

I/E. BARN - NIGHT

Margaret ties the barn doors. She glances up at the window -- the DARK OUTLINE of Wallace, head bowed in prayer, looms.

Inside, chin still lowered, Wallace opens his eyes, watches Margaret usher the girls to the house.

ROSE (PRE-LAP)
I thought you were imagining things.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Margaret wedges a chair under the doorknob, joins Rose on the bed.

MARGARET
No. I knew someone was here, just not who.

ROSE
Did he heal me?

MARGARET
I don't know.

Margaret drinks in the closeness, smooths Rose's hair.

ROSE
Will you sing?

Margaret sips water.

MARGARET
(singing)
Gonna build me a-log ca-bin... On
the moun-tain so high--

Margaret's eyes begin to flutter... lulled by her own lullaby.

CUT TO:

A SHRIEK! Margaret jolts awake -- the girls are gone.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Margaret flings open the door. It hits something and LURCHES BACK. She pushes slower ... A pile of CHOPPED WOOD blocks the door. Another SQUEAL. Margaret steps into

THE YARD

She watches the girls, confused. They aren't distressed, but filled with glee. SOMETHING WET hits Margaret's face.

She looks up -- it's RAINING.

ROSE
Come on!

The girls pull Margaret into the rain. They run to the GREENHOUSE, fling open the top. Rain WETS the seedlings.

VIEW ON WALLACE
Arms extended heaven-ward, seeming to CONJURE THE RAIN.

EXT. GARDEN - LATER

Margaret and Rose tend the newly watered plants. Rose concentrates on the TOMATO VINE.

ROSE
Like this?

Margaret watches Rose pull a "sucker" from between the stem and main branch on the plant.

MARGARET
That's it.

Rose waves her hand under her nose.

ROSE
Smells funny.

MARGARET
(laughing)
So don't smell it!

ROSE
But I like it.

INT. BARN, STALL - DAY

Margaret enters with WATER. Wallace hands her a BOWL --

WALLACE
Trade ya?

-- Containing a tiny splash of MILK. Margaret lights up, quickly drapes her APRON over the bowl.

WALLACE (CONT'D)
What else you got for me?

MARGARET
I could catch up on some cleaning, work on Rose's dress for the dance if you want to work on a wind break. Henry meant to. Just never seemed to be enough hours.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE. Intercutting between Wallace and Margaret -- twine looping around WOODEN STAKE, fabric snapping TAUT, the wooden stake twisting into dust, broom flinging dust, stopping...

Margaret inspects her bedroom. For once, EVERYTHING IS CLEAN.

She turns to the SEWING MODEL, begins to attach the lace.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DUSK

Margaret sits in a wooden barrel of water, relishing the bath. She ducks underwater, stays there.

FLASH TO:

Margaret dips the diaphanous fabric of her dress into water.

YOUNG ADA (3) stands below Margaret's dress. Water dripping onto her like a waterfall.

CUT TO:

Margaret pours her bath water over Ada's grave. Eyes the new WIND BREAK protecting her garden.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - LATER

Margaret stitches a seam on Rose's new GREEN DRESS.

Just then, Ollie bursts into the room wearing a RED HAT. She flings open the WARDROBE, checks behind the door -- both are empty. Margaret WINKS at Ollie, gestures to the bed.

Ollie trots forward, finds Rose beneath Margaret's mattress. Rose reluctantly takes the red hat from Ollie, exits --

ROSE

You told her where I was.

Through the WINDOW, Margaret watches Rose chase Ollie past Wallace, who LIMPS to the barn.

INT. BARN, STALL - DAY

Wallace cleans dust from Georgia's nose while Margaret milks her. Rose zips past the window wearing the RED HAT.

WALLACE

Why the red hat?

MARGARET

Helps Ollie with Hide and Seek.

Wallace LIMPS to the window.

WALLACE

Isn't that clever? "...Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience."

MARGARET

How'd you get into the church?

WALLACE

Daddy was a preacher. And his daddy before. Said I had The Touch young.

MARGARET

Why don't you heal your leg?

WALLACE

Some injuries are a reminder of past sins.

MARGARET

Like?

WALLACE

Always had a hard time with people depending on me. Don't know if sometimes their faith was lacking or if it was me, but when it didn't work... I'd turn to drink. Tried to jump into some water from a bridge once. I "misjudged" is one way to put it. Another is that I landed right on the bank, nowhere near the water. That I was drunk as a skunk.

(then)

Hadn't had a sip since. The ache in my leg reminds me why.

Ollie bursts into the stall, hides behind Margaret.

WALLACE (CONT'D)

How do I say, "Good hiding spot"?

She shows Wallace the SIGNS, which he mimics. Ollie beams.

MARGARET

Most people just talk loudly. You're good with her.

WALLACE

It comes honestly. Four little sisters.

MARGARET

Where are they now?

WALLACE

Two are in Texas. Scarlet Fever took the others while I was off spreading the word.

This seems to pain him.

MARGARET

Ollie had it ... and Ada. When they went into quarantine, Ada called out for me until her throat bled. I clawed the door until my nails were left in the wood.

WALLACE

Temporary separation is a burden of our earthly lives, but there's a reunion that lasts for eternity. Do you believe that?

MARGARET

I have to. Don't have a choice.
(MORE)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

(beat)

Funny thing is, after Ada passed I
just wanted my mother.

