

**MOM?**

Written by

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EXT. PEPPER PIKE, OHIO - EARLY MORNING

A flare of fiery orange sun burns from the sky.

The sunlight seeps across the vista, cresting above endless rows of oak trees.

Revealing clusters of sturdy white-washed homes, playgrounds, a baseball field and running trails.

A good neighborhood to raise a family.

But then, the cheerful BIRDSONG is replaced by the WHINE of an engine.

It belongs to a retro Triumph Bonneville T140.

750 cc's of engine gliding effortlessly across smooth asphalt.

The bike floats past a JOGGING MOM pushing a stroller.

A SHARPLY DRESSED MOM in business attire - sipping coffee, laptop bag slung over her shoulder, bundles two UNRULY TODDLERS into a Tesla.

Another MOM mows the lawn with her infant strapped into a Baby Bjorn carrier.

Her HUSBAND brings her a glass of freshly squeezed juice.

GOD'S EYE VIEW:

The faraway shape of the motorcycle follows the gentle contours of the roads, winding through the maze of suburbia.

The WHINE of the engine grows louder and louder, overwhelming, and then --

Jarring SILENCE.

SMASH TO TITLE:

**MOM?**

EXT. STRIP MALL - MORNING

The motorcycle has stopped in the parking lot of a dated strip mall.

There's a laundromat, sandwich joint, pawn shop and a nail salon.

The driver dismounts and removes their helmet, revealing --  
JOHN SLATER, 40's.

He strips off his black leather jacket, revealing a white  
DOCTOR'S COAT underneath.

He has greying stubble and tired eyes, coat hanging too  
loosely over his skinny frame. Puts the care of his patients  
above his own health.

John turns to face an URGENT CARE squeezed between the  
laundromat and nail salon.

A grey building with an ugly green awning. An oversized red  
medical cross on the front.

It might not look pretty, but this is his domain. His  
kingdom.

As his hand touches the doorknob, he takes a deep breath.

Game time.

INT. URGENT CARE, WAITING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The frantic CHATTER of a PACKED WAITING ROOM. Cheerfully  
painted pink walls do little to disguise the stench of  
despondency.

The room is teeming with old, young and everything in-  
between.

There are bloodied noses, bruises and injured limbs.

Just as a BOY, 6, is about to HURL, John slides a plastic  
bucket towards him, catching the vomit just in time.

The kid's MOTHER, 40's, gives John an embarrassed shrug.

John kneels in front of the boy, glancing at the bucket.

JOHN  
Someone had Lucky Charms for  
breakfast.

John fetches the boy a cup of water from a nearby cooler.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
It's okay. They're my favorite too.

The boy smiles, spirits lifted.

John strides to an OVERWORKED RECEPTIONIST, 20's, hunkered behind a desk, phone jammed to her ear, scribbling notes.

She looks at him and makes a "four" gesture with her fingers - pointing John to the appropriate room.

John nods, marching off with purpose.

A man who needs to keep moving at all costs. Like a shark that will die if it stops swimming.

INT. URGENT CARE ROOM - DAY

John attends to the pregnant HANNAH HILL, 19, who's coming to the end of her term.

She's wearing a fast-food uniform. Has lived a lot of life for someone so young.

JOHN  
(referring to a file)  
Sounds like you've been  
experiencing some discomfort.

HANNAH  
I've been having these really sharp  
pains. Sometimes they get so bad I  
wanna pass out.

John nods understandingly.

JOHN  
Usually, for someone as far along  
as you, I'd recommend seeing your  
OBGYN.

Hannah taps her foot anxiously.

HANNAH  
I'm between shifts and your  
building's right across the street  
from work, so...

He motions for her to sit on the edge of the examination table.

John secures a blood-pressure cuff around her arm and inflates it.

Then listens to the baby's heartbeat with a stethoscope.

Hannah looks at him with apprehension.

JOHN

Blood pressure's slightly elevated, but no indication of gestational hypertension. Your baby's heartbeat is strong and regular.

(comforting)

You have a healthy little one coming soon, Miss Hill.

Hannah relaxes, comforted by the news.

HANNAH

What about the pain?

JOHN

Aches and pains are the body's way of preparing for childbirth. If it continues, take one Tylenol every four hours, but no more than four times a day.

John removes the cuff, opens a drawer and packs it away.

JOHN

So, boy or a girl?

HANNAH

My boyfriend wants it to be a surprise.

JOHN

Brave.

HANNAH

Stupid.

They laugh.

She then checks the time, jolting into action.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

My shift's about to start. You take cash, right? I'm not covered.

John looks at her sympathetically.

JOHN

Keep your money. I'll work something out with the front desk.

HANNAH

You don't have to-

JOHN  
It's just paperwork.

HANNAH  
Thank you.

Hannah leaves.

John snags a lollipop from a jar on his desk, opens the door and SHOUTS --

JOHN  
Next!

He bites into the lollipop, SHATTERING it in his mouth.

EXT. SLATER HOME - LATE AFTERNOON

John's motorcycle pulls into the driveway of a two-story colonial at the end of a cul-de-sac.

INT. SLATER HOME, LIVING AREA - LATE AFTERNOON

A well lived-in home that has been comfortably furnished with Costco and Ikea.

John has barely made it through the front door, when --

IZZY (O.S.)  
Spin!

John turns as a softball WHIZZES at him, catching it with one hand.

He's greeted by his 12-year old daughter IZZY wearing her softball uniform.

An independent spirit. The rare breed of tween who's life isn't dictated by algorithms.

JOHN  
Talk to me.

Izzy smiles and holds up one finger... two fingers... and then three.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Three strikeouts?

Izzy nods proudly.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Get over here.

She runs over to him. He gives her a big hug.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
I told you all those late-night  
knee drills would be worth it.

He regards her intently.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
You still have six games left in  
the season. Don't let it get to  
your head, okay?

A tinge of disappointment that despite her achievement John  
still isn't wholly satisfied.

TESS (O.S.)  
What am I missing?

TESS SLATER, late 30's, enters. Radiates kindness and  
empathy. Her ability to take a step back and see the big  
picture is the perfect counter to John's impetuousness.

JOHN  
I was just telling our MVP how  
proud I am.

She dumps a pile of CASE FILES on a cluttered dining room  
table and gives John a kiss.

TESS  
Pizza's here in twenty.

Izzy WHOOPS with excitement.

TESS (CONT'D)  
Okay MVP. Go upstairs and get that  
grime cleaned off.

As Izzy dashes up the stairs, the energy deflates out of  
Tess.

The kind of mom who always shows strength in front of her kid  
- even on her worst day.

Tess removes her jacket, unties her hair and rolls up her  
sleeves. Reveals a tattoo of Izzy's name on her forearm -  
rock and roll beneath the surface of suburban compliance.

John tosses the softball at her. She catches it casually.

JOHN  
Wanna talk about it?

As they talk, they toss the softball back and forth. Easy and natural.

TESS  
I had to remove two kids from their parents' custody. Shoulda seen them, John. They had that look. No child should have that look.

She throws the softball to the ground with force. THUD.

TESS (CONT'D)  
Makes me want to tear the whole fucking system apart.

JOHN  
You will.

He kisses her tenderly just as the doorbell RINGS.

TESS  
But first, pizza.

INT. SLATER HOME, DINING AREA - EVENING

The Slaters eat dinner. Izzy devours her pizza in a hurry.

TESS  
What's the big rush?

IZZY  
I promised I'd call Mel. She's not doing so good. Her mom's being a total bit-

Tess cuts her off.

TESS  
Send her our love.

As Izzy gets up to leave, John notices her *raw bleeding knuckles*.

JOHN  
What happened to your hand?

IZZY  
Huh?

Izzy looks at her scratched hand, brushing it off.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
Oh, I got beaned by a line drive.

JOHN  
Hmmm. Sure you wanna stick with  
that?

Izzy knows she's busted.

IZZY  
Fine. It was Blair Cooper. She was  
bullying Mel again. I warned her  
not to, but she didn't listen.

JOHN  
You promised no more fights.

IZZY  
She hit me first.

JOHN  
True strength is being able to walk  
away.

IZZY  
So, being a coward?

JOHN  
No, being smart. Thinking about  
your future. If you wanna get into  
a good college-

IZZY  
I'm 12 years old.

JOHN  
When I was 12...

IZZY  
"When I was 12..."

The tension is palpable. A conversation they've had before.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
Can I go now?

JOHN  
(with anger)  
No you can't.

TESS  
John-

John snaps.

JOHN

I guess there are no fucking rules  
in this house!

TESS

It's okay Izz, you're excused.

Izzy stares daggers at John.

IZZY

Thanks mom.

Izzy leaves. John tries in vain to apologize.

JOHN

Izz? Shit.

He's too late. A moment between husband and wife.

TESS

She's 12, John.

Tess gets up and ruffles John's hair. Despite the tension and acrimony, she has a way of diffusing things.

She leaves John alone with his thoughts.

He gets up and TOSSES the pizza box into the garbage.

INT. SLATER HOME, IZZY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

John stands at Izzy's cracked bedroom door.

He sees Tess lying next to her on the bed.

Tess holds out an AirPod, Izzy takes the other.

They rock out together.

A closeness that John can't seem to capture with his daughter.

He reaches for the door, but then stops. Retreats.

After a moment, the sound of DRUMMING carries into --

INT. SLATER HOME, BASEMENT - NIGHT

A large finished basement with carpeted floors and a dry bar in the corner.

John lets off steam by POUNDING on his drum kit.

A pulsing anxiety lurking beneath the surface.

He hears the FEEDBACK from a speaker and the sound of guitar strings being plucked.

He looks to the side and sees Tess has joined him with a beat-up electric Fender Strat.

She's changed into a pair of comfortable sweatpants and a baggy T.

They start playing a pulsing rock beat.

But even once the song is finished, John continues to POUND the drums.

Finally, Tess places her hand over his and then gently removes the drumsticks from his grip.

John SIGHS.

Tess tilts his chin, eyes meeting his.

TESS  
You can be her parent and her friend. There's room for both.

She strokes his cheek with compassion.

TESS (CONT'D)  
Try not to stay up too late, okay?

John nods.

As Tess goes in for a kiss, she turns and COUGHS into her elbow.

TESS (CONT'D)  
Rain check?

She smiles at John and leaves the room.

As Tess leaves, John SMASHES the cymbal one more time.

The hollow, metallic sound echoes.

INT. SLATER HOME, IZZY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

John stands over his sleeping daughter and gently removes the AirPods from her ears.

Moonlight trickles onto a photo next to Izzy's bed.

Tess and Izzy are at an environmental protest march, smiling and holding up a banner that says, "There is No Planet B."

From Tess's face...

FADE TO:

An OLD WOMAN'S FACE. Crow's nests. Tightly pursed lips. Eyes that look right past you.

She tries to smile as if it's the most unnatural thing in the world.

Just then, her left eye caves in like a sink hole.

The flesh starts to SLIDE OFF of her face, revealing sinew, teeth and jaw.

But she keeps smiling.

And smiling...

BEDROOM

John is suddenly startled awake out of his dream by an ALARM on his iPhone - the sound of an ambulance siren.

He turns over and is surprised to see that Tess is sitting on the edge of the bed.

JOHN

Tess?

She COUGHS.

John feels her forehead.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
You're running a fever.

TESS

I'm fine.

She stands up, but clutches her head.

TESS (CONT'D)  
I kinda do feel like shit.

John gently goads her back to the bed and kisses her on the forehead.

INT. SLATER HOME, KITCHEN - MORNING

Izzy eats cereal while John slugs back some coffee. An awkwardness after the previous night's argument.

JOHN

Mom's a little green around the gills. But lucky for you, I'm doing the school run.

IZZY

Yay.

John puts his coffee down and makes a peace offering.

JOHN

What if, I dunno, we took the old gal out for a stretch? If that's okay-

Her entire face lights up.

IZZY

Really?

JOHN

Hell yeah.

IZZY

Can I drive?

JOHN

Hell no.

INT. SLATER HOME, MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

Izzy says goodbye to Tess. Snug in bed with the blankets pulled up.

