



ANTLERS

Written By

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Based on the short story
"The Quiet Boy"
By Nick Antosca

3.3.17

WME
Writ Large

OVER BLACK

A low murmur. Hushed voices whisper indiscernible words. They swirl around us like spirits, growing malevolent, swelling into a roar -

EXT. BACKYARD - DARK HOUSE - NIGHT

A mangy DOG lies half asleep in the grass, one eye keeping watch.

A shadow creeps across the yard.

The dog rises, ears pricked. BARKS once. A warning.

The sound of quiet footsteps approaching.

The dog hunches and snarls, eyes locked on an UNSEEN INTRUDER... We PUSH IN, encroaching -

The dog LUNGES, barking viciously, saliva spewing from hellhound jaws -

And strains against its CHAIN, ready to tear the intruder to shreds, but unable to reach. Then -

A knot of RAW HAMBURGER lands on the grass.

The dog quiets, sniffs.

REVEAL -

A CHILD'S SILHOUETTE, seen from behind, facing the dog.

Watching it begin to EAT.

We can't see this CHILD'S face, but it looks to be a 9 or 10 year old boy. CUT TO -

EXT. SCRAGGLY FRONT YARD - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: The BOY dragging the UNCONSCIOUS DOG...

He drugged that hamburger.

Now he's dragging the dog by its hind legs across pavement. Then gravel. Then grass.

Wider to reveal he's approaching -

EXT. THE WEAVER HOUSE - NIGHT

We'll see this house again, but for now, in darkness, it is just the sinister silhouette of a collapsing two-story house.

We can tell: Nothing good goes on in this house.

Slowly, deliberately, the Boy drags the dog toward the house... and around the side, moving out of sight.

Leaving us to linger on the SILENT, OMINOUS HOUSE. CUT TO -

INT. REXFORD ELEMENTARY - JULIA'S CLASSROOM - DAY

On a peeling whiteboard, the handwritten word:

"STORYTELLING"

We can hear the MURMURING of children's VOICES, surreptitious LAUGHING AND GIGGLING, O.S.

JULIA GREY (23, smart, likable, young-looking even for her age) stands at the board. This is her first year as a teacher, and she's determined to look serious and in control, even though she's still figuring it all out.

JULIA

Guys, settle down please. From yesterday, remember what we talked about? What is *storytelling*? Let's see some hands.

She waits, looking around at...

Her class. **FOURTH GRADERS**, all around 10 years old. Mostly lower-income, small town kids in hand-me-down clothes. Not exactly a rapt audience.

Here's **CLINT** (10), an A.D.D. kid who can't stop moving, keeps swinging his leg and bobbing to music in his head.

And **ELLIE** (10), an unkempt little girl who's poking one of her friends and giggling, as other **KIDS** giggle around them.

And then there's **LUCAS** (10, quiet, withdrawn)...

Lucas sits in the back. Separate, drawing something on his desk, in a different world. Wearing dirty, frayed clothes.

He looks like he's not very well taken care of at home.

We'll come back to Lucas.

JULIA, still waiting for an answer.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Clint. What's storytelling?

Clint makes a look of exasperation at being called on and flops on his desk, like *Ughhhhh*.

CLINT
Ummmmmm it's liiiiike... if you
tell something that happened?

Julia's about to reply, but -

HER CLASSROOM DOOR OPENS. She glances over to see -

PRINCIPAL SIMMONS entering. Simmons is 40s, prematurely aged, impassive. His clothes are ill-fitting and cheap.

He stand in the back, behind the kids. He folds his arms and watches Julia, here to observe (and judge) her teaching skills/habits.

It makes Julia nervous, but she acts normal and continues. A little awkward, self-conscious.

JULIA
Telling something that happened.
Yes.
(then)
Storytelling is *also* a way of
explaining our lives. In Ancient
Greece, if they saw a thunderstorm,
they didn't know that lightning is
just static electricity, so they
told stories about Zeus throwing
lightning bolts like spears.

A scrawny loudmouth kid named **TREVOR** (10, old Wolverine t-shirt) interjects -

TREVOR
Cos they were pagans.

SOME OTHER KID
Lightning isn't *static electricity*.

Julia falters, glancing at the stone-faced principal in the back of the room.

Rather than respond to either comment, she presses on.

JULIA

We talked about different kinds of stories, right? Ellie? What are some kinds of stories?

ELLIE

Fairytales. Myths.

JULIA

Ok. Yes, those are two. Someone give me an example of a fairytale.

She surveys the class. Not paying attention. She hears WHISPERS as they talk to each other, ignoring her. She clocks Principal Simmons' impassive face, watching.

She clocks Lucas in the back, still drawing quietly.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Lucas?

Lucas looks up, deer in the headlights. Doesn't like any attention called to him. He SHRUGS silently.

Julia quickly turns her attention to **JASMINE** (10), a little cleaner and better clothed than her classmates.

JULIA (CONT'D)

(beseeching)

Jasmine?

JASMINE

Goldilocks.

JULIA

What happens in Goldilocks?

JASMINE

Goldilocks goes to the bears' house and eats their porridge and the bears come home and she runs away.

JULIA

Good. Now fairytales, like fables, sometimes have what? We talked about this.

HARRISON

(third kid)

Morl.

JULIA

What?

HARRISON

A moral!

JULIA

A moral, or a lesson. So Jasmine, what's the moral or the lesson of Goldilocks?

JASMINE

Don't eat bears' food.

Julia smiles.

JULIA

Okay. Yes. Don't take things that aren't yours.

Julia observes the room. Quieter now. She pushes on, trying to engage.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Now what about myths? Stories that help people understand their world, the things they're afraid of...

TREVOR

Like the Wendigo?

A few interested looks on the students' faces.

In the back of the room, LUCAS stops drawing, eyes fixed on his desk. He's listening.

JULIA

Wendigo. Which is a Native American myth, right Trevor?

The kids start to pay more attention. This is interesting to them, they want to talk about it. Julia notes this.

Meanwhile Principal Simmons watches closely.

TREVOR

It's Indian. It's a evil spirit that lives in the woods.

CLINT

No, it lives in the coal mines.

TREVOR

It came from the mines but it lives in the woods.

The two boys arguing, both wanting to be the expert, each heckling the other -

CLINT

It's *nocturnal*, Trevor. It can only do stuff at night. In *day* it goes back underground to sleep.

HARRISON

My dad told me if you see it out in the woods, it'll EAT you.

CLINT

It doesn't *eat* you, *Harrison*, it makes you be a cannibal so you eat other people -

TREVOR

- yeah and it makes you so hungry you *never* get full, and you just eat other people, all you want to do is eat their meat and drink their blood -

Other kids are laughing at Trevor and Clint getting over the top about this.

Principal Simmons folds his arms in judgement as if this confirms what he has suspected: Julia does not have control of her classroom.

Julia sees this and quickly claps her hands together.

JULIA

All right, okay! Thank you, Trevor, for sharing that.

The LUNCH BELL RINGS - and the fourth graders leap to life, tumbling over one another to get outside to recess.

Julia tries to hold their attention for a minute longer.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Ok - guys! After lunch, you're going to be writing your own stories. So think of a myth or fairytale. Guys! One at a time -

As the students funnel out, Principal Simmons watches Julia. And we CUT TO -

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Julia sits across from Principal Simmons. She's uneasy but hiding it.

He's staring at her, hard to read. All kinds of distances between them - age, gender, culture. He was born and raised in this town - and it is significant to him that she wasn't.

PRINCIPAL SIMMONS

So. How are you liking it here?

JULIA

(faking confidence)

I feel like it's going really well.

I love the kids.

He just looks at her. A beat of awkward silence. Is she expected to say more? Julia hesitates, then -

JULIA (CONT'D)

(admitting)

Sometimes it's... hard to get them to focus. But they like the unit we're doing. They're smart.

Principal Simmons smiles slightly but still doesn't say anything. It's almost like he's enjoying making her a little uncomfortable. Like he's waiting for her to be honest.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I mean. Half of them are still reading at a second grade level. Maybe five of them actually can't read at all.

PRINCIPAL SIMMONS

I know.

Julia waits for him to elaborate. He doesn't.

JULIA

I... was thinking maybe I should talk to the parents. Get a sense of what's happening at home.

Simmons leans in. He's been waiting for this conversation.

PRINCIPAL SIMMONS

You've been here, what. Three months now?

(beat)

Look. Those kids having trouble reading?

(MORE)

PRINCIPAL SIMMONS (CONT'D)
 Most of 'em have rough shit going
 on at home. Pardon the language.

JULIA
 And what's the school doing about
 that?

He seems puzzled by the question.

PRINCIPAL SIMMONS
 (shaking his head)
 School is school. Home is home.

JULIA
 What does that mean?

The Principal sighs, leans forward, speaks slowly and
 patronizingly, so she understands:

PRINCIPAL SIMMONS
 You are not the parents. The
 parents don't want what you want.
 The parents don't believe what you
 believe.

JULIA
 What if there's a problem and the
 parents won't help?
 (beat)
 What if the parents are the
 problem?

PRINCIPAL SIMMONS
 Let me put it another way - this
 isn't a magnet school. This is the
 opposite of a magnet school. You're
 the girl who keeps them from
 setting themselves on fire until
 the bell rings.

"Girl." Julia sits back, burning but helpless. Principal
 Simmons looks her up and down, vaguely sympathetic but
 condescending.

PRINCIPAL SIMMONS (CONT'D)
 You'll get used to it.

Off Julia, smiling to hide how helpless and out of place she
 feels.

INT. REXFORD ELEMENTARY - JULIA'S CLASSROOM - LATER

Julia steps into her empty classroom, feeling low.

A scribbling sound. Julia looks over and sees that the classroom is not empty:

LUCAS, the quiet kid, still sitting at the same desk in the back. He's DRAWING SOMETHING in a notebook.

Julia approaches. He doesn't notice.

JULIA

Lucas. Aren't you going to recess?

Lucas shakes his head. Uh-uh. Julia gets closer, sits at the desk next to him.

JULIA (CONT'D)

What're you working on?

LUCAS

I'm writing my story.

JULIA

Getting a head start? Good for you.

LUCAS

Mhm.

Lucas shifts in his seat, angling himself away.

Julia subtly looks him over. Taking in the threadbare clothes. And noticing:

ANIMAL FUR stuck to his clothes. All over him.

Julia reaches down and gently plucks off a clump of fur, flicks it away.

JULIA

What kind of dog do you have?

LUCAS

I don't.

Huh.

JULIA

Ever ask your mom and dad for one?

Lucas's eyes dart nervously to Julia.

LUCAS

It's just my dad.

JULIA

You just live with your dad?

Lucas hesitates strangely, then gives a quick nod. A hint of something unpleasant at home. Julia watches him.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Can I read your story?

She starts to look over his shoulder - he's just finishing up a page. Catches a glimpse of many SMALL ANIMALS. Cats, dogs, squirrels...

But Lucas quickly - almost violently - covers the page with both hands.

JULIA (CONT'D)
You don't want to show me?

He won't look at her. Quickly he shakes his head no.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Why not? How about just one page?

She reaches for the papers almost gently, not to yank them away but just to touch when -

Lucas leaps to his feet, snatching up the pages of his story -
And frantically TEARING THEM TO PIECES.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Hey-

But he's already at the door. He throws the shreds of paper in the TRASH. Then he's gone.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Lucas!

Julia sits down and sighs. It's hard not to take that as a personal rejection of her as a teacher.

EXT. REXFORD ELEMENTARY - PLAYGROUND - SAME TIME

Kids play on the patchy grass. A game of kickball. They're happy, laughing. But now reveal -

LUCAS standing alone at the edge of the playground. Isolated from the others.

His eyes are closed. He's breathing hard. Intense. Something about the encounter he just had with Julia shook him up badly. But we can't tell if he's scared or energized or *what*.

INT. REXFORD ELEMENTARY - TEACHERS LOUNGE - DAY

Julia sits at a wood-laminate folding table, concentrating on something she's working on - we don't see it yet.

The teacher's lounge is small, drab, depressing. Several other similar tables are arranged around hers. The fridge is old and beat-up. The coffee-maker is dirty.

Across the room, a handful of other teachers eat their lunches and banter amongst themselves. MRS. PARSONS, the cheery arts and crafts teacher. MR. SCHMITT, the stolid history teacher.

In a strange way, Julia's isolation from the other teachers echoes Lucas's isolation from the kids in class.

One teacher, BRET (30-ish), watches Julia. Curious. Attracted to her. He gets up and crosses the room to sit at her table.

Now reveal: She's taping together the scraps of Lucas's story. She retrieved them from the trash and she has arranged the pages like a jigsaw puzzle. Each has an illustration and handwritten text, barely legible. Like a PICTURE BOOK.

BRET

What you got there?

JULIA

A story one of my kids wrote.

BRET

Dog get to it or something?

JULIA

Not quite.

Bret cranes his neck to see the pages. A bit too close.

BRET

Which kid?

JULIA

Lucas Weaver.

He chuckles softly, sympathetically.

JULIA (CONT'D)

You know him?

BRET

Kind of a lost cause, isn't he.

Julia looks at him challengingly. *What a dick thing to say about a kid.*

JULIA

What's *that* supposed to mean?

Bret gets faintly self-conscious, defensive.

BRET

I had him last year. Always seemed a little... slow, y'know?

JULIA

He has trouble fitting in.

(she looks at the story)

But I don't think he's slow. I just don't think there's much support at home.

Bret. Not sure whether to say what he's about to say.

BRET

The dad, yeah. What a mess.

(thinks)

You know the laundromat, by Zee's Pizza?

JULIA

No.

BRET

Well- I was there a few months ago. And he came in. Lucas did, I mean. By himself. He didn't even notice me, but I could smell him like, ten feet away. And I watch him... going from machine to machine, and he steals *one or two pieces* of laundry from each. Like so people wouldn't notice.

Bret shakes his head. Chuckling again.