WALLACE

Did she come for the service?

Margaret shakes her head, "No."

MARGARET

She still doesn't know. I wrote her
when they were sick, and she said I
should never have come West. Married
Henry. That it was my fault. Maybe
it was.

WALLACE

I don't think so. I think those
girls are lucky to have you.

Off Margaret's disbelieving look --

WALLACE (CONT'D)

No?

MARGARET

After Ada, my sleep was ... fitful.
They say I went into the girls' room,
tried to make the bed while they
were in it sleeping. Pulled the
sheets down tight over their heads.
Scared them.

OLLIE WATCHES--

Margaret's PAINED FACE. She reaches up and touches it.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Could you make her hear again?

WALLACE

I don't know. I'd need time. If I
tried it all at once ... it could
kill me. There's a cost. A balancing
that happens.

Margaret nods. Then:

WALLACE (CONT'D)

If I could work with someone. My
father has my gift and more.

(then)

Course I wouldn't know how to get
him here.

ROSE (O.S.)
Mail!

Rose appears at the door, tosses the red hat at Ollie.

Wallace nervously watches the girls run to the MAILBOX.

MARGARET
Let's pray there's a letter with
money for us. Travel money.

EXT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

The girls run up as Wallace and Margaret exit.

WALLACE
Anything good?

ROSE
Not today --

Wallace seems to relax.

ROSE (CONT'D)
-- But the letter carrier says a
haze is moving in.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DUSK

The edges of the house are smudged out by the hazy air.

MARGARET (O.S.)
Wallace? Care to say the blessing?

INT. KITCHEN - DUSK

A CALLOUSED HAND extended palm up, a tiny hand grabs it.
Margaret, Wallace and the girls sit at the table, praying.

WALLACE
God above, I thank you for the warmth
of the Bellums. You connected us
through Henry, and for that I will
be eternally grateful. Thank you
for Rose's continued health and we
ask that you hold Ollie in your ever-
loving light. I'm reminded of a
verse my father taught me. John
nine. "Neither this man nor his
parents sinned, but this happened so
that the works of God would be
displayed in him."

Margaret opens her eyes, moved.

WALLACE (CONT'D)
Thank you for this nourishment--

ROSE
And thank you for ... this!

Rose presents a LETTER.

MARGARET
When did that come?

ROSE
Today.

Ollie tries to grab the letter, but Rose snatches it back.

MARGARET
It's her turn, sweetheart.

ROSE
It'll take a century.

WALLACE
Let me give you ladies a little
privacy here.

MARGARET
Stay. Hard to see out there.

Ollie opens the letter, shakes it. Nothing spills out.

WALLACE
But still--

MARGARET
Don't be silly.

Wallace returns to his seat ... edgy. Ollie SIGNS the letter word by word. Margaret translates --

MARGARET (CONT'D)
First off, I need to ... apologize
for the delay. This next part's
just for Mama, girls.

Margaret TAKES the letter. Ollie descends into TANTRUM.

ROSE
Stop!

Margaret skims the letter, rattled, then SIGNS to Rose.
Confused, Rose SIGNS back.

MARGARET
Now, Rose!

As Rose exits, Wallace waves Ollie towards him.

WALLACE
Y'all telling secrets over there?

Margaret turns to see Wallace CLUTCHING Ollie in his lap.

MARGARET
Put her down!

Rose re-enters with the SHOTGUN. Hands it to Margaret who trains it on Wallace.

WALLACE
Well, that seems like a bad idea.

MARGARET
Who are you?

WALLACE
I told ya. Wallace Grady.

ROSE
Mom, stop it!

MARGARET
Read the letter, Rose. Aloud.

ROSE
(reading)
I'm fine Margaret, but my jacket was took. Along with the letter in its pocket, money and sweets for the girls. There was a preacher hanging around, asked to stay the night. Next day my bunkmate didn't come back from lunch. Found him with his head cracked open like an egg, boots pulled off his feet. Nobody knows how he got out. Like he just vanished.

Margaret cocks the shotgun.

WALLACE
I wouldn't have hurt y'all. Just wanted the jacket. The boy walked in. Wouldn't quit hollerin'.

MARGARET
Where's the money?

WALLACE
Gone. Where's your money? Henry said you had some squirreled away.

MARGARET
Gone. Let her go.

WALLACE
I will. In exchange for that letter
there.

MARGARET
We'd better hold onto this. See
what the sheriff thinks.

A beat. Suddenly, Wallace jumps to grab the LETTER.

OLLIE'S WATCHES--
As Margaret pulls the TRIGGER, and the gun muzzle FLASHES.
Rose crouches, covering her ears.

Wallace rips the letter from Rose's hands, turns to see a
GAPING HOLE in the door next to him.

In the chaos, Ollie breaks free, and runs to Margaret.

WALLACE
Y'all would've starved without me.

MARGARET
Without you, his letter would've
gotten to us. We could've bought
feed for Georgia. We could've left.

WALLACE
"Do not neglect to show hospitality
to strangers, for thereby some have
entertained angels unawares."

MARGARET
Angels?

WALLACE
(re: Rose)
Fixed her didn't I? How bout I undo
it, put her back the way she was.

MARGARET
Fixed her? You're a con. Your father
a con too?