IZZY

You never get sick.

TESS

Moms are people too. Now get over here and gimme a hug.

Tess sits up and embraces Izzy. But she hangs on and on, clinging to her daughter for dear life.

IZZY

Mom, it's just school, I'll see you later.

Tess finally releases her. Izzy gives her a strange look.

TESS  
I just love you so damn much.

IZZY  
Love you too, weirdo.

With that, Izzy skips out of the room.

John approaches with a hot cup of tea.

JOHN  
I made you lemon and ginger tea.  
There's DayQuil in the cabinet. And  
no work stuff. You can save the  
world tomorrow.

EXT. SLATER HOME, DRIVEWAY - MORNING

John and Izzy, holding bike helmets, make their way towards the motorcycle.

Their balding, annoying neighbor SYDNEY ROTH, 60's, RAKES the leaves on his yard.

JOHN  
Keep walking.

John does his best to avoid him. Head down, bee-lining towards the motorcycle.

IZZY  
Morning Mr. Roth!  
(smiling at John)  
What?

John swallows his irritation and throws on a fake smile.

JOHN  
Morning.

Sydney drops the rake and approaches.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
If this is about the fence line-

SYDNEY  
No. It's my mother. She hasn't been  
feeling like herself. I thought it  
was just a cough, but then the  
fever started. At her age...

JOHN

Sounds like Tess has the same  
thing. Must be going around.

John and Izzy hop on the motorcycle.

JOHN (PRELAP) (CONT'D)

Make sure she rests and gets plenty  
of fluids...

INT. URGENT CARE ROOM - MORNING

JOHN

... and if the fever gets any worse  
come back and see me.

John consults with a PATIENT, 40's, female. She COUGHS hoarsely and has a pale complexion.

She slings her purse over her shoulder and leaves.

Moments later, another MOM, 30's, strides into John's office with the same nasty cough and pale complexion.

John cuts her a look, noting the similarities between the two patients' symptoms.

INT. SLATER HOME, LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Tess, pen in hand, attempts to do some work as she pours through her case files.

She swigs from a bottle of DayQuil and rubs her aching head.

All of a sudden, her attention drifts to a photo of a YOUNGER IZZY riding her bicycle.

She stares at the photo, zooming onto Izzy's face. Everything else fades into the background. Tess smiles faintly, when --

SNAP!

The pen breaks.

Black ink oozes all over the table.

INT. SLATER HOME, BATHROOM - MORNING

Tess, body shaking from the fever, gets into the shower.

She adjusts the temperature.

Gradually turning off the cold water.

As she does this, her eyes lock into a thousand-yard stare, expanding until they're impossibly wide.

Scalding-hot water washes over her. Her flesh begins to redden, but she doesn't even flinch.

Tess continues CRANKING the faucet, until it BREAKS OFF.

At that precise moment, her pupils DILATE - a SHIFT in her eyes. Distant. Far away.

Like Tess isn't there anymore.

EXT. URGENT CARE - MORNING

John has a much needed moment to himself, rubbing his tired face.

He's startled by an urgent KNOCK on the door.

JOHN

Yes?

The receptionist enters.

RECEPTIONIST  
You need to see this.

He follows the receptionist's eyes towards the waiting room.

*There's a line of women that extends from the waiting room and stretches all the way around the block.*

He furrows his brow in concern.

EXT JERICHO MIDDLE SCHOOL, PLAYGROUND - AFTERNOON

It's recess. A flurry of young minds fill the playground.

Izzy hangs out with MEL SINGH, 12, overweight, self-esteem hovering below zero.

Mel pulls out a very small jar of pureed food.

IZZY  
That isn't real food.

MEL

It's baby food. Mom saw it on some  
skinny-bitch's TikTok. 'Three jars  
a day keeps the baby fat away.'

She takes a teaspoon full and swallows, nearly gagging.

MEL (CONT'D)

My life sucks.

Izzy grabs the baby food out of her hand and throws it in the trash.

MEL (CONT'D)

Hey?! That was my lunch.

IZZY

What your mom doesn't know can't  
piss her off.

Instead, Izzy offers her half a sandwich. Mel accepts,  
gratefully.

IZZY (CONT'D)

You know you can come over and stay  
anytime, right?

MEL

(sadly)

Thanks, Izz.

Mel wipes a tear from her eye and forces a bright smile.

MEL (CONT'D)

Is it okay if we talk about  
something else?

BLAIR (O.S.)

Hey girls.

They're interrupted by BLAIR COOPER, 12. Acrylic nails and  
too much make up.

IZZY

I guess Sephora must've had a sale.

BLAIR

I happen to take pride in my  
appearance. Unlike some people.

Blair looks at Mel, instantly shaming her.

IZZY

Say something else. I dare you.

BLAIR  
Or what?

Izzy squeezes a fist.

BLAIR (CONT'D)  
My mom's a lawyer and if you so  
much as raise another finger, she's  
gonna sue you so bad that your  
whole family will be eating food  
out of cans. Or jars...

She smirks, gesturing to the jar of baby food in the trash.

Izzy takes a step towards her.

They're now face to face.

IZZY  
Try it.

As Izzy and Blaire stare off --

Blair's cellphone PINGS.

BLAIR  
I'm gonna get that.

She steps away to attend to her phone.

Just then, Izzy's phone VIBRATES with a text from Tess.

IZZY  
"Thinking of you... love mom."  
(to Mel)  
My mom's being a lot right now.

Mel's cell also vibrates.

MEL  
Mine too. "Have a great day. Love,  
mom." Yeah, right.

And then --

In a spiral-like effect, the sound of cellphones PINGING,  
BEEPING and VIBRATING gradually begins to fill the  
playground.

Everyone starts checking their phones.

Izzy and Mel share a look.

INT. JERRICHO MIDDLE SCHOOL, HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

The bell RINGS to signal the end of school.

Children pour out of their classrooms.

EXT. JERRICHO MIDDLE SCHOOL, PICK UP AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Izzy, Mel and the other children exit towards the pickup area.

There's a long row of cars as moms and dads wait to do their daily collections.

SARAH SINGH (O.S.)  
Melanie, sunshine, over here!

SARAH SINGH, 40's, immaculately groomed in her Alo Yoga workout leggings and tank, waves Mel over towards her white Mercedes A-Class.

IZZY  
Call me later?

MEL  
Definitely.

Mel walks off.

Just then, John's motorcycle skids to the front of the row.

JOHN  
Izzy.

Izzy hops on and throws on her helmet. The motorcycle spins away.

IZZY  
WATCH OUT-

A CAR speeds directly towards them, showing no signs of stopping.

John SWERVES to avoid them.

Inside the car, the unnaturally serene face of a WOMAN behind the wheel with two visibly upset KIDS.

John, unsettled, stares at the car in the side mirror.

EXT. SLATER HOME, DRIVWEAY - LATE AFTERNOON

The motorcycle pulls into the driveway. The garage door is wide open.

IZZY

Mom?

A perky Tess, looking alert and healthy, has popped the hood of the car, sleeves rolled, digging around in the engine compartment.

She waves brightly at them.

TESS

I heard a noise. Sounded like rats.

John studies his wife.

JOHN

Someone's feeling better...

TESS

Like a new person.

She SLAMS the hood closed and puts an arm around Izzy.

TESS (CONT'D)

I was just about to make a grilled cheese. Any takers?

IZZY

Me.

All of sudden, a SHADOW approaches from behind...

Everyone spins to find a disheveled Sydney Roth.

JOHN

Mr. Roth?

SYDNEY

She's gone. I can't find her anywhere.

JOHN

All right. Let's take it easy.  
Who's gone?

SYDNEY

My mother. Please. You have to help.

John motions to Tess and Izzy, "I'll be right back."

INT. SLATER HOME, HALLWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

Izzy follows Tess towards the kitchen.

She passes a hammer and a box of nails lying on the floor, but doesn't pay any mind.

INT. MR. ROTH'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

John follows Sydney through the house.

It's dank and musty. Shag carpets and floral-upholstered furniture stuck in the 70's.

INT. MR. ROTH'S HOUSE, MOTHER'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

A stuffy, carpeted cesspool. Potted plants filled with ferns. Withering leaves like tentacles reach everywhere.

Sydney motions to an empty bed.

SYDNEY

She was laying right there.

John looks around the room.

JOHN

Maybe she just went for a walk.

SYDNEY

I doubt that.

He motions to the corner of the room.

Sunlight punches between a gap in the curtains, illuminating an old wheelchair.

INT. MR. ROTH'S HOUSE, VARIOUS ROOMS - AFTERNOON

John and Sydney search the house room by room.

JOHN

Hello? Mrs. Roth?

But each room is empty.

INT. MR. ROTH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

John has his hands to his hips, perplexed.

SYDNEY  
I'm calling the police.

Sydney begins to dial 9-1-1, but his shaking hand struggles to press the digits.

John places a hand on his shoulder.

JOHN  
She couldn't have gone far.

These words seem to steady Sydney.

He begins to redial...

But then, John's eyes widen.

He gently takes the phone away from his neighbor's ear.

SYDNEY  
What?

JOHN  
Behind you.

Through thin sheer curtains, they can see a FIGURE appear in the huge glass sliding door that leads out to the backyard.

It's MRS. ROTH, 80's, in a flimsy nightgown. A puff of grey hair that wafts in the breeze.

*She's walking with the help of a cane.*

SYDNEY  
Mother!

Caught up in the relief of seeing his mom, he doesn't think twice about opening the door for her.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)  
(re: legs)  
Praise God. It's a miracle.

MRS. ROTH  
Sydney...

She touches her son's cheek with soft, wrinkled fingers.

MRS. ROTH (CONT'D)  
My sweet Sydney.

SYDNEY  
Let's get you back to bed.

There's a look of utmost serenity on her face.

But John notices there's something else, too.

*A milky secretion leaking from her eyes, dripping onto the thick, shaggy carpets.*

As Sydney reaches to guide his mother to the bed, John stops him.

JOHN

Mrs. Roth? It's Doctor Slater from next door. How are you feeling?

She stares at him for what seems like an eternity.

MRS. ROTH

I just had the most wonderful dream.

Then she picks up the cane, which actually isn't a cane at all but a RAKE.

The rest all happens in a blur --

AS SHE LIFTS THE RAKE, SWINGS AND SLAMS IT INTO HER SON'S CHEST.

Blood buckshots all over John.

Sydney's eyes widen, grappling with the fact that his own mother just impaled him.

SYDNEY

Mother...

The words drain out of his mouth as she RIPS the rake out of him with a SQUELCH.

John backs off. Not processing. Not wanting to.

JOHN

Put the rake down, Mrs. Roth.

But the nightmare isn't over.

It's just begun.

As she holds the rake up --

JOHN (CONT'D)

Don't- NO!

*Mrs. Roth RAMS her entire face into the long metal teeth of the rake.*

The metal spikes pierce through her soft wrinkly flesh.

She calmly removes her face from the spikes and then --

Does it again.

And again --

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Stop, please Mrs. Roth!

Faster and faster, harder and harder, until her body suddenly drops with a THUD.

Mother and son united in death.

John, pale, stumbles, falls, quickly gets up as he hears the 911 operator's voice coming out of Sydney's fallen phone.

911 OPERATOR  
Sir? Are you there? Hello?

John grabs the phone.

JOHN  
Yes! Yes I'm still here. I want to report-

911 OPERATOR  
Sir, I'm going to need you to hold the line for me.

Before he can respond, the operator puts him on hold.

He tries to call again, but this time the phone BEEPS with a busy signal.

INT. SLATER HOME, KITCHEN - SAME

Tess butters bread as she preps the grilled cheeses for the panini grill.

IZZY  
Do you think Mrs. Roth is okay?

TESS  
Who?

IZZY  
Mrs. Roth. The old lady from next door.

Tess drops the bread. Doesn't bother to pick it up. Just grabs another slice.

TESS  
She'll find her way home.

Another piece of bread drops to the ground. She grabs another.

IZZY  
Mom?

TESS  
Yes honey?

IZZY  
Are you sure you're alright? You seem kinda...

A small pile of bread has assembled on the ground.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
... Out of it.