BRET (CONT'D)

Probably grow up to be a perv.

JULIA

I really don't think that's why he was taking clothes.

Bret is looking at Julia, bored with talking about Lucas. He's more interested in *her*. In making a connection.

BRET
 Y'know, I did Teach for America
 too? When I was your age.

Julia nods politely.

BRET (CONT'D)
 Yeah, they had me in Baltimore.
 Poor people name their kids the
 craziest shit. I had these twins in
 my class... the one was named
 Yahighness and the other was named
 Yamajesty.
 (laughs)
 You want to grab a beer after work,
 I'll tell you about it?

Jules smiles, just as politely. Not interested.

JULIA
 I have to do some lesson plans.

Bret looks at her. The rejection stings a little.

BRET
 You don't really fit in here, do
 you?

JULIA
 What?

BRET
 You won't do yourself any favors
 with the social justice thing.
 There's no bleeding hearts in
 Rexford.

Julia doesn't know how to react. She's uncomfortable. Bret
 suddenly smiles, like he's just being playful.

BRET (CONT'D)
 You know the town motto, right?

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON GRAFFITI: "HILLS, WHORES AND LIQUOR STORES".

On an ancient, battered road sign that once just read: KEEP
 REXFORD PRETTY - PLEASE DON'T LITTER. We are -

EXT. ROAD - DUSK - AERIAL VIEW

A narrow road skates along a hillside, a sort of boundary between TOWN and FOREST.

JULIA'S HATCHBACK drives the empty route, a red speck.

Over this - Sounds of RADIO STATIONS... AM talk, country hits, classic rock -

INT. JULIA'S CAR - DUSK

The radio has settled on an EVANGELICAL PREACHER, but Julia is elsewhere, barely listening.

PREACHER (ON RADIO)
- *and so be sober, be vigilant;
your adversary the devil, as a
roaring lion, walks about, seeking
whom he may devour -*

She steps on the gas, trying to beat nightfall. Accelerating a bit too fast.

The single CHIRP of a POLICE SIREN. Red and blue lights in rearview. Julia tenses.

She puts her hands at ten and two, carefully pulling the car to the side of the road.

EXT. ROAD - DUSK

DREW, the Sheriff, exits his car ("REXFORD POLICE"). Drew is young for a sheriff, maybe 30. Handsome. A little hefty, but he carries it well. He looks like a bit of a redneck.

Drew saunters up to Julia's driver side window. Taps on the glass with a single knuckle.

INT. JULIA'S CAR - DUSK

JULIA rolls down the window. Fumbles for her ID, frustrated.

DREW
Miss Grey. You know how fast you
were going?

Julia pauses. Looks up at Drew. Holds back a smile.

He stares back, stone-faced.

JULIA
Slow night, Sheriff?

DREW
Well, we got this one cat missing
over on Brockleman Road.

JULIA
You send all three squad cars after
it?

Drew allows a slightly exasperated sigh. Rests his hand on
the roof of the car.

DREW
I'm only gonna ask you this once.
(beat)
Your place or mine?

Julia smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

We're in the modest, slightly messy and cozy living room of
Julia's cottage - the little place that she rents on the edge
of town, as we'll come to learn.

JULIA (V.O.)
... Mine.

The door opens and Julia enters, dropping her bag on the
floor. Drew comes in behind her.

Tiredly she turns around and kisses him. He kisses her back.
It's comfortable, though not a fit of passion.

Then she walks toward the bedroom, casually starting to take
off her jeans.

JULIA
Where're my sweatpants?

Clearly they are dating. CUT TO -

INT. CLOSE ON - THE TITLE PAGE OF LUCAS'S STORY

The torn-apart pages now are now SCOTCH-TAPED together.

In awkward block pencil, the title reads -

JULIA (V.O.)
"The Three Bears".

Julia turns the page. A drawing of a cave on a mountainside. Inside the mouth of the cave are... THREE BEARS.

The drawing is advanced for a fourth grader.

Julia reads the text aloud, printed neatly in pencil at the bottom of each page.

JULIA (V.O.)
Once there were three bears that lived in a cave up above a little town. Big Bear, Little Bear and Baby Bear.

She turns the page. A closer view of the bears as she describes them.

JULIA (V.O.)
Big Bear was mean and dangerous and nobody liked him. Baby Bear was scared of everything. And Little Bear was the one who took care of them all.

New page. Little Bear descends the mountainside. At the bottom, houses drawn quite skillfully.

JULIA (V.O.)
Every day, Little Bear went down into town and got food for them to eat.

New page. The bears around a campfire.

JULIA (V.O.)
But one day, Little Bear came home and Big Bear and Baby Bear had changed.

New page. Big Bear and Baby Bear chase people in the town.

JULIA (V.O.)
They had rabies now and they only wanted to eat people.

New page. Little Bear rolls a large boulder.

JULIA (V.O.)

So Little Bear blocked the entrance to the cave with a rock and trapped them inside to keep the townspeople safe.

New page. The tapestry of small animals we glimpsed earlier, when Lucas was drawing the pictures.

JULIA (V.O.)

Every day he'd go out to catch critters for them. And every night he'd sleep outside the cave to make sure they never got out.

The final page. Big Bear and Baby Bear trapped in the cave. Faces contorted and grotesque and eerily HUMAN.

PUSH IN on those DISTORTED, TORMENTED FACES.

And as the page flips away, WIDE TO REVEAL that we are in -

INT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Julia's lying in bed, beside Drew. She's in PJs, he's in an old t-shirt and boxers.

In bed like this, Drew seems much more affable and harmless. A likable and even slightly dorky guy. Domestic.

DREW

Hello? Where's Goldilocks?

JULIA

Think these are different bears.

DREW

Or they ate her, and this is after.

JULIA

What do you know about Lucas Weaver?

DREW

There's a bio on the dust jacket.
(off her irked look)
Lucas. Mom ran away when he was a kid. He lives with his Dad and the little brother.

JULIA

I didn't know he had a brother.

DREW

Yeah, he'd be five or six maybe.
And the dad... Frank Weaver, I mean
I don't know him, but you put
handcuffs on a guy a few times...

JULIA

You've arrested him? For what?

DREW

Meth. One time I found Frank smoked
out of his mind up in the old
mining camp. Think that was his
spot.

(beat, he sighs)

Stuff'll suck a town dry. People
you think you knew, then six months
later - where'd all their teeth go?

Julia stands, shutting the book.

JULIA

I don't get it. Nobody has tried to
help this kid.

DREW

Help... how?

Julia crosses her arms.

JULIA

Lucas could flourish if his
circumstances were different.

DREW

What, foster care? You don't just
pull people's kids away. Not here.

JULIA

I wasn't suggesting that. I was
talking about disadvantages.

DREW

We got those coming out our ears.
Half the kids in that school come
from broken homes. Why him?

Julia turns to Drew.

JULIA

You saw his drawings. He's
talented.

(MORE)

JULIA (CONT'D)
 Everybody thinks he's slow but I think nobody's ever encouraged him because nobody believes in him. And that's *hard* when you're a kid. I mean, isn't that why I'm there? To help kids who need it most?

DREW
 That, and the money.

JULIA
 How many times have I told you not to mention money until I pay off my loans in 20 years?

Drew shrugs sheepishly.

DREW
 This is a new relationship. You have to train me.

JULIA
 I can do that.

She smiles, touches his stubbly face. They start to make out.

EXT. JULIA'S COTTAGE / ELAINE'S BACK YARD - MORNING

Establishing. The next morning.

Then Julia emerges from the cottage, fumbling with her keys.

We now see the geography of the cottage exterior: It is behind and to the side of ANOTHER, LARGER HOUSE where Julia's landlord lives. The cottage and the house are separated by a back yard, surrounded by trees and bushes.

Her landlord and neighbor, ELAINE (50s), stands on the back porch of the main house watering her plants.

Elaine's TWO DOGS play nearby, yipping and tussling.

Elaine is a kind of crunchy redneck, in her 50s, wearing an AC/DC t-shirt. She waves at Julia.

ELAINE
 Was that the Sheriff's car overnight?

JULIA
 Two months and going strong.

ELAINE

When you're done with him, you send him on over to the big house, 'kay?

JULIA

Sure, Elaine.

ELAINE

That'd be a month off the rent!

Julia walks toward the car, rolling her eyes slightly.

INT. LOCAL RITE AID STORE - DAY

Julia walks down the aisle... and stops at the sad little CLOTHING SECTION:

Ultra-cheap sweatshirts, sweatpants, socks, plain generic t-shirts. Julia looks at them.

Then she grabs some socks, undershirts, sweatpants etc, starts filling a basket with them.

INT. REXFORD ELEMENTARY - TEACHER'S LOUNGE - DAY

Julia is alone in the teacher's lounge, with her bag from Rite Aid now full of cheap new clothes and school supplies.

She is going through one by one and cutting the tags off the clothes, peeling the stickers off the school supplies.

The BELL RINGS.

INT. REXFORD ELEMENTARY - JULIA'S CLASSROOM

Julia stands at the head of the classroom. The students are yelling, screaming, totally not paying attention. She surveys them with tired eyes. She sees -

LUCAS at his desk. He's reading a book, unfazed by the chaos around him.

INT. REXFORD ELEMENTARY - OFFICE - DAY

Julia leans over the counter in the office as CAROL, longtime Rexford secretary, flips nimbly through a stack of folders in a drawer.

CAROL
 (flatly)
 What're you interested in the
 Weaver kid for?

JULIA
 Mrs. Parsons mentioned a Board of
 Ed thing a while back. A program
 for gifted students in the arts.
 County Arts Program, or-

CAROL
 The Arts Mentorship Program?

JULIA
 That's it. I think it'd be perfect
 for Lucas.

Carol looks skeptical. She plucks out a file - "WEAVER,
 LUCAS." She hands it to Julia.

CAROL
 Go nuts.

MOMENTS LATER

JULIA has relocated to a side table. She flips through the
 folder.

Personal Info, Medical History, Emergency Contacts...

Family. Listed beneath, "FRANK WEAVER (father)". And a "TODD
 WEAVER, 5 (brother)".

JULIA
 Shouldn't his brother be in school?

CAROL
 I think he's home schooled.

JULIA
 Really.

Carol's attention turns to a ringing phone -

CAROL
 Rexford Elementary...

Julia quickly grabs a pencil and copies two pieces of
 information from the file onto a POST-IT note.

The ADDRESS: "18 PERLMUTTER ROAD"

And the PHONE NUMBER.

EXT. REXFORD ELEMENTARY - PLAYGROUND - DAY

The kids are playing at recess. Julia is one of several teachers watching them. She spots TREVOR across the playground, terrorizing a group of girls.

JULIA

Trevor. Hey, Trevor! Cool it.

Trevor sticks out his tongue at her. Then he cools it.

Keeping one eye on the kids, Julia takes the POST-IT from her pocket and dials the number on her phone. It rings.

Her eyes drop to the pavement. Amongst other chalk drawings, she notes a tiny animal head with antlers, almost like an aboriginal symbol. Strange... And then-

The ringing stops. A click on the other end, but no answer. Just the prickly hiss of static.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Hello?

The noise fades in and out like breathing. Like someone is just listening on the other end. The call is dropped.

Julia pockets the phone. She can tell that this'll be the first frustration of many.

Looking around, she notes another teacher watching the kids. She turns and walks toward the school building.

INT. REXFORD ELEMENTARY - JULIA'S CLASSROOM - DAY

In the empty classroom, Julia goes to Lucas's DESK, looks around to make sure there are no prying eyes, then reaches into the DRAWER and pulls out:

A couple of colored pencils, some worksheets from class, a TATTERED NOTEBOOK with the same kind of pages Lucas drew his story on, and a BOOK checked out from the SCHOOL LIBRARY.

First she looks at the tattered notebook. Flips it open, revealing more DRAWINGS and SCRIBBLES.

Creepy little BEAR FIGURES. A HOUSE. It looks like his own house. An image of a CAVE.

And then, large on a page: a HUMAN HEART. Not a cartoon valentine's type heart. A heart like an organ from a human body. Crudely drawn but clearly recognizable.

Julia stares at it for a moment, puzzled and slightly unnerved.

Then she sets the notebook aside and looks at the library book:

"SHADOW OF THE WENDIGO"

On the front cover, an illustration of a moonlit forest. A FIGURE passes between two trees... DARK, SINEWY and TALL, with large ANTLERS protruding from its head.

Julia turns the book over curiously.

EXT. REXFORD ELEMENTARY - DAY

STUDENTS flood out of the front doors as the BELL rings.

JULIA stands, watching the crowd. She spots LUCAS, moving slowly, grasping some books in front of him.

JULIA

Lucas!

Lucas looks her way. His face brightens slightly as she approaches.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Could I talk to you?

Lucas nods yes. Julia looks around. A few kids are staring.

JULIA (CONT'D)

You want to get something to eat?

LUCAS

No, I'm fine.

JULIA

How about ice cream at Sciscilo's?
My treat.

INT. SCISCILO'S DINER - DAY

Lucas wolfs down a SUNDAE. Julia watches from across the booth... This kid was *hungry*.

After a moment, she sets a PAPER BAG down on the table and slides it towards Lucas.

He looks at it, then at her, almost suspiciously. She waits.

He peels the bag open apprehensively, revealing the CLOTHES and SCHOOL SUPPLIES she picked up for him this morning.

JULIA

I had some things around the house
I thought you might be able to use.

Lucas doesn't say anything. Just looks at her uncertainly. As if this might be a trap somehow. Julia smiles encouragingly.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Do you think those'll fit?

LUCAS

I think so.

JULIA

Good!

Julia pulls out a box of colored pencils and a sketchbook.

JULIA (CONT'D)

You like to draw, right?

LUCAS

Yeah.

JULIA

You're very talented. I got you
these so you could keep practicing.

Lucas slides the notebook and pencils into the bag with the clothes.

LUCAS

Thank you.

Julia nods, "of course."