WALLACE
... Never met him.

Margaret pulls back the second hammer on the rifle, motions
to the door.

MARGARET
Get out.

WALLACE

Guess I'd be scared too. Out here all alone. Knowing a man could come back with friends. A few locks, bit of twine won't stop me. Won't stop the Grey Man.

(a moment)
Be seeing you.

Wallace backs out the door ... melting into the haze.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

BAM! BAM! BAM! Margaret finishes hammering a board over the SHOTGUN BLAST in the door.

Rose turns from the door to the windows, which have been boarded up FROM THE INSIDE.

ROSE
Will he really come back?

MARGARET
I won't let him.

On Rose, conflicted, wanting to say more as Margaret begins BLOCKADING the door with stacked chairs.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - LATER

As Margaret tucks them in, Rose lets Ollie snuggle into her.

ROSE
We could write dad. Tell him to come home.

MARGARET
We have two weeks left. By the time we reach him, he'll be headed back.

Margaret crosses to the VANITY TABLE and blows out the lamp.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

CLOSE ON the door. A tangle of chairs blockading it.

The camera PANS to Margaret's sleep-deprived eyes. She leans the RIFLE against the RIGHT SIDE of her chair.

The WIND kicks up outside. Something slides across the roof.

Her eyes track the sound ... without cutting, we TILT UP to the ceiling, back DOWN to Margaret. She turns back to the door, GASPS as the CAMERA WHIPS back to find:

THE CHAIRS BLOCKING THE DOOR HAVE BEEN NEATLY CLEARED AWAY.

Margaret covers her mouth, horrified. She glances to her RIGHT where the gun SHOULD BE, but it's gone.

She turns, finds the gun on her LEFT SIDE. Odd ...

What just happened? She never left the room ... Margaret checks, and the door is still LOCKED.

INT. FARMHOUSE - IMAGE SERIES

Lamp lighting the way, Margaret opens her bedroom door to reveal: the girls sound asleep.

Without cutting, Margaret moves past and we TRACK BEHIND her as she creeps down the HALLWAY and into the FRONT ROOM.

The lamp casts STRANGE SHADOWS as she checks that the front door is locked. Then, suddenly:

ROSE (O.S.)

MOM!

Margaret sprints down the HALL, bursts into --

HER BEDROOM

-- To find... THE CURTAINS ARE ON FIRE. The girls huddled, terrified. Margaret grabs water, douses the flames.

MARGARET

Did you knock the lamp over?

ROSE

We were asleep.

Margaret turns -- the lamp is ACROSS THE ROOM on the vanity.

MARGARET

Did you hear anything?

ROSE

When?

MARGARET

I was up the whole night. The doors are locked. Where is he getting in?

Ollie opens the book of GHOST STORIES to THE GREY MAN.

Margaret takes the book, stares at the Grey Man ETCHING.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

(reading)

During a dust storm, the Grey Man's ashes blow back together. He slides in through cracks like dust, takes shape on the other side. You'll breathe him in and he'll make you do terrible things.

Margaret glances at the girls, the BURNT CURTAINS, then ... a LINE OF DUST beneath the door jamb.

On Margaret, considering ...

ROSE

It's just a story, mom. I let Wallace read the Grey Man one day.

MARGARET

But he healed you, right? He came into a sealed house. While I stood watch.

A sudden KNOCK on the door. Margaret MOTIONS for quiet.

Rose goes to pull out a wad of fabric from the windowsill, so they can see outside... Margaret grabs her hand.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

No. That's what he wants.

A WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Hello? Margaret? It's Esther.

MARGARET

Slide the fabric back back under the door when I leave. Stay here. No matter what.

ROSE

But it's just Aunt Esther.

Margaret exits, and Rose follows directions. Then, she pulls out the POSTER that Sheriff Bell gave her. Begins to write.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Esther listens for movement inside. She looks better, more lucid than when we saw her last.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Margaret enters the kitchen.

ESTHER (O.S.)
Margaret? You missed church again.
Everyone's worried. Are you okay?

Margaret smooths her dress and hair, then opens the door forcing a smile. She SQUINTS from the sunlight.

MARGARET
We're fine. Come in.

Margaret checks to see if Wallace is outside.

CUT TO:

The kitchen is DARK again, sealed up from the dust and light. Margaret stitches quickly, glancing around the room.

Esther angles her SEWING closer to a LANTERN.

ESTHER
It's difficult with such low light.

MARGARET
Much easier to breathe though.

ESTHER
You've been missed at the sewing
circle...
(then)
Oh Margaret I've come to apologize.
Sheriff thought I might could show
you. I'm not mad at all.

MARGARET
It's not that. We've just had a
bug. Didn't want to chance the girls
getting worse.

Margaret nervously eyes a CRACK in the wall. Stands and patches it.

Esther watches her, glances at the boarded up windows.

ESTHER
I wonder if it might help to get out
more? Take it from me, it's wild
what happens up here --
(she taps her head)
-- When we're allowed to stew. Might
help to take the lid off, let some
of that steam out.

Margaret sits back down. Suddenly clear.

MARGARET

That's true, isn't it? We really
should get out more.

ESTHER

You might start with the dance
tonight.

(then)

I've been trying to get out more
too. Working with a preacher.
Praying to get my head right.
Visiting the children... I hear
Thomas is improving. Margaret, you
were right to do what you did. The
things I started thinking... the
things I said...