TESS  
The trick is to butter both sides.

IZZY  
(confused)  
What?

TESS  
Or the bread will dry out.

Thick, greasy swathes of butter are applied to the bread, grossing Izzy out.

TESS (CONT'D)  
Most people forget that step.

IZZY  
Okay... both sides... sure...

TESS  
This is nice. Some you and me time.  
We don't do this enough. That reminds me-

She jumps to another topic, rambling.

A manic energy taking over.

TESS (CONT'D)  
We should take another girls trip.  
Like the one to DC. Our first  
protest march. That was a riot,  
riot...

Tess chuckles dully at the play on words as she lumps slices of American cheese onto the bread.

TESS (CONT'D)  
Me and my bleeding heart. That's  
what your father used to say.  
(without missing a beat)  
I'd like to see how your heart  
bleeds.

Izzy recoils.

IZZY  
What did you say?

TESS  
Did I say something?

Their eyes meet. A vacuous smile on Tess's face.

Gradually, a look of utter horror takes over Izzy.

IZZY  
Mom.

TESS  
Yes?

IZZY  
Your hand.

*Tess looks down at her hand to find that she has enclosed it inside the panini grill.*

The SINGE of burning flesh. Smoke wafts.

TESS  
Oh.

Tess casually lifts the grill and stares at her red, blistering hand.

IZZY  
(really freaked out)  
Mom, what's going on with you?

A faraway look in Tess's eyes.

TESS  
Nothing that a hug can't fix.

Tess holds her arms open so Izzy can embrace her. Izzy's hesitant, watching as the flesh on her hand pops and oozes.

Suddenly, Izzy's heart skips at the sound of feet THUDDING. But it's only John, out of breath.

JOHN  
Izz, don't. Something's...  
something's wrong with them.

TESS  
John, is everything okay?

Izzy then notices the flecks of blood decorating John's shirt. The wheels in her head begin to turn.

IZZY  
Dad, why's there blood on your  
clothes?

JOHN  
Come stand next to me, Izzy.

IZZY  
Is Mrs. Roth okay?  
(beat)  
Is Mr. Roth...?

A dread-filled moment.

JOHN  
No they aren't.

Izzy very slowly edges closer to John.

But Tess puts a hand on her forearm.

TESS  
Your dad's just overreacting.

Izzy looks at her dad. Back to her mom. Caught between two opposing wills.

*But then, she notices the wax-like secretion leaking from Tess's eyes.*

IZZY  
Mom. Your eyes...

TESS  
There's nothing to be afraid of.

JOHN  
We gotta go.

TESS  
Nothing at all.

Izzy knows that's definitely not fucking true. It's time to go.

But as she moves towards John --

Tess GRABS at Izzy. Feral.

She locks onto Izzy's forearm, squeezing, tightening her hand around the flesh.

IZZY  
OW!

As Izzy YANKS her arm away, she accidentally hits Tess's lip, splitting it.

Tess LUNGES again at Izzy, but this time she misses.

Her face drips with rage. Blood dribbles down her chin.

TESS  
I'm gonna shred your pretty face  
you devious little cunt.

It takes a moment to process - did she really just say that?

Izzy and John take a couple of small steps backwards before BURSTING into a full-blooded sprint.

INT. SLATER HOME, FRONT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

John and Izzy haul ass through the house.

They stop as they reach the front door, looking at it in disbelief.

IZZY  
(terrified)  
Dad.

*The front door has been nailed shut with plywood and nails.*

They circle round to the BACK DOOR.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
No way...

The door has also been secured with PLYWOOD AND NAILS.

John WALES against the door as he tries in vain to rip off the planks of wood.

JOHN  
Goddamnit!

The voice of his daughter brings him back.

IZZY  
Dad... DAD?

He looks at his shell-shocked daughter. Despite the terror, there's resilience.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
The car.

INT. SLATER HOME, KITCHEN - SAME

Tess calmly regards the magnetic knife holder on the wall.

She brushes her fingers along the array of knives finally settling on a BONING KNIFE.

Long and narrow, ten inches of razor-sharp steel.

INT. SLATER HOME, GARAGE - LATE AFTERNOON

John and Izzy climb into the vehicle. The keys are still dangling in the ignition.

Just as he's about to start the car --

IZZY  
Did Mr. Roth's mom do something to him?

John looks at his daughter. No words come.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
Is mom gonna do something to me too?

A heartbreakin moment.

JOHN  
Your mom loves you.

He starts the car.

But nothing happens. Not even a spark.

Again.

Nothing.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
(dawning on him)  
Rats...

He quickly pops the hood and looks inside.

A chill runs down his spine.

The battery cable wires have been ripped out.

Another part of Tess's insidious plan to entrap them.

Izzy frantically presses the buttons on the garage door clicker.

But no luck either.

*John removes the cover off the clicker to reveal that the batteries have been removed.*

TESS (O.S.)  
Izz, hon. I'm really sorry. I don't  
know what came over me.

Her voice is close. Too close.

John's eyes dart towards the garage door.

He looks at the emergency release cord, disengaging it with a CLICK.

JOHN  
Help me lift the door.

Together, they lift the garage door a couple of inches but it JAMS UP.

That's when John notices --

PADLOCKS on each side of the door, preventing the rollers from moving upwards.

TESS (O.S.)  
Let's talk about this as a family.

John looks at his terrified daughter, scrambling for another solution.

Finds one.

He nods towards ANOTHER DOOR in the far left corner of the garage...

THE BASEMENT ENTRANCE.

On their haunches, they scuttle toward the door and gently open it, leading to --

A flight of cement stairs that steeple into darkness.

They descend, quickly approaching the basement door and enter.

INT. SLATER HOME, BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

John locks the door behind him and kills the lights.

INT. BASEMENT STAIRS - MOMENTS LATER

Tess slowly walks down the stairs, lathered in darkness.

CLIP-CLOP

A strip of pale light reveals the BONING KNIFE.

BASEMENT

John and Izzy hide amongst the drum kit and plethora of other instruments.

The ominous CLIP-CLOP of footsteps coming down the stairs.

They watch the door handle TURN and JIGGLE.

After a moment, they hear the sound of KEYS JANGLING.

Their faces ignite in terror.

A key is inserted, pushing the basement key out of the lock.

But it's the wrong one.

Tess tries again.

No luck.

Another one.

With each key inserted their hearts pin-ball madly inside their chests.

CLICK --

The door WHINES open.

After what seems like an eternity, Tess finally enters the basement.

But then, Izzy accidentally BUMPS one of the symbols.

Luckily, John quickly catches it, muting the noise.

They can breathe again.

Tess picks up the Fender Strat and begins cutting the strings with the knife.

TWANG --

TESS  
I'm better now. I promise.

TWANG --

TESS (CONT'D)  
Cross my heart.

TWANG--

TESS (CONT'D)  
Hope to die.

The boning knife TEARS through the bass drum stopping millimeters away from Izzy's face.

Tess, crouching, stares back at her terrified daughter with a smile.

She suddenly stumbles as John KICKS the electric keyboard into her.

Giving them enough time to run back up the stairs.

They reenter the --

GARAGE

And close the basement door behind them.

The sound of Tess's FOOTSTEPS rapidly approaching from the stairs.

Closer...

John looks at the car and has an idea.

He throws the driver's door open, disengages the handbrake and pushes the car towards the basement door.

Any second Tess is about to burst through that door.

And just as she opens it --

The car collides into the door, jamming it shut and trapping Tess inside the basement.

A brief respite.

John and Izzy's eyes remain on the door.

After a moment, Tess KNOCKS calmly like she's asking a neighbor for sugar.

TESS (O.S.)  
Did you ask him how that blood  
found its way all over his clothes?

Izzy looks at John - mom's words playing on her mind.

JOHN  
She's messing with you.  
(to Tess)  
Tess, it's us. You can fight this.  
You're strong. We love you.

TESS (O.S.)  
I'm not the one you should be  
afraid of, Izzy. If you open that  
door I can protect you.

JOHN  
Don't open the door, Izzy.

TESS (O.S.)  
(to Izzy)  
Tell him about the strikeouts. Tell  
him what you told me...

JOHN  
What is she talking about?

TESS (O.S.)  
It doesn't matter. You'll always be  
a disappointment to him.

JOHN  
That's enough...

TESS (O.S.)  
He'll try to break you the same way  
his own mother broke him.

A sadistic edge to her voice.

TESS (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Once a mommy's boy, always a  
mommy's boy, right, *Johnny Boy*?

Something inside John SNAPS.

JOHN  
SHUT UP!

TESS (O.S.)  
See? I'm not the one who's sick. He  
is.

JOHN  
Tess, we're leaving now.

TESS (O.S.)  
(helpless)  
Help me, baby. I'm cold...

Izzy is panicked and confused. This is her mom. This is her rock.

IZZY  
We can't- we can't just leave her  
here. Mom... MOM!

TESS (O.S.)  
He's going to make you promises he  
can't keep and when he does, I'll  
be right here, baby... right here.

John kneels, eyes meeting hers, taking Izzy by the shoulders.

JOHN  
Izz- listen to me. That isn't your  
mom behind that door... that's  
something else. I promise I'm gonna  
get her the help she needs. But we  
have to leave now. Okay?

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)  
(with emphasis)  
Okay?

IZZY  
Okay.

As they leave the garage, John passes a wall stacked with tools and removes a CROWBAR.

JOHN  
Follow me.

Izzy looks over her shoulder one more time at the basement door.

INT. SLATER HOME, FRONT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

John uses the crowbar to RIP the plywood and nails off the front door.

CRACK.

And then --

They step outside...

EXT. SLATER HOME - AFTERNOON

It takes Izzy and John a beat to absorb their new surroundings.

At first the sounds around them are background noise, but they FADE UP, becoming sharper and relentless.

An alarm WAILS. A car horn BLARES.

Clusters of sobbing FATHERS wonder aimlessly.

One of the fathers tries to wrestle a revolver away from a MOM, but she FIRES a single shot into his heart.

He drops dead.

She marches forward as if nothing happened.

All of a sudden, John's phone RINGS.

Tess's name flashes on the screen. He contemplates before answering.

TESS (V.O.)  
Turn around.

John and Izzy turn around to face the house.

They see Tess watching them through a small barred window in the basement, phone to her ear.

TESS (V.O.)  
Put Izzy on for me.

JOHN  
I can't do that.

TESS (V.O.)  
I just wanna talk to her.

Tears are beginning to collect in John's eyes - his wife. His family. His life. Everything is in ruins.

TESS (V.O.)  
The last time I saw a sunset as perfect as this was on our wedding day. It was the best day of my life.

John squints at the sun slanting perfectly through the treetops around him.

A beautiful sight amongst the carnage.

TESS (V.O.)  
Your mom hated that I made you happy. That we got to share this wonderful life.

Tess presses her wedding ring against the security bars. A shard of afternoon sun reflects off the rose gold surface.

TESS (V.O.)  
It's still me, John.

A sad moment.

JOHN  
I have to say goodbye now,  
Tess.  
(choking up)  
I'm sorry.

He ends the call.

But within seconds, Izzy's phone RINGS. "MOM" appears on the screen.

John looks at Izzy sadly, gently removes her phone and turns it off.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
The phone stays off. It's for your  
own protection. I need you to  
promise me.

A devastating moment passes.

Izzy realizes this could be the last time she speaks to her mom.

IZZY  
I promise.

Just then, Tess begins to SCREAM for her daughter. Over and over.

TESS  
IZZY!

Her previously calm demeanor has been replaced by a seething desperation.

TESS (CONT'D)  
ISABEL!

An urge to get to her child at all costs.

As she SCREAMS, Tess grabs the security bars of the basement.

And with preternatural strength --

SHE BENDS THEM APART.

*Whatever this virus is has perverted Tess's maternal instinct into something dangerous.*

Once the bars are separated, she begins to squeeze her body between them.

Her ribs CRACK. Muscles compress. Flesh bruises. Her mouth pulled back into an awful rictus.

Once she's free, she adjusts herself, locks eyes with John and Izzy and then sprints after them. Fast.

Really fucking fast.