JULIA

I was talking to Mrs. Parsons the
other day. She told me about a
special program for kids like you.
Kids who like art. Is that
something you'd want to do?

Julia sees something in Lucas's eyes: A quiet glimmer of excitement.

LUCAS

(shyly)
What is it?

JULIA

You'd get to stay after school. You could draw whatever you want, and just make things.

Lucas begins to smile despite himself. It's sweet to see. He can't believe someone is being so kind.

LUCAS

Okay.

JULIA

Great. I just need your dad to sign the permission slip. I'd like to talk to him about it, too, and-

Lucas's face abruptly darkens. A small shift. Fear.

LUCAS

Actually, I don't want to.

JULIA

What do you mean?

LUCAS

I changed my mind.

JULIA

But Lucas, you'd get to...

Lucas slides out of the booth.

LUCAS

I have to go home.

JULIA

Can I drive you?

But she's lost him -

Lucas slides out of the booth and hurries away, clutching the bag Julia gave him.

Julia sinks back into the booth. Waits a minute.

Then impulsively, she gets up, slaps some cash on the table and follows him.

EXT. REXFORD TOWN CENTER - DAY

Julia tails Lucas from a distance.

He's moving quickly and with his head down, trying his best to be invisible.

He rounds a corner.

Julia speeds up, turning the corner just as Lucas disappears into the LAUNDROMAT.

INT/EXT. LAUNDROMAT - DAY

Julia peers cautiously through the tinted window, fake plants and neon providing cover.

There's LUCAS. He looks around, making sure he's unobserved.

Then goes to the back corner, to the last washing machine.

He opens the bag Julia gave him. Puts the clothes into the machine.

Then he picks up an old detergent packet from the floor and squeezes the dregs of it into the machine.

Then he starts taking all his clothes off, too. Strips right down to his underwear.

He bunches them up, puts them in a MACHINE.

He puts two quarters in and starts the cycle.

Then he sits on the bench in his underwear and waits, a sad, scrawny, lonesome sight, watching the clothes spin round and round.

Julia watches him, heart aching, until she feels like she shouldn't anymore. She turns away.

EXT. REXFORD TOWN CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Julia hurries across the street towards her car. She's looking at something on her phone, puzzled.

She approaches a WOMAN tacking a flier to a bulletin board.

JULIA

Excuse me-

The Woman turns, startled but friendly.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Do you know Perlmutter Road? I'm looking for it on here but...

WOMAN

Perl-mutter? That's down past the train station. This way, then left at the light, go straight 'til you hit the bridge... Only thing down there, you won't miss it...

JULIA

Thanks.

Julia heads for her car. The Woman scrunches up her face... *Who is this girl?*

The Woman turns back to the bulletin board and we see what she was posting: a MISSING DOG flier. She runs her hand across it, smoothing out the lumps.

And as we PULL BACK, we see that the ENTIRE BOARD has been overrun with MISSING PET FLIERS.

INT. JULIA'S CAR (MOVING) / VARIOUS DRIVING SHOTS - DAY

Julia drives through town, past the pizza place and the laundromat.

She passes through the residential streets just beyond that center of town. Modest houses. Mostly older.

She drives down a pockmarked road that leads to a DEAD OLD TRAIN STATION.

She crosses the tracks and drives down a SHORT ROAD, flanked by WOODS and turns down another road.

And now she's in the bad part of town.

STREET SIGN: "PERLMUTTER"

This is PERLMUTTER ROAD. The street the town forgot.

It's the street we saw earlier.

Sagging old houses that look like toothless faces. Overgrown lawns. Abandoned pieces of furniture in the grass.

ON JULIA as she drives slowly down the street, looking at the addresses. Taking in the poverty.

Then up she slows to a halt outside -

THE WEAVER HOUSE

The sun is low, so all we can really see of it is a silhouette, set back from the road behind a yard of tall grass and weeds. It's slightly taller than the other houses. Something about it's shape feels off.

Julia takes out the crumpled Post-It to check the address:

This is it. This is Lucas's home.

She watches from inside the car. There are no lights in the windows. No car out front. No signs of life.

Julia's PHONE vibrates, breaking the moment.

She looks at the Caller ID: "Man in Uniform" (that's how she's playfully entered Drew in her phone). She answers.

JULIA

Hey.

(beat)

Yeah, start the fire, I'm on my way.

She pulls away from the curb, a little shaken, thankful for a reason to leave the neighborhood.

EXT. DREW'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

We're in the backyard of Drew's modest house. The yard is bordered by woods.

Drew's a bachelor and he's messy but the yard has a surprisingly ambitious attempt at a garden, and some old wooden deck chairs arranged around a CRACKLING FIRE PIT.

DREW and JULIA sit in those chairs, drinking beers. He has some shish kebabs cooking on a grill over the fire pit.

Drew may be a rural Rexford guy, born and bred, but he's not some yokel. He's smart, clever, and a bit progressive. He can even cook. We get why Julia likes him.

He gets up and goes to the grill. But instead of more food, he picks up the barbecue lighter and then takes out a joint and lights it.

Julia watches as Drew takes a long drag of the joint.

JULIA

They really don't drug test you?

DREW

What do you think we are, the LAPD?
The whole sheriff's department is
me, Trish, Larry, and Mark Jr, who
doesn't even count.

He offers her the joint.

DREW (CONT'D)

Here.

Julia shakes her head: *No thanks.*

JULIA

I've got enough problems at school.

DREW

You talk to the Weaver kid any
more?

JULIA

Lucas. I've tried. I was trying to
get him involved in this art thing,
but he clammed up when I mentioned
his dad.

(beat)

I drove out where he lives today...

DREW

The Mutters?

JULIA

What?

DREW

Perlmutter Road. Out where he
lives. They call it the Mutters.

Julia nods gloomily.

DREW (CONT'D)

My advice is to leave it be. His
situation is his situation.

Julia stares at the fire, lost in thought.

DREW (CONT'D)

... but if it'd make you feel
better, I could swing by and pay
them a visit.

JULIA

(thinks)

I'm not sure if that would help or
make things worse.

Drew nods. Coughs up a bit of smoke.

JULIA (CONT'D)

What if I just cut to the chase and
adopt him. You want a kid?

DREW

(laughs)

Moving a little fast, huh?

JULIA

Sometimes I set my mind on things.

Drew takes a drag, sits back and thinks.

DREW

Never really made sense to me,
adopting. I'd be scared I wouldn't
love that kid as much, you know?
And even if I did, like sometimes
I'd probably secretly wonder -
would I love this kid *more* if he
was, you know, really mine? Seems
unfair to all parties involved.

He sees Julia looking at him strangely. Almost uncomfortably.
To lighten the mood, he jokes:

DREW (CONT'D)

Ha. You're like, "Fuck you, I was
adopted."

(beat; off her silence)

Wait, you weren't, were you?

JULIA

Um...

DREW

Wait, *were* you?

Julia shrugs: *Yep, you figured it out. So what?*

DREW (CONT'D)

You never told me that.

JULIA

Why would I?

DREW
 (shrugs, embarrassed)
 I'm sorry, wow, I just deep-throated my own foot, didn't I? So this was... as a baby?

JULIA
 No, but before I can remember. You know, I didn't talk til I was five years old? They all thought I was - "special."

Long pause.

DREW
 You are special.

Julia darts a glance: *Hah hah*. Then she smiles, breaking the tension. The mood returning to lightness.

Julia reaches for the joint Drew is smoking.

JULIA
 Okay. Give me that.

Drew smiles and hands her the joint.

DREW
 Don't beat yourself up about the kid, okay? You can't save a kid from his own family, not if they don't want you to.

JULIA
 Says who?

DREW
 Julia. There'll be lots of kids you *can* help.

CLOSE ON JULIA - Stay on her as she takes a thoughtful drag on the joint. Stares into space... CUT TO -

EXT. THE WEAVER HOUSE - DUSK (DREAM)

Julia, standing outside the Weaver house again. Staring at it from the front lawn.

A weird, eerie twilight. Something surreal, unreal about this whole moment. The house looks ominous. Faintly we can hear a sound almost like it's BREATHING.

Julia takes a cautious step toward it.

CHILD'S VOICE

Don't.

Julia jumps, turns back to see CHILDREN FROM HER CLASS standing behind her, on the road. Clint, Ellie, Harrison, Trevor, and Jasmine. Just staring at her.

JASMINE

Don't go in there.

JULIA

I have to.

But Julia turns away from them. She walks toward the house, forcing herself forward.

She climbs the steps. They creak underfoot.

She touches the door handle. Slowly turns it. The door creaks open, REVEALING:

DARK FOREST. The door leads not to the interior of the house, but to some outdoor place. We can see what looks like rocks, and some other entrance deeper within the darkness.

We sense a presence there. BREATHING. A WHISPER. A very faint GIGGLE.

And Julia steps through -

INT. DREW'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Julia wakes with a start - to find herself lying alone in Drew's bed. It's the middle of the night.

She looks around the dark bedroom alarmed, then sees -

DREW

- sitting in a comfy armchair against the wall, reading a novel by the dim light of a small table lamp.

He looks up.

DREW

I couldn't sleep. Didn't want to wake you.

JULIA

Had a nightmare.

DREW

Yeah, I noticed some rustling and snorting over there.

She doesn't laugh, still thinking about the dream. Finally, slowly, she says:

JULIA

What do you know about the Wendigo?

DREW

Wendigo? Why?

JULIA

Some kids brought it up in class.

Drew sets his book on the side table.

DREW

Well - everyone here grows up hearing those stories. It's how they teach you not to go in the old mines.

JULIA

It lives in the mines...

DREW

Some nights it comes up to hunt in the woods. Looking for lost people. This area's a pretty good place to find 'em if you ask me.

JULIA

(quietly)

Then it takes them back down there? Under the forest?

DREW

The way my dad told it was that down in those mines, deep underground, there's a second forest. One that grew up in the dark, trees and everything. And That's where the Wendigo spirit lived, along with all the Wendigo-people it made.

JULIA

Trees can't grow underground...

DREW

Yeah, well. What did my dad know.

Drew switches off the light. He's about to get up, but he stops. Remembers something... almost an afterthought.

DREW (CONT'D (CONT'D)

When I was growing up, there was this kid - Davey Willis. He was a few years older than me. His parents used to beat him up, kicked him out of the house. We heard he was living out there for a few months, in the woods, in the old mining camp. And after a while, we just - didn't see him anymore. People used to say the Wendigo took him...

JULIA

What really happened to him?

Drew sits silently, lost in thought.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Drew?

DREW

Never found.

Drew looks oddly unnerved now. Like *he* needs reassurance.

JULIA

Come back to bed.

Drew nods, returns to bed.

Wraps her in his arms, more looking for comfort than to be comforting.

Julia allows herself to close her eyes.

Something scratches softly on the bedroom window...
The branch of a tree, twitching in the breeze.

INT. FOREST - NIGHT (DREAM)

We're back in Julia's dream, but Julia is gone.

We drift noiselessly through the pines.

Toward...

EXT. MINES - NIGHT (DREAM)

A set of train tracks leads towards a roughly-hewn hole in the side of a hill, framed by wooden beams.

This is the entrance to the REXFORD MINES.

PUSH IN SLOWLY on the MOUTH OF THE MINE. A distinctive and threatening image. Mark this, remember it.

We're swallowed by the darkness.

INT. REXFORD ELEMENTARY - JULIA'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Next day. Afternoon. The kids have *just* left and we can hear them out in the hallway, clamoring as they head for buses.

Julia is hurriedly packing her lesson plans in her bag. The school day has just ended and she's going somewhere now.

EXT. REXFORD ELEMENTARY - DAY

SCHOOL BUSES are lined up outside, picking up the kids to take them home. Kids mill around outside, lining up to get on their buses. Among them we see -

Lucas. Apart from the others as always. Standing quietly in line to get on his bus. And now reveal -

Julia. Watching him. She's just come outside, her bag slung over her shoulder.

Then she turns away and walks quickly to the parking lot, to her car. As she gets in and starts it -

EXT. WEAVER HOUSE - DAY

JULIA parks on the street in front of the grim WEAVER HOUSE.

She gets out. Looks up at it for a moment, uneasy.

Then she cautiously approaches the house, weaving through the tall grass. The yard looks like it hasn't been mowed in years. The driveway is overgrown.

In the daylight, she realizes the windows of the house are BOARDED UP. *What the hell?*

YOUNG MAN

(O.S.)

Hey.

Julia flinches, startled. The voice is coming from a neighbor's yard. She turns to see -

A YOUNG MAN, maybe 17, on the next porch over. Reclining on a Little Mermaid inflatable chair and drinking a beer.

Hollow eyes of an oxy addict.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
What're you doing?

JULIA
Do you know if Frank Weaver's home?

YOUNG MAN
You better get away from there.

JULIA
I'm Lucas's teacher.

YOUNG MAN
Go back to school.

JULIA
How old are you?

The Young Man gets up and goes inside his house.

Julia turns back to the Weaver house.

She steps carefully up onto the porch. It groans in protest.

She notices an IRON HORSESHOE, nailed directly onto the center of the front door. Odd.

She rings the doorbell and waits.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Mr. Weaver?

She knocks on the door. Raises her voice a touch.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Frank Weaver?

She knocks one last time, hard.

She steps to one of the WINDOWS on the porch. She notices:

It's boarded up from the OUTSIDE.

The boards are haphazardly cut, misaligned and nailed at crazy angles. As if by a child.

Julia runs her hand along one of them. A PRICK of PAIN. She retracts her hand. She's gotten a SPLINTER.

She pulls it out. A DROP OF BLOOD beads on her fingertip...

And falls to the porch below.

CLOSE ON THE BLOOD as it disappears between the floorboards, as if absorbed. Julia doesn't see this.

ON JULIA as she approaches the front windows. There are gaps between the boards covering them.

Julia leans in, staring between the boards into the interior darkness of the house.

HER POV: A thin slice of sunlight reveals a LIVING ROOM. Ratty furniture, Fisher-Price toys on the floor.

Beyond the reach of the light, Julia sees something else:

A DARK SHAPE, could be a man, could be junk leaned against the wall.

Julia shivers. Cups her hands around her eyes, trying to get a better look.

And then the dark shape MOVES. Just shifts its weight.

Julia flinches back from the window, blinking in the sun.

Then shakes her head, convinced it was a trick of the light.

EXT. THE WEAVER HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

Julia makes her way around the side of the house. (Here too, all of the house windows are BOARDED.)

She arrives in the back yard, takes it in:

A barbecue grill in the overgrown grass, decaying toys in a Barbie pool. The HULL OF AN OLD TRUCK, half-buried in the grass.

And she notices something at the far end of the yard.

A SMALL BLUE CAMPING TENT.

It looks lonely and strange.

Julia cautiously approaches the tent.

The FRONT FLAP is open. She kneels and looks-

IN THE TENT: Clutter. Candy wrappers, a peanut butter container. A pile of bed sheets with a comic book character on them. *Children's* bed sheets.

And there's the clothing she bought for Lucas, neatly folded in the corner along with the notebook and pencils.

Clearly Lucas is living in this tent. An unbearably sad sight.

Julia's eye falls on a single, familiar BOOK:

"SHADOW OF THE WENDIGO"

Julia picks up the book.

She opens it, slowly flips through.

We quickly glimpse sketched ILLUSTRATIONS, including one of

A man eating what appears to be a human heart.

But before we can get a good look -

The SHARP WHEEZE of pneumatic brakes out front. The SCHOOL BUS is here.

Julia backs out of the tent, looks for somewhere to HIDE. CUT TO -

EXT. THE WEAVER HOUSE - FRONT YARD - SAME TIME

Back in front of the house, LUCAS steps off of the school bus, backpack slung over his shoulder.

The bus is empty. His house is the LAST STOP.

He heads toward his house - but walks around the side, heading for the back yard.

We FOLLOW HIM AROUND the house into the -

EXT. THE WEAVER HOUSE - BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS

- the overgrown yard and the blue tent coming into view...

But Julia is nowhere in sight.

Lucas goes straight to the tent. Crouches and looks inside.

He pauses. Looking around as if sensing something off.

REVEAL JULIA:

Hiding behind the dead OLD TRUCK at the edge of the yard.
Watching Lucas, holding her breath.

Julia is, for a second, petrified that she moved something in
the tent and Lucas has noticed.

But then he reaches into the tent and grabs the SHEETS. He
uses the sheets as a bag, wrapping them around some old
clothes to make a bundle, then stands back up.

Julia watches silently as Lucas marches out of the back yard.
A sad little figure heading off. Must be heading back to the
laundromat.

Julia steps out from behind the truck.

She starts to walk back around to the front of the house, as
if to follow Lucas. But then -

She hears something, briefly. And very soft. Sounded like...

A LITTLE BOY CRYING.

It was coming from INSIDE THE WEAVER HOUSE.

Julia stops. Slowly turns. Looks toward the house. Now there
is silence. Did she hear that?

Still silence. She starts to walk away after Lucas.

...when she hears it again. Louder this time. The SOFT CRYING
OF A TERRIFIED KID INSIDE THAT BOARDED UP HOUSE.

Julia turns back once more, certain now.

She steps closer to the house. Toward a BOARDED UP WINDOW.

JULIA
(cautiously)
Hello?

The CRYING STOPS.

Julia hesitates, uncertain.

JULIA (CONT'D)
... Hello?

PUSH IN ON THE BOARDED UP WINDOW. Ominous quiet.

Julia finally steps up to the window. She lightly knocks on
the boards.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 Todd...? Is that you?
 (no reply)
 I'm Miss Grey. I'm Lucas's teacher.
 Are you okay?

No response. Then -

FOOTSTEPS in the house. The sound of a child moving quickly and quietly, socks padding on a wood floor.

Julia hesitates again, debating what to do. Then pulls out her phone.

Anxiously she dials DREW. She clasps the phone between her ear and shoulder, looking for another GAP between the boards.

DREW (ON PHONE)
 Hey babe, what's up?

JULIA
 I'm, uh... I'm at Lucas Weaver's house.

INTERCUT:

INT. SHERIFF'S STATION - KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Drew stands at the coffee machine, making coffee. He stops what he's doing, puzzled and a bit concerned.

DREW
 Why are you there?

Julia hears a FAINT SOUND from somewhere in the house. Something rustled or fell over.

JULIA
 I think you need to come out here.

DREW
 What's going on? Julia, why did you go back there?

Now we END INTERCUT and STAY WITH JULIA.

JULIA
 Something's not right. It's all- the house is boarded up. But I heard someone inside, I heard a *kid* crying. And there's a- a tent out back with Lucas's stuff. I think he's been *living* in it.

(MORE)

JULIA (CONT'D)
 But I think- I think his little
 brother's locked up inside the
 house.

Drew is calm, reassuring.

DREW (ON PHONE)
 Okay. Stay there. I'm coming right
 over.

JULIA
 Hurry.

DREW (ON PHONE)
 I'll be there in fifteen. Wait for
 me.

JULIA
 Okay.

Julia pockets her phone.

She looks back at the boarded-up window. Still quiet inside.

She waits...

Then she sees an opening between several of the boards.

She hesitates. Then cautiously leans forward and puts her eye
 to the crack... (*Fuck no, don't put your eye up to that!*)

HER POV: A DARK HALLWAY.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 (cautiously)
 Todd?
 (then)
 Are you in there?

FOOTFALLS MOVE QUICKLY UPWARDS inside the house - he's gone
 upstairs.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 Todd!

The sound of BREAKING GLASS upstairs. And the CRYING starts
 up again, but it's HIGHER PITCHED, TERRIFIED and PANICKED.

Julia rushes into action, hurrying to the -

BACK PORCH

- and to the BOARDED-UP BACK DOOR (where, we note, there's
 another IRON HORSESHOE nailed to the door).

She starts peeling away the boards from the back door. One by one, wrenching them off by hand. Somebody did a lot of work here, boarding up this house.

Julia cuts her hands, gets splinters - but ignores it. We can still hear a child WAILING from inside..

Amongst the boards and nails, the HORSESHOE FALLS OFF the door, clattering to the ground - Julia ignores it, but we know: THIS IS NOT GOOD.

Once the boards are off, she tries to open the back door - but it's locked.

It's a flimsy, rotten old door, and when she KICKS IT A FEW TIMES, it BURSTS OPEN -

AND THE CRYING STOPS.

Julia stares into the foul darkness within. The inside of the house is eerily still.

Then she steps carefully into -

INT. THE WEAVER HOUSE - BACK HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

- where the darkness conceals everything but shapes.

A SNAP beneath her feet. Julia looks down:

She's inadvertently stepped on something, some object made of twigs, like a CHARM. Now crushed into pieces.

She continues onwards into the black. The buzz of insects gives way to SILENCE.

The back hallway leads her into a -

KITCHEN

- illuminated by the few tinged rays of light allowed through the boards over the window.

She covers her mouth - something has rotted a long time ago. Dishes in the sink. Empty beer bottles on the formica table. Everything coated in a patina of grime.

A soft CREAK on the floorboards above.

Julia calls out again.

JULIA

Todd?

Julia continues into the FRONT HALL. Then to the -

LIVING ROOM

- where the floor sags severely - empty beer bottles collected against one wall. The rug is grey-brown. Rat droppings everywhere.

Shoved against another wall is a coffee table. On it, a BOWL of something that used to be soup. Now it's just black moss.

Julia gets closer. Beside the bowl are three small TEA TINS. Each holds a little bed of dirt. And beside those, THREE SMALL FIGURES made of CLAY.

The figurines have ANTLERS.

Animals of some kind, maybe goats.

Julia steps away, continues on.

A scratchy RUSTLE. Julia whirls around. It came from the DINING ROOM.

With a growing feeling of dread, she steps towards the black doorway.

JULIA

Todd...?

DINING ROOM

JULIA'S POV: Up ahead, the dining room is darker than the rest of the rooms, a void within a void.

The black resolves into a SHADOWY ROOM. This room has no furniture. But it is not empty...

Curled up in the middle of the floor are... TWO SHAPES.

One larger, one smaller.

Julia stares: Their shape is ominous. *No - it can't be.*

Julia steps closer. And now we see:

TWO CORPSES.

A man and a child. They look emaciated, twisted. Husks.

A tremor of repulsion passes across Julia's face.

In the darkness behind Julia, we see A SHADOW MOVE.

It was always there - just one shadow among many - but now we realize that it's SOMEONE OR SOMETHING, human-sized but a little bigger, not a part of the room...

And it has ANTLERS.

Julia is unaware. She takes a hesitant step forward.

The Antlered Man steps closer to Julia. Silent.

Julia moves closer still to the bodies. We can see that their mouths have been PULLED OPEN, unnaturally wide. And around them - crude chalk drawings and what looks to be RAT POISON.

Her gaze is fixed on the bodies... so she doesn't notice the Antlered Man growing ever closer behind her.

Julia slowly bends toward the larger body.

ANGLE ON its BIZARRELY DISTENDED FACE. The mouth looks like the mouth in Munch's *The Scream*.

She leans closer, disturbed. *What happened to these people?*

The Antlered Man leans down behind her. Closer... closer...

Until he is right behind her head -

ANTLERED MAN
(whisper)
CLOSER.

Julia flinches and spins around with a GASP -

To see an empty room. The Antlered Man is gone.

But Julia's HEART IS POUNDING now - she knows she's not alone. She looks around wildly - sees only the sinister room -

Hears what sounds like A WHISPER from the darkness - then another and another -

What little light is left begins to fade and the walls melt away into suffocating darkness.

She hears a SCURRYING from the ceiling - someone moving across the floor upstairs. *Todd?*

The chorus of WHISPERS grows stronger. Malevolent. Hateful.

And finally Julia runs for the door - fleeing the house...

EXT. THE WEAVER HOUSE - NIGHT

Night has just fallen, bringing with it a layer of THICK FOG. A SQUAD CAR pulls up along TWO OTHERS already parked outside the house, lights ablaze.

Inside the house, DEPUTY TRISH (30s) takes crime scene photos. We see the flash of her camera through the windows.

Outside, DEPUTY LARRY (50s) paces the yard, smoking.

DREW comes out of the house to meet JULIA, who is standing beside his SHERIFF'S CAR hugging herself. Still shaken.

Nobody is in a hurry. This isn't an emergency... what happened here has already happened.

DREW approaches slowly, expression grim, a little hunched...

Julia is watching him, silent questions in her eyes. But he has no answers -

DREW

State lab'll tell us. But I'm pretty sure it's Frank Weaver and his son Todd.

JULIA

What about the crying I heard?

DREW

There's no one else in there. Only place we haven't been yet is the basement.

Julia stares: *You're kidding.*

JULIA

Why not?

DREW

It's bolted. Heavy door. Got a locksmith on his way.

JULIA

Could someone be down there...?

DREW

They're being real quiet if so.
More likely Frank Weaver was
keeping something down there.
Might've been cooking again.

JULIA

(I don't get it)
Why wouldn't Lucas tell anyone
about this?

DREW

(shakes his head)
Probably scared county would take
him away.

Julia notices a weakness in Drew's voice. He rubs his arms as if cold.

JULIA

You're shaking.

DREW

Just... cold in there.
(then)
I've seen a few people die younger
than they should have, but...
something's not right in that
house.

Julia nods uneasily. She felt it too.

DREW (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I should've checked it
out sooner.

JULIA

So what now?

DREW unclips the radio from his shoulder.

DREW

(into Walkie)
Hey, Trish.

He's met with a burst of STATIC. He grunts. The stress has his redneck roots showing.

DREW (CONT'D)

Fucking walkies don't even work.
(to Larry)
Larry! Go by the laundromat and see
if the kid's there.

Larry grinds out his cigarette and heads for his car.

Drew returns to Julia -

DREW (CONT'D)
Now we find Lucas.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Lucas walks through the woods, the makeshift sack of LAUNDRY slung over his shoulder and a tiny backpack on his back.

INSECTS can be heard, faintly, eerily.

He's taking a shortcut, climbing up a brambly HILL towards-

EXT. A BACK ROAD - CONTINUOUS

LUCAS emerges onto the road. There are no streetlights. He's a tiny silhouette in the moonlight.

He is crossing the road when he hears -

A MEOW.

He stops in his tracks. There's a STRAY CAT by the side of the road, staring at him with hollow yellow eyes.

Lucas sets down the bag of laundry and kneels.

LUCAS
Here, kitty.

A voice from him we haven't heard before. Stronger, more practiced. He beckons the cat with ticking noises.

He has done this before. And now we're sure: It was Lucas we saw at the opening of the movie, luring the dog. He's the one that has been taking these local pets.

LUCAS (CONT'D)
Come on. Come on, kitty.

Lucas takes a tiny piece of JERKY from his pocket.

Approaches the cat, hugging the side of the road. He holds the treat out to it like an offering.

As the CAT watches Lucas warily, a VEHICLE emerges from the fog, kicking up leaves and dirt.

The cat startles and runs into the woods.

Lucas stands... It's not just any car... it's the CORONER'S VAN. Heading in the direction of his house.

And as his eyes follow it, a look of alarm comes over him.

Lucas picks up his bag and RUNS into the woods, racing for home.

EXT. THE WEAVER HOUSE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON THE OPEN FRONT DOOR... darkness within.

Then in EERIE SLOW MOTION, the CORONER and his ASSISTANT emerge, wheeling a GURNEY with a LARGE BODY BAG.

Drew emerges from the house behind them. Arms folded tensely. He watches them take the gurney down the front stairs, toward the CORONER'S VAN, open and waiting.

Behind them, DEPUTY SHERIFF MARK JR. emerges, carrying a SMALL BODY BAG, looking sick.

Mark Jr. carries that bag towards the van, too.

JULIA is standing further back, by herself across the street in the darkness, just watching.

She looks isolated and exhausted.

Watching the bodies emerge hits her hard - they're suddenly REAL to her, physical artifacts...

Meanwhile BEHIND HER, OUT OF FOCUS, we see a SMALL FIGURE emerging from the darkness.

We sense it is Lucas, but he is just a creepy out of focus shape... moving softly towards her. An unsettling image, making him feel like a threat. As he creeps closer, unseen -

LUCAS'S POV - Julia from behind as he approaches her. We hear his QUIET BREATHING.

HIS POV pans smoothly over to the back of the van, where he sees the BODY BAGS being loaded in.

His BREATHING QUICKENS, seemingly disturbed.

He looks back toward Julia. Creeps closer.

His hand reaches cautiously... hesitates... and TOUCHES HERS -

JULIA - GASPS and whirls around to see LUCAS. As she recovers, scared -

LUCAS
What are they doing?

JULIA
Oh, god-

LUCAS
What are they doing?

She kneels and hugs him.

JULIA
Oh god, Lucas, we found them. It's
over now.

Lucas finally looks her in the eye, his state of shock subsiding and a flicker of comprehension coming into his eyes. He nods.

LUCAS
(quiet, stunned)
Why did they take them out?

JULIA
How long have you been on your own?

Lucas isn't listening. He's looking again in horror as the coroner's van is closed. The look on his face is not one of anger. It's despair. Someone who has lost everything.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Lucas - they're not going to take
you away. Somebody will -

But Lucas suddenly convulses with a SOB. He's not hearing anything she's saying. On the verge of hysterics.

Julia knows there's NOTHING she can say here. So she just hugs him again, holds him as he shakes with quiet sobs.

ON DREW - Not far away. He's walking away from the porch.

He sees Julia and Lucas, and he stops by the open door of his Sheriff's car and just watches for a moment. Admiring her compassion and empathy with this poor kid.

His RADIO CRACKLES inside the car, startling him.

DISPATCHER (OVER RADIO)
(sounds shaken)
Sheriff?

He doesn't answer it yet. Julia looks up, hearing the radio, and sees him watching. They make eye contact.

DISPATCHER (OVER RADIO) (CONT'D)
 (sounds shaken)
Sheriff, you there?

Drew leans inside to answer the radio.

DREW
 Little busy right now, Lisa.

DISPATCHER (OVER RADIO)
 (sounds shaken)
*You- you better get over to the
 campgrounds, Sheriff. Ben Shepard
 heard somebody yelling- sounds like
 some kids got hurt down there.*

DREW
 Hurt how?

DISPATCHER (OVER RADIO)
*Something attacked them, maybe a
 black bear mama. I got the EMTs
 headed out- you better go over.*

DREW
 Copy that.

He hangs up - and sees Julia now standing closer.

Lucas is a few steps behind her, hanging back.

JULIA
 Can't you send someone else?

DREW
 Who? This is it.
 (then)
 It's five minutes away.

Drew starts to walk around the driver's side, about to leave.

JULIA
 Wait.

She pulls him aside, to talk quietly so Lucas can't hear.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 What's gonna happen to him?

Deep exhale from Drew. This is his job, to have answers to these impossible questions, and he's searching for one.

DREW

We need to figure out the relative situation. Maybe he goes to live with an aunt or a- a grandma.

JULIA

I asked. There's no other family nearby. And I meant *tonight*.

DREW

Well, we'll have to take him to the station. And then... I mean, we'll have to take him to the hospital in Morgantown and get him looked at...

JULIA

That's two hours away. And I mean, where's he going to sleep?

This catches Drew off guard. He hadn't considered it.

DREW

Uh- Christ. I, um. Look, I don't have all the answers yet. For now let's just...

Seeing Drew's uncertainty, Julia becomes firm, decisive. Someone needs to take care of the kid. Teacher voice:

JULIA

I'll take him home.

DREW

What, to your place?

JULIA

He can't just *stay* here staring at that house. He needs someone to look out for him right now.

Drew hesitates, then looks at Lucas, who is watching them. Then Drew makes a decision.

DREW

Okay, yeah. Get him out of here. I'll come by after I'm done.

He gets into the sheriff's car. A last look with Julia.

She goes back to Lucas and takes his hand. Linger on them in the darkness, watching the sheriff's car pull away.

Then she looks at Lucas and tries to give a reassuring smile.

But he doesn't look reassured. CUT TO:

TREES THROUGH A CAR WINDOW

We're driving quickly, getting far away from the Weaver house. A reprieve. We are in -

INT. JULIA'S CAR (DRIVING) - NIGHT

LUCAS is tucked into the passenger seat, wrapped in a college fleece blanket Julia had handy.

Julia keeps glancing at him. He looks scared and withdrawn, paranoid. He's looking out the window in fear, attentively, as if searching the dark woods for something.

To distract him -

JULIA

Hey. Lucas.

He looks over, waiting.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I know it's scary, and you don't know what's going to happen. But you're going to be okay. Because people care about you. I'm going to make sure you're safe and someone's taking care of you.

LUCAS

(beat)

How?

Julia falters, unsure.

JULIA

By... looking out for you. And making sure you're safe.

Lucas looks right at her.

LUCAS

You'll make sure I'm safe?

It's not a casual question. And Julia hears it: You'll make sure I'm safe?

JULIA

Yes. I will.

LUCAS
You promise?

That gets to Julia. She feels the burden of responsibility.

JULIA
I promise.

LUCAS
(quiet)
Thanks.

But instead of being reassured... Lucas turns and looks out the window. Watching the darkness, waiting for something...

OUTSIDE THE CAR

As Julia's car disappears down the road, taillights fading...
PUSH INTO THE DARKNESS... and CUT TO -

EXT. BALLARD CREEK CAMPGROUNDS - NIGHT

Eerie darkness, then HEADLIGHTS splashing over trees and benches as the Sheriff's car pulls up and stops.

WITH DREW as he gets out. The shabby campgrounds are dark, shadowed by trees.

A PATH leads down toward a river we HEAR but can't see.

Further ahead, two CAMPGROUNDS WORKERS stand by the path.

Drew looks at them as he approaches. HIS POV IN SLOW-MOTION, creating a queasy, unreal feeling:

The MAN appears frozen in shock.

The WOMAN is touching his arm, as if trying to console him.

DREW
Ben? Amy? Where are they?

The Man doesn't even seem to hear. The Woman just glances at Drew, jerks her head further down the path.

Drew continues past them with a growing sense of dread. *This feels bad. This feels much, much worse than he thought...*

CAMPSITE - MOMENTS LATER

WITH DREW as he comes down the dark path...

Up ahead is the CAMPSITE: two TENTS with a DYING CAMPFIRE between them... but something's wrong.

Parts of the fire have been scattered. BLACKENED LOGS still GLOW or LIGHTLY BURN, creating an eerie, nightmarish light.

THREE BODIES lie in the darkness...

Drew's HEART STARTS POUNDING IN HIS EARS.

The FIRST BODY is the closest, male, shrouded in darkness... and DRENCHED IN BLOOD. Dead.

He walks toward the SECOND BODY. A man, DRENCHED IN BLOOD AND TORN OPEN, **PARTIALLY DEVOURED**. Also shadowed, but what we're looking at is dreadful. We only get a glimpse.

Drew looks toward the THIRD BODY, behind the dying fire. As he walks closer, we see:

The BODY HAS BEEN RIPPED IN HALF. Linger on the nightmare sight, half-obscured by low flames...

RAGGED VOICE
uqAAAGHHHHHHHHH...

Drew jolts violently - we jump - and spins around to see:

The First Body is moving. The guy is still alive.

DREW
Jesus -

Off Drew, rushing to the guy's side, CUT TO:

EXT. ELAINE'S HOUSE / DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

ELAINE retrieves plastic RECYCLE BINS from the end of her driveway as Julia's car pulls in.

She's wearing a faded tee and vans, listening to music on her earbuds, oblivious to the situation (of course she is!) -

HEADLIGHTS SPLASH ACROSS HER and Elaine looks up as Julia's car pulls into the driveway.

Elaine waves, takes out her earbuds, and Julia reluctantly rolls down the window.

Elaine leans down to the window.

ELAINE
Who's this? One of yours?

Julia makes the split-second decision not to tell Elaine what has happened. She nods.

JULIA
This is Lucas. He's hanging out for
a little bit.

Lucas looks at Julia. Looks back to Elaine. Smiles.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Elaine lives in the house.

Elaine looks a little puzzled, a bud still in her left ear, the other one dangling freely and leaking Talking Heads. She looks at Lucas and tries to have bonding moment with him.

ELAINE
Lucas, buddy, how you doing?

But Lucas just stares at her.

LUCAS
(re: the house)
Are you gonna be here tonight?

ELAINE
You know it.

LUCAS
Lock the doors.

Elaine glances at Julia, puzzled. *Huh. Weird.* Then back at Lucas. Adopting a serious expression.

ELAINE
Alright, but I want you to do one
thing for me, okay?

LUCAS
(quiet)
What?

ELAINE
Keep it real.
(then)
Can you do that?

LUCAS
(now a whisper)
Yeah.

Elaine winks and stands up straight.

ELAINE

Then you got nothing to worry
about.

Julia smiles politely and starts driving Lucas up the
driveway toward her cottage, behind the main house.

INT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

LUCAS follows JULIA through the front door.

She's carrying his laundry bag and his small BACKPACK - she
sets them down by the sofa.

Lucas quickly shuts the door and locks it, then steps away
from it as if it's hot.

Then he starts going around the room turning on the lights.

Julia watches, then beckons him to the couch.

JULIA

Here, sit down.

Lucas obliges, hesitantly. He's not used to being in other
people's homes.

JULIA (CONT'D)

You want to get pizza for dinner?

LUCAS

No thanks, Miss Grey. Do you have
anything here?

JULIA

You can call me Julia now, Lucas.
There's not a whole lot in the
fridge... you don't like pizza?

Lucas isn't being picky... he's AFRAID of something outside.

LUCAS

I just don't want to go out.

JULIA

(laughs)
We'll get it delivered. What do you
like, cheese? Pepperoni?

LUCAS

(beat; tentative)
Bacon and pineapple?

JULIA
 (smiles)
 Sure.

EXT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Outside the cottage. A little glowing place surrounded by darkness.

From the main house - Elaine's house - faint MUSIC can be heard, Elaine blasting some 80s punk. (*Note: The lights in many windows of Elaine's house are on. We can see them here, and when we're in Julia's cottage, we can sometimes see them in the b.g. through Julia's windows.*)

The back yard is empty but the shadows feel ominous.

INT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

JULIA is on the phone with the pizza place.

Through the doorway, LUCAS is visible in the living room. He's watching a kids' movie on her laptop.

PIZZA MAN (ON PHONE)
 ...miss?

JULIA
 Oh. Sorry. 36A Greenville Rd. It's back behind the main house-

PIZZA MAN
 Elaine's place, got it. Be about twenty minutes.

JULIA
 Okay. Thanks.

As she ends the call, she looks through the doorway at Lucas. He doesn't see her observing him.

She notices more than ever his birdlike shoulders, his frailness.

The movie is playing on her laptop but he's not really looking at it. He's looking around, out the windows. Carefully, watchfully.

Julia walks into the -

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

- and sits near him. He looks at her, haunted.

JULIA
Are you looking for something?

He doesn't say anything. As if he's scared to.

JULIA (CONT'D)
What are you worried is out there?

He still doesn't answer. Julia studies him, compassion in her eyes. How to get through to him?

She reaches over and takes his hand.

JULIA (CONT'D)
I promised to keep you safe,
remember?
(off his silence)
Lucas. Nothing bad is going to
happen to you now. You can talk to m-

The PHONE RINGS and she jumps. Then laughs nervously.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Hang on.

She gets up and goes back into the -

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

- to answer her phone, which she left on the counter. We see the caller is "Man in Uniform".

JULIA
(on phone)
Hey.

INTERCUT:

EXT. BALLARD CREEK CAMPGROUNDS - NIGHT

Drew stands near his police car, BATHED IN RED-AND-BLUE LIGHTS flashing from several other POLICE CARS and EMERGENCY VEHICLES that have now arrived.

PARAMEDICS and CORONER folks move around the area. Deputy Trish is here, too.

Drew looks really, really badly shaken up. So much so that at first his voice fails him, and he can't reply.

Julia hesitates, confused.

JULIA

Drew?

Drew pulls it together. Tries to sound less fucked up than he really is.

DREW

Hey.

JULIA

Hey - are you still at the campgrounds?

Drew looks over at something. REVEAL: The First Victim, the mangled one who was still alive, being loaded into an AMBULANCE - soaked in blood, arm moving SPASTICALLY like a convulsive death twitch.

DREW

Yeah. I'm here.

JULIA

When are you coming over? We just ordered pizza.

DREW

Um. Not for a while. It's... more serious here than I thought.

JULIA

(unsettled)

What's going on?

Drew doesn't want to get into it. He's too freaked out, doesn't even know where to begin.

DREW

I'll... tell you when I get there. But there's something else you should know. About Lucas.

JULIA

What?

DREW

(hesitates)

He - has he said anything? About the house?

Julia glances into the living room at Lucas.

JULIA
No. Why?

DREW
He hasn't said anything about the basement.

JULIA
No...

DREW
They got the door open.

JULIA
(sensing something wrong)
... And?

DREW
Larry said they found... animals down there. A lot of animals. Dead.

JULIA
(whispering)
What... animals -

DREW
...Dogs.... Cats... Some with collars and tags. He said they were, ah...

The call DROPS OUT for just a moment. Bad reception.

JULIA
What?

DREW
He said something'd been at them. Like, eating them. And some hadn't been down there more than a week. Or less.

Drew stops. In case she didn't get the implication:

DREW (CONT'D)
Frank and Todd have been dead for months.

Julia gets the implication. *Lucas put the animals down there.*

JULIA
(quiet)
I know.

DREW

Look, if you don't want to keep him over there, you can take him down to the station. Nobody's there, but... you can wait.

STAY ON JULIA. She glances back into the living room at Lucas... who is now standing facing the window, with his back to her. Just staring outside. Eerie.

On Julia as she watches him, wondering... *What is going on with this kid? Is he dangerous?* She makes a decision -

JULIA

I'll call you back, okay?

Chatter on the other end... Drew giving instructions to one of the other officers. Julia hangs up and goes into the -

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She walks toward Lucas, who still stands at the window with his back to her.

Cautiously she approaches him. Now wary.

CLOSE on LUCAS'S FACE. He's looking out the window, watching the darkness.

JULIA comes up behind...

And Lucas looks sharply around. She hides her discomfort.

JULIA

Hey.

Awkwardly she sits. Takes his arm. Pulls him away from the window to sit by her side.

She flips the laptop shut, so the sound of the movie STOPS.

JULIA (CONT'D)

You okay?

LUCAS

(unconvincing)

Yeah.

JULIA

Okay. Good.

He just looks at her. A prolonged silence.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Can I ask you a question?
About your dad and brother?

LUCAS
(almost inaudible)
I don't want to talk about that.

JULIA
I know. But this is really
important: What happened to them?

He won't answer.

JULIA (CONT'D)
(gently)
Were you there?

Lucas stares at her. Very slightly, he nods.

She hesitates, trying to decide whether to pursue that line of questioning. But it's like dealing with a wary animal: She doesn't want to spook him too much. So she changes course:

JULIA (CONT'D)
The police found some animals in
your basement. Do you know what I'm
talking about?

No reaction.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Do you know how they got there?

BARKING OUTSIDE distracts her... TWO DOGS. Over at Elaine's. She glances out the window, then back at Lucas.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Did you put them down there?

Lucas shakes his head "no" slowly.

Julia leans closer. Nervous.

JULIA (CONT'D)
The more you're honest with me, the
more I can help you. Please. Tell
me the truth. What happened at your
house?

Lucas stares at her, torn. Finally he says:

LUCAS
 (quiet, almost a whisper)
 You wouldn't believe me.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK - Julia nearly leaps out of her skin.
 Someone's at the front door - PAN OVER TO IT.

Julia stares at the door, irrationally afraid.

PIZZA KID (O.S.)
 Zee's Pizza?

Julia relaxes - almost laughs.

EXT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - PORCH - NIGHT

The PIZZA KID (18ish, high schooler) stands outside holding a pizza. Elaine's house in the b.g. and MUSIC can faintly be heard coming from it. She's blasting it loud.

The cottage door opens and a frazzled Julia manages a smile. Pizza Kid awkwardly flirts with her as she gets cash out.

JULIA
 Hi...

PIZZA KID
 Aw, heyo, I thought you live here.
 My little cousin Clint's in your
 class... says you're real cool...

JULIA
 He's a delight.

PIZZA KID
 Yeah, I mean kids can be crazy and
 stuff, but-

Julia shoves cash in his hand and takes the pizza -

JULIA
 Thank you. Night...

- and shuts the door, leaving him a little confused.

He turns and walks back to his beat-up OLD CAR.

INT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Julia sits back with Lucas, puts the pizza in front of him.

He reaches for the box and takes out a piece.

Julia watches him eat, wondering how to get through to him.

INT. PIZZA KID'S CAR (MOVING)/EXT. ELAINE'S DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

The Pizza Kid is heading down the driveway. We're with him in his rough POV, watching his HEADLIGHTS illuminate the driveway up ahead, bleaching it.

But right as he's almost to the end of the driveway...

His HEADLIGHTS FLICKER OFF. Dashboard lights too. In fact all the lights inside his car just went dead. What the hell?

He brakes to a stop. Flicks the lights a couple times. Nothing. Tries to turn on the overhead light. Nothing.

PIZZA KID
Ah, man. Piece of shit...

He turns the engine off. And...

He gets out of the car.

The night is quiet except for the MUSIC coming from inside Elaine's house.

The Pizza Kid walks around the front of his car. Looks at the dead headlights. Taps them. In their absence he is now surrounded by darkness.

He sighs and takes out his phone. As he starts trying to make a call... we PAN SLOWLY AROUND HIM TO REVEAL -

A TALL, SILHOUETTED FIGURE moving silently, slowly toward him from the darkness.

The ANTLERED MAN.

INT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Back with Julia and Lucas.

JULIA
Lucas, I -

A SHORT, HIGH-PITCHED SCREAM from outside jolts her. Julia flinches, spins around - looking toward the front door.

Something very bad just happened to the Pizza Kid.

Julia is frozen for a moment - then her senses kick in and she jumps to her feet, starts for the door -

But Lucas leaps up and grabs her arm. Suddenly he's animated, almost vibrating with fear.

LUCAS
No! It's them.

Julia looks back, alarmed.

JULIA
Who?

LUCAS
(beat; quiet)
My dad and my brother.

Julia stares at him, pained at his delusion. Time to rip the band-aid off.

JULIA
No, honey. They're gone.

LUCAS
(firm)
They're here. And they're hungry.

Off Julia... not understanding -

EXT. ELAINE'S FRONT YARD - SAME TIME

The Pizza Kid's empty car still sits in the driveway, dark, its door hanging open...

LUCAS (V.O.)
That's what it does to you.

UPBEAT MUSIC still plays incongruously from Elaine's house... (it probably drowned out the scream)...

... and on the front lawn, REVEAL NOW something horrific happening... some VIOLENT, ANIMALISTIC MOVEMENT... and as we move toward it their VOICEOVER continues...

LUCAS (V.O.)
It makes you so hungry you never get full.

JULIA (V.O.)
What does?

... and now we can see **The Antlered Man FEEDING ON the Pizza Kid's fresh corpse, devouring it, ravenous and monstrous, exulting in the feast... BLOOD-DRENCHED...**

LUCAS (V.O.)
The Wendigo.

Then a SOUND - Elaine's front door opening.

Elaine steps out onto her porch, and stares uncomprehending at the nightmare she sees on her front lawn...

INT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Back with Julia as she hesitates by the front door - part of her compelled to go outside, investigate that terrible scream, but part of her needing to hear what Lucas is saying -

LUCAS
 He's coming to get me. He wants to make me like *them*...

JULIA
 (slowly)
 I saw their bodies. They've been dead a long time -

Lucas is very still, terrified.

LUCAS
 Those were just skins.

Off Julia...

INT. THE WEAVER HOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS - NIGHT (MEMORY)

This is before the Weaver house was boarded up. Back when Frank and Lucas and Todd all still lived in it.

FRANK WEAVER, seen up close, his face contorted.

LUCAS (V.O.)
 He- he started coming back different.

A TERRIFYING FLASH from Lucas's STORY - the face of a BEAR.

THEN LUCAS - standing in the filthy living room. Watching as:

FRANK WEAVER kneels, stricken by some kind of attack or seizure. His body is twisting, his abdomen HEAVING...

LUCAS (V.O.)
 It changed him from inside out. And then...

Frank's MOUTH OPENS IMPOSSIBLY WIDE...

And something begins to EMERGE:

ANTLERS.

*As Lucas watches, the old body is peeling back and **THE ANTLERED MAN is emerging from Frank Weaver...** it looks like Frank, but taller and inhuman, majestic and terrible...*

EXT. ELAINE'S FRONT YARD - SAME TIME

Back to Elaine standing on her front porch, looking at -

The Antlered Man on her front lawn, hunched over the partially devoured corpse of the Pizza Kid. Covered in blood, a nightmarish sight.

The Antlered Man turns slowly to look at her.

Elaine backs away in horror, then flees back inside her house and slams the door.

The Antlered Man starts toward her house. And he's not alone:

A SMALL, SINISTER FIGURE, the size of a child, emerges from the darkness to follow him toward Elaine's house...

INT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Julia looks at Lucas with horror, unsure what to believe...

LUCAS

I trapped both of them in the house
so they wouldn't hurt anyone. I
kept them there and I brought them
food.

JULIA

(hesitant)
You mean, animals?

Lucas nods solemnly. She stares at him. Wondering if he's insane, delusional... wondering what really happened...

JULIA (CONT'D)

Lucas. Did you kill your dad and
your brother? Because "the Wendigo"
changed them?

Lucas looks at her almost sadly. She still doesn't believe him. She still doesn't understand what's going to happen.

But before he can answer, in the b.g., through the window & OUT OF FOCUS:

The LIGHTS IN ELAINE'S HOUSE ALL FLICKER OFF.

Julia doesn't see. But Lucas does. She thinks his distracted gaze is just a way of avoiding her question:

JULIA (CONT'D)

Lucas.

A **PIERCING SCREAM**. From Elaine's house. It's *Elaine*, but the scream sounds so raw, so unfamiliar, it's almost inhuman.

Julia jolts around. She sees Elaine's house now dark. The neatly mowed back yard. The recycle bins. The SCREAMING CONTINUES, ragged and panicked.

Julia starts to rush outside -

LUCAS

Don't go out there!

He grabs her arm.

JULIA

Let go.

She wrenches away and goes -

EXT. JULIA'S COTTAGE / ELAINE'S BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS/NIGHT

- outside. And the SCREAMS STOP, as if cut off. From the cottage porch she looks toward Elaine's dark house. The music has stopped too - gone along with the lights.

Now the only sound is TWO DOGS BARKING from inside Elaine's house. Julia hesitates. She really does not want to go over there.

JULIA

Elaine??

No answer. Julia forces herself toward Elaine's house. We follow as she walks across the grass.

Lucas slips out onto the porch. Hisses:

LUCAS

Miss Grey!

But Julia walks up toward Elaine's back porch. The dogs are BARKING MORE URGENTLY inside.

Julia goes right up to the back door.

JULIA
... Elaine??

No answer. The BARKING is a constant, nerve-jangling sound. She POUNDS on the back door.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Elaine!

Nothing. Julia goes to a window by the back door, looks in.

HER POV: A DARK HALLWAY INSIDE. No movement - until -

A DOG leaps up to the glass, barking and gnashing its teeth!

Julia flinches.

She glances back at Lucas. Standing there alone by the cottage, looking scared.

Then the BARKING STOPS.

Julia turns back... the dog has vanished, the barking replaced with ominous QUIET. Julia looks and feels vulnerable standing here alone.

SOMETHING CREAKS in the house. Like someone took a heavy step. Julia starts backing away. Really scared now. This feels *all wrong*.

She turns and strides as quickly as possible back toward the cottage. Gesturing to Lucas -

JULIA (CONT'D)
Go inside.

INT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS/NIGHT

Julia hustles Lucas inside, and shuts and locks the door behind them.

She takes out her phone. Dials 911...

It doesn't ring. Instead, she just hears breathing STATIC... just like she heard when she called the Weaver house.

She hangs up, freaking out.

She types a text to Drew: "CALL ME NOW."

Hits send... The blue bar indicated *sending-in-process* starts to move across the screen.

But it stops. She watches, holding her breath.

A little "Message Not Sent" error appears.

Behind her, an INTAKE OF BREATH. Lucas has seen something...

Julia looks around. Lucas is still staring out the window...

JULIA

What is it?

He doesn't answer. And she sees: the back door at Elaine's house is open now.

Uneasily, Julia joins him. And sees:

A **SMALL FIGURE** in Elaine's YARD. The same shape we saw joining the Antlered Man out front. Hidden mostly in shadow.

Moving in odd, playful motions. Hopping around like a kid playing a game, pretending to be a bunny.

It's a child... but the proportions aren't quite right. The child seems scrawnier, limbs weirdly elongated. What flesh we can see looks bloodless and moon-colored.

He hops forward a little, and pats his hands on AN OBJECT lying in the grass, like it's a big coconut he's drumming.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Lucas... who is that?

LUCAS

My little brother.

Julia shakes her head, weakly sticking to the idea that *This can't be real*... She is quietly pleading - clinging to a version of reality she no longer trusts:

JULIA

Your little brother's dead.

LUCAS

(just as quiet)

I know.

Julia and Lucas stand frozen, watching The Child. Because it isn't really Todd anymore. It's a Wendigo version of him.

The Child keeps playing with the dark object lying on the grass. Tapping it, poking it, picking at it. And then finally picking it up, so Julia can see -

It's a HUMAN HEAD. Elaine's head. Severed, trailing bloody wet hair. Some of its flesh has been stripped or bitten away.

Julia GASPS as she realizes what it is. The Child licks the face... then nibbles it, chewing off flesh.

He ROLLS IT AWAY across the grass like a ball. Just playing. He scrambles after it like a puppy.

Then the Child stops. And turns back toward Elaine's house. Julia follows his gaze to see...

THE ANTLERED MAN just inside the back door. Sinister, majestic, long and tall. Pale skin. Intense DEER-LIKE EYES.

He emerges into the back yard. Still silhouetted.

JULIA
(whispers)
Is that your dad?

LUCAS
Uh-huh.

The Antlered Man holds out his hand. There's something in it.

The Child scurries up to him - and eats from his hand.

The Antlered Man turns to look at the cottage. At Julia.

A sinister silence. From the Antlered Man we sense unbridled malevolent energy.

Julia keeps her eyes on them as she says quietly:

JULIA
How did you trap them in the house?

LUCAS
The book says you keep them out by putting iron at the threshold.
(beat)
That means door.

JULIA
(realizing)
But you used it to keep them in.

LUCAS
 (nods, shaky and scared)
 I didn't want to kill him.

JULIA
 You put a horseshoe on the door.

Lucas nods.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 And I took it off.

The Child starts walking toward the side of the cottage.

He takes giant, exaggerated tiptoe steps, like a cartoon villain sneaking up on someone.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 How do we stop them?

LUCAS
 They won't come in the light.

The Antlered Man starts walking toward them after the Child.

They approach with nightmarish slowness - enjoying themselves, like an obscene parody of a father and son out for a walk.

JULIA
 Then we'll keep the lights on.

A LAMP by the side window starts to FLICKER. The Antlered Man seems to smile. Then the lamp GOES OUT.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 Is that going to happen to all of them?

LUCAS
 Uh-huh.

She starts to look around hurriedly. Another LAMP STARTS FLICKERING... then an OVERHEAD LIGHT...

... and now ALL THE LIGHTS ARE FLICKERING, threatening to die as the Antlered Man and the Child get closer.

JULIA
 Come on.

She grabs Lucas and races into the -

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

- where she yanks open a drawer, grabs a LIGHTER. The OVERHEAD LIGHT IS FLICKERING.

Julia frantically grabs SEVERAL POTS AND PANS - 5 total - and hands some to Lucas.

Through the doorway behind her, we can see the LIGHTS IN THE LIVING ROOM GOING OFF ONE BY ONE.

She grabs a STACK OF JUNK MAIL that's been shoved in the corner - some coupons and catalogs and newspapers, etc.

She shoves some at Lucas.

JULIA
Tear those up.
(points to the pots)
Put them in there.

With one pot and a FLYER made of NEWSPRINT PAPER and the lighter, she rushes back into the -

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

- and FLINCHES as she sees The Antlered Man standing right outside the side window, looking in at her, not fifteen feet away.

One last LIGHT is still flickering here...

...And now it DIES, plunging the living room into **DARKNESS**.

The Antlered Man raises one arm, as if to smash it through the window. But -

HEADLIGHTS SPILL THROUGH THE FRONT WINDOWS as a car comes up the driveway.

Julia spins to look - and beyond the blinding headlights, sees the SILHOUETTE OF A COP CAR.

A door SLAMS. She hears Drew's freaked out voice:

DREW
Julia??

He's in silhouette. Julia looks over to the side windows - where The Antlered Man and The Child are nowhere to be seen.

She looks back to the front. Drew's silhouette approaches the cottage, headlights behind him.

JULIA
 Get back in the car!!
 (to the kitchen)
 Lucas, come on, we gotta go -

The CAR HEADLIGHTS FLICKER AND DIE.

DREW
 Julia? What's going on-

He's CUT OFF ABRUPTLY as -

THE ANTLERED MAN SCUTTLES UP ON ALL FOURS FROM BEHIND TO
 ATTACK HIM!

Drew SCREAMS!

Julia CRIES OUT in horror.

She can't see what's happening out there - only DARK SHAPES
 AND VIOLENCE... and DREW'S INTERMITTENT SHORT SCREAMS...

... which rapidly get further and further as Drew is dragged
 away from the cottage...

Julia hesitates, paralyzed for a moment.

Goes to the front door - *Will she go out there, try to save
 Drew?* But through the front window she sees:

The shape of The Child standing out there. Standing guard so
 she and Lucas won't leave.

Julia backs away from the door. She knows what she has to do:
 Drew's arrival (and his horrible fate) have bought her a few
 moments to build a defense. She has to act fast:

Frantically she starts shredding the newsprint flyer by hand.

She drops the shredded paper in the pot, then FLICKS THE
 LIGHTER and sets it on fire. It IGNITES FAST.

She places the pot by the front door - LIGHT to keep them at
 bay. She grabs other stuff too - an envelope, a notepad,
 anything that will burn - and drops them into the pot also.

She looks back and sees Lucas standing in the doorway,
 holding another cooking pot with shredded paper in it.

She LIGHTS THE PAPER in his pot, too.

Off them, frantically preparing, CUT TO -

EXT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Drew, outside, bloody and terrified.

He's lying on the ground and struggling to unholster his gun as he crawls backward away from -

- The Antlered Man, who is stalking him.

Behind Drew (a little distance from both the cottage and Elaine's house) there's

- A SMALL GARDENING SHED. The door is open.

Drew is almost there.

The Antlered Man lunges forward again -

- but Drew manages to get his gun out and FIRES at the Antlered Man, striking him with several shots.

They don't seem to do much damage, but they buy Drew just enough time to get into the -

INT. GARDENING SHED - CONTINUOUS / NIGHT

- where Drew kicks the door closed and huddles against the wall. He's badly hurt, soaked in blood, his face gashed and his arm and side shredded.

He fumbles for his radio - but it's DEAD.

He sits very still, listening. The Antlered Man can be heard O.S., as SMALL SOUNDS ominously circle the tiny shed.

Drew raises his gun uncertainly, trying to track the Antlered Man by sound so he can shoot through the wall.

But then there is SILENCE...

Drew hesitates, bleeding and scared, aiming his gun at the wall ready to fire at the slightest sound.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL that he is hunched just under a small, dirty WINDOW... and in the window we can see:

The tops of ANTLERS. Suggesting that the Antlered Man is crouched or bent just below the window... Right behind Drew, on the other side of the wall.

A painful, still beat. Only sound: Drew's ragged BREATHING.

CRASH!! - The Antlered Man's ELONGATED HANDS SMASH THROUGH THE WALL ON EITHER SIDE OF DREW'S HEAD AND GRAB HIS FACE - and we CUT TO -

INT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

FLAMES LICK THE AIR from the pots and pans of burning scraps.

Julia is kneeling on the floor, holding Lucas. She has surrounded herself and Lucas with THREE POTS FULL OF BURNING PAPER, arranged in a triangle.

She's also put a POT FULL OF BURNING PAPER on the counter under the kitchen window to keep anything from coming in.

Now she and Lucas are just staring at the dark kitchen doorway. Through it they can see part of the living room, but not the front door. The GLOW of the fire that Julia left just inside the front door is growing more amber, dying.

BANG! She jolts and grabs Lucas close at the sound of a gunshot from outside.

SEVERAL MORE QUICK GUNSHOTS - then nothing.

Julia and Lucas wait. The GLOW in the living room now dies down to nothing. The fire by the front door has burnt out.

Then Lucas whispers -

LUCAS

If I just go with them, they might not-

JULIA

Shhh.

CRASH - a sound of GLASS BREAKING from the living room. The Antlered Man has entered the house.

THE FLAMES SHIVER as if touched by a strange wind.

Julia and Lucas stare fearfully at the dark, empty doorway.

She starts to hyperventilate, struggles to fight it. Finally she can't stand it and cries out -

JULIA (CONT'D)

What do you want?

The Antlered Man steps into the doorway. A terrifying sight.

His skin is WAX-WHITE in contrast with the BLOOD smeared all over his mouth, spattered crazily all up and down his body. His eyes are large, bulbous, yellow - crazily staring in.

Lucas stands as well. Julia grips him with her arm.

(Note: The Antlered Man does speak out loud. His words are heard as the disembodied voice of FRANK WEAVER, as if they're in Julia's head.)

ANTLERED MAN

Give him to me.

Julia, shaking, holds Lucas tighter.

The Antlered Man's whispering takes on a sinister, seductive tone.

ANTLERED MAN (CONT'D)

Give us the child and you can live.

Push him out of the light.

(then)

Don't you want to live?

Julia still says nothing.

LUCAS

Miss Grey...

Julia hears GIGGLING coming from behind them... she looks...

The fire on the kitchen counter is guttering, and The Child - Todd - is pressed up against the window, looking in like a hungry, crazed dog, waiting for the fire to fully die.

The Antlered Man moves closer. Seen through the haze of the flames, he is a nightmarish, demonic vision.

The Antlered Man snarls:

ANTLERED MAN

I am his father.

And that makes Julia remember something. She leans closer to Lucas, whispers in his ear.

JULIA

You said you trapped them inside because you didn't want to kill them. Do you know how to kill them?

Lucas looks at her. Before he can respond -

A CRASH behind them. The kitchen window shattering.

Julia looks back to see that the fire on the kitchen counter has died and the Child has smashed the glass...

The Child starts crawling through the window, onto the counter.

ANTLERED MAN
He belongs with his family.

Julia is trembling at the sound of this, turning away.

Julia holds Lucas close. Hugs him almost as if saying goodbye. Or asking forgiveness. As if she's about to push him out of the light...

The fires are dying. Lower and lower.

ANTLERED MAN (CONT'D)
Give him to me!

But she turns to the Antlered Man and says with all the quiet courage she can muster:

JULIA
No.

The Antlered Man doesn't reply. At least not with words.

Instead he opens his terrible bloody mouth impossibly wide, showing his jagged teeth and emitting a SLOWLY RISING SHRIEK -

The inhuman CRY OF THE WENDIGO.

Just as it becomes unbearable, it drops away.

And the Antlered Man stares at Julia hungrily.

Lucas looks at The Child, his brother. Then at the Antlered Man, his father. And then leans close to Julia and whispers:

LUCAS
You take their hearts.

And then -

LUCAS WRIGGLES OUT OF HER GRASP -

And RUNS TO THE ANTLERED MAN - into his Father's arms...

JULIA
Lucas!

Lucas looks back at her. Makes eye contact with her. His eyes are sad but resigned: *I had to.*

The Antlered Man smiles... and seems to recede into the darkness of the living room with Lucas. Suddenly both are gone, slipped away into the night.

Julia looks around wildly - the Child is scrambling out the kitchen window into the darkness. Gone.

Julia is left alone in the middle of the three dying fires. A desolate image.

She looks around in shock. She's failed. She lost the child she promised to protect. Off her despair...

MONTAGE / VARIOUS SHOTS:

A series of tableaux:

EXT. THE DARK COTTAGE - NIGHT

Silent and abandoned.

EXT. DREW'S SQUAD CAR - NIGHT

Sitting outside, the door hanging open.

EXT. PIZZA KID'S CAR - NIGHT

At the end of the driveway, door still open.

EXT. ELAINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dark and desolate. Some of the grass on the front lawn drenched in blood where Pizza Kid died.

INT. ROOMS IN ELAINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The floor smeared and splashed with blood, the silhouette of a dead dog visible.

FADE TO:

INT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Julia is curled on the floor. The fires have gone out.

A breeze courses through the kitchen window, kicking ashes from the fire pots up into the air.

Julia looks up at the eerie sight.

EXT. MINES - NIGHT (DREAM)

The MINE ENTRANCE from Julia's dream. Standing out in front of it is LUCAS. Ashes drift in the air.

Lucas looks longingly towards us, waiting for someone...

A HAND reaches from the darkness, fingers unnaturally long and bony, skin peeled back and tendons visible.

It rests gently on Lucas's shoulder.

Lucas turns, guided by the hand, and disappears down the tunnel.

CUT TO:

INT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Julia's GASPS, breath caught.

She picks herself up off the floor.

An ash lands on her face. She touches it. It smears across her cheek.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Julia surveys the room.

Windows smashed, curtains wafting in the breeze. Door wide open. The uneaten pizza is still on the coffee table.

Julia sees Lucas's BACKPACK, resting by the sofa.

She picks it up, turning it over in her hands.

She reaches in and pulls out...

The SHADOW OF THE WENDIGO. Opens it. As she pages through, illustrations fill the screen. They're rendered in gory detail, like an apocalyptic Bosch painting:

- The Wendigo spirit gripping a MAN and BREATHING INTO HIS MOUTH.

- The MAN, now with ANTLERS, DEVOURING A PERSON. He is flanked by two Wendigo CHILDREN.

- The MAN and the CHILDREN surrounded by a RING OF FIRE, villagers with torches crouched on all sides. Trapped.

- Finally, one of the VILLAGERS holding a HEART, the ANTLERED MAN and CHILDREN dead on the ground. The Antlered Man's chest has been carved OPEN.

"You take their hearts."

Julia takes a deep breath. She knows how to kill a Wendigo. But does she have the courage to try?

She digs back into the backpack and pulls out...

Lucas's SKETCHBOOK - the one she gave him.

She flips through the pages, looking for answers... they're all blank - but then, on the very first page, a DRAWING:

A small child (looks like Lucas) holding hands with a woman. They're standing on top of a hill under the shade of a tree.

Julia stares... it's HER.

Slowly she closes the notebook. Knowing what she has to do.

INT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Julia pulls a KNIFE from a drawer.

Grabs the LIGHTER off the floor.

EXT. JULIA'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Julia walks down the front path to her car.

There's a BARBECUE GRILL out front. She stops beside it and grabs a can of LIGHTER FLUID, then goes to the car.

She sets the knife on the roof as she unlocks the door.

Then she hears *something*...

A thud. Soft and weak.

Coming from the GARDENING SHED behind her.

Julia starts toward it, gripping the knife.

The door to the shed is slightly ajar. A wooden clunking sound is audible, like someone shifting their weight.

Julia steps closer, readying herself.

Slowly she pushes the shed door open, reaches in, switches on the LIGHT to see -

DREW, crumpled on the floor and clutching his side. He looks rough, clothes torn, face grimy.

JULIA

Oh god.

Julia rushes to his side.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Drew!

DREW

That fucking thing-

Drew's hands are painted in blood. Not fatal, but NOT GREAT.

DREW (CONT'D)

I shot it but...

JULIA

Come on.

She tries to start helping him up.

But Drew grabs her wrist.

DREW

What happened to Lucas?

JULIA

(silent; then)

They took him.

Drew winces, ashamed he couldn't do more.

JULIA (CONT'D)

They come from the mines. That's where they'll take him, isn't it? That's where they live.

DREW

Julia, you did what you could-

Julia shakes her head sharply, pulls back.

JULIA

I can't just let them have him.

Drew hears certainty in her voice. He nods.

DREW
 Okay. Well, you can't go there
 alone-

JULIA
 No way. You can't move.

With great effort, Drew slides up against the wall,
 stabilizing himself. Hiding the pain as best as he can.

Gets to his feet and manages a smile.

DREW
 You were saying?
 (then)
 It's not on any map. I'll get you
 there at least...

He limps toward the door.

EXT. GARDENING SHED - NIGHT

Julia helps Drew out of the shed and over to her car.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT - AERIAL

A tiny glowing spot below - the ONLY CAR on the road.

INT. JULIA'S CAR - NIGHT

Julia drives. Drew is slouched in the passenger seat - in
 pain but eyes locked on the road. He's starting to pale.

DREW
 Turn up here.

Julia sees ahead: a dirt pull-off and an old GATE with a
 faded metal SIGN: "ACCESS ROAD".

She turns...

DREW (CONT'D)
 This thing have four-wheel drive?

BANG! We go from asphalt to rough dirt. The car bounces and
 creaks as they ascend the steep slope.

JULIA
 Okay. Up here?

DREW

It's a few miles more up this road
to the old camp... a little bit
more to the mine entrance, but
you'll have to walk that.

CUT TO -

THE TREES. A maze of tortured wood.

The headlights of the car pass slowly from one side of frame
to the other, casting odd shadows across the forest floor.

BACK TO -

INT. JULIA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Julia continues along the turbulent road.

Suddenly, she **SLAMS ON THE BRAKES** -

HER POV: Up ahead, the road is obstructed by a **FALLEN TREE**.
Too big to move.

JULIA

Shit.

She looks to Drew. He's slumped over in the passenger seat.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Drew?

She shakes his arm. He breathes quietly. Passed out.

Julia puts the car into park, pulls out her cellphone. She
dials 911 -

The call **FAILS**. No bars.

The phone promptly **DIES**. Then the **CAR**. Like the life has been
sucked out of them.

Julia rubs her eyes furiously. She's can't lose her grip.
There's no time.

She notes Drew's **GUN**, still holstered on his waist. She pulls
it out carefully.

EXT. MINE ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Julia hustles out of the car and looks around...

The world is eerily quiet up here. Nothing but WHISPERS in the dark trees. Murmurs.

Julia shivers, gathers her courage.

She tucks the gun into the back of her jeans and starts climbing over the tree, heading up the road.

EXT. FURTHER UP THE MINE ROAD - NIGHT

The dirt road continues, weaving further into the hills, gradually narrowing into a PATH.

Julia keeps her pace up.

Through the thick trees, she sees something up ahead -

White STRUCTURES in the moonlight. Buildings.

EXT. MINING CAMP - NIGHT

Julia emerges into a clearing. Clustered around it are small wooden HUTS, sad and eroded. Dwelling spots for the miners.

At the other end of the clearing, a rusted-through mine cart on a set of TRAIN TRACKS.

It is dead quiet, as if even insects keep away.

Julia walks swiftly past the buildings, every open window and door a potential threat.

These dwellings have clearly been used by junkies and squatters. In the moonlight we glimpse see disarray inside, detritus of lives.

Julia reaches the other side of the clearing and steps onto -

RAILROAD TRACKS

They're difficult to see, overgrown with grass. But they cut a clear path into the trees.

Julia follows the trail, the mining camp receding behind her.

A gust of wind ripples through the trees and the branches COME ALIVE all around, guiding her into another clearing where she finds -

EXT. MINE ENTRANCE - NIGHT

An image ripped straight from her dream. The mine entrance.

Broken boards are scattered around, like the hole was at one point covered up. But now it lies open. Menacing.

Julia freezes up. The uncanny feeling that she's *seen this before.*

But she buries the fear and trudges on.

She approaches the opening and peers inside.

Beyond the threshold is a deep TUNNEL. No sounds inside except the faraway drip of water.

Then - a faint SCREECH. We've heard it before.

The CRY OF THE WENDIGO. It ricochets off the walls, coming from deep within the mines.

Julia impulsively touches the gun, checking that it's still tucked in her jeans.

She steadies herself. Then, taking a deep breath, she vanishes into the tunnel.

INT. TUNNEL - NIGHT

Black.

Labored breathing.

Footsteps in the dirt.

A small FLAME bursts from the LIGHTER. Julia holds it up to get a look at her surroundings.

We glimpse WOOD BOARDS lining the walls. Blackened lanterns hang from above. Trash is scattered below.

The rail tracks stretch ominously into the dark abyss.

Julia looks back. The entrance to the tunnel is just a glint of moonlight. A brief hesitation - the impulse to turn back. But she trudges on and soon arrives at -

TRACK SWITCH

A room where the track splits, branching off into SEVERAL TUNNELS. Julia looks between them hesitantly. *Now what?*

Another bone-rattling WENDIGO SCREECH pierces the air. Closer now. The flame quivers.

It definitely came from the tunnel on the FAR LEFT.

So she follows the sound into -

THE LEFT TUNNEL

- where the wood boards give way to BIG ROCKS speckled with tumorous growths. Chains and wires hang above. It feels less like a tunnel than a toothy tract in some large organism.

As Julia hurries along, a sudden gust of WIND extinguishes the lighter.

She curses, losing her nerve. Tries to relight. Once... twice...

The spark catches. She cups the flame with her hand. Leans down, plucks a DRY BOARD from the ground and sets it alight.

She stands and holds the makeshift torch up, REVEALING -
SOMETHING STANDING BEHIND HER.

A small humanoid shape, out of focus in the b.g.

And as Julia begins to move -

- the SHAPE moves too. Stalking slowly and silently.

It's THE CHILD.

But Julia doesn't notice him.

The Child follows in agonizing silence. Just when it seems he might pounce, he slips softly back into the darkness.

CRACK.

Julia starts. Looks down.

She's stepped on a BEER BOTTLE.

Nearly gave her a heart attack.

She wipes her brow.

Gathers herself.

Continues on.

After a few paces - in the distance behind her:

CRACK. The bottle.

Julia freezes. Something is following her.

She turns around slowly. Lifts the torch.

The tunnel is empty.

And there's the beer bottle, shattered.

As she stands there, paralyzed -

THE CHILD RUSHES AT HER!

A nightmarish BLUR and a piercing SHRIEK.

But Julia is prepared, more so than she thought. She yanks Drew's GUN from her waistband and promptly fires THREE SHOTS. The third one HITS.

The Child falls, not dead but stunned. Black fluid blooms around a bullet wound in his EYE.

She tries to fire again. The clip is empty. Shit! She tosses the gun.

The Child starts to get to his feet.

She thinks fast. Pulls out the bottle of LIGHTER FLUID and pours it onto him.

Then touches him with the TORCH -

WHOOSH!

Her face lights up in a red-orange glow as The Child IGNITES, a screaming FIREBALL, knocking the torch away.

No time to waste, Julia turns and runs, entering a tight and claustrophobic artery, barely tall enough to stand up in.

She quickly finds herself in PITCH DARKNESS, and as she staggers forward, sweeping her hands blindly in front of her, she's surrounded by a suffocating chorus of WHISPERS.

As they reach a crescendo, she emerges into -

"THE WHITE FOREST"

Silence.

For a moment, Julia doesn't comprehend what she sees.

It's a dim space. Unclear how large it is since no walls are visible.

Throughout the space are GNARLED SHAPES, strange and tree-like. Stark white designs.

As Julia gets closer, she sees that the shapes are not trees but giant entanglements of ANTLERS. They loom above her.

Scattered on the ground below are dried-out HUSKS that used to be bodies. They have gruesomely distended FACES, like FRANK and TODD. Trapped in a permanent scream. A collection of WENDIGO skins.

This is some sort of LAIR. She calls out:

JULIA

Lucas?

Her voice is muted, as if she were in a padded cell.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Lucas!

Suddenly - a piercing VOICE in Julia's ear.

THE ANTLERED MAN (O.S.)

You're too late.

Julia whips around. A few yards away, THE ANTLERED MAN, perfectly still. A shape amongst the shapes.

At his side, holding his hand, is LUCAS.

Both their mouths are stained with blood.

JULIA

Let him go.

Again - The Antlered Man does not speak, his voice simply projects itself into Julia's head.

THE ANTLERED MAN

(calmly)

He doesn't want to go.

(then)

This is his home.

JULIA

This isn't a home.

THE ANTLERED MAN

It has already begun. He will consume the flesh and soon he will molt like his brother.

JULIA

His brother is dead.

The Antlered Man snarls ruefully. A chorus of angry voices hisses: "LIAR."

Julia shakes her head.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I killed him.

The Antlered Man releases Lucas's hand. Begins to slowly drift, circling Julia like a predator. Eyes trained on her.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Let Lucas leave.

ANGLE ON Lucas, watching the exchange silently.

THE ANTLERED MAN

Why would I do that?

JULIA

He deserves better than this.

The Antlered Man lets out a deafening SHRIEK.

THE ANTLERED MAN

He deserves to be with his family.

JULIA

Let him go... and take me.
(firmly)
Make me like you.

The Antlered Man closes in, ravenousness in his eyes.

Julia's confidence falters as she realizes that there's no reasoning with him.

THE ANTLERED MAN

It's good that you came here. I'm going to open you up like a deer and scoop out your insides. Lucas and I will feast on you together.
(beat)
Then he'll be like me.

Julia realizes the perverse irony. She'll be the cause of Lucas's transformation into a Wendigo.

The Antlered Man's pale face contorts, his scarred lips peeling apart, revealing a mouth full of sharp teeth.

He rears back. Ready to LUNGE.

Julia braces herself.

Suddenly - a WHITE SPIKE bursts through his chest.

He screams. The SPIKE retracts. He falls.

Standing behind him, holding a massive ANTLER, is LUCAS.

Julia sees her chance - she frantically retrieves the KITCHEN KNIFE from her back pocket.

She lunges for The Antlered Man, who is momentarily stunned but starting to get up -

SHE PLUNGES THE KNIFE INTO HIS CHEST.

She CARVES HIS CHEST OPEN with careful, deliberate cutting motions. The black blood boiling out of him. As he's still moving, weakly struggling.

JULIA TEARS OUT THE ANTLERED MAN'S HEART. With her hands, she digs into the dark bloody swamp of his chest cavity and excavates the pulsing black heart.

The Antlered Man SCREAMS as Julia CRUSHES THE BLACK HEART in her hand.

The Antlered Man finally weakens, going limp... and then going still. He is dead.

Julia crawls off of him, panting weakly. She looks to -

LUCAS. Standing perfectly still.

JULIA

Lucas...

No response.

Lucas walks slowly, almost curiously, to The Antlered Man's body and sits down next to it.

Julia watches. Taken in isolation, it's a touching image of a boy silently saying goodbye to his father.

Then Lucas looks up at Julia.

And comes over to her. She wraps her arms around him in a reassuring, protective embrace.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 ... it's okay, Lucas. It's going to be okay.

Lucas finally hugs her back, accepting her as his protector.

INT. HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

LUCAS snaps awake.

He sits up in bed. Sunlight spills in from outside.

The room is foreign to us. Cozy and colorful. Drawings line the walls.

Lucas is wearing nice PJ's, tucked into fluffy bedding.

It's strange - like an alternate version of his life.

A voice from another room...

JULIA (O.S.)
 Lucas!

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Lucas pads groggily into a bright kitchen, fully dressed and wearing his BACKPACK.

JULIA is at the stovetop.

JULIA
 Morning sleepy head!

LUCAS
 Guh-morning.

JULIA
 Have some nourishment.

She slides an egg onto a plate. Lucas sits at the table.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 How're you feeling about the spelling test?

LUCAS
 Okay, I guess.

JULIA
 Okay? You'll do great. Don't let
 Ms. Bartlett get to you.

LUCAS
 I don't think she likes me.

JULIA
 (smiles)
 Of course she does. She just shows
 it in odd ways.

Lucas shrugs. Takes a bite of egg.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Julia stands in the doorway as Lucas runs down the front walk
 towards the SCHOOL BUS, waving at her as he goes.

EXT. DREW'S HOUSE - DAY

REVEAL - Julia is standing in the doorway of DREW'S HOUSE.

The grass is green and it's clearly SPRINGTIME.

EXT. DREW'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - EVENING

Later, in the evening, Lucas and Julia chase each other
 around the yard.

The loud CHIRP of a siren, the FLASH OF LIGHTS in the
 driveway. *Booo-whoop!*

Lucas looks up as DREW rounds the corner of the house! He's
 wearing a cast on his right arm, his gait a little lopsided,
 but he's very much alive.

Lucas barrels towards Drew.

DREW
 Oh no, no no...

Lucas starts to chase and harangue him, a game of tag.

LUCAS
 Arrrrrrr!

DREW
 Not the arm! I'm maimed!

Julia laughs.

EXT. DREW'S HOUSE - FIRE PIT - EVENING

Julia, Drew and Lucas sit around the roaring fire pit.

They eat hot dogs contentedly.

They crack jokes with one another. Lucas grins.

They're a family.

EXT. DREW'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - MAGIC HOUR

Lucas roams the yard, trying to catch a firefly in his hands.

Julia and Drew are by the fire pit, tangled in each other's arms, talking quietly. Distracted.

Lucas notices something at the edge of the yard by the woods:

A WILD RABBIT. It sits still for a moment, fur gently pulsing, then hops off into the WOODS.

Lucas follows it slowly, furtively...

EXT. WOODS - MAGIC HOUR

Lucas is perched on a large ROCK. We PUSH IN from behind, unsure of what he's doing.

Then we realize: he's eating something.

CLOSE ON Lucas as he finishes chewing. A brief look of satisfaction is quickly overshadowed by one of deep GUILT. He quickly tosses something away...

... The carcass of the rabbit. It lands...

In a small PILE OF OTHER ANIMAL CARCASSES below the rock.

EXT. DREW'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - NIGHT

Julia sits alone by the fire pit. As if waiting for something. Then she sits up...

... as Lucas appears from the woods. She was waiting for him.

Lucas crosses the yard, comes over to Julia.

JULIA
You have enough to eat?

LUCAS

Yup.

A BREEZE passes through the yard. The trees ripple and sway.

Lucas glances back towards the beckoning woods. Nervous.

JULIA

Hey.

Lucas looks back.

Julia reaches down and wipes a bit of red from the corner of his mouth. *She knows what he eats.*

She holds his eyes for a second. Then smiles.

JULIA (CONT'D)

You're safe here.

The breeze dissipates. Lucas settles. He smiles at Julia.

And they go inside.

FADE TO BLACK.