MARGARET

I know I could've done better too.

ESTHER

You're my sister, and I love you.
That's all.

MARGARET

And I'm glad you're here.

ESTHER

Sheriff Bell's teaching me some jokes.
Would you like to hear one?

(off Margaret's nod)

Guess why we're going to have to pay
taxes in Kansas.

MARGARET

Why?

ESTHER

Because that's where our farm has
blown.

This gets a genuine TITTER from Margaret.

MARGARET

Maybe it'll blow back before planting
time.

They laugh more. Margaret seems to relax as she sews.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Esther holds her SEWING SUPPLIES as she exits.

ESTHER

Girls?

No response as we CUT TO:

MARGARET'S BEDROOM - SAME

Rose listens at the door. Unsure what to do.

ESTHER (O.S.)
Girls! Come hug my neck!

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Margaret is horrified to see Rose and Ollie run outside, hug Esther goodbye.

ESTHER
There they are.
(then)
Henry's back soon, right?

MARGARET
That's right.

ESTHER
Oh! I ought to take your square for
the quilt.

Esther takes Margaret's FABRIC and GASPS, dropping it.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
My goodness.

Rose retrieves the fabric, sneaks a look. On top of the once delicate stitching, Margaret has sewn

HUNDREDS OF ERRATIC BLACK LINES

In a chaotic, frenzied pattern. Rose THINKS, grabs Ollie.

ROSE
You sewed over mom's needle work?!

Ollie jerks away from Rose, confused. Margaret is forced to attend to Ollie's TANTRUM --

MARGARET
No! Breathe!

-- As Esther leads Rose ACROSS THE YARD. Unable to hear Rose and Esther, Margaret watches them, suspicious.

MARGARET (PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)
What did she say?

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - DAY

Margaret slides fabric under the door jamb.

ROSE

Just ...

(then)

She said we had to come to the dance.
People were talking ... worrying.

MARGARET

Worrying?

On Margaret, mulling this over.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

What about Wallace? What if he gets
in while we're gone?

ROSE

Sheriff Bell will be there, we can
talk to him. Tell him what's
happening.

MARGARET

Do you remember how he looked at me
when he was here last? When I said
someone was in the barn?

On Rose: "Like you were crazy."

MARGARET (CONT'D)

He already sent her here to check on
me. Without the letter from Wallace,
I can't risk... If the sheriff thought
something was wrong. If he felt
that way again, he could take you.
Both.

(long beat)

No, we won't mention it. We'll go
to the dance. Show them everything's
okay. Once and for all. We don't
need them clucking about me being
unfit, do we?

CUT TO:

Rose modeling her new green and lace DRESS. Margaret kneels,
looks for areas that need to be taken in or adjusted.

ROSE

It's so pretty.

MARGARET

I think it's the wearer.

Margaret nervously touches Rose's cheek.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Are you flushed?

ROSE
No. I'm just excited.

Meanwhile, Ollie finishes dressing Henrietta in DOLL CLOTHES. The kitten is NOT HAPPY and takes off. The girls pursue --

MARGARET
Girls! We stay in here unless you're
wearing your mask.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - DAY

Margaret pulls her dress on. Looks at her slightly-warped reflection in the mirror.

INT. FRONT ROOM - DAY

Donning a mask, Margaret steps into the main room and sees ROSE falling to her knees, her back HEAVING.

Margaret comes closer -- beneath the fabric of Rose's new dress, a GROTESQUE LUMP seems to burrow across her flesh.

MARGARET
What is that? Rose?

Margaret looks away, then back -- the SHIFTING LUMP remains. She grabs Rose, RIPS OPEN the back of her new dress.

ROSE
Mom, stop! What's wrong with you?!

Rose PUSHES away from her mother. Reveals that it's only the KITTEN that was crawling under the fabric of her dress.

Rose steps away, holding her TATTERED DRESS together.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - DAY

Rose sits on the bed, her dress torn, spirit dampened. Margaret retrieves Rose's OLD DRESS from the wardrobe.

ROSE
I don't think we should go.

MARGARET
You'll still look perfect.

ROSE
It's not just the dress.

Margaret eyes the MIRROR -- her face is gaunt, sleepless.

MARGARET

I see.

(then)

But we have to show them we're okay,
right?

On Rose, not sure that "looking okay" is possible.

Margaret goes to the WARDROBE, retrieves the KNIFE.

She lifts her skirt, drags the BLADE across her inner thigh.

ROSE

Mom! Stop!

MARGARET

Relax, honey. Relax.

Margaret dabs her finger in the BLOOD, pats it onto her CHEEKS and LIPS. Ollie approaches, wanting makeup too.

ROSE

Little, no.

MARGARET

My perfect girls.

Rose watches Margaret dab the blood on Ollie's cheeks.

She moves to the WARDROBE, stealthily tucks SOMETHING UNSEEN in Ollie's doll.

EXT. DUSTY LANE - DAY

Margaret and the girls move through the HAZY AIR wearing GOGGLES and DUST MASKS.

INT. ONE ROOM CHURCH - DAY

On a makeshift stage, Janie plays an OLD TUNE on piano. The sewing circle's QUILT hangs behind her for decoration.