Head down like a demented 100 meter sprinter.

Boning knife in her grasp.

JOHN  
Gogogo!

John and Izzy run towards the motorcycle still parked in the driveway.

He reaches into his pocket for the keys, but instead pulls out a lollipop.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Shit!

Tess is gaining on them.

Panic surges.

Change of plan.

They need an escape.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Over there!

His search for a getaway car leads them to a BLACK MINIVAN parked on the other side of the street.

The engine HUMS gently.

A stroke of luck in this ungodly shit storm.

But there's something unsettling about the vehicle...

Large sun visors cover the front windscreen as well as the driver and passenger sides, making it impossible to see inside.

There's a FAMILY DECAL STICKER on the back window of TWO MOMS and a GIRL with pigtails all holding hands.

There's the slightest moment of hesitation before they approach.

Izzy opens the passenger door and SCREAMS as the lifeless body of MOM #1, 40's, slumps out of the minivan onto the ground.

MOM #2, 30's, is on the driver's side, head resting against the steering wheel.

Finally, a TEENAGE GIRL, 17, sits with her head bowed on the backseat, as if she's in a peaceful sleep.

A hose feeds from the exhaust pipe directly into the vehicle, pumping carbon monoxide fumes.

But there's no time to dwell.

*Tess is coming.*

John frantically drags Mom #2 and the Teenage Girl's body out of the minivan and then disconnects the hose.

As Izzy and John pile into the minivan, he PUSHES a button to close the sliding door.

It slides closed... excruciatingly slow.

INT. MINIVAN - MOMENTS LATER

Izzy and John immediately start COUGHING from the fumes.

John cracks the sunroof for some fresh air and then tries to pull away, but he struggles to shift out of Park.

JOHN  
(struggling with the gear)  
Come on come on!

As he struggles, the sliding door continues to sliiiiide shut...

And as the door finally closes --

Tess LAUNCHES herself at the minivan, attempting to JAM the knife between the gap in the door.

But she's a split second too late as the door CLICK shut.

Tess stares at them with burning rage and then --

SLAMS her fists repeatedly against the windows.

The glass CRACKS and spiderwebs, but holds firm.

She slashes madly at the tires, piercing one of them.

IZZY  
Dad!

JOHN  
(still fighting the gears)  
I'm trying.

And then, just like that, Tess vanishes.

A moment of silence.

IZZY  
Where did she-

Izzy SCREAMS as Tess spider-crawls onto the roof.

Tess JAMS the boning knife through the crack in the sunroof, stabbing wildly at Izzy.

JOHN  
IZZY!

Izzy ducks and weaves, barely avoiding the deadly blade.

TESS  
Look into my eyes, sweetie.

Tess's face is pressed against the sunroof. Thick, gooey secretion pours from her eyes, leaving a hideous trail.

TESS (CONT'D)  
This is what love looks like.

All of a sudden, John SHIFTS the gears into Drive.

The minivan JOLTS forward with such force that it WHIPLASHES Tess off the vehicle.

As they drive away, John glances into the rearview to check if Tess is okay.

Tess gradually pulls herself to her feet, eyes never leaving the minivan.

Izzy and John stir in silence, overcome with horror.

IZZY  
Dad, I'm scared.

JOHN  
Me too.

After a moment, the tire pressure light flashes red on the console.

John clocks Izzy's concern.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
They're run flat tires. We're good for a while.

EXT. PEPPER PIKE, NEIGHBORHOOD - AFTERNOON

The minivan works its way through the vast network of suburban streets.

INT. MINIVAN - AFTERNOON

John turns the dial on the radio, trying to gather information. Static. Garbled.

Izzy stares dully out of the window. Numb. No tears. In shock.

No time to properly process the magnitude of what's going on.

Outside, she sees a MAN with a big gut holding a cardboard sign, "God Save the Children."

Their eyes meet for a brief second.

IZZY

Dad, why is this happening?

JOHN

I don't know, sweetheart.

IZZY

Do you think mom's going to be okay?

John knuckles the steering wheel.

JOHN

I don't-

IZZY

(struggling to say the words)

Is she going to...

John raises his voice.

JOHN

I DON'T KNOW.

He instantly regrets it.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean... It's a lot for me too.

Izzy, hurt, turns to look out the window again.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Hey...?

A tiny shred of comfort as she looks down to see John holding a lollipop - the same one from his pocket earlier.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Friends?

She accepts the lollipop, takes off the wrapper and places it in her mouth.

They both jump as a VOICE suddenly BLASTS through the radio.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)  
There are distressing reports that the town of Pepper Pike is the epicenter of a novel airborne disease. The CDC has yet to issue an official response, but we're hearing the threat is localized.

The reporter swallows hard.

NEWS REPORTER  
The virus appears to be causing the infected to viciously attack their own offspring before turning on themselves.

The reporter stops talking as information is relayed to him.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)  
I'm now joined by renowned local virologist doctor Judith Lynch from the Cleveland Clinic to help make sense of the situation. Doctor.

DOCTOR LYNCH (V.O.)  
As much as we like to think such acts go against the natural order, they don't. Infanticide is by nature a mammalian trait.

IZZY  
What's infantile?

John HUSHES her.

DOCTOR LYNCH (V.O.)  
Evidence suggests our earliest ancestors, Homo heidelbergensis, participated in such acts. A behavior we've seen play out time and again in the animal kingdom. Polar bears, for instance, are known to kill and cannibalize their young.

*Outside, OLDER CHILDREN armed with makeshift weapons, accompany a group of scared YOUNGER KIDS.*

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)  
Some experts are calling this a new strain of rabies?

DOCTOR LYNCH  
It's a theory.

NEWS REPORTER  
Not yours I gather?

Doctor Lynch takes a few moments to collect her thoughts.

DOCTOR LYNCH (V.O.)  
Recent studies suggest that the biological ties between a mother and child is even deeper than we thought.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)  
Deeper how?

DOCTOR LYNCH (V.O.)  
During pregnancy, there is a physiological exchange between the fetus and mother. These fetal cells migrate through the placenta, and can remain in the body for life. It's known as fetal microchimerism.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)  
I'm 45. I flew the nest a long time ago, but you're suggesting traces of my fetal cells can still be found floating around inside my 80 year old mother's body?

DOCTOR LYNCH (V.O.)  
Yes.

Her voice spikes with intensity.

DOCTOR LYNCH (V.O.)  
Remarkably, scientists have observed the presence of microchimeric cells in the mother's brain decades after giving birth.

(MORE)

DOCTOR LYNCH (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I have reason to believe, and it's only a theory, that this disease has somehow mutated these fetal cells embedded in the mother, triggering something very primal and very deadly...

As the news reporter takes a minute to process, Izzy looks out the window and sees --

*A MOTHER dragging her broken leg behind her, scraping against asphalt, bone piercing through flesh. Her will to kill supersedes all else.*

*Her dead eyes meet Izzy who looks away, haunted.*

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

Doctor Lynch, how concerned should we be?

She takes a moment to gather her thoughts.

DOCTOR LYNCH (V.O.)

That depends. Typically you'll find that viruses operate in three distinct patterns. One: It's just passing through our bodies, much like the 24-hour stomach flu. Two: The host dies, which will immediately neutralize the threat. And three: It's persistent.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

"Persistent" meaning what?

DOCTOR LYNCH (V.O.)

That's to say the virus never really goes away. It nests inside of our cells, blood and microbes. Meaning at any time it can reemerge. A ticking bomb.

John has heard enough. He kills the radio.

He then looks over at Izzy.

She's sobbing. Tears stream down her face. It's all too much.

IZZY

I'm never going to see her again, am I?

JOHN

You heard what she said. This thing could be over and done in 24-hours.

IZZY

What if it isn't? What if the virus never goes away?

John's heart shatters at the sight of his distraught little girl.

JOHN

Suppose I had friends in high places who could help us?

IZZY

Like who?

JOHN

Doctor Lynch.

IZZY

The radio doctor?

He nods.

JOHN

We were in the same graduating class at medical school.

Izzy wipes her nose with her sleeve.

IZZY

You were?

JOHN

She's real smart. So smart she's helped develop some of the world's most important vaccines. I bet she's working on one as we speak.

Hope fills Izzy's eyes.

IZZY

Do you think Doctor Lynch could help mom?

JOHN

She has a place in Maple Heights. I'm hopeful she'd be willing to help out an old friend.

IZZY

She'd do that?

JOHN  
I told you, kiddo, friends in high places...

Excitement rushes through Izzy.

IZZY  
Thank you thank you thank you!

Izzy reaches over and gives her dad a side hug.

But then her expression changes. Pensive and worried.

JOHN  
What is it?

IZZY  
We have to go back. I can't leave without Mel.

JOHN  
Izz-

IZZY  
I can't do that to her!

JOHN  
You've seen what's out there. We're lucky to be on the other side of this.

IZZY  
What if she's all alone and scared and there's no one to save her?  
Then what?

John measures his next words carefully.

JOHN  
During times of extreme emergencies, sometimes doctors are forced to make certain decisions... impossible decisions. To choose between life and death. We call it, "Triage."

IZZY  
I don't understand.

JOHN  
You're my responsibility, Izz. Keeping you safe is my number one priority. My only priority.

IZZY  
But I can't lose her too...

John glances at her and then back at the road. He MUTTERS something under his breath

And then, going against his better judgement --

EXT. ROAD - DUSK

The minivan suddenly SPINS, doing a 180 in the middle of the road and speeds back towards the neighborhood.

INT. MINIVAN - DUSK

The neighborhood is drenched in desolation.

Dogs wonder the streets aimlessly in search of their owners.

John does his best to offer Izzy a shred of comfort.

JOHN  
Izz?

She looks at him.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
We're gonna get through this. We're gonna be a family again. The three of us.

Izzy nods, emotional, appreciating John's comforting words.

Just then, John and Izzy's attention moves to a cluster of the surrounding houses.

The SILHOUETTES of fives MOMS perched on the roofs of their respective homes.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Close your eyes.

*One by one, the moms begin to majestically swan-dive headfirst off the roofs.*

Their skulls collide into the ground in a gut-churning symphony of suicide.

Horrified silence fills the minivan.

EXT. NEARBY STREET - DUSK

John guides the vehicle down a nearby street.

IZZY  
It's the one with the bricks.

John angles the car towards a face-brick house. It's quiet. Just like the rest of the homes on the block.

He flashes the high-beams twice at the house, signaling.

But there no sign of life. No sign of Mel.

A few more seconds tick by.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
One more minute, please.

JOHN  
She isn't coming, Izz.

But as John throws the vehicle into reverse...

A FIGURE SLAMS their fists against the windshield.

IZZY  
MEL!

Izzy climbs out of the minivan and bundles Mel inside.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
Drive drive drive!

Mel looks frantically over her shoulder as the car drives away.

She tries to talk and catch her breath at the same time, making it nearly impossible to speak.

MEL  
She...

IZZY  
It's okay. You're safe. She can't get you.

MEL  
There was this stuff coming out of her eyes... like melting snow.

Her breath quickens, hyperventilating.

IZZY  
Dad- what's happening?

Mel begins to shiver. Teeth CHATTERING. John glances at her.

JOHN  
She's having a panic attack.

IZZY  
What do I do?

JOHN  
Keep her calm.

IZZY  
How?

JOHN  
Just keep talking.

IZZY  
I'm supposed to keep talking, but  
you can tell me to shut up whenever  
you feel like.

John nods, "keep going..."

IZZY (CONT'D)  
Anyway, he knows this famous doctor-  
person who makes vaccines and stuff  
and he's going to take us there so  
she can help us.

She meets John's eyes in the rearview.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
And then when this is over, you can  
stay at my place and we can binge  
scary movies and pitch tents in the  
garden and camp out till sunrise.

This appears to do the trick. Mel relaxes. Her breathing  
regulates.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
I think it's working...

All of a sudden, the minivan DIPS violently, rims SCRAPING  
asphalt in a shower of SPARKS.

The tire is completely flat from Tess's vicious assault.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
You said they were run flats?

A rueful look from John.

