

The Cellar

by

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DARKNESS

And then --

A GUNNED ENGINE --

BLURRED HEADLIGHTS flash across the screen --

TIRES SQUEAL on asphalt --

A split second of unnerving silence and --

CRAAAASSSSH!

Lightning quick, CLOSE UP snippets of --

GLASS SHATTERING --

METAL BENDING and RIPPING --

A VEHICLE coming to rest --

A TIRE SPINNING upside down --

SMASH CUT TO:

BLACK

And SILENCE.

The soft, rhythmic HUM of a distant generator fades in.

Followed by a deep, pained BREATH.

A dim light flickers, then steadies, revealing a --

POV SHOT

But everything is out of focus -- blurred shades of grey.

The light fades as consciousness slips away, replaced again by --

DARKNESS

The generator continues its rhythmic HUM.

A slow FADE IN --

DIM FLUORESCENT LIGHT illuminates --

A SMALL ROOM

A young woman lies on a sheet-less mattress on the floor. A thin blanket covers her body. Her eyes remain closed.

This is MICHELLE BURKE (18). Classic Mid-Westerner -- attractive and smart with a slight edge that does little to mask her deep-rooted wholesomeness.

But right now she's bandaged, bruised and barely conscious.

Somewhere nearby -- the MUFFLED THUMP of a closing door.

Michelle's EYES SNAP OPEN -- glassy but aware.

She touches her temple and winces. Her fingers come away tinged with blood from the soaked-through gauze that's taped to her forehead.

Her eyes adjust. Take in her surroundings --

Low ceiling. Unpainted cinder block walls. Cement floor. No windows. A closed door.

She turns her head causing her to MOAN.

And -- seemingly in response to her moan -- there's a SHUFFLING SOUND on the other side of the door.

Michelle goes silent.

She waits, listens -- but the shuffling sound doesn't return.

Her eyes flit around the room as her confusion builds.

She peels back the blanket --

She's in her underwear and there's a makeshift brace wrapped around her knee. Her shirt is crusted with blood and torn at the collar. Confusion quickly turns to panic.

She moves to swing her legs off the mattress but searing pain stops her. She grabs the brace, struggles not to cry out.

Her jeans sit in a crumpled pile next to the bed.

Keeping her leg steady, she reaches out and pulls them toward her. A shaky hand digs her cell phone from a pocket.

She ignores the display telling her she has new texts. She punches 911 -- but there's no signal.

She holds up the phone, moves it around -- still nothing.

Michelle starts to sob. Stops. Takes a deep breath and --

Rolls off the bed. Gritted teeth muffle her agony.

She drags herself toward the door.

A lone TWO-BY-FOUR rests against the wall. She uses it to haul herself up onto her good foot, shock and adrenaline help her fight through the pain.

Steadying herself on the wooden crutch, she turns the door handle. It doesn't budge -- the bolt is locked.

Michelle looks around the room for another escape.

And then --

FOOTSTEPS on the other side of the door. Getting LOUDER with each step. Growing CLOSER with each step.

She hops to the side of the door, grips the two-by-four like a baseball bat... and waits.

The bolt lock slides --

The handle turns --

The door CREAKS open --

A foot steps into the room --

Michelle swings for the fences --

The two-by-four smashes into a man's shoulder. A tray of food flies through the air as the man tumbles to the ground.

We'll come to know the man as HOWARD STAMMLER (40s), but right now, he's batting practice.

Michelle lifts the wood. Howard raises his hands.

HOWARD

Wait! Stop!

Michelle slams down the two-by-four with all she's got. Howard's forearm absorbs the brutal blow.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Just listen to me for a sec!

Michelle swings again, for his head this time.

Howard rolls out of the way. The two-by-four splinters against the cement floor. He reaches back, latches onto the wood and jerks it from her hands.

Michelle chokes back panicked sobs as she hops toward the open door. Her knee cracks against the frame. She cries out in pure agony, collapses hard to the floor.

Blood seeps from under her bandages.

Howard gets up, his body blocking the doorway. He towers over Michelle, the two-by-four gripped tightly.

He stares down at her -- breathing hard -- his expression somewhere between surprise and anger.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
I'm only trying to help you!

Michelle frantically crawls away from him, her bad leg dragging limply behind.

Howard steps after her.

MICHELLE
Stay away from me!

Michelle struggles onto her good foot, SCREAMS from the pain. She hops toward a shovel that rests against the back wall.

Howard drops the two-by-four.

HOWARD
I'm not going to hurt you.

Michelle hops faster, stumbles, falls. Her busted knee hits the floor. She blacks out from the excruciating pain.

Howard stands over her for a beat. Then he walks to the back of the room and grabs the shovel that rests against the wall.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM - LATER

Michelle's eyes slowly open. She's back on the mattress, the thin blanket covering her again.

A tray of food sits on the floor next to the bed. The two-by-four and shovel are gone.

Howard sits on a folding chair by the door, his forearm is now wrapped with a bandage where she hit him with the wood.

She peers at him through the dim light. Is he sleeping? She props herself up.

His voice cuts through the darkness, startling her --

HOWARD

You should eat the eggs. You'll be dreaming of fresh food before long.

Michelle looks at the tray of food, then back to Howard -- detachment in his voice, intelligence in his weary eyes. A combination that makes him hard to read.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

In a couple of weeks, everything's going to be from a can.

Panic sets in again. Michelle grabs her cell. Holds it up.

MICHELLE

I called the police. They'll be here any minute. Let me go now. You'll be in a lot less trouble.

Michelle shoots him a defiant look.

Howard shakes his head --

HOWARD

You've got no idea what happened, do you?

Michelle lowers her cell but doesn't respond.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

There was an attack last night. Some kind of bomb exploded. The city's destroyed.

Michelle looks at Howard like he's a lunatic.

MICHELLE

Yeah... Right.

HOWARD

I was rushing back here when I came across your wrecked car. I couldn't just leave you there.

MICHELLE

If you're such a good samaritan why the hell am I locked in this room?

HOWARD

I spent all night setting your leg
and closing that wound on your
head. I needed some sleep and
didn't want you wandering off.

(rubs his bandaged arm)

Or cracking my head open with a
shovel.

MICHELLE

You really think I'm stupid enough
to fall for this?

HOWARD

I think you're smart enough to know
that if I was gonna do something, I
would have done it already.

MICHELLE

How do I know you didn't? I woke up
in my underwear with no idea where
I am or how I got here. That's
pretty fucking disturbing.

HOWARD

I'm a doctor. I had to take off
your jeans to set your knee.

MICHELLE

I want out of here. Now.

HOWARD

You can't leave. The entire
countryside is blanketed with...
with some sort of poisonous
chemical.

MICHELLE

You're out of your mind.

HOWARD

You go outside, you die. But this
place has a filtration system. It
should protect us from whatever is
floating in the air out there.

MICHELLE

What's gonna protect me from you?

Howard shakes his head, knows he's not going to convince her
of anything right now. He stands up.

Michelle pulls the blanket tighter around her neck.

HOWARD

You need to rest.

(pointing at the tray)

That's Ketamine in the small cup.
It'll help with the pain. I
recommend you take it... but I'll
leave that up to you.

MICHELLE

Special K? We going clubbing?

HOWARD

I'm a veterinarian. It's the
strongest painkiller I have.

MICHELLE

Thought you said you were a doctor.

HOWARD

A veterinarian is a doctor.

He points to her leg as he tries for a little levity.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Hey. Consider yourself lucky. If
you were a horse, I would've had to
put you down.

Michelle's not laughing.

MICHELLE

Thanks, Doc. But I'm not taking a
date rape drug while being held
prisoner.

He takes a step toward her... and there's a tiny shift in
Howard, something stirs beneath his calm exterior --

HOWARD

If I wanted to drug you, I would've
crushed it up in your food or hid
it in your drink. Or shot you up
with it while you were already
unconscious. And then I could've
done what ever I wanted.

Michelle looks sick to her stomach. Howard takes a deep
breath, knows he went too far.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

This is a lot to take in. For both
of us. You need to eat and you need
to sleep.

(MORE)

HOWARD (CONT'D)
There will be plenty of time to
talk when you're feeling better.

Michelle pulls the tray onto her mattress and starts picking at the eggs. She's not convinced of Howard's story but realizes that either way, she's fucked.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Call me if you need anything. I'll
be right outside.

That doesn't make her feel any better. He exits the room, leaving the door open behind him. Michelle waits a beat...

She sets the food tray back on the floor.

Her hand lingers, grabs the butter knife.

She tries to pull herself up, but her weight shifts to her busted knee. The pain is excruciating.

Michelle grits her teeth, falls back onto the mattress, eyes watering. She can't take it. She grabs the Ketamine off the tray and drinks it.

She tucks the butter knife under her pillow and passes out.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - BASEMENT - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

(Note: All of the flashbacks are grainy and high contrast -- it's hard to tell whether we are watching history, a memory or something altogether different.)

Dozens of college students drink from plastic cups and bounce to hip hop music in the basement of an off-campus house.

In a back corner Michelle stands across from PATRICK (19).

Despite the raging party going on around them, the expressions on their faces say that they're not having fun.

PATRICK
*Lauren's in my lit class. We were
just studying...*

MICHELLE
*It took you ten minutes to close
your books and come downstairs?*

PATRICK
*I didn't hear you knock. I didn't
even know you were coming.*

MICHELLE

*I wanted to surprise you. God, I'm
such an idiot.*

Michelle takes a long drink from her cup.

PATRICK

Nothing happened.

MICHELLE

*I saw the way she looked at you...
the way she looked at me.*

She locks eyes with Patrick, daring him to lie.

PATRICK

*Okay. She kissed me... But I didn't
kiss her back.*

MICHELLE

What the hell does that even mean?

PATRICK

It means you can trust me.

MICHELLE

Trust you? Why? So you can hurt me?

PATRICK

Michelle, I love you.

MICHELLE

*Yeah? You got a fucked up way of
showing it.*

*Michelle chugs the rest of her beer, throws the empty cup at
Patrick and charges for the stairs.*

He chases after her.

PATRICK

You can't go. You need to sober up.

Michelle pushes through the crowd of bodies, ignoring him.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM

*Michelle wakes up. The fluorescent bulb is off but a bit of
light bleeds through the open door along with some noise --
HAMMERING and SANDING. It puts an anxious look on her face.*

The food tray is gone. She reaches under her pillow. The butter knife is gone too. A folded t-shirt and women's drawstring athletic shorts sit on the floor next to her cell.

Michelle reaches over, grabs her cell and opens up her texts - all six from Patrick. The last one at 2:42 a.m. -- "Sorry had to end this way. I wish we could be 2gether 4ever."

Is he referring to the attack? She shakes the thought from her head.

Michelle swaps her torn, blood-crusted blouse for the t-shirt. It's skintight but it's clean. She then gingerly pulls the shorts on over her wounded knee.

Michelle looks around the empty room. She calls out --

MICHELLE
Hey, Doc? These luxury
accommodations come with a
bathroom?

Howard enters carrying crutches made out of some nailed together pieces of wood -- there's material wrapped around the tops, sanded hand grips and duct taped feet at the bottom. They're rudimentary, but nonetheless impressive.

He sets the crutches down by her mattress.

HOWARD
My name's Howard.

Michelle doesn't say anything as she pulls herself up onto the crutches. Howard reaches for her arm to steady her.

She instinctively pulls away from his touch.

He gets the message, turns and leads the way out of the room.

INT. MAIN ROOM

Michelle enters the cramped living area. It's windowless with the same low ceilings and cinder block walls.

Her eyes dart around, studying every square inch --

In the middle there's a small table with two folding chairs. To her right, there's a kitchenette alongside a cupboard.

Next to the cupboard, an open door leads to another room.

To her left, a worn couch blocks a set of stairs that disappear up into darkness.

And on the far side of the room, there's a fully stocked, floor-to-ceiling wine rack that takes up the entire wall but for one corner where there's a closed steel door with a deadbolt above the handle.

Howard leads Michelle through the main living area into --

HOWARD'S ROOM

A mattress on the floor. A small chest of drawers against a wall. In the back, two shower curtains come together to square off the corner.

Howard pulls one of the curtains aside to reveal a toilet, a sink, a small mirror, and a tub.

Michelle crutches by him.

INT. BATHROOM

Howard lets the curtain go but stands right outside.

MICHELLE
Yeah, um, a little privacy, Doc.

Howard heads toward the door.

HOWARD
Let me know if you need any help.

MICHELLE
You can help by closing the door on
your way out.

Through the slit in the shower curtain Michelle watches Howard exit. He closes the bedroom door behind him.

Michelle quickly crutches into --

HOWARD'S ROOM

She hobbles to the chest of drawers and starts rooting through them. The top drawer is filled with women's clothes. The second drawer down contains men's clothes.

Michelle opens the third drawer revealing a cornucopia of pharmaceuticals, including the Ketamine, antibiotics and a few syringes.

Michelle grabs a syringe. As she lifts it, she notices a collection of old survival magazines underneath --

A headline on the cover of one of them catches her eye --
"HOW TO MAKE A WEAPON OUT OF ANYTHING."

HOWARD (O.S.)
You okay in there, Michelle?

Michelle startles at hearing her name. She drops the syringe and shuts the drawer. Hobbles over and opens the door.

Howard all but tumbles into the room, having had his ear against the door.

Michelle tamps down her surprise and makes her way around him back into the --

MAIN ROOM

Leaning on her crutches, she opens the cupboard. Every square inch is taken up with canned goods and dried foods.

Michelle turns to Howard.

MICHELLE
How do you know my name?

HOWARD
I looked in your purse, saw your
driver's license.

She works her way to the back corner. She tries the steel door next to the wine rack. The deadbolt is locked.

Howard watches her but doesn't say anything.

Michelle takes a seat on the couch, cranes her head to look up the stairwell but she can't see where it ends.

She tries to act calm and confident --

MICHELLE
Okay. So where the hell are we?

HOWARD
Near Kenosha. 40 miles outside of
Milwaukee. Underneath my farmhouse.

MICHELLE

(looking at the wine rack)
Where you just happen to have a
fully stocked dungeon.

HOWARD

I converted this cellar into a
fallout shelter right after 9/11.
The electricity comes from solar
panels mounted on the barn roof.
Water's piped in from a well
underneath the house then it goes
through a reverse osmosis filter.
Completely self contained.

Howard leans against the table.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Started to think I went a little
overboard, but figured, even if it
never serves its purpose, it makes
a decent wine cellar.

MICHELLE

How were you able to figure out
what happened? The TV and radio
would have stopped broadcasting the
instant the bomb went off.

HOWARD

The ones from Milwaukee did. But I
was able to pick up a station from
Chicago... until that cut out too.
But it was enough info to know I
needed to get here quick.

Michelle loses a bit of confidence.

MICHELLE

You saying Chicago was hit?

HOWARD

All I know is that they're not
broadcasting anymore.

MICHELLE

That's where I'm from. That's where
my mom is. I need to call her. I
need to make sure she's okay.

The look on Howard's face says that she's probably not.

Michelle tears up. Howard's not sure what to do, what to say.

HOWARD

I have a daughter in Washington,
D.C. I don't know if anything
happened there. But, I mean, it's
Washington, D.C.

He fights back his own emotions.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Never should have let her go.

MICHELLE

We need to go outside. Find a cell
signal. Figure out what happened.

Howard comes over, reaches out to comfort her.

HOWARD

I'm sorry. I know it's hard, but I
can't let --

She suddenly swings her crutch --

MICHELLE

Get the hell away from me, you
lying son of a bitch!

Michelle struggles to her feet, backs against a wall. She
keeps Howard at bay with her crutch.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

You're full of shit! There was no
attack. You're just a sick pervert
trying to keep me down here.

Howard looks at her, his face a blank slate. And then -- a
flash of anger. He pulls the couch away from the stairs.

HOWARD

You want to see what's out there?
(motioning toward stairs)
Go ahead.

Howard keeps his distance as Michelle cautiously crutches her
way to the steps, struggles to climb them.

INT. STAIRWELL - EVENING

Michelle arrives at the top of the stairs and finds a thick
lead door with a small 4x6 inch window.

Howard comes halfway up the stairs behind Michelle.

HOWARD
Have a look.

Michelle leans in and stares out the window --

MICHELLE'S POV - EVENING

Late afternoon. Faint sunlight. A thin strip of the outside world is visible along the top of the exterior stairwell --

Sunlight kicks off the front end of a dented pickup which barely sticks out from behind the corner of a rundown barn.

Outside the barn, there's a fenced in pen occupied by --

TWO DEAD PIGS. But not just dead -- their skin is completely gone -- peeled, sliced or melted away. All that remains are two huge blobs of blood-stained muscle and fat.

INT. TOP OF STAIRS - EVENING

Michelle pulls away. Terror pulses through her body.

HOWARD
Believe me now?

Howard climbs the stairs as Michelle tries to get her panicked breathing under control.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Mildred and Frank. They seemed fine when we got here. I looked out a few hours later. That's what I saw.

MICHELLE
What happened to them?

HOWARD
I don't know.

Howard flips a switch on a kluged together piece of electronic equipment by the door. A steady CLICKING SOUND emanates from the machine as the meter fluctuates slightly.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
This is a Geiger counter.

A wire runs from the device to a wand. Howard threads the wand through a small hole in the door. The clicking speeds up and the meter moves but only a little.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Definitely radioactive fallout in
the air, but not enough to do that
kind of damage, not that quickly.

MICHELLE
Yeah. Looks more like the work of
some twisted freak with a knife.

HOWARD
(to himself)
God grant me the serenity...

Howard pulls the wand in. Looks up at Michelle.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
There's something else out there.
Some sort of chemical, like mustard
gas... or worse.

Michelle subtly braces herself against the wall.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Whatever it is, we sure as hell
can't open this door.

Without warning -- Michelle shoves Howard as hard as she can.
He loses balance, tumbles down the steps, ass over elbows.

Michelle grabs the door handle, turns it. But it's locked.

HOWARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
God damn it!

Michelle frantically pulls at the door.

Howard gets to his feet -- his body fills the bottom of the
stairwell, blocking the light from the room.

Michelle bangs on the small window.

MICHELLE
Help! Somebody help me!

Howard rubs his shoulder as he climbs the stairs.

HOWARD
What the hell is wrong with you?!

There's real anger in his voice.

Michelle smashes her crutch against the glass, against the handle, but it's pointless. She begins sobbing, slides down the wall until her butt hits the stairs.

MICHELLE

Please let me go. Please. I
promise, I won't tell anyone.

Howard stops a few steps below her.

HOWARD

(bordering on creepy)
There's no one to tell.

Michelle looks up at Howard, horrified.

MICHELLE

How long are you going to keep me
here?

HOWARD

You're not a prisoner.

MICHELLE

(through her sobs)
Then open the fucking door.

Howard leans in, breathing right in her ear.

Michelle cowers as his hand reaches toward her... then past her. He switches off the Geiger counter.

HOWARD

You're not thinking straight.
Probably have a concussion. Then
there's the shock of all this info.

Howard stands back up, towering over her.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You open that door and whatever's
out there comes in here. Is that
what you want? To end up looking
like my hogs?

Michelle can't tell if it's a warning or a threat.

They stare at each other for a long moment.

She finally shakes her head... surrenders.

Howard turns, lumbers back down the stairs. And as he goes, the sun sets outside, leaving Michelle in near darkness.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Looking in the mirror, Michelle peels the blood-crusted gauze off her forehead. The cut is still gruesome, but the bleeding has stopped. She tapes on a clean piece of gauze.

INT. MAIN ROOM

Howard sits at the table fiddling with a small radio but nothing's being broadcast.

Michelle crutches into the room. Howard looks over.

HOWARD
(spinning the dial)
See?

MICHELLE
I see a broken radio.

Howard shakes his head as Michelle crutches by him.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM

Michelle sleeps restlessly.

EXT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

Michelle pushes through partying students on the porch as she storms out of the house toward her car.

Patrick continues after her.

PATRICK
*Come on, Michelle. I made a
mistake. Give me another chance.*

MICHELLE
(slurring slightly)
*Same thing my dad used to say. And
my mom was stupid enough to believe
it. Until he left her for good.*

PATRICK
This is about you and me. Not them.

Michelle opens her car door.

MICHELLE

*You're right. It's about you and
me. And Lauren. And that's one too
many.*

*She gets in the car and slams the door. Patrick grabs the
handle but it's already locked.*

PATRICK

*Get out of the car. You're not
alright to drive. Seriously.*

Michelle peels away from the curb --

Two students jump out of the way.

She squeals around a corner and disappears into the night...

INT. SMALL BEDROOM

Michelle wakes with a start. She looks over to --

HOWARD standing silently in the doorway. He turns and walks
away without a word.

INT. BATHROOM

Michelle inspects her damaged knee. Then she glances at
Howard's dresser drawers. She crutches toward them, keeping a
nervous eye on the door to the main room.

HOWARD (O.S.)

You alright in there?

She stops.

MICHELLE

Yeah. I'm fine.

INT. MAIN ROOM

Howard and Michelle sit at the table, eating in silence. He
looks at her, but she keeps her eyes on her plate.

HOWARD

(trying for small talk)

What were you doing in Milwaukee?

Eyes down, Michelle pushes her food around with her fork.

MICHELLE
 (almost robotic)
 Visiting a friend.
 (a beat)
 But he's probably dead, right?
 So what's the point in talking
 about it?

So much for small talk. Howard bites his tongue as he pushes away from the table.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. BATHROOM

A few days have passed. Michelle looks at herself in the mirror. She peels the gauze from her head. The wound is healed enough that she doesn't replace the gauze.

She runs water but sneaks from the bathroom -- using the noise to mask her movement. She hobbles into --

HOWARD'S ROOM

She crosses the room without her crutches, limping but moving reasonably well.

Michelle opens a drawer and takes the magazine with the "HOW TO MAKE A WEAPON OUT OF ANYTHING" cover.

INT. MAIN ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Michelle maneuvers through the main room -- past Howard. She leans heavily on the crutches making it appear that she's completely dependent on them to get around.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM

Using the sharp edge of a soup can lid, Michelle whittles away at the end of one of her crutches, slowly shaping it into a point. She hears Howard moving outside and quickly rewraps the end with tape.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM - LATER

Michelle lies on her mattress as Howard unwraps the bandage on her knee. Michelle winces as the last layer sticks to her pus-covered wound. Howard tugs it off.

MICHELLE
Ow! Damn it. That hurt.

They both stare at the wound. It's gruesome.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
I need to go to a hospital. I need
a real doctor.

Howard ignores the dig.

HOWARD
Where are you hiding them?

MICHELLE
What are you talking about?

HOWARD
The antibiotics.

Michelle doesn't answer.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Think you'll still be able to
refuse medicine when this turns
into gangrene... and I have to saw
your leg off?

Michelle looks from the wound to Howard. He's serious.

She reaches into a small slit on the side of her mattress and
digs out a dozen pills. She sets them on the bed.

Howard separates them into two piles.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
(pointing at one pile)
You're welcome to suffer through
the pain all you want...
(points at the other pile)
But you will take the antibiotics.

Michelle picks up one pill from each pile. Pops them both
into her mouth and swallows.

MICHELLE
Happy?

Howard rewraps Michelle's knee with a clean bandage then gets
up and heads for the door.

HOWARD
I'm stuck down here too, you know.

He pulls the door shut on his way out.

Michelle reaches over and grabs her crutch. She unravels the duct tape and goes back to work, sharpening it into a point.

The painkiller kicks in. She groggily tucks the lid back under the mattress then lies down and drifts to sleep.

INT./EXT. MICHELLE'S CAR - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

Michelle speeds on a winding country road. A truck pulls up behind her. Its LIGHTS GLARE in her rearview mirror. It seems to get closer and closer.

Michelle swerves across the road drunkenly. The truck HONKS.

She guns the engine, accelerates. The truck keeps pace, tailgating her yet again.

She glances at her rearview. The glare blinds her...

INT. SMALL BEDROOM

Michelle jolts awake.

The bedroom door is open, but she's alone. She reaches for her crutches, notices that the tape at the foot of one of them is unraveled, the carved point clearly visible.

She grabs it and tapes it up. But she has no idea if Howard was in the room to see it or not.

She lies back on the bed for a moment, listens. Nothing but the WHOOSH of air coming in through the vent above her.

Michelle stares up at the vent -- an idea comes to her. She grabs her crutches and limps out of the room.

INT. MAIN ROOM

Michelle peeks into Howard's room. He snores on his mattress.

She quietly closes his door then stares up at the ventilation system above the kitchenette where two air ducts branch off from the main register and pipe into the bedrooms.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM

Michelle strips the cover from her pillow. She uses the spear-point on her crutch to rip one end open and begins pulling out the polyester stuffing.

INT. MAIN ROOM

Michelle climbs onto a folding chair beneath the main vent. She pulls off the cover and shoves the stuffing into the ventilation system.

When she has it all in, she takes a crutch and pushes it as far into the duct as possible.

She climbs off the chair then reaches up and BANGS on the vent with her crutch until Howard's snoring stops.

She hears him moving and quickly limps back into her room.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Michelle catches a glimpse of Howard through the open door.

She waits a beat then hobbles out of the bedroom.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Howard is on a chair underneath the main duct. His ear and his hand are pressed up against the vent.

Howard turns to Michelle -- deadly serious look on his face.

HOWARD

The ventilation system is failing.

Michelle's face gives nothing away.

MICHELLE

What are you gonna do?

HOWARD

Don't know. If it's the solar panels we're screwed because I can't go outside to repair them.

He turns valves on the ducts that lead into the bedrooms.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
I'm shutting down the bedroom flow.
We'll have to limit ourselves to
this room. Keep the system from
having to work so hard.

He gets down from the chair.

MICHELLE
What about the bathroom?

HOWARD
I'll keep a bucket in here. Short
of that, you'll have to be quick.

Howard seems to be staring at the tape on the bottom of
Michelle's crutches as he speaks.

INT. MAIN ROOM - LATER

Michelle sets two plates on the table, unidentifiable blobs
of canned meat and pale vegetables on both.

MICHELLE
Two years worth of food down here
and not a single piece of
chocolate.

Howard stands on a folding chair, his face against the vent.

HOWARD
Surviving is about the essentials.

Michelle drops into a chair, exhausted. She stares at the
wall of wine, looks around the rest of the sparse room.

MICHELLE
Yeah, there's no way a bag of
chocolates would've fit in here.

HOWARD
Tell you what. Next time I'm
planning for the apocalypse, I'll
make sure to buy candy bars. Right
now we have more pressing problems.

He gets down from the chair and joins Michelle at the table.
They both struggle to catch their breath.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
(somber)
We're not getting enough oxygen.
(MORE)

HOWARD (CONT'D)
I might have to go outside and see
if I can fix it.

MICHELLE
Thought it was poisonous outside.

HOWARD
It is. But we're facing carbon
dioxide poisoning down here.
Something has to be done.

Howard picks up a fork and starts eating. Michelle just
stares at her plate. Is she having second thoughts?

MICHELLE
If this crap is our last meal, we
need something better than water to
wash it down.

She crutches over to the wine rack and grabs a random bottle.

HOWARD
You're not old enough for that.

MICHELLE
Feel free to call the cops.

She sets the bottle on the table, hobbles over and digs
through the utensil drawer.

HOWARD
You were drinking the night you
crashed. I could smell it on you.

MICHELLE
(laughs)
Then drunk driving saved my life.
Otherwise I'd be a skinless corpse,
right?
(frustrated)
Where's the corkscrew?

HOWARD
I've never opened a bottle down
here. It's just storage. Guess
we'll have to make do with water.

Michelle pulls off her shoe. She grabs the bottle and puts
the base of it in the bottom of the shoe then starts gently
banging it against the nearby door frame.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

MICHELLE

Most parents won't notice if a bottle of wine disappears, but they will notice a missing corkscrew.

Michelle is breathing heavily from the lack of oxygen, but little by little the wine forces the cork from the bottle.

When it's halfway up, she twists it the rest of the way out.

She takes a moment to catch her breath, then fills her glass. She goes to fill Howard's glass. He holds his hand over it.

HOWARD

I don't drink.

Michelle looks over at the wall of wine.

MICHELLE

That just decorative?

Howard looks down at his dinner plate.

HOWARD

I used to. I don't anymore.

Michelle raises her glass.

MICHELLE

More for me then. Cheers.

She takes a big swig.

INT. MAIN ROOM - LATER

Michelle's food is still uneaten but the wine bottle is half empty. The lack of oxygen mixed with the booze has her tipsy. She refills her glass.

HOWARD

You've had enough.

Michelle picks up her glass and takes a gulp. She looks at the full wine rack.

MICHELLE

Why keep all those bottles if you don't drink?

HOWARD

It's a long story.

MICHELLE
(sarcastic)
Yeah, maybe you can tell me some
day when we have more time.

Howard shrugs.

HOWARD
Maybe I'll tell you some day when
you're ready to listen.

Michelle stares at the unappetizing food on the plate in
front of her.

MICHELLE
I can't look at this shit anymore.

Michelle, still tipsy, grabs her plate and limps over to the
sink WITHOUT HER CRUTCHES.

Howard watches her intently as she makes her way back to the
table and sits down next to her forgotten crutches.

HOWARD
(suspiciously)
Your knee's getting a lot better.

Michelle takes another drink of wine, plays it cool.

MICHELLE
Guess the alcohol numbs the pain.

Howard nods dubiously. All of a sudden, he gets up from his
chair and walks to the back of the room. He digs a small key
ring out of his pocket and opens up the locked closet door.

Howard pulls out the shovel before closing the door and
locking it.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

HOWARD
Wondering how I could be so naive.

Howard walks underneath the main duct, tapping it with the
shovel handle as he goes.

TAP -- a hollow echo. TAP -- another hollow echo. TAP -- same
hollow sound. Howard glances at Michelle.

She fights to keep a disinterested look on her face.

He walks a few more feet. Reaches up, TAPS again -- and this part of the duct answers with a muted THUMP.

Howard climbs onto a chair. He pushes the shovel deep into the vent and starts fishing around.

Michelle surreptitiously unwraps the tape from the bottom of her crutch under the table as she keeps her eyes on Howard.

Howard pulls the shovel out, bringing a big chunk of polyester pillow stuffing with it.

Air immediately starts flowing into the room again.

Howard looks at Michelle. He's furious.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I pulled you from a crushed car.
Kept you safe from whatever's in
the air out there. I gave you
antibiotics from my limited supply.

He climbs off the chair, shakes the edge of the shovel at her as he speaks. He doesn't seem to notice her shaky hands working underneath the table.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You were a stranger. I owed you
nothing. But I helped you anyhow.
And instead of thanking me, you try
to kill us both.

Howard takes a step toward Michelle. She jumps up from the table and thrusts her spike-tipped crutch at Howard. He knocks it aside with the shovel.

She pulls it back, ready to strike again.

MICHELLE

Is that your plan? Lock me up and
keep telling me how thankful I
should be until I throw myself at
you? Well, it's never gonna happen.
(raises the spear higher)
I won't let you hurt me.

HOWARD

That's the beauty of it. I don't
have to.

He throws the shovel down.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
I'm gonna let you hurt yourself.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out his key ring. Sets it on the table.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
It's the small brass one.

Michelle hesitates for a long moment, not sure if she believes him, not sure if this is some kind of a test.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
You're free to go.

Howard drags the couch away from the stairwell.

Keeping the crutch pointed in front of her, Michelle steps forward, grabs the keys off the table.

She limps toward the exit, crutch at the ready.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
There's just one thing...

Howard's voice wavers between menace and regret.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Once you leave, you can't come back. You'll be covered with whatever it is that melted the skin off my hogs. Go ahead and kill yourself if you like. But I'm not going to let you kill me too. Your choice.

Michelle makes her way into the --

STAIRWELL - DAY

She slowly climbs the stairs. Daylight filters in through the tiny window above.

She gets to the top, fumbles with the key ring --

She sticks the small brass key in the lock --

She pauses, looks back down the stairs. Howard's nowhere to be seen. But he calls out --

HOWARD (O.S.)
Leave the keys in the door. And be
quick to close it.

Michelle pauses... Decision time. She hesitates --

And then the daylight from the window suddenly goes DARK.

Michelle spins around -- a man in a hazmat hood presses
against the window -- looking right at her.

He BANGS frantically.

MAN
(muffled)
Open the door! Open the god damn
door!

Michelle SCREAMS in terror.

Howard rushes to the bottom of the stairs, sees the figure on
the other side of the window --

HOWARD
Do not open that door!

Michelle panics, spins the key, unlocking the door.

Before Howard can get up to her, the man pulls open the door
and enters, pushing into Michelle -- TOUCHING HER --

The man blocks Michelle from getting out. He spins back,
shuts and locks the door. Then strips off his hazmat hood.

MAN
(whispering)
Shh! We don't want them to find us.

This is NATE (20s), his matted hair and dirty face only
enhance his rugged good looks.

MICHELLE
Who?

NATE
(whispering)
Get back! Get away from me!

Howard disappears down the stairwell. Michelle hesitates...

Maybe it's the booze or the lack of oxygen -- or maybe it's
something in Nate's voice that convinces her. But Michelle
backs down the stairs, away from the door.

Nate looks out the window one more time before he heads down into the --

MAIN ROOM

Howard stands on a chair under the vent, turning the valves on the ducts that lead to the bedrooms.

HOWARD

We need to get that suit cleaned off. Right now.

Nate hurries past Michelle into Howard's room -- he clearly knows his way around.

MICHELLE

What the hell is going on?

HOWARD

(a concerned look)
That's Nate.

MICHELLE

You know him?

Howard nods, but not happily. He gets down from the chair and heads for his bedroom.

INT. BATHROOM

Nate strips off the suit. Underneath he's only wearing a pair of boxers and few tattoos. He throws the suit in the tub.

Howard comes in and starts running the water over it.

Nate looks back, sees Michelle in the bedroom doorway. He hurries into --

HOWARD'S ROOM

-- in just his boxers. Michelle can't help but notice Nate is in great shape.

NATE

You touched the suit. You need to get washed off right away.

He reaches for her. She doesn't resist. He leads her back to the --

BATHROOM

Howard scrubs the suit which is completely submerged. Nate holds a towel under the faucet -- but the water flow has reduced to a drip. Nate begins to put the towel in the tub.

HOWARD

No! Water might be contaminated.

Howard closes the faucet.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Try the sink.

Nate spins the sink faucet. It sputters and a weak stream of water flows out.

Nate wets the towel as he turns to Michelle.

NATE

Those clothes have to go. Throw 'em in the tub with the suit. Then wash yourself down.

MICHELLE

What?

NATE

If you want to keep your skin, you need to lose your clothes. Now!

Michelle takes the towel, pauses, looks at Nate then Howard, who's paying no attention as he cleans the hazmat suit.

Nate sighs, turns away from her.

NATE (CONT'D)

No time to be modest.

Michelle strips down to her underwear.

Nate keeps his back to her, but turns enough to sneak a peek in the mirror as Michelle washes herself down with the towel.

ON HOWARD

He turns the hazmat suit inside out to scrub the rest.

And he sees -- written on the inside in permanent marker:
PROPERTY OF JOHN BENNETT, PIKEVILLE FIRE DEPT.

Howard stares at the name, his face tightening up. He glances at Nate, who still has his back turned.

INT. MAIN ROOM - LATER

Nate, now in a pair of Howard's jeans and a t-shirt, sits at the table with Howard. They speak in tense whispers.

HOWARD

Got some nerve showing up here now.

NATE

You said I was always welcome.

HOWARD

A lot's changed since then. And you know it.

Michelle walks in, dressed in a different set of clothes.

Nate eyes her as she heads for the couch.

NATE

(to Howard)

A little greedy wanting to keep this all for yourself.

She sits on the couch and looks at the men distrustfully.

MICHELLE

(to Howard, re: Nate)

He was out there. He seems fine.

HOWARD

Because of the hazmat suit.

(stares at Nate)

Lucky you happened to have that.

MICHELLE

(to Howard)

This all part of the plan? You couldn't convince me so you called for backup.

NATE

What's her problem?

HOWARD

Not sure where to start.

MICHELLE

You're both full of shit and now
you're sitting there trying to get
your lies straight.

NATE

You seriously think I've been
standing at the top of the stairs
in a hazmat suit for a week -- just
waiting for you to open the door?

When he puts it that way, it does sound like a stretch.

MICHELLE

I don't know what to think anymore.

NATE

Lucky you. This is one of those
cases where ignorance is bliss.

HOWARD

(under his breath)

Then she should be ecstatic.

Nate gets up from the table, walks over to Michelle. He
offers his hand along with his most charming look.

NATE

I'm Nate. I built this place --

HOWARD

You helped.

Nate ignores him -- keeps his focus on Michelle.

NATE

What's your name?

MICHELLE

Michelle.

He reaches out and she gives him a half-hearted shake. Nate
takes a seat on the couch next to her still holding her hand.

NATE

I wasn't expecting to find anyone
but Howard here.
(flashes a magnetic smile)
Guess my luck finally took a turn.

Nate squeezes Michelle's hand. She pulls it away guardedly.

NATE (CONT'D)
Nice to meet you, Michelle.

Out of the corner of her eye, Michelle glimpses Howard furrowing his eyebrows at the sight of Nate next to her.

Michelle turns, offers Nate a forced smile.

MICHELLE
Nice to meet you too, Nate.

HOWARD
(interrupting the moment)
So how is it out there?

NATE
Something's still in the air. Not
as bad as it was but...
(a beat)
On the way here, I came across a
guy that looked like he'd been
dropped in a deep-fryer. That'd
been me if I didn't have a suit.

MICHELLE
Did everyone but me know the world
was about to end?

Howard stands, moves closer to them.

HOWARD
So what happened? Who's behind it?

NATE
Well, there was a lot of talk...
But not a lot of answers.

Nate leans forward on the couch. Howard and Michelle stare with anticipation. This guy knows how to tell a story.

NATE (CONT'D)
It's all just rumors... But word
is, Iran got hold of some Russian
stockpiles -- nuclear, chemical,
the works. Hired some fanatical
whack jobs to hand deliver the
bombs. Then they exploded the
chemical stuff everywhere else.

MICHELLE
Russians probably made it easy for
them.

HOWARD

Hold on a second. I rescue you.
Keep you safe. And you refuse to
believe a word I say. But this guy
shows up and tells us the obvious
and you buy in?

NATE

I have an honest face.

MICHELLE

I didn't say I believed him. It's
just his story makes sense.

Michelle startles as the ventilation system GROANS... then
starts emitting a cyclical CLUNKING sound.

HOWARD

Christ. Your little stunt must've
damaged the system.

MICHELLE

Can you fix it?

HOWARD

I'd have to go out for that.

MICHELLE

I'll do it.

NATE

No!

HOWARD

Not a chance in hell.

Michelle's taken aback by their adamant response.

HOWARD

You've done enough damage already.

NATE

And it's not safe. There are people
out there. Not a lot, but a few.
Scavengers. They're desperate.

MICHELLE

Shouldn't we try to help them?

HOWARD

The water pump's stressed. The
ventilation system's struggling.
There are too many of us down here
already.

INT. HOWARD'S ROOM

Howard puts on the hazmat suit. He doesn't pull down the mask yet. He walks out into the --

MAIN ROOM

Michelle and Nate are on the couch -- and too close to each other. Howard looks them over, grits his teeth.

HOWARD

If I can't get it fixed, then I'm
not sure we can support three
people down here.

NATE

What are we gonna do, draw straws?

HOWARD

It's my cellar. I decide.

NATE

Get on out there.
(laughs)
You could use some fresh air.

Howard exhales irritably, closes the mask without responding.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Dark and overcast.

The modest farm house sits in the middle of nowhere. Fallow fields in front, thick woods in back.

The dead pigs rot in their pen.

The cellar door opens. Howard steps out. He looks back as the door slams shut.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michelle stands by the table. Nate comes down the stairs and takes a seat on the couch.

MICHELLE

You really think he'd make you
leave?

NATE

(shrugs)

He didn't say it'd be me. He just said he gets to decide.

Michelle walks over and sits down next to Nate.

MICHELLE

You'd let him kick me out?

NATE

Howard's shit when it comes to people, but he's good with machines. He'll fix it.

Not exactly the answer Michelle was looking for.

MICHELLE

Something happen between you two?

NATE

He hired me to help him convert this place to what it is now. About halfway through, he started changing everything. But didn't want to pay. So I walked. Guess he's still pissed off about it.

MICHELLE

And you think... you think he's alright?

NATE

Did something happen between you two?

MICHELLE

No. It's just, he seems off.

NATE

Everyone thought he was nuts when he built this place. But then again, I guess he was right.

EXT. BARN ROOF - LATE AFTERNOON

Howard climbs to the top of a ladder. As he steps onto the roof, something catches his leg.

He looks back -- it's a bent nail, tugging at the hazmat suit, nearly causing it to rip.

Howard carefully takes a step back and releases himself from the nail.

He then moves across the roof in the wan light. His BREATH FOGS the plastic mask.

He stops at the solar panels. A large tree branch has fallen across the panels. Two of the four are cracked. Howard shoves the branch to the side.

The branch rolls off the edge of the barn and lands with an echoing WHACK! Howard freezes, looks around...

Nothing but emptiness and silence. And then --

THWOCKA-THWOCKA-THWOCKA-THWOCKA. Howard spins around and --

HOWARD'S POV

On the horizon, something in the air, way out in the distance -- maybe a helicopter?

Howard wipes the fog from his face mask...

His hand moves away but whatever it was has slipped behind a hill before Howard can make heads or tails of it.

CUTTING WIDE

Howard stares at the horizon but it's empty. He turns back to the roof, looks over the rest of the solar panels.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Howard heads for the cellar door. He stops, turns and makes for the front door of the farm house instead.

INT. FARM HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Howard opens the closet door in his bedroom. He pulls out a small safe and sets it on his bed.

He unlocks it --

The safe door opens revealing a revolver and a box of ammo.

INT. FARM HOUSE - BACK STAIRWELL - LATE AFTERNOON

Howard comes down the stairs into the --

KITCHEN

Howard grabs a plastic trash bag from under the sink. He stuffs the gun and ammo into it, then pulls open a cabinet.

INT. STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

Howard enters the cellar, locking the door behind him. He hurries down the stairs, trash bag in hand.

INT. MAIN ROOM

Howard gives Nate and Michelle a thumbs up as he rushes past them toward his room.

INT. BATHROOM

Howard steps into the bathroom, takes the gun out of the trash bag and quickly wraps it in a towel. He throws the bag in the tub. Then he begins stripping out of the hazmat suit.

Michelle pulls aside the shower curtain.

MICHELLE (O.S.)
See anything out there?

Howard pauses, considers his answer.

HOWARD
Nope... Nothing.

Howard turns on the water -- a weak stream drips.

Nate steps up behind Michelle.

NATE
What's in the bag?

Howard pulls the bag from the tub, reaches inside and pulls out a sealed bag of Hershey's miniature chocolates. He wipes it with a wet towel, then throws it to Michelle with a smile.

HOWARD
Dessert.

INT. MAIN ROOM

Howard and Michelle sit at the table as Nate works at the kitchenette behind them.

Michelle fills two glasses to the brim with wine. Howard watches, a look of disappointment on his face.

NATE
(with flair)
The house special for the lady.

Nate sets a plate down in front of Michelle. It's the same canned food but he's arranged things to look almost appetizing.

Michelle smiles.

Howard rolls his eyes, turns a suspicious eye to Nate.

HOWARD
Where did you get that hazmat suit?

Howard keeps his eyes on Nate who pauses before he answers --

NATE
I'm a volunteer firefighter. When the attack happened, I went straight to the firehouse. We all suited up waiting for orders. But nothing came. Land lines, cell phones, radios -- everything was dead. Didn't take long before most of the guys went home to check on their families. When none of them came back, I figured I'd take my chances and come here.

HOWARD
I didn't know you were volunteering at the fire department.

NATE
Just started a few months back.
(pointed)
If you came into town more often, you'd know that.

HOWARD
Charlie still running the show down there?

NATE
Charlie? Yeah. He sure is.

Howard locks eyes with Nate.

HOWARD
My old pal John Bennett volunteers
too. You must know John.

A moment of tension -- Nate's eyes say *be careful*.

NATE
Nope. Must not have the same shift.

Howard and Nate stare each other down.

Nate turns to Michelle, takes a sip of his wine. Swishes it
in his mouth.

NATE (CONT'D)
Oh that's nice. A little oaky with
hints of raspberry. Mmmm. Smooth
finish.

Howard looks up from his plate.

HOWARD
Don't know what you're talking
about, do you?

Nate holds his glass out to Howard.

NATE
Wanna show me how it's done?

Howard ignores the question -- he just stares at Nate.

NATE (CONT'D)
(turns to Michelle)
What do you taste, Michelle?

Michelle takes a sip. Swishes it the same way Nate did.

MICHELLE
I do taste the raspberry.

NATE
(smiles at Howard)
How can you argue with that?

Howard struggles to cover up his irritation.

INT. MAIN ROOM - LATER

Empty dinner plates and crumpled candy wrappers. Nate washes down the last of the wine.

Howard pushes his dish and silverware toward Nate.

HOWARD

I bought dinner. How about you do the washing up.

Nate pushes the plate back toward Howard.

NATE

I'm still thirsty. Michelle, why don't you grab another bottle.
(still looking at Howard)
It's not like we have to drive anywhere.

Michelle gets up -- drunkenly wobbles to the wine rack.

HOWARD

(quietly to Nate)
Remember, this is my cellar and that's my wine. You're just a guest.

NATE

(leans in close)
Then start treating me like a guest.

Howard stands up, walks into his room and closes the door.

Michelle limps back over with a new bottle of wine.

MICHELLE

What was that all about?

NATE

Howard used to have a drinking problem.

MICHELLE

I know. He told me.

NATE

He also tell you about his wife?

Michelle shakes her head.

NATE (CONT'D)

I guess he wouldn't. About three years ago she was killed. He wasn't charged, but most folks around here figured it fairly suspicious.

Michelle drops into her seat.

MICHELLE

Oh my god. That's awful. Then who has his daughter?

NATE

What daughter?

MICHELLE

He told me that he has a daughter in Washington, D.C.

NATE

Howard never had any kids.

Michelle sets the wine bottle on the table, suddenly her thoughts a jumble.

MICHELLE

Why would he lie about that?

Nate takes the bottle, starts opening it.

NATE

(ominous)

I don't know. Maybe to gain your trust. But we ought to be watching out for each other. Pressure seems to be getting to him down here.

Nate fills Michelle's empty glass with more wine.

INT. MAIN ROOM - LATER

Nate sits on the couch, very close to Michelle. She holds a nearly empty glass of wine in her lap. Her head bobs. Nate takes the glass off her lap and sets it on the floor.

He turns and leans in for a kiss.

MICHELLE

Nooo... mmmmmmm.

Michelle pushes him away clumsily.

Howard opens his door, comes into the room.

Nate breaks off from his attempted make-out session.

Howard grabs some crackers out of the cupboard. He sits at the table and slowly goes about opening them, staring daggers at Nate the entire time.

Nate stares right back as Michelle falls sideways on the couch and passes out. Nate looks at her, then back at Howard.

Nate gets up off the couch.

NATE

Guess I'll take the bed tonight.

Nate goes into the small bedroom and slams the door.

Howard eats his crackers while staring at Michelle.

INT. MAIN ROOM

Howard SAWS and HAMMERS on a piece of wood.

The bedroom door opens. Nate comes out holding his head, looking like complete shit.

Howard whacks at a nail, notices Nate wincing with each strike.

NATE

What the hell time is it?

Howard looks around the windowless cellar.

HOWARD

Does it matter?

NATE

Where's Michelle?

HOWARD

She's in the bathroom. Throwing up.
You must be proud of yourself.

Nate settles into a chair as Howard goes back to his hammering -- a big smile on his face each time Nate winces.

Michelle stumbles in, holding her head with both hands. She collapses to the couch. Her face is the same color as the cinder block walls.

MICHELLE

I think that stuff is seeping in here. Feels like my skin is peeling off.

HOWARD

So you finally believe me.

Howard pounds in another nail.

NATE

Can you stop hammering for a minute!

Howard stops hammering. He looks over to Nate.

HOWARD

Almost done.

NATE

With what?

HOWARD

The frame on one of the solar panels was broken. This should hold it for a while at least.

NATE

When're you gonna take it out?

HOWARD

I'm not. You are.

NATE

Why me?

HOWARD

Because it's time you start earning your keep.

INT. MAIN ROOM - LATER

Nate climbs the stairs in the hazmat suit, holding the wooden corner. Howard waits until he hears the door close then he walks up the --

STAIRWELL

And locks the door behind Nate.

INT. MAIN ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Howard sits down next to Michelle on the couch.

HOWARD
Nate's a liar.

MICHELLE
What are you talking about?

HOWARD
The hazmat suit. It had someone else's name in it.

MICHELLE
So he grabbed the wrong suit in the panic.

HOWARD
He also said Charlie Winston was still fire chief. But Charlie retired years ago. I was at the party.

MICHELLE
What's your point?

HOWARD
If he doesn't work at the fire department, how'd he get the suit? And what happened to the guy who's name is on it?

MICHELLE
Why don't you just ask him?

HOWARD
Look, Nate's been in and out of trouble for as long as I've known him. Spent some time in prison -- mostly small stuff. But he's got a violent streak in him. You should be careful.

Just then -- pounding from the top of the stairwell.

Howard doesn't move.

MICHELLE
Let him in.

HOWARD
Did you hear what I just told you?
He can't be trusted.

MICHELLE
Let. Him. In.

Howard gets up, heads for the stairwell.

INT. MAIN ROOM

Howard and Nate finish their meal. Michelle stands at the sink, watching water drip from the open faucet into her empty glass.

MICHELLE
It's getting worse.

HOWARD
We're using too much water.

Nate takes his dish over to Michelle. Tosses it in the sink.

NATE
Leave 'em. Howard'll figure it out.

He playfully slaps her ass. She jumps, swats at him --

MICHELLE
(flirting)
Can you please not do that?

NATE
It's really hard not to.

Nate winks. Michelle smiles.

MICHELLE
God...

Howard's stomach turns as he watches them. He pushes back his chair. It SCRAPES loudly, grabbing Nate and Michelle's attention.

HOWARD
Fuck it.

He crosses to the wine rack, selects a bottle. He turns back and hands it to Michelle.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Go on, open it.

Michelle goes through the process.

Howard pulls out TWO wine glasses, sets them on the table.

Michelle pulls the cork out and puts the bottle down. Howard pours two small portions into the glasses.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

1986 Montrachet. Best bottle in the cellar. You don't want to know what it's worth. But the idea of it sitting down here, untouched, as the world ends -- or worse yet, having you two heathens drink it on your own, without half a clue what's on your lips -- well, that thought is more than I can bear.

Howard sets one glass in front of Michelle, picks up the other himself. He swirls the wine, puts his nose to the glass and inhales deeply. He smiles.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Cheers.

Michelle doesn't touch her glass. Howard clinks it anyway then takes a mouthful of the wine.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

That's the stuff!

Howard picks the bottle up, fills his glass to the rim. And chugs the entire glass as Nate and Michelle watch in silence.

NATE

Don't you want to savor it?

Howard ignores him.

HOWARD

(to Michelle)

Try it.

She doesn't move.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

What's wrong with you? That's a few hundred dollars worth of wine in your glass. It's oaky. With a hint of raspberries.

Michelle watches as Howard pours himself another full glass.

MICHELLE
Maybe you should slow down.

Howard pounds the wine.

HOWARD
(glares at Michelle)
What's the problem, princess? You
couldn't get enough last night.

NATE
Back off.

HOWARD
I wasn't talking to you.
(back to Michelle)
Were you visiting your boyfriend in
Milwaukee?

Michelle doesn't answer.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Pretty girl like you. You've
probably had plenty of boyfriends.
Those poor saps. They didn't have a
clue what they were getting into.

NATE
(growling)
I said, leave her alone.

Howard's gaze shifts to Nate. He lifts his glass, but doesn't
drink.

HOWARD
You know what this is? This thing
I've done for both of you? It's
called charity. And when someone
provides you with charity, the
polite thing to do is thank them.

NATE
You wouldn't have this place if it
weren't for me.

HOWARD
I could've hired any old vagrant to
do a half-assed job.
(a beat)
Hindsight being what it is, I wish
I had.

Nate picks up the wine bottle but keeps his eyes on Howard.

NATE
You spent all your money on this
cellar. And for what?

Nate takes a big swig straight from the bottle. He swishes it in his mouth, leans over, and spits it on the floor.

NATE (CONT'D)
To protect a bunch of shitty wine.

Howard's expression turns dark and unhinged...

He jumps up -- flings his wine glass at Nate. It CRASHES into the table. Glass and wine splatter into Nate's face.

Howard charges --

HOWARD
You fucking ingrate!

Nate wipes the wine from his eyes as Howard SLAMS into him. They collide into the wall. Nate takes the brunt of the hit in his back -- the oxygen rushes out of his lungs.

MICHELLE
Stop it!

Howard steps back, throws a haymaker.

Nate ducks the punch and swings a fist into Howard's gut.

Howard GROANS in drunken pain. And just like that, the fight has turned. Howard has lost the initiative. Older, drunker and weaker -- he's in trouble.

Nate comes up with a crushing upper cut --

Howard stumbles backwards -- stunned. Nate stalks forward, jabs Howard, follows with a right hook --

SMACK! Full impact. Howard's head snaps back, his body careens into the wine rack and --

Dozens of bottles SHATTER. Wine EXPLODES in all directions. Glass rips through Howard's skin as he tumbles to the ground.

Nate kicks Howard in the ribs. Hard.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
That's enough!

Michelle grabs Nate around the stomach, pulls him away.

Howard groggily looks up from the ground, encircled by broken glass and Cabernet.

NATE

You fuckin' come at me again, and I
won't stop. Hear me?

Nate stomps into Michelle's bedroom leaving Howard and Michelle to stare at each other.

INT. BATHROOM

Howard looks at himself in the mirror, picks shards of glass from his back.

INT. MAIN ROOM

Michelle sweeps up the mess. She looks shaken. Whatever the hell is going on, it's getting worse and she's starting to lose her composure.

INT. HOWARD'S ROOM

Howard is now bandaged up. He listens to Michelle SWEEPING GLASS. Then climbs into his bed, each cut and bruise screaming at him.

INT. MAIN ROOM

Michelle lies down on the couch with a blanket. Her spike-tipped crutch lies on the floor in front of her.

INT. MAIN ROOM - MORNING

A GLASS held under the faucet, but no water comes out.

Michelle stands at the sink, a concerned look on her face as she stares at her empty glass.

Howard walks out of his room. His REVOLVER is holstered on his hip.

Michelle eyes the gun.

MICHELLE

It's not working at all.

Howard comes over to have a look as Nate enters from Michelle's room.

NATE
(conciliatory)
Listen, Howard, I gotta say...

But his words fade away as he sees the gun.

NATE (CONT'D)
What the hell is that for?

HOWARD
This cellar is mine. I'm in charge
down here. You either get in line
or you get the hell out.

Nate releases a blustery chuckle.

Howard reaches down, touches the butt of the gun.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
You want to try me?

NATE
Okay, Howard. Whatever you say.

Howard nods then turns his attention to the faucet.

HOWARD
(under his breath)
Too damn many of us down here.

Michelle eyes both men, an uneasy look on her face.

INT. MAIN ROOM - LATER

Howard removes a throw rug from the floor. Underneath, there's a trap door. He pulls it open, revealing a narrow crawl space. Howard nods to Nate, hands him a flashlight --

HOWARD
You first.

Nate grimaces, but climbs down into the crawl space. Howard turns to Michelle.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
I want you up by the door. If you
see any water running through the
yard, you come let me know.

Michelle nods as Howard drops down into the crawl space. She climbs over the couch and into the --

STAIRWELL

At the top of the stairs, Michelle looks out the window --

MICHELLE'S POV

The yard. The dead pigs. The barn. And the front end of the pickup. This time it's not obscured by reflecting sunlight.

CLOSE ON

MICHELLE -- staring at the yellow paint and large dent on the old truck.

Suddenly her blood runs cold as her memory kicks in --

INT./EXT. MICHELLE'S CAR - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

Michelle is blinded by the headlight glare in her rearview.

She nearly veers off the road, wrenches the steering wheel at the last possible moment.

The truck behind her HONKS again and pulls alongside her.

Michelle looks over at the truck -- DENTED, YELLOW, OLD.

Michelle's eyes flit back to the road, but there's a turn ahead and it's too close.

The truck swerves -- is it trying to run her off the road, or is it just trying to pass her?

Michelle overcompensates as she turns away from the truck, her car weaves toward the edge of the road --

She slams on the breaks, twists the wheel --

The car SQUEALS across the pavement --

Michelle knows she won't make it. Her eyes open wide in pure terror...

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

Michelle stares at the old truck -- the same one as in the flashback. She hyperventilates, struggles to regain control of her breathing.

She tries the door handle. Locked. A long beat of shallow breaths and then she turns and heads down the stairs.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Howard and Nate climb out of the crawl space. Nate has a small pump in his hands.

Michelle stands by the men -- a troubled look on her face.

HOWARD

You alright?

MICHELLE

Yeah. Fine.

(changing the subject)

What's with the engine?

HOWARD

It's a pump. And it's busted.

NATE

I can fix it.

HOWARD

Let's hope you're right.

INT. MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Nate works on the pump. Michelle puts together another meal.

Howard walks in from his room. He doesn't say a word, just pulls a bottle of wine off the wall and hands it to Michelle.

She opens it. Nate fidgets with the pump, doesn't look up.

Howard pulls out a single wine glass, sets it on the table.

Michelle pulls out the cork. It drops to the floor.

As Howard reaches down for it, Michelle slips liquid Ketamine into his glass.

Howard comes up with the cork, sets it on the table.

Michelle pours him a full glass of wine and forces a smile.

Howard nods, takes a sip.

HOWARD

A little off. Might be corked.

He spins the wine, sniffs it.

Michelle watches nervously.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

But I guess we can't let it go to waste. Especially, now that our reserves have been... depleted.

Howard takes a big drink.

INT. MAIN ROOM - LATER

Howard is slumped on the couch, unconscious.

Nate and Michelle stand over him.

MICHELLE

It was his truck. He ran me off the road that night.

(shivers)

He planned to bring me here. Guess he figured he'd at least have a plaything for the end of the world.

NATE

He's never been the most stable guy. And now that he's drinking again...

Nate pulls the gun from Howard's holster.

NATE (CONT'D)

Best that we hold onto this for safe keeping.

MICHELLE

He's gonna freak when he wakes up.

NATE

Let him. Not much he can do if I'm holding the gun.

MICHELLE

What about me?

NATE
I'll protect you...
(nods at the stairs)
Or we could just take care of it
for good.

MICHELLE
You want to throw him out?

He shrugs. Michelle shifts warily.

NATE
He's been talking about doing the
same to us.

Michelle works this over in her mind, slowly shakes her head.

MICHELLE
I can't do it.

NATE
Fine. Without the gun, he can't
hurt us.

Nate looks deeply into her eyes.

Michelle produces a cautious smile. Nate leans in for a kiss.
And it's decision time.

Michelle balks, turns away.

NATE (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

MICHELLE
You'll take care of me, right?

NATE
We'll take care of each other.

Michelle reads between the lines. She leans in, kisses Nate.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Nate and Michelle naked on the bed, having the kind of wild,
passionate sex that only happens with the world coming to an
end.

Michelle MOANS in ecstasy.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Howard on the couch. His eyes flicker open. He rubs his face.

Michelle's MOANS echo from the other room.

Howard's brain slowly returns to consciousness as Michelle works her way toward an orgasm.

Howard reaches down to his waist. His gun is missing.

The look on Howard's face is chilling as he begins to piece together what's happened.

With one final SQUEAL of ecstasy, Michelle's noise dies down. And then Howard hears someone coming his way. He closes his eyes, feigns like he's still passed out.

Michelle enters and heads for the bathroom -- wearing only her PANTIES.

Howard's eyes open to slits. He covertly watches her pass.

INT. HOWARD'S ROOM - LATER

Howard sits on his mattress, propped up on his pillow against the back wall. He drinks from an open wine bottle.

Nate comes into the bedroom, the revolver tucked into his waistband in clear view.

HOWARD
Give me back my gun.

Nate passes by him and walks into the bathroom.

NATE (O.S.)
Not gonna happen.

Howard takes another slug of wine as he's forced to listen to Nate PEE in the toilet.

Nate steps out of the bathroom, heads for the door.

HOWARD
Guess you never plan on sleeping again.

Nate stops, walks over to Howard, kicking an empty wine bottle out of the way.

NATE
Good point. Give me your keys.

HOWARD
Fuck you.

Howard takes another drink.

Nate pulls the gun, points it at Howard's head.

Nate's demeanor is darker and colder than we've seen it.

NATE
Give me the fuckin' keys or you're
going to be lying out there next to
your dead pigs.

Michelle appears in the doorway of Howard's room, surprised
by Nate's tone.

HOWARD
(to Michelle)
This is who you decided to throw
your lot in with? After all I've
done for you.

Michelle marches over. Stands at Nate's side.

MICHELLE
All you've done for me? You mean
like running me off the road and
nearly killing me.

Howard's face shifts through emotions -- lands on anger.

HOWARD
(pointing at Nate)
This asshole tell you that?

MICHELLE
I saw your truck. It was you.

HOWARD
You were unconscious, you don't
remember shit. I saved you.

MICHELLE
You have an answer for everything.
But why are there always so many
questions?

Nate pulls back the hammer on the revolver.

NATE

I'm only going to say it once more.
Give me the keys.

His finger tenses on the trigger. He's really going to shoot Howard.

Howard reaches into his pocket, pulls out his key ring, hands it over.

Nate smiles -- really enjoying this now.

NATE (CONT'D)

The pump is fixed. When you sober up, take it down to the well.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM

Nate and Michelle stand at the door. Nate turns the key in the lock.

NATE

This door requires a key on either side. Whenever we're in here, this stays locked. If you get up to use the bathroom, you wake me first. If this door's unlocked, I need to know about it.

Michelle lets out a small laugh.

MICHELLE

First I'm locked in a cellar. Now I'm locked in a room in that cellar. Just keeps getting better.

Nate turns on her, a cold look in his eyes --

NATE

You take this seriously or you could end up dead.

Michelle is put off by his tone. She wipes away her smile and nods.

INT. MAIN ROOM

The trap door to the crawl space is open. Howard pokes his head out, looks at Nate, who is near the sink.

HOWARD
Should be working.

Nate turns the faucet. Water POURS in a thick stream.

Howard pulls himself up through the trap door and closes it, drags the throw rug back over it.

NATE
You were down there so long, I
thought you might have fallen in.

Nate smiles cheerfully. Howard sneers.

HOWARD
You're one hell of a bastard,
coming in here, taking over.

NATE
Shit. You didn't give me any
choice. But you were right about
one thing. This place. It's not big
enough for three people.

HOWARD
You're going to kick me out?

NATE
Well, I'm not going anywhere. And
neither is Michelle. Guess that
only leaves you. She needs a little
convincing, but she'll come around.

Nate looks over as Michelle enters from the bedroom.

NATE (CONT'D)
Hey, baby.

MICHELLE
Morning...
(a beat)
If it is morning. God I hate having
no idea what time it is.

Nate opens the cupboard. Grabs a can of beans.

NATE
Being that all our meals are
basically the same, guess it really
doesn't matter much.

Michelle offers a weak smile.

Howard processes Nate's words. His face is ashen.

INT. MAIN ROOM - LATER

Nate, Michelle and Howard sit around the table finishing their meal.

Howard's halfway through another bottle of wine. Nate pushes his empty plate in front of Howard.

NATE
Clean that up, would ya.

Nate gets up from the table, the revolver visible in his waistband.

NATE (CONT'D)
This food is killing me.

He pats his belly as he walks toward Howard's room.

NATE (CONT'D)
(with a smile)
Just remember, I tried to get you
to spend the extra money for a vent
above the toilet.

HOWARD
Least you could do is close the
door.

Nate swings Howard's bedroom door closed behind him.

Howard leans in close to Michelle. He speaks in a hushed whisper.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
You were right.

MICHELLE
About what?

HOWARD
This is all a put on. There was no
attack. Nate and I planned this
from the start. He talked me into
it. Said we could get a girl down
here and nobody would ever know.

Michelle is caught completely off guard.

MICHELLE

Why are you telling me this?

HOWARD

Isn't it obvious? I'm jealous. You weren't supposed to be only for him.

Michelle's stomach turns.

MICHELLE

You're lying.

HOWARD

About there being an attack or about there not being an attack?

(a wry smile)

You fell for it. Now you're his little toy and I'm locked down here to suffer until he tires of you... And god only knows what's gonna happen then. He can't just let you walk out, can he?

MICHELLE

Why would I believe you?

HOWARD

Because you know it's true. And you'll never be safe as long as he has that gun.

MICHELLE

Giving you the gun isn't gonna make me feel any better.

HOWARD

Tell you what, just get me the keys. I'll find a phone and call the police... What do you have to lose? Either you're rid of me for good, or else I'll bring back help.

Michelle looks doubtful.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I can get you out of here, back to your family, to your life. But only if you help me.

The toilet FLUSHES.

Howard peers at Michelle. She doesn't say a word.

INT. HOWARD'S ROOM

Howard sleeps on the mattress.

Michelle comes in and nudges him awake.

Howard's eyes open. Michelle's kneeling next to him. The key ring JANGLES softly in her hand.

Howard shakes off the cobwebs and grabs the keys from her.

INT. MAIN ROOM

The door to the small bedroom is closed. Michelle sits on the couch, anxiously picking at her fingernails.

Howard comes out dressed in a hazmat suit. They whisper --

MICHELLE

If it's all the lie, why are you
wearing the suit?

HOWARD

Nate still has a gun. If he's awake
when I come back, we'll tell him I
had to check on the solar panels.

MICHELLE

Are you coming back?

Just then, the bedroom door whips open.

Nate comes out, gun drawn.

NATE

Where the hell you think you're
going?

HOWARD

The electricity's shorting out. I
need to check the panels.

Nate sees the key ring in Howard's hand. He turns to Michelle, eyes ablaze with rage.

MICHELLE

He said it was an emergency.

NATE

And you didn't wake me?

MICHELLE

I was scared. I panicked.

Nate flicks on the overhead light. It's working fine.

NATE

(to Howard)

You're free to go. But the suit
stays here.

Howard turns and heads back toward his bedroom.

NATE (CONT'D)

The keys. Leave them on the table.

Howard complies.

Nate steps toward Michelle, a menacing look on his face.

NATE (CONT'D)

I thought we were getting
somewhere, you and me...

He reaches up and gently rubs her chin with his hand that still holds the revolver. A shiver runs through Michelle when the cold metal touches her face.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM

Nate sleeps on the mattress. Michelle sits next to him, propped against her pillow, staring at the blank wall.

She moves to get out of bed but stops. Shakes Nate. His hand whips from under the pillow, gun pointed at Michelle.

She flinches. Then gently pushes his gun arm away from her.

MICHELLE

I gotta use the bathroom.

Nate sits up. He unties the key ring from his waistband, hands it to Michelle.

INT. HOWARD'S ROOM

Howard snores loudly on his mattress. Two empty wine bottles rest on the cement floor next to his bed.

Michelle tiptoes by him into the --

BATHROOM

She pulls the curtain closed.

Howard's snoring stops.

Michelle finishes peeing. She pulls up her underwear, parts the shower curtains to leave --

Howard stands there, leering at her with drunken eyes.

MICHELLE

It's all yours.

She moves to slide by him. But he steps in front of her.

HOWARD

You're too good for me. But you'll lie down with that cretin.

MICHELLE

Get out of the way.

HOWARD

You've given me nothing but trouble since you got here. I should've left you in that ditch...

Michelle steps around him into --

HOWARD'S BEDROOM

Howard matches her steps, blocks her path to the door.

MICHELLE

Get away from me!

HOWARD

...would've made my life so much easier.

Howard steps toward her.

Michelle reaches down, grabs a wine bottle and swings it.

Howard jumps back, avoids the impact.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You bitch.

He grabs Michelle around the neck, a crazed look in his eyes.

And then --

WHAM! The revolver smashes Howard in the back of the head.

Howard collapses forward into Michelle, knocking both of them onto the mattress, leaving Michelle underneath his limp body.

Nate stands over them both, looking down at Michelle.

NATE

You ready to deal with this problem
for good?

Michelle looks up at Nate. He waits for a response.

She stares at him a long beat... and shakes her head no.

Nate turns and leaves the room as Michelle frantically struggles to get out from under Howard's leaden weight.

Michelle finally manages to push Howard off of her. She scurries for the door.

INT. HOWARD'S ROOM - LATER

Howard comes to -- reaches to the back of his head and finds it crusted with blood.

He wobbles to his feet, stumbles into the --

MAIN ROOM

Michelle stands at the sink pouring out full wine bottles. Judging by the dozen or so empty bottles on the counter, she's been at it awhile.

HOWARD

What are you doing?

Michelle ignores him. Howard hurries over and grabs a bottle out of Michelle's hand.

MICHELLE

Don't touch me!

Nate saunters into the room. He walks right up and holds the revolver against Howard's skull.

NATE

I've just about had enough of you.

HOWARD
That's my wine.

NATE
Can't drink it if you're dead.

Howard lets go of the bottle and backs away.

Nate locks eyes on Howard, a chilling look on his face --

NATE (CONT'D)
You enjoy attacking women, don't
you?

HOWARD
I didn't attack her. I would never
do that. I...

Howard reaches a hand out to Michelle -- she backs away from
him.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Look, I got emotional. I'm sorry.
But that's not me.

NATE
This whole set up has just about
run its course... Michelle, go in
the other room.

Tears form in Michelle's eyes.

HOWARD
Wait, no. Michelle. Don't go!

She turns away from Howard, walks into the bedroom and closes
the door.

Howard backs away from Nate. Nate grabs him by the scruff of
the neck with one hand, holds the gun to his temple with the
other.

NATE
Up the stairs.

HOWARD
Nate, please don't.

NATE
Get up the FUCKIN' STAIRS!

Nate shoves him forward. Howard stumbles, falls at the bottom
of the stairs. Tears form in his eyes.

Nate kicks Howard in the ass.

NATE (CONT'D)
Move!

HOWARD
Please, please no.

NATE
It's not like I didn't give you
enough chances.

Howard stumbles to his feet. Nate shoves the gun barrel in his back, pushes him into the --

STAIRWELL

HOWARD
(sobbing hysterically)
Don't, Nate. Please. What do I have
to do? I'll do anything!

Nate pulls out the keys.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michelle stands with her ear to the door, listening...

HOWARD (O.S.)
You can't do this! It's murder...

Tears form in her eyes.

HOWARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
We can work this out. I'll stay out
of your way. You won't even know
I'm here.

Michelle reaches for the door handle... hesitates.

HOWARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Please, Nate! Please...!

Michelle pulls open the door. Rushes to the --

STAIRWELL

MICHELLE
No! Stop!

Nate keeps his eyes on Howard, who's kneeling on the stairs.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Don't do it, Nate.

Nate pauses, considering...

Howard looks up to him with pleading eyes.

Nate pushes Howard back down the stairs.

HOWARD
Thank you.

NATE
Shut up.

Howard stumbles into the --

MAIN ROOM

Nate follows on his heels.

NATE
There are gonna be some changes.
You stay in your room. Always. You
wanna come out, you ask for my
permission and you do it when she's
not out here. You don't go anywhere
near her, no matter what. Got me?

HOWARD
Okay. However you --

NATE
And stop talking. I've heard enough
out of you for a lifetime. So do us
all a favor. And shut the fuck up.

Nate sneers at Howard. Howard returns an empty look --
something has snapped inside of both of them.

INT. HOWARD'S ROOM - LATER

Howard sits at the edge of his bed. He doesn't move an inch.
There's a feral look in his eyes.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM

Michelle awakens -- next to Nate -- from a bad dream. Cold sweat runs down her face. She shivers.

NATE
(half asleep)
You okay?

MICHELLE
Yeah.

She burrows into his arms. He pushes her away, pulls off the covers.

NATE
I gotta piss.

Nate climbs out of bed and crosses to the door. He unlocks it, walks out, closing it behind him.

Michelle hears the sound of Nate locking the door from the outside. She curls into her pillow, eyes flutter closed.

INT. MAIN ROOM - MORNING

Howard sits at the table, fiddling with the radio.

Michelle walks in rubbing sleep from her eyes, she scans the room, then walks into Howard's room.

A moment later she comes back in -- wide awake.

MICHELLE
Where's Nate?

Howard looks up, mulls over his answer.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Where is he?

There's a long beat before Howard responds --

HOWARD
Said he heard something outside.
Decided to go have a look.

MICHELLE
How long has he been gone?

HOWARD
A couple of hours.

She stares warily at Howard.

MICHELLE
Think he'll be back soon?

HOWARD
Depends on what he finds, I
suppose.

Michelle moves to the cupboard.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
I knew this was gonna happen.

MICHELLE
What?

Howard motions around the cellar.

HOWARD
The attack. Way things have been
going in the world -- growing
population, dwindling resources.
Too many rats in the cage. And a
bunch of politicians who only care
about getting a sound bite in the
next news cycle -- it wasn't hard
to see we were coming to a
crossroads. But that's the problem
with people -- they're so damn
entitled, so insistent on believing
in whatever it is that they want to
be true, facts be damned. Try
telling them something they don't
want to hear. Might as well talk to
the wall.

Michelle nods, but doesn't respond.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
But sometimes people need to hear
the truth.

MICHELLE
Like what?

HOWARD
At the bottom of everything, people
are selfish and brutal. We do
what's best for ourselves. We want
to pretend like it's logic or
morality or religion. But it's not.
(MORE)

HOWARD (CONT'D)
It's darker than that. And if
you're in denial...

Howard locks eyes on Michelle --

HOWARD (CONT'D)
...if you're in denial, Michelle,
then you're in danger. I know it's
hard to face facts, to admit it's
all a frenzy of selfish and
desperate chaos. But if you don't
face those facts, you're putting
yourself in a far worse, far
riskier position.

Michelle breaks eye contact, pulls out some food -- masking
her growing sense of unease.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Michelle washes her face at the sink. She reaches for a towel
and notices splattered drops of pink on it. She looks around.
More drops of pink liquid remain in the bottom of the tub.
Could be watered down BLOOD.

She stands there frozen, staring.

INT. MAIN ROOM

Howard is on the couch now, reading. He looks up as Michelle
enters.

MICHELLE
What really happened?

HOWARD
What do you mean?

MICHELLE
Nate wouldn't leave me down here
with you. Not after what you did.

HOWARD
I told you, it'll never happen
again. You made sure of that.

Howard motions to the empty wine rack.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Guess I should thank you.

MICHELLE
(stoic)
Howard?

HOWARD
Yes.

MICHELLE
I can't do it anymore.

HOWARD
Can't do what?

MICHELLE
Whatever you're going to do to me,
just get it over with.

HOWARD
You got it wrong. Nate was trying
to... He'll be back soon. You'll
see.

Silent tears begin to roll down Michelle's face.

MICHELLE
You told me the whole story was a
lie. Then you begged for your life
when Nate was going to make you
leave. I can't live with the
uncertainty anymore. Or is that
part of the game?

HOWARD
I'm sorry. I lied to you earlier. I
needed the keys. I needed to get
out. Nate was going to kill me.

MICHELLE
So what, you killed him first?

HOWARD
Michelle, I'm not going to do
anything to you. I'd never hurt
you. You're like my own daughter.

MICHELLE
And you're like my father. He was a
lying son of a bitch.

Michelle's lips quiver, she crumples against the wall.

HOWARD
Stop crying. I'm trying to help
you. That's all I've ever done...

Michelle heaves. Howard aches for her, but knows better than to approach.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
It's going to be alright.

And then -- a RUMBLE echoes from outside. GRAVEL CRUNCHES under something heavy, something big.

And it's coming closer.

Howard flips off the lights, leaving only a weak beam of sunlight from the tiny window at the top of the stairwell.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Don't make a noise.

The vehicle stops above them. The engine cuts out --

An unnerving silence.

MICHELLE
(whispering)
What if it's help?

HOWARD
(whispering)
What if it's not?

Howard moves toward Michelle who stands in near darkness looking up the stairwell... waiting.

MICHELLE
(barely audible)
Maybe it's Nate.

Howard nods as he slowly, methodically moves closer.

Michelle gazes at the stairwell, unsure of whether to scream for help or heave silently.

HOWARD
(whispering)
If it's Nate, he'll knock.

An eternity passes.

The RUMBLE of the engine restarting breaks the silence.

Michelle suddenly charges for the stairwell --

MICHELLE
Help! Hel --

Howard tackles her, covers her mouth.

The engine cuts out again.

Michelle bites Howard, pulls free for a moment. But he pulls her back and they struggle across the floor.

And now there's POUNDING on the stairwell door.

LOUDER and LOUDER.

Michelle squirms. Howard holds her down. He drags her toward a kitchen drawer and reaches into it. She bites him again, but as she does so, he plunges a syringe into her arm.

BANG, BANG, BANG from the stairwell.

Michelle stops struggling.

BANG, BANG, BANG!

Her eyes close.

The pounding stops.

As Michelle fades into unconsciousness, she hears --

The engine FIRING UP. The vehicle pulling away.

Howard watches Michelle, a sad look on his face.

INT./EXT. MICHELLE'S CAR - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

Michelle's car SQUEALS across the road...

Her eyes wide in pure terror...

And the car careens over the ledge, the back tires catching and flipping it. It rolls to the bottom of the ditch -- all BROKEN GLASS and BENDING METAL.

Then a sudden SILENCE as it comes to a rest.

And the darkness is pierced by a set of headlights pulling to a stop on the road above.

Someone climbs out of the vehicle and steps into the beams of light. Then begins climbing down the side of the embankment.

INT. MICHELLE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

She's upside down, belted into her seat, the door crushed to her side, blood gushing from her head, eyes slit open in semi-consciousness.

A sudden SHRIEK from the door but it refuses to be opened.

Another, louder SHRIEK. And again. And again. The door is slowly pried open.

And finally -- the door gives, swings open, revealing --

HOWARD, standing above Michelle, looking down at her. The expression on his face is... hard to read.

HOWARD

Don't worry. Everything's going to be alright.

As Howard reaches down for Michelle, she slips into unconsciousness...

INT. SMALL BEDROOM

Michelle wakes up.

Alone on the mattress where it all started.

She gets to her feet, crosses the room and pulls on the door. It's locked. She leans in, examines the deadbolt lock above the door handle.

There are two flathead screws facing her. She touches them with her fingers... an idea forming.

Michelle bangs on the door. She waits.

MICHELLE

Come on! I gotta use the bathroom.

Footsteps approach. The lock clicks. The door opens.

HOWARD

Morning.

Michelle walks by him without saying another word.

INT. MAIN ROOM - MORNING

Howard sits at the table. He doesn't notice as Michelle slips a butter knife into her pocket.

Michelle opens the cupboard, reaches to the very back and pulls out five bottles of wine.

Howard sees them lined up on the counter.

HOWARD

Where'd those come from?

MICHELLE

Nate had me hide some bottles. Said we should save them for special occasions.

HOWARD

And what's so special about today?

MICHELLE

It's my birthday.

Michelle starts opening the wine.

Howard steps over, takes the bottle from her.

HOWARD

Still, kind of early for that, wouldn't you say?

Howard looks down at the bottle in his hand, clearly tempted.

MICHELLE

You got some big plans that I don't know about?

She puts her hand back on the bottle. Her fingers slightly overlap Howard's fingers. He lets go of the bottle.

Michelle finishes opening it. She pours herself some.

Howard puts his hand over his empty glass.

HOWARD

I'm good.

MICHELLE

Gonna make me drink alone?

Howard keeps his hand over the glass, fighting temptation.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Come on. One drink. That's it.

HOWARD
Okay. One drink. And only because
it's your birthday.

Howard moves his hand away. Michelle pours him a full glass.

INT. MAIN ROOM - LATER

The second bottle has been opened. Michelle and Howard sit at the table.

MICHELLE
I don't really like this one.

HOWARD
Open another.

Michelle crosses, bringing her glass with her. She grabs another bottle off the counter and opens it.

While Howard isn't looking, she pours her full glass down the drain.

Michelle stumbles, nearly falls on her way back to the table.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Careful. Maybe you've had too much.

MICHELLE
Or maybe I haven't had enough.

She pours herself a full glass and tops off Howard.

HOWARD
Normally, you don't mix Chardonnay
and Shiraz. But hell...

He tastes a bit.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Makes a half decent rose.

Michelle offers a smile, clinks glasses with Howard.

INT. MAIN ROOM - LATER

Michelle is on the couch, eyes barely open. There's a fourth bottle on the table in front of Howard.

MICHELLE
(slurring)
I miss beer. Wine's too strong.

HOWARD
Well if you didn't guzzle it down
so quickly...

MICHELLE
And I miss Pepsi and Starbucks and
lasagna and chocolate chip cookie
dough...

HOWARD
We have some freeze dried lasagna.
Somewhere...

MICHELLE
Uh huh.

She's fading. Her eyes close and she slumps on the couch.

HOWARD
Alright, missy. I think it's time
for a nap.

Howard stands, a bit wobbly himself. He walks over to
Michelle and pulls her to her feet. She MOANS softly.

Howard takes Michelle to her room, keeping her on a more or
less straight line.

INT. MICHELLE'S ROOM

Howard sets Michelle down on her bed. She rolls over and
curls into a ball.

HOWARD
There you go. Nothing a bit of
sleep won't sort out.

He gently pulls a blanket over her as she sinks into the bed.

Howard stands up and watches her for a moment -- a soft,
wistful look on his face --

Then he reaches into her purse which lies next to the bed. He
digs around, pulls out her wallet.

Michelle watches him anxiously through half-closed eyes.

Howard pulls out her driver's license, stares at it a beat, then tosses on the mattress next to her.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
(ice cold)
Hope you hid some more wine. Looks
like we'll be doing this again in
six months. For your real birthday.

Michelle's eyes pop wide open.

Howard turns and walks out.

INT. MAIN ROOM

Howard closes the door to Michelle's room and locks it with his key.

INT. MICHELLE'S ROOM

Michelle lies on the mattress, completely still, eyes wide open -- sober and aware.

She slips out of bed -- in complete control of her senses.

Michelle pulls the butter knife from her back pocket and approaches the lock.

The two flathead screws face Michelle. The butter knife is just thin enough to fit into the grooves.

She goes to work loosening the screws.

INT. MAIN ROOM

Howard sits at the table and pours himself another glass of wine. He takes a big gulp and shakes his head disappointedly.

INT. MICHELLE'S ROOM - LATER

The screws have been removed from the deadbolt. Michelle has her ear to the door, listening to --

INT. MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Howard -- face down on the table -- SNORING. A fifth bottle of wine is half empty in front of him.

The lock on Michelle's door pops out of its hole. And the door swings open.

Michelle hurries into the room and begins sifting through Howard's pockets.

She finds the keys and crosses to the metal door, unlocks it.

Michelle pulls open the door and finds -- the HAZMAT SUIT, along with the gun and a set of car keys.

Michelle pockets the car keys, tucks the gun in her waistband and grabs the suit.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Michelle pulls on the hazmat suit. She checks herself in the mirror and then exits.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michelle walks by a passed out Howard, heads up the stairwell.

INT. STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Michelle reaches the top of the stairwell and goes through the key ring.

BUT THE KEY TO THE DOOR IS MISSING.

She frantically goes through the keys again. Still not there. She tries other keys, but none of them work.

INT. MAIN ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Michelle returns to the bottom of the stairs and scans the room, looking for the key.

Howard stirs, readjusts his head, but clearly he's beginning to wake up.

Michelle is growing frantic. She reaches down and slides the carpet over, revealing the trap door. She pulls open the door and climbs down into the --

CRAWL SPACE

It's only a couple of feet high. The well is at one dark end.

Michelle glances around, finds what she's looking for -- cracks of DAYLIGHT.

She moves toward the light, doing her best not to scrape up the suit.

At the far end of the crawl space, she finds an old vent that has been boarded over.

She pulls at the boards, but they're solid. So she rolls over on her back, feet to the boards, and kicks as hard as she can.

THUMP! But the boards hold.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Howard stirs, lifts his head at the sound of Michelle kicking the boards in the crawl space. He shakes his head, still half asleep.

INT. CRAWL SPACE - CONTINUOUS

Michelle kicks the boards again. They're starting to crack and come loose, revealing the old metal vent behind them.

CRACK, CRACK, CRACK!

INT. MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Howard shakes himself out of his stupor. He sees the trap door wide open. Suddenly he's fully awake.

He moves to the trap door, ducks his head inside, spins around and finds --

The KICKED OUT VENT.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - DAY

A steady rain falls. Michelle comes around the side of the farm house in the hazmat suit, the mask is fogging from her breath. Rain patters off her hood.

INT. MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Howard scrambles across the room, finds the closet door wide open - gun and hazmat suit missing.

HOWARD

Fuck!

EXT. FARM HOUSE - DAY

Michelle comes around the corner of the farm house and freezes. Nothing she has experienced yet compares to the horror in her eyes now --

MICHELLE'S POV

Mask FOGGED, but through it -- NATE, face down in a puddle, raindrops bounce off the back of his head but it's not enough to wash away the blood, skull fragments and brain matter.

CUTTING WIDE

Michelle lifts the hazmat mask from her face and stares in shock.

INT. HOWARD'S ROOM

Howard scrambles in, throws the mattress into the air and finds the cellar door key beneath it.

He grabs the key and rushes out.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - CELLAR ENTRANCE - DAY

The LOCK CLICKS. The DOOR FLIES OPEN.

Howard climbs out of the stairwell. He's wrapped head to toe in a blanket. He scans the yard --

His eyes lock in on the two dead pigs -- steady raindrops chew at their rotting flesh.

Howard hesitates for a long moment...

EXT. FARM HOUSE - DAY

Michelle stands in the rain, staring at Nate's body. She's barely breathing.

HOWARD (O.S.)
Michelle!

Michelle jumps at the sound of her name. ADRENALINE rushes through her veins.

HOWARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
We gotta get back inside. It's not safe!

His voice is getting closer.

Michelle scans her options --

THE WOODS -- fifty yards away.

THE BARN -- twenty-five yards away.

THE FARM HOUSE -- five yards away.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Michelle!

His voice just around the corner now.

Michelle rushes to the farm house's back door, her feet churning up the muddy ground beneath her.

She turns the handle. The door swings open.

Howard comes around the corner, catches a glimpse of the hazmat suit disappearing inside the farm house.

Howard glances down at Nate's corpse for a brief moment then he makes for the house.

INT. FARM HOUSE - MUDROOM - DAY

Michelle spins the lock on the back door then peeks out the small window next to it --

Howard approaches, wrapped head to toe in the wet blanket.

Michelle reaches down to her waistband for the gun. Realizes it's on the inside of the hazmat suit.

She grabs the suit's zipper when --

BAM!

EXT. FARM HOUSE - BACK PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Howard throws himself into the back door again and again.

The door holds.

INT. FARM HOUSE - MUDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Zipper down, Michelle reaches into the hazmat suit.

She pulls out the revolver. It slips in her gloved hands.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - BACK PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Howard stops, takes a step back and kicks hard just below the door handle.

CRACK!

The door jamb splinters.

INT. FARM HOUSE - MUDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michelle tries to thread her gloved and shaking finger through the trigger.

BAM!

The back door FLIES OPEN.

Howard stands in the doorway, his face all but hidden beneath the wet blanket.

Michelle spins -- the gun tumbles out of her slippery glove, hits the ground near Howard's feet.

Michelle turns, bolts from the room.

HOWARD

Wait!

Howard pulls the wet blanket from his face. He reaches down and picks up the gun, shoves it in his pocket.

Howard pushes the door closed behind him then follows Michelle's muddy footprints out of the room.

INT. FARM HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Michelle rushes into the kitchen, over to the counter where she starts tearing through the kitchen drawers.

HOWARD (O.S.)
(yells from the hallway)
You're not safe!

MICHELLE
No shit!

Michelle flings aside a silverware tray -- she's done with butter knives. She rips open another drawer.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Down the long corridor, Howard closes in -- watching Michelle move frantically in the kitchen with her back to him.

HOWARD
I didn't have a choice. You didn't
know Nate like I did. He was
dangerous... I did it for us.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Howard now visible in the hallway behind her. He moves slowly, talks calmly.

HOWARD
He was going to kill me. I had to
protect myself.

Michelle still rooting through drawers, looking for something, anything she could use as a weapon.

MICHELLE
You coming to finish the job.

Howard steps into the kitchen.

HOWARD
You don't have to love me. You
don't even have to like me, but
please. Don't leave me. I don't
want to be alone. I'll never hurt
you. You can trust me.

MICHELLE
Trust you? You're a murderer.

HOWARD
It was self-defense.

MICHELLE
I don't believe you.

Michelle stops searching. She stands at the counter, frozen, but stays facing the other way.

MICHELLE'S POV

A reflection in the rain-coated window --

Howard approaches her from behind.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Howard's close enough to touch her. He reaches out.

HOWARD
I won't let you leave.

Michelle spins -- a butcher's knife gripped in her hand.

MICHELLE
You can't stop me!

The blade slices throw the wet blanket that covers Howard -- he stumbles, falls to his ass, taking the knife with him.

Michelle bolts toward the rear stairway.

Howard looks down, a big slice through the wet blanket but the blade only grazed his chest.

Howard pulls the gun from his pocket as he gets to his feet.

INT. FARM HOUSE - BACK STAIRWELL - DAY

Michelle races up the back stairs. A cumbersome task in the oversized hazmat suit.

She glances over her shoulder.

Howard starts up the stairs behind her, revolver at his side.

Michelle trips over the top step, stumbles, steadies herself on a large cabinet at the top of the landing.

It wobbles against the wall.

Howard's halfway up the stairs behind her.

She tugs hard on the cabinet. It rocks more. She pulls on it again. It rocks further. One more huge pull --

Tipping point --

The cabinet crashes down the stairwell, forcing Howard to retreat back down the stairs.

INT. FARM HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Michelle hurries into the master bedroom.

A cordless phone sits on the bedside table. She rips it out of its cradle -- but the battery's dead.

Michelle throws the phone. Moves to the window -- a two story drop to the ground below.

Her eyes lock on the yellow pickup parked against the barn.

She opens the window wide.

Rain blows in, pattering off the carpeted floors as Michelle leans out and looks down at the muddy ground below.

INT. FARM HOUSE - MAIN STAIRWAY - DAY

Howard marches up the main stairway, gun still in hand.

INT. FARM HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Howard stalks into the bedroom. He sees the open window.

He crosses the room, looks out the window -- no sign of Michelle. Howard turns back, looks around the room --

The closet door is closed.

The bathroom door is half open.

Howard slowly approaches the closet --

He rips open the door -- it's empty.

Howard walks toward the bathroom.

He pushes the door all the way open.

He notices the shower curtain pulled across the tub.

He steps into the --

BATHROOM

Howard reaches out, he grips the shower curtain --

He pulls it aside and finds --

MICHELLE, a bottle of foaming tile cleaner in her hand. She sprays the cleaner into Howard's face.

He drops the revolver as his hands fly up to protect his eyes, but the damage is done. He's momentarily blinded.

Michelle lunges for the revolver. Howard grabs for her but can't get a grip on the slippery hazmat suit.

Michelle comes up, gun in hand. She backs toward the door as she gets her finger through the trigger.

Howard wipes his eyes with the wet blanket that's still wrapped around his head.

He squints, wipes some more. He manages to open them a bit. Takes a moment to focus --

Michelle stands in the bathroom doorway, gun trained on him.

Howard puts his hands up.

HOWARD

It's not easy killing someone.
Pulling that trigger was the
hardest thing I've ever done...

Howard seems to get lost in a moment of thought.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

First real feeling I've had since
they took my daughter.

Howard wipes his eyes again. It's hard to tell if the water dripping from them is from the cleaning solution or from tears.

MICHELLE

Spare me your bullshit. I know you
never had a kid. I also know you
killed your wife. Nate told me.

Howard stands there, a forlorn look on his face.

HOWARD

And you believed him? Why...

MICHELLE

He didn't run me off the road. He didn't kidnap me and lock me in a cellar. He didn't attack me.

HOWARD

I saved you.

MICHELLE

Stop with the fucking lies! You're out here, walking around, breathing the air. You seem fine... I mean, except for the fact that you're batshit crazy.

HOWARD

It's the rain. The rain must've washed that crap from the air.

MICHELLE

You always have an answer.

Howard stands there a beat, a tortured look on his face --

HOWARD

Three years ago, I was driving home from a party. My wife was in the car with me. I was drunk. I lost control and hit a tree. My wife didn't make it.

His eyes water up.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

The state claimed I was an unfit father. They fought to take my daughter, Lily away. Nate testified against me -- he lied, saying he'd seen me hit her. All because he thought I owed him some money. My in-laws got custody. Took Lily with them to D.C. and I haven't seen her since. Not sure I ever will again.

Howard takes a small step toward her.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I can't lose you too.

Michelle raises the gun to his face.

MICHELLE
Stay the fuck away from me.

Another small step.

HOWARD
You don't have it in you.

Michelle starts to lower the gun.

Howard smiles as he takes another step.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
It's going to be okay.

MICHELLE
I know it will.

Michelle PULLS THE TRIGGER --

A bullet RIPS through Howard's knee. He collapses, screaming to the floor.

Howard rolls around in agonizing pain.

Michelle turns and runs out of the room.

INT. FARM HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Michelle sprints toward the front stairs.

She slows when she sees -- the entire stairway wall is filled with a collection of framed family photos from over the years -- different shots of Howard, a BEAUTIFUL WOMAN and a YOUNG GIRL.

Michelle pauses, stares at them, a million thoughts rushing through her head.

Howard's SCREAMS snap her out of it. She continues down the steps.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - DAY

Michelle runs out the front door.

She sprints across the muddy yard, past Nate's body. She reaches the truck and pulls open the door. She grabs the keys from a pocket on the inside of the hazmat suit.

Howard's voice drifts out the open window upstairs

HOWARD
Michelle! ...be careful.

Michelle starts to get in the truck, looks over her shoulder and sees the rotting pig flesh in the pen.

She climbs in the truck and closes the door.

EXT. PICKUP - CONTINUOUS

The engine ROARS to life --

Michelle stomps on the gas --

Mud flies across the yard as the tires spin.

INT. PICKUP - DAY

The truck bounces along the pothole filled driveway. After a couple hundred yards, Michelle reaches the road.

She pulls out onto the asphalt and floors the accelerator as rain SPLATTERS on the windshield.

She reaches down and turns on the old radio, scans the dial but only comes up with STATIC. Maybe it's busted.

Michelle turns her eyes back to the remote farm road as she pulls up to an intersection.

A sign directs her to CHICAGO: 25 MILES.

EXT. PICKUP - DAY

The truck turns onto the two lane highway in the direction of CHICAGO. The road is eerily empty.

INT. PICKUP - MOMENTS LATER

Michelle comes upon a filling station. She pulls in, but it's closed.

EXT. FILLING STATION - CONTINUOUS

Michelle climbs out of the truck and walks up to the filling station door, looks in, knocks.

She walks around to the side of the building and sees --

TWO PAY PHONES.

Michelle moves to the first phone, lifts the receiver. There's no dial tone. She dials 9-1-1 anyway. Nothing happens.

She picks up the receiver on the second phone -- same problem. She flips the lever, trying to get something. Her gut is churning by this point.

Michelle drops the receiver. She heads back to the truck and climbs in.

INT. PICKUP - LATER

The rain has stopped. Michelle has driven out of the storm.

She speeds up a hill, passes a road sign -- CHICAGO: 10 MILES.

The road is still completely empty. Just Michelle, the pickup and Michelle's growing sense of foreboding.

The truck has almost reached the top of the hill. It's clear there will be a vantage point as she crests. Michelle's anticipation grows...

Her heart thumps...

Her eyes widen...

EXT. PICKUP - CONTINUOUS

FRONT ANGLE

The truck crests the hill. It slows, pulling forward into a --

CLOSE UP ON

MICHELLE -- not breathing, a look of horror on her face. Shock doesn't even begin to explain what she's going through.

MICHELLE'S POV

THE DOWNTOWN CHICAGO SKYLINE - reduced to smoking rubble.

INT. PICKUP - DAY

Michelle stares out at the decimation. Her lips quiver. Her heart pounds.

She slowly pulls down the mask on the hazmat suit before taking a breath.

SMASH TO BLACK

ROLL CREDITS