Nearby, several WOMEN waltz in pairs, steal glances at MARGARET. She forces a smile as Bertha and Birdie approach.

BIRDIE

So good to see you and the girls,
Margaret.

MARGARET

It's good to be here.

BERTHA
Feeling better?

Margaret scans the room -- clocks Rose chatting with Sheriff.

MARGARET
Sorry.

Margaret moves past the women. They follow.

Meanwhile, Rose pulls a LETTER from Ollie's doll and clandestinely hands it to the Sheriff.

SHERIFF BELL
Everything alright?

ROSE
Yes, sir. Just trying to surprise
Ollie with something. Her birthday's
coming up.

SHERIFF BELL
You're a good big sister. Hope my
little one ends up half so good.

Sheriff Bell turns to Birdie and Margaret.

SHERIFF BELL (CONT'D)
How about a spin, Margaret? My lady
claims disability.

Sheriff Bell winks at Birdie, who touches her pregnant belly.
Rose looks on, nervous as Margaret and Bell begin to dance.

Margaret spins, thinking...

MARGARET
Silly us. We forgot to put a stamp
on Rose's letter.

SHERIFF BELL
How's that?

MARGARET
The letter Rose gave you.

A moment.

SHERIFF BELL
Well, that won't do, will it?

He hands Margaret the LETTER, and she relaxes.

SHERIFF BELL (CONT'D)
So how's things?

MARGARET
We had a little bug, but we're much
better now.

SHERIFF BELL
Glad to hear it. No more strange
happenings?

MARGARET
...No. We're just fine.

Margaret watches Ollie and Rose whirl in gleeful pirouettes.
She LIGHTS UP at the sight. Then, the music STOPS.

The dancers stop too, but Ollie's late to get the memo, bumps
into Rose, who stares at Margaret.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
What? What's wrong?

SHERIFF BELL
Oh uh Margaret. You're...

She looks down -- a SPOT OF BLOOD SPREADS across the front
of her skirt. Margaret covers the stain, tries to explain --

MARGARET
Goodness. It's just a cut.
(then)
It's just my leg... I...
(desperate now)
Please keep playing. Play!

Rose GRABS Margaret, pulls her to the exit.

Margaret suddenly GASPS and backs the girls up.

Then, her POV: The HAZY OUTLINE of ESTHER AND WALLACE.
Entering the dance together.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
What are you doing with him?!

Confused, Esther steps inside, turns back as Dr. Cox, the
town doctor, steps into the light.

ESTHER
With Dr. Cox? Well I--

MARGARET
I'm sorry. Excuse me. I better
take care of this cut.

ESTHER

Oh, Margaret, that healer I mentioned,
the one who got me thinking right
again? Helped me with the house.
How about we stop by later?

MARGARET

Healer? You mean Wallace?

ESTHER

His name's Everett Lee. Why?

MARGARET

Does he have a limp?

ESTHER

You met him?

MARGARET

You're housing a murderer.

ESTHER

I don't understand.

MARGARET

Henry sent me a letter. Your healer
killed a man at his camp.

ESTHER

That can't be. He's real nice.

MARGARET

He's not of this world. He's been
sneaking into our house, moving things
at night. He can get through the
locks, closed windows. Sheriff, he
was the one hiding in our loft. The
one who cut our cow.

Rose sees the townspeople watch and WHISPER.

ROSE

She's telling the truth, Sheriff. I
saw him.

Margaret is suddenly aware of how she must seem.

MARGARET

I'm sorry. I didn't want the girls
to miss the dance, but this cut has
me a little light headed.

Margaret moves to exit, hears WHISPERING, stops --

MARGARET (CONT'D)

I can hear you.

(mimics a whisper)

Sppspspsp. I know what you're saying. That I have rats in the attic. But you're the ones being buried alive, poisoned! There is something in the dust, something--

ROSE

Mom? Please?

Margaret stops. As she crosses past Esther --

ESTHER

We'll get you. Won't be long.

MARGARET

What?!

ESTHER

(confused)

I said you have to be strong. Like you told me. Remember?

As Margaret hurries the girls outside, Sheriff Bell and Esther share a concerned look.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Should I--

SHERIFF BELL

Better not. I wrote Henry a while back. Due any day now.

INT. FARMHOUSE, FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Margaret's lamp barely lights the room as the girls enter.

MARGARET

Keep your masks on. Wallace could be in here right now.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Margaret locks the door and wedges fabric beneath the door jamb as the girls remove their masks, dress for bed.

MARGARET

They're conspiring, Esther and Wallace. To make me look... And it's working, even on you.

ROSE

What do you mean?

Margaret turns, pulling out Rose's letter.

MARGARET
(reading)
"Something's not right at home."
(to Rose)
What's "not right"?

ROSE
You... Sorry.
(then)
The Sheriff didn't read it...

Margaret gestures to her bloody dress.

MARGARET
But he saw me like this.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rose STARTS awake. Strangely, the door is WIDE OPEN.

Margaret's gone, and so is the GUN. Rose peers into THE HALLWAY. Hundreds of DUSTY FOOTPRINTS dirty the floor. As though someone has paced all night long.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAWN

Rose moves through the HAZY AIR to ADA'S GRAVE where she finds Margaret facing away, standing EERILY STILL.