EXT. SUBURBAN GAS STATION - DUSK

"Gas N' Go" is lit up in red neon.

A quiet mom and pop gas station with a convenience store, surrounded by rural roads.

The minivan barely makes it into the parking area.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - DUSK

The store has been completely abandoned. The dull HUM of refrigerators.

Bells CHIME as the door EXPLODES open.

Mel, grimacing, has her arm slung over Izzy for support.

John cases the store.

JOHN  
This'll do.

CUT TO:

John secures the area.

Makes sure the back door is locked and the blinds are drawn.

He takes a final look outside.

A breeze RATTLES one of the gas pumps.

Night has finally arrived. Darkness swallows the landscape.

Mel sits on a chair near the --

CHECKOUT COUNTER

Drinking purple slushie from a plastic cup.

Izzy props Mel's injured ankle onto another chair.

MEL  
What are you doing?

IZZY  
Keeping your ankle elevated.

She digs through a first-aid kit, finds some bandages and then begins to tightly wrap her ankle.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
This should help with the swelling.

Izzy places a pack of ice cubes against Mel's ankle.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
(re: ice)  
Hold that there.

Mel looks at her neatly bandaged ankle - a perfect compression wrap.

MEL  
Your dad taught you how to do this?

Izzy nods.

Mel SLURPS her drink and then regards her friend earnestly.

MEL (CONT'D)  
Can I ask you something?

IZZY  
Okay.

MEL  
Is your mom...?

IZZY  
She'll be fine. They all will.

Izzy quickly changes the subject.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
I'm freakin' starving.

Izzy slides open a glass display cabinet at the front of the counter. It's filled with stale pastries under the glow of artificial light.

She pulls out two glazed donuts.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
Donut?

Mel takes a bite.

MEL  
My mom would literally kill me.

IZZY  
Too soon.

They smile despite the gravity of the situation.

MEL  
Promise you won't leave me.

IZZY  
I promise.

Just then, their attention switches to a TV in the corner. John turns up the volume.

A SHAKEN ANCHOR for a local news station is on the screen.

NEWS ANCHOR  
The footage you're about to see was pulled from the Cleveland clinic just a few minutes ago. Be warned, what we're about to show you is extremely disturbing.

Grainy and pixelated footage fills the screen.

It takes a moment for the image to find clarity, revealing --

*Static black and white security cam footage from the Cleveland Clinic.*

*It's focused on the NEONATAL UNIT - a large glass room filled with new-born babies nestled inside incubators.*

*A MOTHER in a hospital gown and slippers pads down the hallway.*

*She stands motionless in front of the glass and gazes into the room.*

*Moments later, she's joined by another MOTHER in a hospital gown.*

*And ANOTHER...*

*Until there are DOZENS OF MOTHERS positioned in front of the glass window.*

*Staring blankly as if they're hypnotized.*

The footage is suddenly interrupted by the news anchor.

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)  
We interrupt this broadcast for  
breaking news.  
(MORE)

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

There are more reports confirming the presence of armed National Guardsmen patrolling the streets. A spokesperson for the Eastern Cuyahoga County's office declined comment-

John takes a moment to process and then switches off the TV.

JOHN

Listen carefully. This is only the beginning. They're going to lock this whole place down. We have to get out of here before they seal us in.

He clocks the girls' terrified expressions.

JOHN (CONT'D)

It's about 7 miles from this gas station to Maple Heights.

IZZY

That's where Doctor Lynch lives, right?

JOHN

That's right. And if we keep on this road that should lead us out of town. Away from all of this. We'll be safe there.

The girls nod, comforted, but then --

All of a sudden, everyone is startled by BANGING on the front door.

BANG-BANG

Their eyes go wide -- what the fuck was that?

BANG-BANG.

Through the shitty Venetian blinds the unnerving outline of a HUMAN FIGURE.

BANG-BANG

John motions for Mel and Izzy to hide.

They crouch behind one of the shelves at the back near the refrigerators.

BANG-BANG

John grabs a FIRE EXTINGUISHER and stands at the doorframe.

The BANGING stops.

The doorknob turns, but the door has been jammed shut with a mop.

Silence.

Eyes stay fixed on the door and the shape beyond.

SARAH (O.S.)  
Melanie, sweetie. It's me. Open the door.

It's the voice of Mel's mother, Sarah Singh.

Mel, terrified, grabs Izzy's hand and squeezes.

John looks at them and puts his fingers to his lips, "SSSSSH."

SARAH (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
I just want to talk. To tell you how sorry I am... for everything. Honey?

John's grip on the fire extinguisher tightens.

SARAH(O.S.) (CONT'D)  
When I was your age I weighed 160 pounds. It took me a long time to realize that it wasn't my weight keeping me down, it was the people around me.

Mel glances at Izzy... her mom's words weighing on her.

SARAH (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
She's not really your friend, none of them are.

Tears gather in Mel's eyes.

SARAH (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Let me free you Janu.

But Mel doesn't take the bait.

After more silence, Sarah simply turns and leaves.

The dull sound of her FOOTSTEPS echos against the asphalt.

John, Mel and Izzy watch through the slits in the blinds as Sarah retreats.

She pauses by the gas pumps.

The faint red glow of neon casts her in a sickly demonic light.

And then she disappears into the darkness.

Collective GASPS of relief as Mel begins to sob. The whole experience is too much to bear.

She buries her head into Izzy's shoulder.

IZZY

She can't hurt you anymore.

But then --

*A tide of liquid washes underneath the bottom of the door and starts to collect inside, spewing from a nozzle.*

Behind the blinds, a FLARE of orange as a match is struck.

JOHN

Run.

Gasoline and flame meet, and in an instant, FIRE IGNITES. Sweeping into the convenience store.

John, Izzy and Mel rush towards the back door.

But its been jammed shut from the outside. Something heavy has been pushed against it.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Shit. It's stuck.

A tide of orange creeps towards them.

John RAMS the fire extinguisher against the door, looking for an escape.

IZZY

Hurry!

Noxious, black smoke burns their eyes and fills their lungs.

COUGHING.

Shelves of candy melt in rivers of sticky goo, bottles EXPLODE.

Half of the store is already in flames.

With the back door partly open, John throws his body against it. Trying to force it the rest of the way.

JOHN  
C'MON GODDAMM YOU!

The door shifts some more.

It's now wide enough for all them to squeeze through.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Let's go!

But as they're about to make their exit --

A HAND reaches out of the smoke and latches onto Mel's.

It's Sarah.

A hazy, smoke-covered silhouette backlit by encroaching flame.

MEL  
Let me go.

A faraway nothingness in her mom's voice.

SARAH  
I can't.

Sarah suddenly PULLS Mel deeper into the smoke, but she grabs onto Izzy's hand.

MEL  
Help me, Izzy.

IZZY  
Mel!

Another vicious TUG.

Mel hangs onto Izzy for dear life, fingers interlocked with her best friend's.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
Hang on!

Izzy strains to hang on, but is losing the battle as Sarah continues to drag Mel towards the inferno.

Mel SOBS helplessly.

MEL  
*Mummy... please don't...*

And then her hand is YANKED away, slipping out of Izzy's grasp forever.

Mel disappears into the black smoke.

Izzy looks at her empty hand in disbelief.

JOHN  
Izzy!

John is halfway out the door and holds out his hand for her.

The flames get closer. Heat pulses against their faces.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Izz. She's gone.

IZZY  
NO!

Izzy tries to make a dash back into the flames to save Mel, but this time John grabs her by the waist.

JOHN  
She's gone...

And he pulls her outside.

IZZY  
(kicking and screaming)  
MEL!

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE, BACK ALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

John and Izzy collapse into a garbage-riddled back alley.

COUGHING, lathered in smoke, eyes watering.

A rusted fridge stands nearby - the object blocking the door.

John continues to hold Izzy back from the burning building.

JOHN  
Are you hurt?

IZZY  
Get off me!

JOHN  
Any blurred or double vision?

IZZY  
I said get off-

She finally pushes him away and looks at the building, devastated.

After a moment, John approaches.

JOHN  
I'm sorry about your friend.

Izzy doesn't say anything.

Tears cut a path through the dark soot on her cheeks.

John, unsure how to comfort her, squeezes her shoulder.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
It's gonna be okay.

She turns to him.

IZZY  
How?

The hope. The luster of youth that once burned in her eyes has been replaced by the flames and smoke of the convenience store.

All of a sudden --

A very distinctive VIBRATING noise breaks the silence.

JOHN  
What was that?

IZZY  
What-

Another VIBRATION.

JOHN  
That.

John snatches something out of Izzy's back pocket.

Her CELLPHONE.

Indicating a message from, "MOM."

In fact, it's one of 82 unread messages.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
I told you to keep that damn phone  
off. Jesus Christ!

Izzy is taken aback by her dad's sudden rage.

IZZY  
I was trying to reach Mel after the  
whole world went crazy... I must've  
left it on.

John GRUNTS with anger.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
If it's such a big deal just turn  
it off.

The phone VIBRATES with another message from Tess.

JOHN  
It's already too late.

John suddenly SMASHES the cellphone against the ground.

IZZY  
I don't understand.

John takes a deep, frustrated breath.

JOHN  
I enabled tracking on your phone.

Izzy's confusion turns to indignation.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
You were getting into trouble at  
school, I was concerned-

IZZY  
That doesn't mean you get to stalk  
me-

JOHN  
Look, we can talk about this later.

IZZY  
(shouting)  
I can't talk to you!

John is taken aback.

JOHN  
We talk all the time.

IZZY

Do we? It's always about grades and softball and my future. We never just... hang out. It doesn't matter what I say anyway, so I just lie cos I know whatever I tell you will never be enough.

Izzy's voice catches.

IZZY (CONT'D)

Wanna know something messed up?  
I've been on the bench all season.

John is stunned.

JOHN

Mom knew?

IZZY

I asked her not to tell you.

She looks at the shattered cellphone on the ground.

IZZY (CONT'D)

I wish you were the one who got sick instead of her.

JOHN

Izzy...

IZZY

Leave me alone.

Just like that, Izzy gets up and bolts into the surrounding darkness.

JOHN

Izzy? Izzy come back!

EXT. SURROUNDING STREETS - NIGHT

Izzy runs through the surrounding streets. Paying no mind to where she's going. Just needing to get away.

EXT. CEMETARY - NIGHT

Finally, she stops running. Hands resting against her knees.

She looks around and finds herself in the eerie surroundings of a cemetery. Carpeted by grave stones and death.

And then Izzy begins to cry. Tears coming fast.

Smoke from the burning convenience store hovers like a creeping mist.

After a few moments, she wipes the tears away and tries to gather herself.

Her attention shifts past a sagging black birch tree to a QUIET ROAD about twenty feet ahead.

There's a SILHOUETTE standing in the middle of the road staring back at her, backlit by a FLICKERING street light.

IZZY

Hello?

Izzy moves through the cemetery.

She reaches the edge of the road and squints, trying to make out the figure.

IZZY (CONT'D)

Who's there?

FLICKER-FLICKER-

With each strand of light the silhouette appears in and out of view.

Just then, the light steadies.

Izzy's eyes widen as the figure is revealed.

IZZY (CONT'D)

Mom is that you?

It's TESS.

Holding up a SINGLE AIRPOD just like she did in Izzy's bedroom earlier.

Izzy fishes in her pocket and finds the other one.

Tess indicates for Izzy to put the AirPod in her ear.

*\*While sharing AirPods, only one mic can be active at a time. This means only Tess can speak, while Izzy can listen.\**

TESS (V.O.)

Can you hear me, sweetie?

Izzy holds her hand up in acknowledgment.

TESS (V.O.)  
I had a feeling I'd see you again.  
Do you know how I knew that?

Tess presses her hand against her heart.

TESS (V.O.)  
Because our hearts beat the same  
blood.

Izzy repeats the gesture.

TESS (V.O.)  
I'm tired of feeling like this,  
Izz. I don't want to hurt you. My  
heart is sore and broken and empty.

Izzy's eyes shimmer in the moonlight - moved deeply by her mom's words.

TESS (V.O.)  
If you take my hand I promise  
things will go back to the way they  
were. Don't you want that?

IZZY  
(sotto)  
Yes.

Tess holds out her hand for Izzy.

TESS (V.O.)  
Me and you.

After a moment, Izzy steps into the road.

TESS (V.O.)  
That's right...

And then Izzy takes another step.

As she gets closer to her mom's outstretched hand, Izzy can see the smile on Tess's face.

But it's a black and empty smile that turns Izzy's blood cold.

Just as the bright lights from an oncoming SEMI-TRAILER TRUCK  
suddenly blind her.

Freezing Izzy to the spot.

*It was a trap all along.*

At the last second, someone TACKLES Izzy away from the oncoming vehicle.

It's John.

He holds onto Izzy, wrapping his arms tightly around her.

JOHN

I got you.

By the time the truck has passed, *Tess is gone*.

IZZY

Dad, I...

JOHN

We have to go.

EXT. EMPTY RURAL STREET - NIGHT

John and Izzy emerge into a wide street flanked by fields.

They take a moment to process the scenes around them.

JOHN

It's starting...

There's a small group of PEOPLE fleeing the town.

CARS loaded to the brim - items secured around the roofs with bungee cords and ropes - try to navigate through the crowds.

Suddenly, three ATTACKERS pounce on one of the cars, trying unsuccessfully to drag the driver out.

The attackers turn their attention to easier prey --

A MOTORCYCLE attempting to cut a path through the street.

The attackers launch themselves onto the hapless MOTORCYCLIST like a pride of lions taking down an antelope.

Attempting to pull them off the vehicle.

Izzy, frightened, grabs onto John's hand.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Head down. Keep moving.

Just then, out of nowhere, a WOMAN GRABS onto Izzy's shoulder.

It's an INFECTED MOM in her 40's dressed in a tattered business suit and heels.

Izzy does a double-take.

IZZY  
Mrs. Cooper?

MRS. COOPER  
Have you seen my Blair? Have you seen my daughter?

It's Blaire's mom.

IZZY  
I... I haven't. Sorry.

*Mrs. Cooper squints as the purple hues of a BLACKLIGHT sweeps across her eyes, highlighting the heavy flow of secretion.*

And then --

BLAM --

A BULLET rips through her skull.

More gunfire reverberates.

SCREAMS erupt and panic takes over as people scatter in fear.

Reveal three NATIONAL GUARDSMEN approaching. They're dressed from head to toe in medical PPE, armed with M4's.

A BLACKLIGHT has been mounted to the top of their gun rails.

A way of seeing the secretion in the infecteds' eyes.

NATIONAL GUARDSMAN  
(on a megaphone)  
Remain in your homes. Do not leave for any reason. This is a lockdown.

All of a sudden, Izzy is KNOCKED to the asphalt by a panicked bystander.

JOHN  
IZZY!

IZZY  
DAD--

Feet rush past her, barely missing her skull. She curls into a fetal position, praying she isn't crushed.

John's HAND emerges through the rush, pulling Izzy to her feet.

Just as a bullet WHIZZES past them, entering the chest of another INFECTED MOM.

John points towards the side of the road, indicating the fallen motorcycle.

Abandoned in the midst of the mayhem.

A classic Harley Davidson 1985 Sportster Evolution.

JOHN  
Stay close.

They duck and weave through the fleeing crowds until they reach the motorcycle.

Straining with exertion, John and Izzy struggle to lift the bike into a standing position.

Suddenly, Tess appears through the crowd with an insidious smile on her face. Hair blowing in the breeze.

IZZY  
It's her...

Now in a standing position, John kickstarts the motorcycle - once, twice...

But the engine won't take.

Tess is closing in.

Three times...

No give.

She's nearly within touching distance.

Another helpless kick. The engine SPUTTERS limply.

Adrenalin pumps through John as he KICKS with all his might.

JOHN  
MOTHERFU-

This time the motorcycle BLASTS off, stranding Tess.

Tess watches as the motorcycle races across the surrounding fields, until it's out of sight.

Her attention fixes on an oncoming car - an old school, beige Volvo station wagon.

Without hesitation, Tess RUSHES the car, using her elbows to SMASH the window.

She reaches through the open window, trying to drag the driver out, a MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN, 40's, with plenty of fight.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN  
Find another ride you crazy bitch!

The Woman holds Tess off, reaching for a Glock 19 on the passenger seat.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN (CONT'D)  
This is why I never had kids.

The Woman snags the Glock and tries to fire it at Tess.

But Tess grabs the Woman's wrist, turning the weapon towards her face.

BLAM!

Tess pulls the trigger, but it's only a glancing blow, tearing off the Woman's ear. Blood sprays.

The Woman SCREAMS as Tess drags her out, gets into the driver's seat, puts the car into gear and guns it.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

The motorcycle races across an open field.

But then --

The motorcycle SWERVES violently and then corrects itself.

Izzy squeezes John's waist for support.

But something is wrong --

Her hands are covered in blood that isn't her own.

There's a bullet wound in John's stomach.

*Wounded by one of the stray bullets fired by the National Guardsmen.*

IZZY  
Oh my God dad!

JOHN

I'm going to need you to compress  
the wound. Can you do that for me?

Izzy squeezes the wound tightly. Her father's blood seeps  
between her fingers.

JOHN (CONT'D)

There's something I need to talk to  
you about.

IZZY

Dad, it's okay, we can talk later.

JOHN

Hold on. Lemme finish.

John takes a strained breath, gathering his words.

JOHN (CONT'D)

There were a lot of things that  
scared me today, but seeing you  
crying in the car like that, that  
scared me the most. So I told you a  
story you wanted to hear...

IZZY

I don't understand.

He's doing his best to hold it together.

JOHN

I made it up, Izz. All of it. I  
never went to medical school with  
Doctor Lynch. I've never even met  
her. I lied.

Shock registers on Izzy's face, trying to come to terms with  
this new truth.

IZZY

I don't believe you.

JOHN

I did it to protect you. If I  
didn't, I knew you would never let  
her go and we'd never get outta  
here.

John takes a heartfelt beat.

JOHN (CONT'D)

The truth is, I don't know if I can save mom, but I can still save you and that makes it a lie worth telling.

His eyes meet hers in the side mirror.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Parents make mistakes, Izz. Good parents are just better at hiding them, because it's our job to make you believe everything's gonna be alright...

Emotion swells in his voice.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Then one day something happens. You grow up and you realize that your parents don't have it all figured out. That these giants who carried you on their shoulders aren't carved from rock, but from flesh, and blood and failure. And that's the day when you really grow up, kiddo.

IZZY

Why are you saying this stuff?  
You're scaring me.

John puts his hand over his daughter's. The blood flowing thick and fast.

JOHN

The only way this all ends is in total chaos. No one is safe. The good news is, they're still playing catch up. Blocking off a small country road is one thing, blockading an entire freeway is another. We can still make it to the I-70 and get you outta here.

IZZY

Wait, what about you?

He ignores the question.

IZZY (CONT'D)

Please don't leave me.

JOHN

I need something to clot this wound. I need a hospital and that's a lot of miles in the wrong direction.

The sad reality strikes home. He's not going to make it.

But then, a look on Izzy's face. A hail Mary.

IZZY

I know somewhere closer.

From a bird's eye view, the motorcycle turns around - reduced to a solitary speck on the vast landscape.

EXT. URGENT CARE BUILDING - NIGHT

The motorcycle pulls out in front of John's urgent care practice.

Izzy helps John shuffle towards the front entrance.

The door stands wide open. An uneasy feeling emanates.

INT. URGENT CARE PRACTICE - NIGHT

Broken windows. Furniture overturned. Signs of looting.

Ordinary people looking for answers they'll never find.

INT. URGENT CARE ROOM - NIGHT

John and Izzy stumble into one of the exam rooms.

He grimaces in agony as she helps him onto the exam tables.

JOHN

Hand me those pills over there. And some water from that cooler.

Izzy finds a bottle of pills on the floor. She fills a paper cup with water from the cooler.

He empties a handful of pills into his mouth and chases them with the water.

JOHN (CONT'D)

First I need to remove any debris or bullet fragments.

John scrambles through a set of drawers and finds a stethoscope with a pendant light attached to it.

He then locates a pair of tweezers.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Whatever happens, just keep shining  
that light.

Izzy moves the light over the seeping, throbbing leaking mess of bullet-riddled flesh.

John guides the tweezers over the wound and finds what he's looking for. A tiny piece of bullet fragment.

But to get to it requires some digging and prodding through intestinal tract and tissue.

He's in so much pain that he inadvertently spews vomit.

IZZY  
Dad...

JOHN  
Shine the damn light.

John latches onto the tiny piece of bullet fragment and then RIPS it out.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
(exhausted)  
Pack the wound. Do it.

Izzy gets to work.

She unravels a roll of bandages and begins to wrap the wound as tightly as possible.

An agonizing process.

John grabs onto the underside of the table to keep himself steady.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
You're a natural.

John flinches.

IZZY  
Keep still.

JOHN  
Hey, Izz? I'm proud of you, kiddo.

IZZY  
(moved)  
Thanks, dad.

JOHN  
I used to go through life hoping my  
mother would say the same to me,  
but she wasn't very kind to others.  
Or herself for that matter.

IZZY  
Is that why you never talk about  
grandma?

He nods, avalanched by a million terrible memories.

JOHN  
She liked to tell me that I would  
never be enough.

John swallows and wipes his feverish brow.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
So I put in the work. I spent every  
minute of every day trying to prove  
her wrong.

IZZY  
Did you? Prove her wrong?

JOHN  
No. I never got the chance to.

IZZY  
Why not?

His eyes glaze over for a second.

JOHN  
She shot herself.

Shock registers on Izzy's face.

IZZY  
Mom said she had a stroke.

The horror and pain hangs in the air like a mist.

JOHN  
It wasn't the first time she tried  
something like that, but this time  
she really meant it.

John struggles to find the words, choked by the memory.

JOHN (CONT'D)

The worst part was she knew I would  
be the one to find her.

*MEMORY FLASH -- a woman's half-smiling fleshless face,  
punctured by a bullet wound -- the same face from John's  
nightmare earlier.*

*His mother's face.*

JOHN (CONT'D)

I still see her face smiling back  
at me. Reminding me that no matter  
what I do, I'll never be enough.

Izzy looks at her dad with new-found understanding.

JOHN (CONT'D)

But you, Izz. You're kind and  
tenacious and selfless in all the  
ways that I'm not.

Izzy squeezes her dad's hand, trying to smile through the  
tears.

IZZY

You're not that bad...

The somber moment between father and daughter is disrupted by  
a man's desperate SHOUTS.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Help us!

John motions for Izzy to stay where she is.

INT. URGENT CARE, HALLWAY - NIGHT

John pokes his head into the hallway and sees a distressed  
MAN, 18, carrying a WOMAN in his arms.

John recognizes her as --

JOHN

Hannah?

It's Hannah from the opening, in the arms of her boyfriend,  
DANNY. The boyish face of a high-schooler suddenly thrust  
into an adult nightmare.

Hannah is drenched in sweat and writhing in agony. God knows  
how many hours she's been laboring.

John doesn't think twice and rushes to assist them.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Through here. I'm Doctor Slater.

DANNY  
Da- Danny.

JOHN  
Everything's gonna be okay, Danny.

INT. URGENT CARE ROOM - NIGHT

Danny and John help Hannah onto the exam table.

John flicks on a light and regards Hannah tenderly.

JOHN  
We're gonna deliver this baby,  
okay?

John turns to Izzy.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Izzy, I need a damp cloth and some  
kind of clamp or scissors.

Izzy nods and rushes off.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Danny, I need you to hold her hand  
and not let go.

After a moment, Izzy returns with a damp cloth and scissors.

John places the cloth on Hannah's perspiring forehead.

He then does a quick check, trying to gauge the position of  
the baby.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
You're just about fully dilated,  
Hannah. It's time to push.

HANNAH  
I don't want to.

JOHN  
The baby's coming. You have to  
push.

She shakes her head fervently.

HANNAH

No no no no no I can't.

Danny squeezes Hannah's hand for support.

JOHN

This is the moment of transition.  
The moment when you really need you  
to push.

Hannah looks at Danny.

HANNAH

Promise me you won't let anything  
happen to our baby.

DANNY

I promise.

She throws her head back and refocuses.

She's ready.

JOHN

When you feel the next contraction  
I need you to push.

It doesn't take long before her body tenses with the  
contraction.

She pushes with the kind of strength only a mother can  
muster.

JOHN (CONT'D)

PUSH!

Hannah CRIES OUT.

HANNAH

AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH.

JOHN

Again!

She SCREAMS.

JOHN (CONT'D)

The baby is crowning. Just one  
more.

But this time, there's no reaction from Hannah. Her body has  
gone limp, eyes closed. As if in a deep sleep.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Hannah? Hannah, stay with me.

DANNY  
What's happen-

All of a sudden --

Her eyes SNAP open...

*Leaking with that familiar secretion.*

Just then, her body SPASMS violently as she sits up.

Hannah SCREAMS and starts to TEAR at the outside of her flesh with her fingernails.

Attempting to give herself a c-section.

JOHN  
No!

Somehow, John grabs onto her wrists, using every ounce of his strength to prevent her from carrying out this horrific act.

HANNAH  
MY BABY!

JOHN  
Danny, grab her shoulders.

But he's too shellshocked to respond.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
DANNY!

Danny springs into action, pulling Hannah back by her shoulders, trying to get her lying flat again.

But she fights, kicks and squirms. Eyes bursting with fury.

HANNAH  
GET OFF ME!

Izzy jumps in, using the same gauze she used to wrap John's wounds, to bind Hannah's wrists around the legs of the table.

Hannah strains and arches her back. Veins popping.

But then on the drop of a dime becomes docile.

HANNAH (CONT'D)  
Danny, baby, tell them to untie me.

DANNY

I... I...

HANNAH

It really hurts, Danny.

DANNY

(sobbing)

I can't.

She quickly drops the act. The viciousness returning.

HANNAH

(re: Danny's tears)

What's the matter, limp dick. Did I  
hurt your feelings?

She's suddenly WRACKED by a body-breaking contraction,  
sucking the words right out of her chest.

John immediately springs into action.

He reaches between her legs, and with the utmost precision,  
removes the baby, severing the umbilical with the scissors  
and wrapping it in a tatty blanket.

After a few stressful seconds, the baby CRIES with life.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

My baby....

Hannah YANKS the table.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I just want to hold my child.

Izzy and John back away towards the exit. Danny can't bring  
himself to leave.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I'm the mother...

John ushers Danny towards the exit.

JOHN

Danny, you need to come with me.

DANNY

I'm so sorry.

HANNAH

I WANT MY FUCKING BABY DANIEL!

Hannah is enveloped with pure rage. She pulls and tugs at the exam table, RATTLING it.

INT. URGENT CARE, BACK ROOM - NIGHT

John, cradling the new born in the crook of his arm, throws open a closet.

Inside are some old blankets and a container of formula.

JOHN

Here's blankets and formula. Now  
Danny, I need you to listen. *Danny*.

John SNAPS his fingers in front of Danny's face.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Do you have some place safe you can  
go?

Danny nods, scared out of his mind. Hannah's maniacal SCREAMS echo.

A moment passes as John offers the baby to Danny.

JOHN (CONT'D)

It's a girl. Welcome to the club.

He regards the tiny bundle before awkwardly accepting.

DANNY

It wasn't supposed to be like this.  
It just happened. We weren't even  
trying. I dunno how to be a dad.

John grabs him forcefully by the forearm, looking at Izzy.

JOHN

You're the only one she has.

Danny regards the beautiful new-born life in his arms and nods, taking off.

EXT. URGENT CARE BUILDING - NIGHT

Danny is already long gone as John and Izzy rush towards the motorcycle.

The leather is crusted with John's drying blood.

They're alerted by a BANGING SOUND.

Hannah stands silhouetted in the doorway with the metal legs of the exam table dangling around her wrists.

She lets out a PRIMAL SCREAM --

MATCH TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

The GROWL of the motorcycle engine as it peels away from the urgent care building and speeds away into the darkness.

Cool wind lashing against John and Izzy's faces as they notice a WANDERING MOM on the aide of the road.

The Mom suddenly stops walking, looks around in confusion as if she doesn't know where she is or what she's doing.

She locks eyes with Izzy and John, pleading and desperate.

But after a moment, the look leaves her face and she continues her insidious journey.

EXT. I-70 - NIGHT

A weather-beaten sign indicates they've reached the I-70 highway.

The main artery that leads out of town.

Concrete flanked by embankments of dying grass.

The coast appears to be clear - nothing in view except the open road.

Escape beckons.

But then, up ahead, faraway lights begin to materialize out of the darkness.

The lights grow brighter and more abundant.

Clusters of white, orange and red.

It's a logjam of vehicles.

Many filled with terrified kids trying to flee.

The traffic jam extends from a makeshift barricade that's manned by two military trucks

Izzy and John aren't going anywhere.

A small CLUSTER of ARMED NATIONAL GUARDSMEN in PPE patrol a crossing.

IZZY  
We're too late.

The atmosphere is tense. Horns BLARE. Vehicles jostle for position.

A voice SHOUTS over a megaphone.

NATIONAL GUARDSMAN  
Please return to your homes  
immediately.

RANDOM DRIVER  
EAT SHIT!

More expletives are launched in the National Guardsman's direction.

The situation is on a catastrophic knife's edge.

NATIONAL GUARDSMAN  
Failure to comply will you put in  
violation of the National  
Emergencies Act. Necessary force  
will be taken.

A few more cars LURCH forward, refusing to obey orders.

The National Guardsman fires a WARNING SHOT into the air.

NATIONAL GUARDSMAN (CONT'D)  
RETURN TO YOUR HOMES. THIS IS YOUR  
FINAL WARNING.

All of a sudden, a CAR tries to ram past the barricade.

A VOLLEY OF GUNFIRE TEARS through the vehicle.

But this only seems to fuel the crowd as engines ROAR and smoke spews from exhausts.

The National Guardsmen are hopelessly outnumbered and they know it.

John's eyes move towards the surrounding embankments. A way to circumvent the traffic.

JOHN  
Hold on.

John tries to reverse, but BUMPS into a chunky MINIVAN behind him.

He shifts forward, but COLLIDES into a Toyota Prius.

He tries his best to maneuver the motorcycle out of the tight space, but he's well and truly boxed in.

And if things couldn't get any worse...

Izzy notices something very fucking disturbing.

SILHOUETTES fanned out across the embankments.

*MOTHERS coming to reclaim their young.*

Someone else sees them too. Soon, panic spreads like wildfire.

Children SCREAM.

People abandon their vehicles, scattering.

The National Guardsman SCREAMS into a walkie --

NATIONAL GUARDSMAN  
Where the hell is my backup?!

Just then, a FARAWAY SHAPE appears at the back of the traffic jam, at first barely perceptible.

After a moment, John sees an unnerving reflection in the back windshield of the Prius parked in front of him --

*It's TESS, LEAPING from vehicle to vehicle, using the car roofs to springboard towards them.*

Her eyes burning with fury.

JOHN  
Fuck me.

John REV'S the engine, desperate to escape. But still can't get out.

IZZY  
Dad!

JOHN  
Just gimme a second.

Somehow, through sheer force of will, he manages to squeeze the motorcycle out of the tight space.

EXT. EMBANKMENT - NIGHT

John guides the motorcycle steadily up a steep and muddy embankment, dirt spraying.

The wheels struggle to find grip in the soft earth.

After a moment, Izzy looks over her shoulder.

IZZY

She's coming.

To Izzy's astonishment, she sees Tess at the base of the embankment, using her fingers like grappling hooks to climb.

Burrowing and tearing through soil with rabid ferocity.

WHIRRERRR

The engine WHINES as it strains to crest the hill.

It's nearly there...

But Tess is making rapid gains, already halfway up the embankment and closing fast.

Just then, the Harley's wheels lock into the ground, spinning helplessly, chewing through earth.

Tess's chance to pounce.

But then, all of a sudden, her body locks up.

*A moment of lucidity on her face.*

Tess tilts her head like she's seeing them for the first time, wearing the same confused look as the Wandering Mom.

TESS

Izzy? John?

But that vanishes in a split-second as she continues her relentless pursuit.

JOHN

AHHHHHHHHH!

John TWISTS the handlebar, accelerating as hard as he possibly can.

Suddenly, the Harley tears free, shooting out of Tess's reach.

Cresting over the top of the hill.

John and Izzy watch in the motorcycle's mirror, observing Tess's silhouette at the summit of the embankment.

She stares down at them, unmoving.

Her head swivels, alerted by the faint sound of a helicopter ROTOR.

The sound grows louder.

And then --

A BRIGHT PURPLE SPOTLIGHT gradually appears over the embankment, backlighting Tess dramatically.

John stops at the bottom of the embankment, turning to face Tess in what will be her final moments on this planet.

Tess, cast in the sickly purple hues of the spotlight, puts her hand over her heart, eyes locked on her daughter.

Dirt and mud are swept up by the powerful rotors, encircling Tess in its cyclone.

Her hair blusters, clothes bulging.

IZZY  
Mom... No...

Suddenly, Izzy runs towards Tess, but John holds her back.

She strains, lashes and kicks, desperate to get to Tess.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
STOP! PLEASE DON'T HURT HER!

The sickly purple hues burn Izzy's eyes, forcing her to look away.

RAT TAT TAT TAT.

GUNFIRE spits down from the heavens.

As much as Izzy wants to look, she can't. It's too painful.

Instead, all they can do is hold onto each other. Eyes sealed shut, glowing purple under the glare of the spotlight.

Eventually, the spotlight fades, casting them and the embankment in darkness.

When Izzy and John turn around, there's no sign of Tess.

The fight leaves Izzy as they're both struck by profound sadness.

Struggling to comprehend that Tess is gone forever.

That it's really over.

EXT. EMPTY ROAD - NIGHT

The Harley merges onto an empty road.

In the distance, the sound of GUNFIRE continues.

Eventually, silence settles.

John and Izzy stare across a vast plain where the lights of the town of Maple Ridge twinkle in the distance.

The promised land.

Suddenly, John and Izzy shield their faces as they're assaulted with the powerful blast of headlight beams.

NATIONAL GUARDSWOMAN (O.S.)  
Stop your vehicle!

Before they know what's happening, they're confronted by a NATIONAL GUARDSWOMAN in PPE.

NATIONAL GUARDSWOMAN (CONT'D)  
I need to see the girl's eyes.

An uncomfortable pause.

JOHN  
Excuse me?

NATIONAL GUARDSWOMAN  
The girl's eyes, sir. I need to see them.

JOHN  
She's 12 years old for Godsake.

NATIONAL GUARDSWOMAN  
Are we going to have a problem?

The National Guardswoman's hand moves towards a Sig Sauer P226 tucked into her PPE.

John shakes his head, resigned.

NATIONAL GUARDSWOMAN (CONT'D)  
(to Izzy)  
Look this way, please.

She raises a small cylindrical handheld blacklight to Izzy's face and moves it across her eyes.

Satisfied, she clicks the light off.

NATIONAL GUARDSWOMAN (CONT'D)  
Go home. There's nothing for you here.

EXT. PEPPER PIKE, NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

The HUM of the motorcycle's engine as Izzy and John make the sad journey home.

This once happy, peaceful bastion of family life is no more.

Armed National Guardsmen patrol the area.

Bats, gloves and helmets lie scattered across the softball field.

The wheels of a kid's tricycle spin aimlessly.

A YOUNG WOMAN rummages through the belongings of a dead family. Picking through their remains like a vulture.

But then a glimmer of happiness...

*Izzy looks to the side of the road and sees Mel being loaded into an ambulance - she survived.*

Their eyes meet, sharing a teary wave before Mel vanishes into the back of the ambulance.

EXT. SLATER HOME - NIGHT

The motorcycle enters the cul-de-sac, finally coming to a stop outside the house.

Izzy and John climb off the motorcycle.

A mournful silence passes as they take in their home. Somehow it's different. Everything is.