Rose notices -- Margaret's dress is on BACKWARDS. The BUTTONS run down her back and a BLOOD STAIN marks the fabric.

ROSE
Mom?

Margaret calmly picks up her SHOTGUN, and POINTS IT DIRECTLY AT ROSE. Her eyes are blank, stare right through Rose.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Are you asleep?

Trembling, Rose gently pushes the gun down. Margaret blinks.

MARGARET
What do you mean? I'm standing right here.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Margaret re-dresses. Her hands are nervous.

ROSE

It's you. You're doing things at night again. That's how the chairs moved. There's no Grey Man. Wallace isn't haunting us.

Margaret touches the burnt curtains: *Has she really been responsible for all of the odd happenings?*

Just then, SCRATCHING on the outside wall.

Margaret motions for SILENCE. BANG, BANG, BANG! Someone POUNDS on the kitchen door.

MARGARET

(whispering)

Stay inside. No matter what, alright?

ROSE

Wait.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Margaret sees the hazy edge of the PORCH RAILING, but everything else drops off into a THICKENING FOG OF DUST.

She un-spools TWINE, steps off the PORCH, and is enveloped by the HAZE.

As she moves, there's the sense that SOMEONE could be inches from her face and she wouldn't see it.

SHATTERING GLASS. Someone's trying to get in. Margaret quietly moves to the sound. Behind her, the house CREAKS.

MARGARET

Wallace? Esther?

INT. FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Rose paces, anxious. She opens the front door, touches the twine encircling the doorknob, and steps INTO THE DUST.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Margaret is trembling, clutching the rifle, disoriented by the haze. There are FOOTSTEPS, a COUGH. Suddenly,

A HAND GRABS HER SHOULDER,

And she spins, FIRES. The GUNFIRE illuminates the OUTLINE OF SOMEONE. A body THUDS.

Margaret kneels to look at the body, brings her shaking hand to her mouth. An excruciating beat: *Who'd she shoot?*

ROSE (O.S.)

Mom?!

MARGARET

(faux calm)

Go back in, Sweetheart. It was
Wallace. I got him.

She begins to SCRATCH at the dirt with her BARE HANDS.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rose looks on as Margaret mends the DRESS with GREAT EFFORT.

ROSE

You killed him?

MARGARET

He would've killed us.

Rose sees that the green dress fabric is BLOODY.

ROSE

Is your leg still bleeding?

Rose pulls the dress away, but it CATCHES -- Margaret has stitched the dress TO HER OWN PALM.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Mom?!

Rose grabs the KNIFE from the wardrobe, and cuts the CONNECTING THREADS.

MARGARET

I'm sorry. That's...

ROSE

Let's go. You said we would.

A tear streaks Margaret's face; she slaps it away.

MARGARET

(as if waking up)

We need some help, don't we?

Rose nods, starts crying. There is sudden LUCIDITY in Margaret's voice.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

When the haze clears, we'll pack and go. On foot if we have to. Okay?

Rose nods, the weight of the world lifted from her shoulders.

ROSE

Promise?

MARGARET

We will, I promise. But I could barely see my hand in front of my face out there.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - DAYS LATER

Ollie carves a notch mark on the WARDROBE door -- Day 81.

Most of the room is PACKED. Margaret enters with WATER.

ROSE

Still bad?

Margaret nods -- she's covered in dust, exhausted.

Nearby, Ollie spins and spins, practicing pirouettes. She loses her balance, and kicks over the BUCKET of water.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Ollie! I'll get more.

MARGARET

No. I'll go.

As Margaret hurries out, Rose sees that she forgot the bucket.

ROSE

Oh, wait --

She turns the handle, but the door BUMPS into something and she realizes... they're LOCKED IN.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Mom!?

Rose climbs onto the seat of a chair by the window. Pulls FABRIC from one of the endless patched cracks.

The girls SQUINT as UNFILTERED SUNLIGHT streams in.

ROSE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

What?

Recovering, Rose peers through the WINDOW -- the sky is crystal clear, not a dust cloud in sight.

OUTSIDE,

Margaret suddenly steps into view. She grabs handfuls of dust, dirties her face and clothes.

Rose realizes with horror -- her mother has been lying about leaving town.

As Margaret strides to the house, Rose hurries to patch the crack, but it still LEAKS LIGHT.

She runs to the VANITY TABLE for a handkerchief, spots Margaret's SLEEPING PILLS... An idea occurs.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Margaret enters "COUGHING." Rose is seated at the VANITY TABLE brushing her hair like nothing's wrong.

ROSE

Is it that bad?

MARGARET

Not windy so much, but the air is so thick.

Rose turns around, offers Margaret a glass of water.

ROSE

Here.

MARGARET

No, no. That's yours.

ROSE

You're coughing. You were out in the dust, right?

Margaret ignores her. Busies herself with packing.

CUT TO:

Later. Rose stares at the untouched GLASS of water, thinks ... she puts her arms around Margaret.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Sing us Jack-o-Diamonds, will you?

MARGARET

Only if you sing with me.

MARGARET AND ROSE

Oh, she's a pretty bird / she warbles ... as she flies / She ne-ver, hollers cuckoo / till the fourth day / of Ju-ly.

Margaret's voice CRACKS -- she sips water.

MARGARET AND ROSE (CONT'D)
 Said Jack-o-Diamonds / well Jack-o-
 Diamonds / oh, I know you ... from--

CUT TO:

Margaret tries to focus her eyes. She looks at the now empty glass, then turns to Rose who SUDDENLY BLURS.

Margaret sinks onto the bed, NODDING OFF. Ollie pushes her mother back and forth, frightened.

ROSE
Just asleep, Little.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Rose leads Ollie by the hand as they exit the house. A wind blows across the farm. Possibly the beginning of a storm.

ROSE
Getting sheriff to get daddy, okay?

With a strength we've never seen from Rose before, she picks Ollie up, puts her on her hip.

Suddenly, Ollie jumps free, runs to a solitary patch of YELLOW FLOWERS, the only vibrant color in any direction.

Ollie goes to pick one as Rose rushes up behind her --

ROSE (CONT'D)
We have to go, before she wakes--

Rose freezes, spotting SOMETHING near Ollie's hand. She thinks quickly:

ROSE (CONT'D)
Explorer? To the greenhouse?

Rose wraps her HANDKERCHIEF around Ollie's eyes, spins her. Ollie orients herself, steps tentatively towards the GARDEN.

Then, Rose's POV: A piece of shoelace in the dust.

Beat. Rose starts to dig. She uncovers a SMALL BOOT. Gathers herself. Digs down further and realizes:

THIS IS AUNT ESTHER, NOT WALLACE.

Part of her arm and a large section of her stomach have been EVISCERATED by Margaret's close range shotgun blast. The remaining tatters of her dress are soaked in DRY BLACK BLOOD.

Rose jerks to her feet, tears leaking from her eyes.

The weathervane CREAKS as it whips the opposite direction.

Georgia's LOW turns her attention to the barn as a low rumble pulls her gaze skyward: A sky-high tidal wave of black dust towers above the barn. A black BLIZZARD.

Rose makes a decision -- storm or not, she's ready to grab her sister and run, but Ollie is GONE.

She turns, frantic, finds Ollie IN MARGARET'S ARMS.

MARGARET

Have to watch her, sweetheart. She was halfway to Texas.

Rose strides towards Margaret, GRABS Ollie's arm and YANKS. Ollie flails, CLAWING to stay with her mom.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Rose, you're hurting her!

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ollie nestles in Margaret's lap, shaken. Outside, the worsening storm BATTERS THE HOUSE.

MARGARET

You scared the devil out of her. What got into you?

ROSE

... I know.

Margaret turns to face Rose. A long beat.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Why are you doing this?

MARGARET

Why? To protect you. Us.

ROSE

Then we should've left.

MARGARET

I was trying to keep us all together. Me, you, your sisters.

ROSE

She is dead!

MARGARET

Don't you understand? You girls are me. Parts of me. Cut away.

(MORE)

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Separated. I bleed when you're sick.
I am alive out there, suffocating
under the dirt with your sister...
And you have no idea what I'm capable
of to keep us together, to keep us
whole.

BANG! BANG! Someone POUNDS on the front door. Rose starts to yell, but Margaret CLAMPS her hand over Rose's mouth HARD.

OLLIE WATCHES--

Rose STRUGGLING AGAINST Margaret. Her face BRIGHT RED.

Rose BITES Margaret's hand. Margaret swallows a SCREAM, but keeps her hand in place.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
They'll take you away! PLEASE.

Rose kicks her feet, starts to go LIMP, growing weaker.

MARGARET (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Shh, shh, shh--

The KNOCKING stops. Rose is SUDDENLY STILL...

INT. FRONT ROOM - SAME

Ollie opens the door for Sheriff Bell. He steps in --

SHERIFF BELL
Hey, sweet pea. Margaret?!

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - SAME

Margaret lets go of Rose who SUCKS IN AIR, recovering. Rose stares at her: "You would've killed me."

As Rose runs out, Margaret clocks the SHOTGUN in the corner.

INT. FRONT ROOM - DAY

Rose enters, kneels to Ollie and SIGNS --

ROSE
Thank you.

SHERIFF BELL
Your mama back there?

ROSE
In the bedroom.

Bell ducks through the hole in the wall. Rose follows.

ROSE (CONT'D)
(suddenly remembering)
She's got a gun!

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - DAY

Sheriff Bell enters to find Margaret clutching the RIFLE. A beat. She hands him the gun.

MARGARET
I don't know what's gotten into her.
It's for coyotes.

Sheriff Bell sniffs the barrel --

SHERIFF BELL
Had one recently?

MARGARET
They're always around.

SHERIFF BELL
Y'all mind waitin' in the kitchen?

Sheriff Bell hands the gun to Rose, who exits with Ollie.

SHERIFF BELL (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Esther stop in over here? She was
doing so good, but hadn't been over
to see the kids in a while.

MARGARET
Hope she wasn't lost in the storm.

SHERIFF BELL
Girls seem rattled.

MARGARET
Stir crazy I guess.

SHERIFF BELL
Maybe they should come with me,
Margaret. Just til Henry's back.

Margaret slides her hands into her pockets and begins to SOB. Sheriff Bell moves to comfort her.

SHERIFF BELL (CONT'D)
Hey. We're talkin' a few days here.
You done good, all I'm--

Bell is cut off by a SHARP PAIN in his side.

SHERIFF BELL (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Margaret?

It takes him a second to realize -- he's WOUNDED.