Izzy and John join hands, approaching the front door.

John reaches for the door and gently pushes it open.

INT. SLATER HOME, LIVING AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Izzy and John stand in silence. The house seems larger. Emptier. Family photos of happier times taunt them.

IZZY

I think mom would've wanted us to come home.

John kneels, tenderly pushing the hair away from Izzy's eyes.

JOHN

I think so too.

He wraps Izzy in a hug, she hugs him back even harder.

Cocooned by the surrounding darkness.

IZZY

Do you think mom will go to heaven?

John wipes a tear off her grimy cheek.

JOHN

First one through the door.

INT. SLATER HOME, IZZY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Izzy sits on the edge of the bed, holding the framed photo of herself and Tess at the protest march.

INT. SLATER HOME, BASEMENT - NIGHT

John looks around the basement, eyes falling on the destroyed Fender Strat.

He grabs a bottle of Jameson from the bar and CHUGS.

He then moves to the damaged drum kit, slumps onto the stool and picks up a drum stick.

TAPS the drums before launching into a full-blown assault. SMASHING wildly. SHOUTING in pain like a wounded animal.

Trying to control the tears that have been building.

INT. SLATER HOME, IZZY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Izzy listens to her father's painful melody, blocking her ears with her hands.

INT. SLATER HOME, BASEMENT - NIGHT

DING DONG --

John is alerted by the sound of the DOORBELL.

INT. SLATER HOME, FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

John and Izzy converge at the front door, sharing suspicious looks.

After a moment, he peers through the peep hole.

John motions to Izzy that everything is okay before opening the door.

It's a NATIONAL GUARDSMAN in PPE. A military vehicle is parked in the driveway.

The National Guardsman's voice has a hushed, muffled quality.

HUSHED-VOICE GUARDSMAN  
Evening, sir. Under section 201 of  
the National Emergencies Act, I'm  
required to search your home.

John sizes them up, unsure.

HUSHED-VOICE GUARDSMAN (CONT'D)  
Sheltering the infected is a  
federal crime.

JOHN  
It's just me and my daughter now.  
Look, we've been through a lot...

The Hushed-Voice Guardsman isn't going anywhere.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
It's okay, Izz. Go upstairs and  
clean up. I'll be right behind you.

Izzy nods and trudges up the stairs.

HUSHED-VOICE GUARDSMAN  
Is there a basement?

INT. SLATER HOME, GARAGE - NIGHT

The Guardsman follows John into the garage, opening the door that leads down into the basement.

JOHN  
Right down those stairs.

The Guardsman motions for John to lead the way.

Darkness beckons.

John takes a couple steps before realizing that the Guardsman isn't following him.

The Guardsman hovers at the top of the stairs, muffled, alien breaths emanating through a respirator.

John doesn't have time to react as the Guardsman SHOVES him.

John falls, bouncing off the concrete steps, CRACKING his skull on the way down, landing in a heap of unconsciousness.

The Guardsman closes the door.

*After a moment, they remove their face mask to reveal...*

**TESS**

She crouches and picks up the same HAMMER used to nail the doors shut earlier.

INT. SLATER HOME, UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Izzy steps out of the bathroom, fresh from a shower.

The house is still and quiet.

She looks down the shadowy corridor, eyes searching through the mirth, water DRIPPING from the ends of her wet hair.

IZZY  
Dad?

INT. SLATER HOME, IZZY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Izzy, in a fresh set of clothes, sits on the edge of the bed.

The quietness of the house unsettles her. Every sound seems too loud.

The CLINK of the blinds shifting in the breeze, the BEATING of her heart.

IZZY  
(calling)  
Dad?

Izzy gets up and opens the bedroom door --

Only to be met by TESS in the doorway, hammer at her side.

TESS

Hello, sweetheart.

Izzy immediately retreats to the corner of the room, backing up against a shelf.

IZZY

They... they shot you...

Tess stalks her, pacing deliberately, gradually closing in on her prey.

She has Izzy exactly where she wants her.

TESS

I guess they missed.

Tess raises the hammer, but then for just a millisecond, she pauses.

That fleeting glimpse of recognition returns to her face.

TESS (CONT'D)

Izz?

IZZY

Mom?

But once again the look vanishes.

The hammer's trajectory continues, but Izzy has the awareness to grab a softball mitt off the shelf and block her.

Causing the claw to get lodged in the mitt.

Izzy strains with exertion, trying to keep her mother at bay.

TESS

I spent 43 hours pushing you into this world. The doctors wanted to cut me open, but that wasn't part of my birth plan. I wanted to feel you coming out of me. I tore and I bled and then I bled some more as you stretched me to my breaking point. I nearly died for you. I'm just asking that you do the same for me.

Just then, Izzy BITES down on Tess's burnt and roasted hand.

Tess YELPS in pain, instantly releases her, allowing Izzy to scramble out of the bedroom.

HALLWAY

Izzy runs for her life with Tess in pursuit.

IZZY  
DAD! HELP!

INT. SLATER HOME, BASEMENT STAIRS - NIGHT

John stirs at the bottom of the stairs, GROANING. His daughter's cries of help filter towards him.

His eyes flick towards the staircase, grim determination etched on his face.

LIVING AREA

Tess stalks through the living area.

TESS  
Your father can't help you. He's sleeping on the job again.

She rounds the corner and sees the door leading to the garage is standing open.

GARAGE

Izzy hides under the car. Breath hitched. Eyes as wide as globes.

The encroaching FOOTSTEPS of her mother TIP-TAP against the concrete floor.

TESS  
Whattya say? How about it, Izz? You and me. Together forever...

Suddenly, Tess crouches, eye-level with Izzy beneath the car.

IZZY  
Mom, it's me. Don't do this.

Tess attempts to DRAG Izzy from under the car, but she manages to evade her mom, shuffling into the corner.

After one more failed attempt, Tess stares at Izzy with an unnerving amount of calmness...

And then disappears.

All Izzy can hear are the sounds of her mom picking through items on the shelves.

Just then, Izzy recoils as a SPLASH of liquid falls to the floor right in front of her face.

HISSING as it strikes the ground, burning into the concrete.

TESS

This is muriatic acid. You can find it at most home improvement stores. Perfect for removing those unwanted stains from grout.

Another SPLASH -- HISS.

TESS (CONT'D)

I have to warn you, sweetie, this is going to burn a little.

Tess gradually tips the contents out of the bottle.

The puddle spreads, inching towards Izzy, who has no choice but to retreat and leave the safety of her hiding place.

Like a rabbit being smoked out of its burrow.

Tess watches with glee, waiting patiently for Izzy to emerge.

Izzy SOBS desperately, the pool of acid creeping relentlessly towards her.

But what Tess fails to see is the BASEMENT DOOR opening behind her, revealing --

JOHN, blood pouring down his face, staring coldly ahead.

Tess turns around, but there's no one there. The door is shut just as it was before.

Just then --

John appears behind Tess, wrapping the SNOW CHAIN around her.

She wriggles and bucks wildly, but can't escape the binds, allowing Izzy to escape from beneath the car.

TESS (CONT'D)

Look at you, John. Father of the fucking year.

JOHN

I know you're still in there, Tess.  
I saw it in your eyes on the highway. Fight it. Remember...

Instead, Tess LAUNCHES a large wad of spit in his direction.

TESS

What's the plan, John? You gonna kill your own wife in front of your daughter? That's brave parenting.

JOHN

No.

John grabs a second snow chain from a hook on the wall and WRAPS it around her, coiling it tightly.

TESS

You can't keep me wrapped in these chains forever, momma's boy.

JOHN

If that's what it takes.

TESS

Tell him to let me go, Izz. Please, I'm your mother.

IZZY

You're not my mother...

Izzy TAPES Tess's mouth shut with duct tape.

HALLWAY OUTSIDE GARAGE

John and Izzy flee the garage, locking the door behind them, just as --

Tess's body SMASHES into the door. Her frenzied, muffled SCREAMS echo.

Together, Izzy and John drag a table from the living area, pinning it against the garage door as reinforcement.

Just like Tess did earlier, John and Izzy use the hammer and nails to secure the table against the door.

They join hands, sliding against the wall, knees to their chests, absolutely bone-shatteringly exhausted.

Izzy rests her head against her dad's shoulder.

The sound of Tess's relentless fury continues --

CUT TO:

Silence.

Sunlight slips into the house, shining into John and Izzy's faces, stirring them awake.

Their eyes move to the door. The table is exactly where they left it.

Izzy and John cautiously get to their feet.

JOHN

Tess?

They remove the nails, shift the table and unlock the door.

GARAGE

Tess lies unconscious on the cold concrete floor.

IZZY

Mom?

Nothing, except for Tess's ragged breathing.

JOHN

Tess, can you hear us?

They wait with baited breath as her eyes begin to FLUTTER.

Finally her eyes stretch open.

*But instead of secretion there are now real tears pouring out of her eyes - a clarity that wasn't there before.*

Izzy peels the tape off of Tess's mouth.

IZZY

Is that really you?

Tess blinks with confusion.

Taking in the battered, bloodied and traumatized figures of her daughter and husband.

Did she really do that to her own daughter?

TESS  
Izzy... did I- God no...  
(wailing in horror)  
What have I done...

FADE TO:

An AUSTERE ANCHOR, 30's, reads the news on TV.

NEWS ANCHOR  
Weeks have passed since the "Fetal Microchimeric Virus" gripped the small town of Pepper Pike, Ohio. As families attempt to rebuild their broken lives, a team of experts, led by doctor Judith Lynch...

A small team of DOCTORS and SCIENTISTS work inside a lab.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)  
... have determined that the virus was likely caused by a mutation in the fetal cells found inside the brains of infected mothers.

At a medical check point, CDC REPRESENTATIVES in PPE perform a series of eye scans on a group of MOMS.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)  
The government has responded by implementing a series of nationwide safety protocols, including regular scans and the administering of hemoglobin F to boost fetal cell immunity.

EXT. SLATER HOME - MORNING

A CDC-marked vehicle pulls up in front of the house. A healthy and vibrant TESS steps out.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)  
For those who were infected and now in recovery, they must first serve out a mandatory period of quarantine at a government-mandated facility before being allowed to return to their families.

Tess rushes into John and Izzy's arms.

EXT. SLATER HOME, YARD - DAY

The sun shines brightly from the clear sky.

JOHN, clean shaven, hair trimmed with no bags under his eyes, grills burgers on the barbecue.

He moves lightly like a great weight has been lifted as he's assisted by DANNY, cradling his infant daughter in his arms.

HANNAH, alive and well, takes the baby from Danny, sharing a kiss with him.

She glides towards a set of deckchairs and feeds her baby with a bottle.

IZZY and MEL sit nearby, sharing AirPods.

Just then, BLAIR approaches, handing Izzy and Mel a soda.

Izzy and Blaire share a nod -- putting the past behind them.

Finally, Izzy casts a look at John and then motions for Mel to pass her the other AirPod.

She walks towards her dad and holds out the AirPod for him.

John smiles warmly, and then places it in his ear.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

Although the virus appears to have run its course, chief medical expert Doctor Judith Lynch isn't ready to declare victory. Earlier, I spoke to Doctor Lynch in this exclusive interview.

INT. SLATER HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

Tess prepares a plate of grilled cheese sandwiches, watching the happy scenes play out through a window.

*On the TV behind Tess, the News Anchor prepares to interview the hollow-cheeked DOCTOR LYNCH, 60's.*

Every ounce of energy has gone into defeating this disease.

NEWS ANCHOR

Doctor, wouldn't you agree that you're being overly cautious? It's clear the virus is very much under control.

(MORE)

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)  
Yet, you still believe that this  
virus is, "Persistent?" That it  
nests inside the body and can  
reemerge at any moment?

Doctor Lynch takes a deep breath. Her blood-shot eyes widen.

As she's about to answer the Anchor's question --

Tess SWITCHES OFF THE TV.

Tess returns to the window, eyes locking with Hannah's, who  
holds her sleeping baby in the crook of her arm.

*Not flinching as she SEARS her hand on the panini grill with  
an awful HISS.*