SHERIFF BELL (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Why'd you--

Margaret pulls the KNIFE from Bell's side, STABS HIM again.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Framed by the hole in the wall, Rose and Ollie listen to the SCUFFLE. Rose raises the rifle, poised to shoot.

Sheriff Bell stumbles backwards into the hallway. He SLAMS into the wall, slides down, leaving a STREAK OF RED.

ROSE
Sheriff?!

Bell pulls the knife from his ribs with a bloody hand.

SHERIFF BELL
Get outta here, girls.

Rose runs past with Ollie, starts to open the door which the wind immediately TEARS open with a BANG! -- The storm is BLINDING. Dust POURS IN through the open door as Margaret approaches and Rose turns, pointing the gun at her mother --

ROSE
Stay back. PLEASE?!

Margaret walks directly towards Rose, who aims the gun at the ceiling, and CLICK ... she tries to fire, but the chamber is empty and somewhere in the CHAOS Sheriff Bell belly-crawls out the front door and into the STORM.

MARGARET
I took the cartridge out before he came in. Believe it or not, I'm trying to protect us, Rose.

Margaret manages to shut the door before realizing ... the Sheriff is GONE ... a trail of blood leads to the door.

Margaret opens the door, staring out at the SWIRLING STORM.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Where is he?!

Meanwhile, Rose shakily kneels to the CRIMSON PUDDLE where Bell collapsed. She runs her hand though the blood, retrieves Margaret's KNIFE. Then, turning to Ollie:

ROSE
*Not Mommy, okay?! She breathed in
 the Grey Man.*

Ollie shakes her head, SIGNS --

ROSE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Not fibbing. Promise. Swear.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rose watches Margaret who sits at the VANITY TABLE in a daze. Calmly combing her hair.

Outside, as the storm worsens, air rushes through the house creating a low WHISTLE... like a train.

MARGARET
Like a train, isn't it?

Rose nods, afraid.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
If the sheriff makes it home, they'll hang me. String me right up... But there's a way around it... A way to stay together.

Margaret opens the drawer to reveal the SLEEPING PILLS.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
We'd just go to sleep like any other night. But longer.

ROSE
 Mom--

MARGARET
It's the only way to stay together, Rose. It's okay to be scared.. Come here.

Margaret wraps Rose in a TIGHT EMBRACE. Behind Margaret's back, Rose fiddles with the KNIFE in her sleeve.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
We could be with Ada.

Rose has the knife in her GRASP, but ... she just can't.

ROSE
I'm just so tired.

MARGARET
I know you are, sweetie.

A long moment -- Rose looks at Ollie.

ROSE

... Okay.

MARGARET

Okay?!

Rose nods, and climbs into bed with Ollie. Margaret dumps out the SLEEPING PILLS, and begins to crush them one by one.

ROSE

Will you tell about the wheat?

MARGARET

The first year it just took hold.
The field was chest high and when
the wind blew, it would sort of ripple
and wave like the ocean...

Meanwhile, we may notice that Rose quietly SIGNS TO OLLIE.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

One day your daddy was late coming
in, so I went down to the field, and
the wheat covered my head--

ROSE

Could we have it in the peaches?

MARGARET

That's a wonderful idea.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Margaret mixes the POWDERED SLEEPING PILLS into the jar of PEACHES. A SLAM from the bedroom.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Margaret rushes in -- DUST blows in from the open TOP WINDOW.

ROSE

I couldn't stop her. Ollie climbed
out!

Margaret spots a torn piece of OLLIE'S DRESS on the window sill, and a CHAIR next to it.

MARGARET

She has to be with us!

Margaret turns to leave. On second thought, she strides back into the room, whips open the WARDROBE DOOR ... no Ollie.

Rose and Margaret share a look.

EXT. FARMHOUSE, FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Holding twine, Margaret steps into the BLINDING STORM...

INT. FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Rose stands TREMBLING at the door. Flicks open the KNIFE... And saws through TWINE that connects Margaret to the house.

Then, Rose stops. Begins to cry: Can she really do this?

The twine begins to BOUNCE ... Margaret's coming back. Rose steels herself, finishes sawing through the twine and ...

TOSSES THE LOOSE END INTO THE STORM.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SAME

The fabric of Margaret's dress FLAPS violently. She frantically pulls the TWINE ... reaches the FRAYED END.

MARGARET IS LOST, DISCONNECTED FROM THE HOUSE. A sharp, GASPING INHALE as she is CONSUMED BY THE STORM.

INT. MARGARET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rose covers the OPEN WINDOW, wipes a tear from her face. She HITS the bed ... hits it TWICE MORE.

Ollie peeks out from beneath the mattress. Rose SIGNS --

ROSE

She's gone.

CUT TO:

A BOUNDLESS OCEAN OF DUST

With no point of reference, it's unclear whether this is the farmhouse post-storm, a dried up field, even a beach.

Then, the sound of a lonely TRAIN WHISTLE. Rose and Ollie step into the FOREGROUND, and the dust begins to TRACK SIDEWAYS through the frame.

The girls squint as their hair dances in the wind. We PULL BACK to reveal that the girls are riding an open train car with HENRY and their COUSINS.

Ollie tugs on Rose, points to a GREEN TREE zooming past. Rose picks her little sister up for a better view.

THE END: