

A ROSE IN THE DARKNESS

by

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FADE IN

INT. DINING ROOM - FAMILY HOUSE - NIGHT

A classical dining room. Complete with ugly knickknacks on mantels and bright flowers on cabinets. The environment radiates an aesthetic traditionalism.

MICAH, 13, settles into his chair at the family dining table. Directly across from him sits FATHER, late 30s, lean and intimidating.

Dressed in black dinner suits, both of them sit in a precise manner - perfect posture and vacant expressions. A large meat platter lies perfectly in the middle of the table between them.

Micah is a small, pale boy who exudes a quiet and offsetting intelligence. Father gives off the standard paternal aura but with a twist - something peculiarly fierce burns behind his dark eyes.

MOTHER, mid 30s, glowing with the maternal exuberance of a housewife from a 50's soap commercial, almost glides into the dining room from the kitchen.

She sits delicately as to not squash her aqua-colored dress. With a slight turn of her wrist, she serves each plate.

Ritualistically, all three hold hands. Father gives an intense look to mother, dictating her to do grace. She smiles. They bow their heads.

MOTHER

Dear Heavenly Father. We sit here in communion and adulation of Your grace toward us today. Your mercies grant us to be strengthened in spirit, body--

BANG! BANG! BANG! A violent pounding sounds loudly above them. Frenzied. Alive.

Mother hesitates slightly. Father doesn't flinch or open his eyes. Micah purses his lips. Mother gives a slight look upwards before closing her eyes and continuing.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

--in spirit, body, and mind by your gift of life everlasting. Thank you, Father, for this food upon our table.

You always satisfy the needs of--

BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG! These pounds come in a rapid, uneven, and ferocious succession. All manic and unpredictable.

Father clenches up. Mother CLEARS HER THROAT.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

--the needs of all living creatures. We praise your name for it.

FATHER

Amen, Lord.

MOTHER

Thank you, Father, for the roof over our heads and the beds in which we find the peaceful sleep of the righteous. We--

A MUFFLED CHILLING SCREAM of inherent terror rolls through the quiet house like an earthquake.

MOTHER (CON'T)

--We give thanks for all you give us this day. Glory to the Father. As it was, is now, and will be forevermore. In your most glorious name. Amen.

MICAH / FATHER

(together)

Amen.

Their eyes open.

The SCREAM continues.

Micah nonchalantly picks up his fork and casually ignores the screams. He cuts his meat. The first incision of the knife is slow. Crimson juices ooze from the rare flesh.

Mother and Father remain stoic in silence.

Father begins to rise.

FATHER

Enough is enough.

Mother, sweetly, ascends first with an obedient smile - one of those contagious smiles that lights one up inside.

MOTHER

Please, don't get up. I'll do it.

She waits for a response. Father nods curtly.

She dips her hand slightly into her neckline and pulls up-

A SIMPLE CHAIN NECKLACE WITH A SET OF BLACK KEYS

-from her bodice, and lifts it over her head.

The SCREAM continues.

Mother walks to the center of the wall between the kitchen and the dining room where-

AN OAK DOOR

-stands ominously. On the right middle of the door is a hinge, locked into place with a black tumbler bolt.

It takes Mother less than a second to pick out her key.

There are four keys on the necklace. One has two sharp edges on its base like horns. One has three slits that go longways. One has a larger base than the others. The last has a large hole at its base.

She takes the last key and enters it into the lock. She turns it and the latch CLICKS.

She softly pulls the door open.

A doorway to the attic - its stairs leading upwards into utter blackness.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

I'll just be a moment.

Micah watches as Mother walks upstairs, each step CREAKING OMINOUSLY. The SCREAMING intensifies, now in spurts of panic.

Micah eats nonchalantly. Father considers him briefly as he takes a sip of water.

FATHER

You look hungry.

Micah nods contently.

The SCREAMING hits the height of a SHRIEK before the sound of a VIOLENT SLASH. A GURGLE. A final THUMP. Silence.

FATHER

Your mother tells me she tried something new.

Micah looks up questioningly.

FATHER (CONT'D)

With the recipe.

Micah chews slower.

MICAH

I don't taste anything different.

Father takes his first bite.

THE MEAT - something peculiar about its shape and color.

Micah notices. A distasteful expression crosses his face as he uses his fork to pull something out of the meat.

Father looks over, concerned.

FATHER

What is it, son?

MICAH

Something in my food.

Micah pulls it out and looks at it.

A HUMAN TOOTH.

Father extends his hand over the table.

FATHER

Let me see.

Micah drops the tooth into Father's palm.

FATHER

(sighs)

She missed something again.

Father wraps the tooth into the napkin and folds it into his jacket pocket.

FATHER (CONT'D)

She hates it when that happens.

A CREAK from the attic door. Father and Micah look up.

Mother walks down from the attic - a trifle disheveled but mainly composed.

A bloody human hand print drags grotesquely across her dress.

Father looks down at the smear in disapproval.

Mother catches his look and glances down.

MOTHER

(sighs)

I'll go get cleaned up.

Father nods firmly and Mother leaves the room again.

Micah continues finishing his food. Father notices the attic door standing open. He stands up and walks toward the door. Micah watches.

Father picks up his own key chain from his neck. Enters the key into the lock. Turns it. Locked.

Micah aims his gaze quickly back toward his food. But Father saw the look.

FATHER

Micah.

Micah looks back up at him.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Do we ever leave the attic open?

Micah gives a definitive head shake as he takes a bite.

FATHER (CONT'D)

And are you to open the attic for any reason?

Micah looks up. Father's eyes harden. A dangerous glint.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Micah. Answer me.

MICAH

No, sir. Not for any reason.

The dangerous glint disappears, and Father nods. He slips the key back beneath his collar and goes toward his seat.

As he does, he puts a fatherly hand solidly on Micah's shoulder. Comforting. Genuine.

FATHER

That's right. And do you know why?

MICAH  
Because it's not my time yet.

Father nods.

FATHER  
One day, you'll get your own key.

MICAH  
Yes, sir.

Father gives him another pat before settling back into his seat. Begins eating again.

MICAH'S PIERCING EYES - focus on the attic door. The door stands like a juggernaut, massive and eternal.

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD FIELDS - AFTERNOON

MICAH'S EYES - roaming delicately. Unblinking.

Micah, same age as before, stands out amid a large grassy field, looking into the tree line a hundred feet away.

SUPERIMPOSE: "Mississippi - 1994"

He looks back. Behind him is his family's house - quaint in an old-fashioned Amish sort of way, obviously built decades before his parents were born.

Between him and the house is a massive garden. Potatoes, tomatoes, lettuce, corn... the whole nine yards.

Shaking his head, Micah turns around stares warily ahead toward something in front of him.

A dead tree lies at a short distance, noticeably isolated from the rest of the forest by at least a dozen feet.

Micah walks toward the tree. His breath grows more ragged and anxious with each struggled step.

Micah's boots crush the long blades of untamed grass as he draws closer. He stops suddenly a few feet away from the tree in a perfect line.

Right at where his feet touch is-

A WHITE CHALK CURVE

-made into the grass. It glitters against the morning dew.

Micah reaches his hand hesitantly out toward the tree. Right on one of the branches, oddly, lies-

A BEAUTIFUL RED ROSE

-flailing slightly in the wind.

Instinctively, he pulls back before contact. He looks down at his feet, which are locked in place like they are stuck in cement at the edge of the threshold.

He sighs as he looks at the rose, shaking his head sadly.

MOTHER'S VOICE (O.S.)

(far away)

Micah, darling! Where are you?

He turns around and jogs back toward the house.

MICAH

Coming, mother!

As he walks, he sees a coyote frantically digging its claws into a large, uneven mound of dirt.

It digs its head in and pulls out a large leg bone. Covered with bits of black garbage bag. Humanoid.

The coyote eyes Micah malevolently as it gnaws on the bone.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Coming!

Micah runs toward the house.

EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

We look down from above on Micah's retreat, offering a view of the whole backyard and its ominous reality.

The coyote dirt mound isn't the only dirt mound there.

All around the back fields are uneven mounds. Dozens of them; some new, most old. All of them large enough to suggest something human-sized has been buried beneath.

This family has been making holes in the fields for a long time.

The continuation of the chalk curve near the tree goes all the way around, unhindered, until it makes a perfect circle in a half mile circumference around the house. A haunting shroud of seclusion.

EXT. BACKYARD FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

As Micah comes within a few feet from the house-

Father struts from the house with a shotgun in one hand and a shovel in the other.

That glint in his eye.

MICAH

Father? What is it?

Father passes Micah without a word or a look, his trek taking him toward the coyote with the bone.

Micah watches with passive interest. Mother appears at the door, looking on warily. Micah treads to the house until he stands next to her.

Father stops a few feet away from the coyote. It looks up, it's head upturned curiously as it gnaws on the bone.

Within a second, Father raises the shotgun up toward the coyote's head and pulls the trigger.

BANG! Birds in the trees cackle and caw as they fly up in panic. The blast echoes eerily.

Mother puts her hands comfortingly on Micah's shoulders.

MOTHER

Go inside. I'll be in shortly.

Micah nods and turns into the house.

Once he's gone, Mother looks back at her husband with an worried expression.

INT. HOUSE - BACKROOM - CONTINUOUS

Micah walks through the back room leading to the living room, passing-

A large chest freezer, humming lightly.

VIOLIN MUSIC begins playing.

INT. HOUSE - SCHOOL ROOM - DAY

AN OAK VIOLIN PLAYING wondrously. Young deft hands slowly glide across the violin with obvious dexterity and experience. Slow and methodical.

MOTHER (O.S.)

That's good, Micah. That's very good.  
Just loosen your grip a little bit more.

Micah is fully in his own world, oblivious to all else, as he stands in the middle of a living room-sized school room.

The room hinges on education. A mahogany bookshelf holds an abundance of classical books. A work space including a desk. A box full of pencils and notebooks.

Mother watches in rapt attention from the couch in the far center of the room, soaking in every movement.

MOTHER

Good, darling. That's it.

Father watches silently from the dining room, a sliver of fatherly pride coming through his stoic demeanor.

Micah's fingers fly with ease through each chord near the complex climax, not missing a beat.

Father now stands behind his wife's chair, putting his hands lovingly on her shoulders. She leans over, smiles, and kisses his left hand. Puts her hand over his.

Micah ends with a flourish. He puts the violin down. Both Mother and Father CLAP RESOUNDINGLY.

MOTHER

That was beautiful.

MICAH

(softly)

Thank you.

CLANG... CLANG... CLANG...! The faraway and yet unmistakable sound of CHURCH BELLS.

Mother and Father grow slightly aloof to the sound.

Micah looks at the grandfather clock. 12:00 PM.

MOTHER

Why do you do that?

MICAH

Do what?

MOTHER

Look at the clock every time you hear those accursed bells?

MICAH

Why? Can't I be interested in out there?

MOTHER

What do we tell you, Micah? Ignore it.  
It's nothing but a snare to bring us  
out in our curiosity. Like Odysseus and  
the Sirens, remember?

MICAH

You don't need to worry about me all  
the time. I know better than to do  
something foolish. I'm not a simpleton.

MOTHER

Of course not.

(beat)

Put that away and finish your math for  
the day. You may be done two hours  
earlier today. Then you can go pick  
some vegetables for dinner.

Mother picks up the violin and puts it in its case.

INT. HOUSE - SCHOOL ROOM - AFTERNOON

Micah and Mother sit on a couch, looking over math. She  
points to something and Micah nods.

Father walks in with two worn Bibles.

FATHER

It's time.

Effortlessly, Micah places his books to the side.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Father sits in the recliner next to a couch, where Mother  
and Micah sit.

Micah flips through his Bible - which is filled with ripped  
pages that scar the base of the spine and large text  
portions blacked out in pen.

FATHER'S BIBLE - same thing.

FATHER

Open to Genesis nine.

They flip through their pages and quickly find the book.  
Father reads in a serene-yet-authoritative voice.

FATHER (CONT'D)

And God blessed Noah and his sons and  
said to them, "Be fruitful and

multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea."

As he reads, A HEAVY RAIN BEGINS TO FALL outside.

Father's face is lightly covered in shadow as the rain continues and blots out any outside light. The rhythmic rain joined with Father's words and the blanket of darkness provide a unsettling tension.

FATHER (CONT'D)

"They are given into your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs..."

He looks almost nightmarish in all his monstrous intensity.

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT PATIO - NIGHT

Father smokes. One arm is propped against the side of the house as he stands just under the protection of the patio from the rain.

A consuming look clouds his face as he looks on into space. He puffs again.

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Micah and mother lie on separate couches, reading.

A LARGE GRANDFATHER CLOCK ticks eerily.

TICK TOCK. TICK TOCK.

Micah briefly eyes the front window. Father's figure is silhouetted in the moonlight, with cigarette smoke visibly rising into the open air.

TICK TOCK. TICK TOCK.

Micah eyes Mother. She flips another page.

The Grandfather clock at the 9 pm hour. BONG... BONG... BONG... BONG... BONG... BONG... BONG!

Mother looks up.

Father's head swivels slightly at the sound. He continues smoking.

Mother closes her book and looks at Micah smilingly.

MOTHER

Bedtime.

Micah nods and closes his book.

INT. MICAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Micah in bed, sleeping.

THE FRONT DOOR SHUTTING.

Micah's eyes snap open. He waits, listening.

He looks at his clock. 11 PM.

A CAR DOOR OPENING AND CLOSING outside. A CAR ENGINE TURNING. The sound of a car RUMBLING away on gravel.

SILENCE.

Micah closes his eyes again. Quickly dozes off.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Micah and Mother making breakfast - Micah making the bacon, Mother making the eggs.

There are three plates on the counter. Mother looks at them as she cooks.

MOTHER

Micah, you forgot an extra plate.

Micah reaches up and grabs another plate from the cabinet above him.

MICAH

Sorry, Mother.

He places it with the other three plates. Mother smiles.

The front door CREAKS OPEN. Mother turns toward the door and GASPS, ALARMED.

MOTHER

(softly)

Oh, no.

Father comes in the house, his neck and shoulder bloody.

Mother hurries toward him with a damp dish rag.

MOTHER (CONT'D)  
(hurried, concerned)  
What happened?

Father takes the rag and pushes it against his neck. He doesn't look hurt - more pissed than anything else.

FATHER  
I'm fine, I'm fine. That bear of an oak  
dropped a branch on me while I was  
fixing the second generator.

MOTHER  
Let me see.

Father pulls back.

MOTHER  
I can't fix it if you pull away.

Father, resigned, looks up and removes the rag. Mother inspects the damage. The cut isn't too deep.

FATHER  
I have... work, you know that.

MOTHER  
You need that taken care of. You can  
put work aside for one day.

FATHER  
No, it can't. Not today.

His look tells her to back off. She relents.

FATHER (CONT'D)  
Can it wait until tonight?

Mother SIGHS, inspecting the wound in depth.

MOTHER  
As long as you keep pressure on it. It  
makes me nervous, but you shouldn't be  
collapsing from the pain. No strain if  
you can help it.

FATHER  
I'll be careful.  
(beat)  
Oh... this broke, too.

Father digs into his pants pocket and pulls out his key chain with its chain snapped. Speckled with blood.

FATHER (CONT'D)

The branch snapped it like a twig.

MOTHER

I'll get you a new chain when you return. Now sit down and eat.

Father puts the chain and key back into his pocket.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Keep the rag on to stop the flow.  
Micah, you almost done?

MICAH

Yes, almost.

Micah sets a plate of bacon on the table. Mother finishes the eggs and serves Father.

MOTHER

Micah, please grab the butter.

Micah gets up and obeys. Father picks up his devotions books and reads it as he waits for his food. Mother places the plate in front of Father.

Micah looks down as-

THE KEY

-slowly falls out of Father's pocket and lands silently on the carpet adjoined the table.

MICAH - can't take his eyes off the key. The mental wheels turning.

His mouth begins to open - then it closes slowly.

Father continues to eat quickly.

Micah looks down, trying to hide his frantic look.

THE KEY - glitters.

Micah moves slightly toward the key, trying not to procure attention...

FATHER (O.S.)

Micah.

Micah snaps to attention, anxious. Father looks solidly at him.

FATHER (CONT'D)  
Recite. Second Samuel six-seven.

Micah briefly glances worriedly at the key.

He stands up and slowly puts a foot over the key to keep it out of Father's view.

MICAH  
"And The Lord's anger burned against  
Uzzah because of his irreverent act;  
therefore God struck him down and he  
died there beside the ark of God."

Father nods solemnly, not saying a word. He finishes his last few bites and puts a hand on Micah's shoulder.

Micah smiles thinly. His foot shifts slightly, making sure the key stays hidden from view. After an awkward moment of inaction, Father lets go.

FATHER  
See you all tonight.

MOTHER  
Drive safely.

FATHER  
Always.

Micah watches as Father leaves through the front door.

MOTHER  
(still cooking, not looking back)  
Clear your father's space, please.

Micah bends down, watching Mother's movements anxiously.

He moves his foot briefly and slides the key effortlessly into his palm. He stands up, the face of normality.

He slides the key into his pocket.

MICAH  
Right away.

Mom puts food onto the fourth plate and takes her key from her bodice.

She walks toward the attic door, opening it, and walking up.

Micah watches attentively.

INT. MICAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Micah lies immobile in bed, twirling the key between the fingers of his left hand. The key falters and falls onto his chest. He's extremely nervous - this isn't usual.

THE SOUND OF STEPS outside the room.

Micah quickly shoves the key beneath his pillow.

Mother comes in. He smiles.

MOTHER

I was wondering... if you'd like a story tonight.

MICAH

We haven't done that in a while.

MOTHER

No, we haven't.

He nods. She comes and sits at a chair next to the bed.

MOTHER

What would you like to hear?

Briefly, Micah's maturity dissipates and a little kid appears in his place, eager to hear a tale.

MICAH

The princess and the cleric.

Mother's eyes light up at the reference.

MOTHER

I like telling that one.

Micah gets more comfortable.

MOTHER

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful young princess. Lilly. She lived in a kingdom with her mother and father, who loved her very much.

INTERCUT (FLASHBACKS IN ITALICS, SCENES ARE SILENT)

INT. LILLY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

*LILLY (8), a beautiful little girl who looks very much like Mother, plays with dolls on the floor. Happy. Bliss.*

MOTHER (V.O.)

But all was not well in the land. Her parents had strong enemies. When Lilly was eight years old, a rival regime attacked her family's kingdom.

*LILLY gasps as LILLY'S FATHER (30s) dressed in a tee shirt and jeans, is thrown through their house door from outside. In his hand is a gun. Police officers barge in. Lilly pushes herself in a corner in fear. LILLY'S MOTHER (30s) comes from the kitchen to see what's happening. She screams. She grabs a knife on the counter.*

MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The King and Queen met swift deaths during the attack and their enemies took control of the kingdom--

*Lilly watches in horror. Lilly's Father raises his gun. A police officer raises his own gun and shoots Lilly's Father in the head.*

*Lilly's Mother screams, rushing toward the officers. Three of them cut her down in a volley of bullets.*

MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

--and stole the princess, for she was beautiful to behold.

*The police officers cast a dark shadow over Lilly.*

INT. MICAH'S BEDROOM (PRESENT)

Mother's light eyes darken as the story progresses.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

The new regime's leaders - another king and queen - decided to keep this girl as a social oddity, living only for their amusement.

INT. FOSTER PARENTS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

*FOSTER FATHER (30s) and FOSTER MOTHER (40s) look down at Lilly. She looks petrified. She cries. Foster Father slaps her. Hard.*

MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

They kept her prisoner, raising her like their own as a final nail in her parents' coffins. But they made sure she never felt love or happiness under

their watch.

*INT. FOSTER'S PARENTS' HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)*

*Lilly curls up in her bed, holding the covers tightly around her.*

*The door opens and both Foster Father and Foster Mother come in, shirtless.*

*Foster Mother yanks the covers off of Lilly and pulls her to her feet.*

*Foster Father gets behind her.*

*Lilly struggles, fights, screams.*

MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

They forced her to live a life of pain  
no child should ever know, let alone  
experience to any degree.

*LILLY'S HELPLESS FACE - as Foster Father holds her down.*

*INT. LILLY'S BEDROOM - LATER*

*Lilly sobs into a pillow. Her face is beaten. Her nightshirt is ripped. She can't stop crying.*

MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

For five long years, they convinced her  
this hell was normal. That pain and  
suffering was all she was good for.

*Lilly SLOWLY BEGINS TO AGE IN THE SAME POSITION. 8... 12... 14.*

MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She couldn't escape. All that was left  
for her was a life of horror. But she  
never gave in. She never forgot.

*LILLY (17) looks up from the pillow. Her eyes are hard. Angry. Bitter.*

MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And she never forgave.

*INT. MICAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (PRESENT)*

*Micah listens, entranced. Mother suddenly smiles. The light appears again.*

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Then, one day, she met a boy.

EXT. FOSTER PARENTS' HOME - DAY (FLASHBACK)

*Lilly sneaks outside at night while foster parents are sleeping.*

INT. CHURCH - LATER

*She sits in one of the pews, listening to a sermon. Hungry for salvation. In the front pew sits JUDAH (18). Their eyes meet. Judah winks. She looks away, blushed.*

MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

A miraculous, wonderful boy. The son of a cleric. He understood her. Cared for her.

INT. LILLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

*Lilly opens her window to find Judah hanging there, smirking. She kisses him passionately.*

MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He knew her story and promised he would take care of her. And he fulfilled that promise.

INT. LILLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

*A sleeping Lilly awakens, startled. She hears something.*

MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Lilly was awakened that night to the sound of screams. She ran toward the sounds.

*She runs from her room-*

INT. HALLWAY

*-toward the sounds.*

*She gets to her foster parents' bedroom. She gasps.*

INT. FOSTER PARENTS' BEDROOM

*Judah stands at the door, his clothes and hands draped in crimson and entrails. At his feet lie the gruesome remains of Foster Father and Foster Mother.*

MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

There stood her protector, his hands

covered in the blood of those who had  
so long tormented her. He was smiling.

*Judah's face remains untouched by the gore. He just smiles  
at her.*

*Lilly collapses into Judah's arms, sobbing and yet smiling.  
Relief and freedom overpower her.*

MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Lilly collapsed into his arms, sobbing.  
She didn't know how to react, what to  
say. Nothing but gratitude that she  
knew she would never be able to repay.  
But his face said there was nothing to  
repay.

*His mouth begins to move.*

MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

"Look at me," he whispered. "You're  
free, Lilly. You're free."

*He holds her tightly, rubbing her hair, consequently  
smearing it with blood.*

MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

His face told her everything she needed  
to know. That she would never had to be  
afraid of anything ever again.

INT. MICAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Mother is content. Happy. The story brought both the good  
and the bad of life back to her.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

They went off into the sunset. They had  
found their souls in one another and  
their lives were never to be the same.

No one would ever control them again.

(beat)

No one.

She trails off. Suddenly remembers she is telling a story  
to her son. Her kind and sane eyes return to normality.  
Gone is the manic passion and dark pain.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Now... time to sleep, my darling.

MICAH  
Of your stories, that's my favorite.

MOTHER  
Why?

MICAH  
Because it shows life. People living  
who aren't trapped in a world of devils  
and monsters.

MOTHER  
That's why it's a fairy tale. People  
aren't like that anymore.

MICAH  
I know. That's why we stay here where  
no one will find us. Still...

MOTHER  
Still what, honey?

MICAH  
Stories like that make me realize how  
lonely it gets sometimes. For all of  
us, I mean.

She rubs his face lightly with her fingertips.

MOTHER  
Sometimes being alone helps us focus on  
what's important.

She moves his head toward her.

MOTHER (CONT'D)  
In all your thirteen years, my darling,  
have you ever truly felt alone?

MICAH  
(laughs)  
No.

MOTHER  
And you never will. We don't need  
anyone or anything for us to feel  
happy. Aren't we enough?

Mother kisses his forehead.

MOTHER (CONT'D)  
Good night.

She turns off the light and exits. Micah rolls over on his side. He pulls the key out for a moment and inspects it, guilty.

After a moment, he puts it back beneath his pillow and closes his eyes.

INT. MICAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Micah still sleeping in same position.

The THUNK of the front door opening and closing.

The ENGINE of the car as it drives off.

He allows the silence to rule - then opens his eyes.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

THE ATTIC DOOR - stands, intimidating, once again.

Micah, holding a flash light in his other hand, takes the key out of his pants' pocket. Holds it to the lock. Slowly slides the key into the lock. Perfect match.

He recoils. Shudders.

He touches the edge of the key. Inch by inch, he turns it.

CLICK!

The latch opens. The door opens with a soft, slow CREAK.

Micah stifles a shudder. The attic stairs are like a descent into the deepest circle of Hell. No light. No shadow. Only the darkest of black.

He clicks on the flashlight.

The first thing he notices is that there is a separate lock on the inside of the door. It locks from both sides.

Aims it upwards to the top of the stairs. He takes his first step.

CREAK!

Then another. And another. And another.

INT. ATTIC - CONTINUOUS

A single ray of light pierces the darkness. The flashlight. Micah is fully up the stairs now. He holds his breath, scared to death.

He waves his flashlight slowly to the items in the large room.

BLOOD-STAINS - cover the ground grotesquely, as if some were attempted to be scrubbed off. A little higher with the light and we get...

A BUTCHER TABLE - in the middle of the room. Iron locks big enough for a hand or a foot are on all four corners.

Micah SHUDDERS and aims his flashlight elsewhere.

Various weapons adorn the walls... knives of all sizes, needles, hammers, axes, etc.

A LARGE OVAL WINDOW - in the far back center of the room, mirroring the moonlight.

A CREAK that isn't his. Micah GASPS, jerking the light.

On the two sides to his left and right are two rows of three cages. All are closed.

His flashlight light goes to the cage in the far left.

A YOUNG GIRL, 14, lies in a heap, her arms wrapped constricted around her knees. She rocks slightly, her eyes not looking toward him even with his flashlight shining in her face.

Micah takes a frightened step backwards. Then stops. She hasn't moved. Curiosity moves him forward.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Hello?

She doesn't move. She simply stares ahead in a dead stare, rocking. A numbness that has taken over her, body and soul.

Slowly, Micah dares to step nearer. He raises his light toward his face so she can see him.

She shifts away from him. He is inches away from the cage now. Kneels down, terrified.

His eyes catch the latch on the cage door handle. Different from the attic door, which means a different type of key.

He SHIVERS at the sight of her. She shrinks back.

MICAH (CONT'D)

It's okay. It's okay.

Nothing. He bites his bottom lip, thinking.

MICAH (CONT'D)

C-can I do anything? Are you hungry?

A shift of her eyes that quickly disappears.

Micah grins triumphantly at the response.

MICAH (CONT'D)

So you're hungry. Wait here, I'll be right back.

He rises and starts toward the stairs.

INT. KITCHEN - A BIT LATER

A SMALL PLATE ON THE COUNTER - with some crackers, cheese, and cookies. Micah places a sandwich on the plate. Smiles. Walks up the stairs.

INT. ATTIC - A BIT LATER

Micah places the plate inside the girl's cage. She looks at it both in fear and suspicion.

MICAH

It's okay. It's safe.

She looks at him - truly LOOKS at him. Gauging him. With a hesitant hand, she lifts up one of the crackers and gingerly nibbles on it. She can't hide the relief.

MICAH

Good?

She nods.

MICAH (CONT'D)

So you do understand me.

She pauses briefly, caught. She nods again.

MICAH (CONT'D)

I hoped you would.

(beat)

My name's Micah. What's yours?

Nothing.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Can... can you speak?

She nods.

MICAH (CONT'D)  
Will you talk to me?

She shakes her head.

MICAH (CONT'D)  
Why not?

She fearfully glances at the butcher table.

His face shows the realization that she's just as afraid of him as he is of her. That calms him.

He shakes his head - this isn't what he expected.

MICAH (CONT'D)  
I promise I won't hurt you.

She sticks to her position.

MICAH (CONT'D)  
(softly)  
So you're from out there. I don't know what I expected you to look like, but you look... normal.

She looks back down.

MICAH (CONT'D)  
I promise I won't do anything. You can talk to me.

She looks back up at him with her full attention.

MICAH (CONT'D)  
I don't know what you want.

A somber expression is his only reply.

MICAH (CONT'D)  
What about, uh... reading? Do you like to listen to reading?

She shrugs.

INT. ATTIC - MOMENT LATER

Micah reclines against the cage, holding a worn copy of Charles Dickens' "Great Expectations." He takes a DEEP BREATH, looks at the girl, and begins reading.

MICAH  
My father's family name being Pirrip,  
and my Christian name Philip, my infant

tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So I called myself Pop, and came to be called Pip...

He talks (muted) as we go through

A MONTAGE:

1. Micah turns page 14.
2. Micah scrunches his eyebrows as he voices a character.
3. The girl watches, tilting her head subtly.
4. Turning page 31.
5. Micah contorts his face to voice a character. He grins.
6. Turning page 65.
7. The girl's eyes look right into Micah's.

END OF MONTAGE

Micah YAWNS as he finishes reading.

MICAH

My state of mind, as I have described it, began before I was up in the morning and lasted long after the subject had died out, and had ceased to be mentioned saving on exceptional occasions.

He SIGHS HEAVILY and closes the book. The girl looks at him, perturbed.

MICAH (CONT'D)

That's the end of chapter six. That's a lot of reading.

She hides slight disappointment.

MICAH (CONT'D)

I know, I like it, too. Would you--

BONG! BONG! Two sounds from the grandfather clock below. 2 AM. He starts.

MICAH (CONT'D)

They'll be home soon. They're always back around this time.

He looks back towards her.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Would you like me to come back and read more?

She nods. He smiles in response.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Alright.

(beat)

I wish you would talk. I mean, it's great and all having someone to talk to. God, it's weird. To talk. To really "talk" to someone.

He looks at her worriedly.

MICAH (CONT'D)

You won't tell them, will you? That I came up here?

She shakes her head.

He grabs the now-empty plate from inside her cage and the flashlight. He smiles appreciatively at her.

MICAH (CONT'D)

It's really great meeting you. I'm glad that the first of you I've ever met was you. You seem... nice. You know?

He gets up and walks toward the stairway down below.

GIRL/ROSE (O.S.)

Rose.

He jumps, turning back. The girl is standing now, her hands holding the bars.

MICAH

(breathlessly)

What did you say?

ROSE

That's my name. Rose.

Her voice is utter beauty. Melodious. Soft. Vulnerable.

Micah swallows.

MICAH

Rose. I like that name. It's beautiful.

With that, he goes down the stairs.

INT. MICAH'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Micah pries a loose floorboard from the floor and gingerly puts the key inside. Closes it.

He lies in his bed with an odd, exhilarated expression.

MICAH

(softly)

Rose...

He closes his eyes to sleep.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Micah steps into the kitchen, fear and anxiety barely being contained through his eyes. He looks terrified, as if his actions the previous night have just now sunk in.

Breakfast is being made by Mother.

MOTHER

Morning.

Mother, as usual, makes an extra portion for the victim upstairs. A generous serving.

Father sits at the table, looking befuddled.

Micah slowly walks into the kitchen toward his seat, his eyes never leaving Father. But Father doesn't look at him.

After sitting, Micah finally copes up enough courage to ask:

MICAH

What's wrong?

MOTHER

(exasperated)

Your father has lost his keys.

Micah stifled a tell-tale expression. Pulls it off.

FATHER

I just can't figure where it went. You haven't seen anything, have you, Micah?

Micah's eyes shift toward Mother, who is scooping up the extra plate and heading toward the attic. He looks back toward Father.

MICAH

No, not that I remember.

Mother opens the attic door and slowly walks up. Her trip seems like it takes an eternity as Micah looks at the darkened entrance.

His anxiety is contagious. What if Rose says something? What if Mother comes back down with that information?

Micah looks back at Father, completely hiding the worry that knots up his stomach.

MICAH (CONT'D)

I'll keep an eye out, though. I'm sure we'll find them.

FATHER

Thank you. And I know we should.

MICAH

Maybe you dropped them at work.

FATHER

Most likely in the fields. We'll never find them then.

MICAH

You remember the last time you saw them?

FATHER

After the chain broke yesterday, no. The rest of the keys and the broken chain were in my pocket.

MICAH

I'm sorry.

FATHER

I'll make a copy from your mother's set today. Just keep a look out.

The FOOTSTEPS of Mother slowly coming back downstairs.

Micah looks up at her face.

She is completely casual and smiles as she always does.

MOTHER

Who's ready to eat?

Relief instantly sets for Micah. Rose didn't say anything.

FATHER

Micah.

Micah starts, snapping back to his father.

MICAH

Yes?

FATHER

You look dazed. Why?

MICAH

Sleep evaded me last night.

Mother closes the attic door. She looks worriedly at Micah.

MOTHER

Nightmares?

MICAH

No. Just restless.

MOTHER

Any idea why?

He shakes his head.

MOTHER

We'll pray about it.

Mother comes to their spots at the table with her pan and begins serving them their food.

Micah smiles as Mother gives him his serving, but his eyes can't leave the attic door.

That anxiety has been replaced by confusion.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Micah sits on the couch, reading the Bible.

Mother embroiders on the recliner, HUMMING lightly to herself.

Micah turns the pages faster and faster, obviously looking for something and not finding it.

MOTHER

You look engaged.

Micah looks up and smiles.

MICAH

I'm trying to be.

MOTHER

Well, good for you. There is no better pastime than burying yourself in Scripture.

Micah nods.

Mother looks back down at her embroidery.

Micah's expression turns to subtle frustration.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

Micah, Father, and Mother sit in their familiar positions during study group, turning their Bible pages.

Micah looks uncomfortably at his parents. He opens his mouth to speak, then closes it.

Mother notices.

MOTHER

Dear, you've been acting odd all day. What's bothering you?

Micah considers it.

MICAH

Mother... how sure are we that we are the only righteous left?

MOTHER

We've talked about this--

MICAH

I know. I know, but what if...

MOTHER

What?

MICAH

What if there are others like us? Somewhere? The world is a big place.

Mother gives a worried look to Father. He remains inscrutable. She looks back at Micah.

MOTHER

There are none like us. Not anymore.

MICAH

But how do we know? Maybe you're wrong.

MOTHER

Do you trust your father and I?

MICAH

Yes, but--

MOTHER

If you trust us... then trust that we've seen enough of the world to know exactly what it is we're protecting you from. We want to protect you from what's out there, child.

She gets up and sits closer to Micah. Looks him right in the eye. Honest. Genuine.

MOTHER

The creatures out there... they may look like us, but they have no morality... no heart... no soul. They wallow in the darkness we condemn. They control you and destroy everything you are and what you could one day be.

She puts her hands on his hands comfortingly.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

They aren't people, Micah. They're like demons. That's why what we do isn't murder. They are only creatures of Hell we must sacrifice to glorify the Lord.

MICAH

(prodding)

But we can't know everything, mother. We aren't God.

Father bristles. Mother SIGHS.

MOTHER

It only makes sense that, at your age, you would begin to question your life. I don't blame you. Questioning is a part of growing up.

(beat)

But some things in life you just can't understand. We want to protect you from that side of reality. Let us do our job in protecting you. Trust us.

MICAH

(shakes head, frustrated, confused)  
We can't be... it.

MOTHER

One day you will see the truth for yourself. We can't stop that. But right now, you just need to understand that your father and I do what we do because we were called to do it. The Good Book demands sacrifice. We do it because it is our duty.

Father continues watching, but that dangerous glint has arisen menacingly.

He has closed his Bible and leans forward slightly.

There is something a bit worse. Unpredictable. Something of a higher class of danger.

FATHER

What brings about these questions so suddenly, son?

MICAH

I just want to know, father. I want it to make sense. What we do. Why we do it.

FATHER

Why do you question our ways? Why now?

MOTHER

Honey-

He waves a hand firmly, silencing her with the gesture.

FATHER

(voice rising)  
And why do you need to know? Why does it need to make sense? You are a child. What place is it of yours to question the ways of your family?

Alarmed, Mother puts her hand on her husband's. He looks at her. The aggression slowly dissipates.

He SIGHS. Looks at Micah.

FATHER

It's like your mother says. Trust us.

MICAH  
Yes, Father.

An awkward silence. Mother opens her Bible again.

MOTHER  
Let us go back to our place, shall we?

FATHER  
Of course.

He opens his passage and reads. His voice quickly fades...

INT. MICAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Micah, eyes closed, lying in bed. The sound of the truck outside PULLING OUT AND DRIVING AWAY. His eyes open.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Micah enters the key into the attic door lock. The latch clicks open.

INT. ATTIC - CONTINUOUS

Rose looks up as Micah's flashlight touches her face. She squints in the sudden light. Brief fear.

MICAH  
Rose?

Her face relaxes slightly.

ROSE  
(softly)  
You came back.

MICAH  
What, did you think I would forget you?

She shakes her head.

Micah sits at the foot of her cage.

MICAH (CONT'D)  
Are you hungry?

She quickly hides the look of disgust and horror in her eyes. Shakes her head.

MICAH (CONT'D)  
I won't bring any meat.

She SHUDDERS. That was what was bothering her.

As if to show her point, she motions to the unfinished plate in front of her cage.

Their dinner - meat loaf and mashed potatoes. The potatoes are gone, but the meat is untouched.

MICAH (CONT'D)

I have some cheese and crackers.

She gives a small smile and puts her finger up, silencing him. She shakes her head again.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Sorry. I just... want to help you.

ROSE

I know.

He LAUGHS LIGHTLY.

MICAH (CONT'D)

I really have no idea what to say.

ROSE

It's okay.

MICAH

I have the book.

He raises it slightly to show her.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Would you like me to read more?

She nods.

He gets comfortable and leans against her cage. He opens to the bookmark.

CUT TO:

INT. ATTIC - A BIT LATER

"Great Expectations" is on the floor.

Micah eats a piece of cheese and Rose nibbles on a cracker.

MICAH

Do you like music?

She nods.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Me, too.

Awkward silence.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Would you... would you like to hear  
some of mine?

She nods.

MICAH (CONT'D)

(surprised)  
You would? Really?

She smiles lightly and nods again.

INT. ATTIC - LATER

Micah plays his violin with the same passion we heard during his recital for his parents. The sound of musical harmony is hauntingly beautiful in its articulate passion.

Rose can only sit and stare in rapt attention as Micah explodes with all the creativity inside of him.

He finishes slowly, almost aimlessly. He opens his eyes and looks at her with a yearning sense of anxiety.

ROSE

You're good.

MICAH

You're just saying that.

ROSE

No, really.

They look at one another silently for a moment.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Do you... like that kind of music?

She nods, grinning somberly.

ROSE

I may not be creative, like you, but...  
listening to music. That's my passion.  
From the Beatles to Mozart to...

(laughs lightly)

...to the Backstreet Boys.

MICAH

I know Mozart. He's my inspiration.

ROSE  
What, and no Beatles?

MICAH  
I have no idea who "the Beatles" is.

ROSE  
Wow.

MICAH  
What an odd name for a composer.

This time, Rose can't stop herself from SNORTING. He looks taken aback, but smiles at her amusement.

ROSE  
What a strange boy you are, Micah.

MICAH  
I don't know of any... modern music.

ROSE  
You've missed out then.

MICAH  
So... what do you love about music?

ROSE  
Music... it has always been my getaway  
from life. Whenever things get hard.  
(beat, softly)  
It's been my escape now more than ever.

MICAH  
In your head?

She nods.

MICAH (CONT'D)  
Why haven't you asked me?

ROSE  
Ask you what?

MICAH  
To let you go. I mean... if I was  
trapped like you, I'd be trying to  
escape. But you aren't.

ROSE  
Maybe I don't care anymore.

MICAH  
How could you not care?

She's silent.

MICAH (CONT'D)  
(beat)  
I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked. How long have you been here?

ROSE  
I don't know. Only a few days, I think. Feels like forever.

MICAH  
(beat)  
Do you like other older composers?

ROSE  
Like who?

MICAH  
Like... Tchaikovsky or Bach or Beethoven...?

ROSE  
I love Tchaikovsky.

Micah blushes.

MICAH  
Me, too.

They smile at each other, both becoming more comfortable with the other person.

MICAH'S VIOLIN MUSIC - starts up again.

MONTAGE INTERCUT IMAGES:

- Micah lies in bed, looking up at his ceiling with a smile on his face.

- Micah eating at the dinner table, looking carefully at his parents. His mother smiles at him.

- Micah grabs the key from the floor panel in his room.

- Micah quickly making a small plate of food in the kitchen late at night.

- Micah and Rose LAUGHING in turn at something the other said. There is real warmth and trust beginning to form between them.

- Micah watching from the window as Father goes out to the backwoods with a rifle.
- Rose looking at how Micah talks in a talkative and highly animated fashion.
- Rose eating and in a relaxed dialogue with Micah.
- Rose's eyes.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Micah chews thoughtlessly.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Micah?

Micah looks up, alert.

Mother and Father look at him, measured. It's an odd response from them. They eat calmly.

MOTHER

You're going to assist your father this morning.

FATHER

I could use an extra pair of hands.

Micah nods.

FATHER

Good. As soon as you're done, go get dressed.

MOTHER

Put on something warm. It's cold today.

Micah nods. He keeps eating - with a hint of anxiety in his eyes.

EXT. WOODS - MORNING (A BIT LATER)

At the outskirts of the circle, Father - wearing warm clothing more fit for winter than for summer - is hard at work dealing with a HUMMING MACHINE half-buried in the ground. Micah looks on.

FATHER

Hold this for me.

Father hands Micah a small screwdriver.

MICAH  
What's wrong with it?

FATHER  
It just needs more energy.

MICAH  
What happens if it stops running?

FATHER  
We lose our electricity and water.

MICAH  
Oh.

FATHER'S HANDS - turning a wheel on the machine. The machine HUMS.

FATHER  
We need to check it from time to time to make sure we're not overworking it. That's why we have such strict rules on using sink and shower water.

MICAH  
I see.

Father wipes his brow with the bottom of his shirt. He tinkers a bit more and the generator begins HUMMING LOUDER.

FATHER  
There, that should do it.

Micah looks up at the oak tree directly above them. He sees a broken branch stump high above them.

MICAH  
Is that the branch that fell on you?

Father looks up and nods.

FATHER  
Yeah.

MICAH  
That high, it could have killed you.

FATHER  
Could have. But it didn't.

MICAH  
I'm glad you're okay.

Father smiles.

FATHER

Come here.

He roots into a bag he had slung over his back. He pulls out two DOUBLE-BARREL SHOTGUNS. He smiles.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Want to go shoot before heading back? I feel like letting off some steam.

MICAH

What about your neck?

FATHER

My neck's fine. Want to go?

MICAH

(beat)

Yeah.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The glorious outback; beautifully lit into the basking of nature.

BAM!

Birds fly into the air.

FATHER (O.S.)

You're shooting too early.

Father and Micah, both on their stomachs, sit perfectly still with a rifle (propped on a small log) in between them aiming into a deeper section of the woods.

MICAH

I thought I had it in my sights.

FATHER

Rabbits can sense more than we give them credit for, son. Here, let me.

Father gently takes the rifle and props it against his shoulder, looking with a steel eye into the scope.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Now look up. 11 o'clock.

Micah looks up and, on the branch of a tree, sits a bluebird, CHIRPING contently. It sits in a cozy little nest with its babies.

MICAH

I see it. The bird?

Father nods, repositioning the rifle.

Father's left eye closes and he leans more into the rifle. His gaze becomes so intense that it's like looking into the eyes of a great white shark just as it attacks - lifeless white orbs that envelop the soul.

BAM!

The bird and the nest fall to the ground.

MICAH

Why would you shoot a bird?

FATHER

Because I can. And because I need you to understand an important lesson.

He gets closer to Micah and puts his hand behind Micah's head, pulling him closer. His gaze is electrifying.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Our spiritual mission is to destroy the creatures among us who do not follow the path. We are servants, Micah. And the Lord asks us for one simple thing.

(beat)

To destroy. That's what we do. And the moment we forget that... that's when judgment reigns down on us. We become one of them. Do you understand?

MICAH

(nods)

If we disobey the mission, we deserve the same punishment.

Father smiles, proud.

FATHER

Never forget that. Never forget who you are. Who we raised you to be.

MICAH

(softly)

And who am I, father?

Father smiles lightly and ruffles his son's hair.

FATHER

You're my son. That's all that matters.

Father stands up. He looks at his son with seriousness.

FATHER (CONT'D)

I have something I want to discuss with you. You've been growing increasingly curious as of late. I'm not sure what has brought this on, but I think you should calm it down.

MICAH

What's wrong with curiosity?

FATHER

Curiosity is fine to learn, but... there are other times when it can get you into trouble. Sometimes... you need to leave things alone.

MICAH

What kind of trouble?

FATHER

Just think about it.

RUFFLE from the trees.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Shhhh...

He points up.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Look.

A deer nibbles on grass blissfully.

Father pulls something out of his jacket.

A tranquilizer gun.

Micah gives him a quizzical look as Father loads it and aims.

THE MUZZLE OF THE TRANQ PISTOL - aims. The trigger is pulled. POP!

The deer goes down.

MICAH

He never saw it coming.

FATHER

They never do if you shoot right.

He walks up toward the deer. It huffs in pain, eyes wide.

MICAH

Why don't you shoot it with a real gun?

FATHER

Fear.

MICAH

Fear?

FATHER

I want its fear, Micah. Dead, it's nothing but meat during the preparation process. But alive? That fear seeps into the meat better than any seasoning ever could.

He takes out a butcher knife from his belt and brushes it lightly across the deer's cheek. It stiffens, its legs kicking in feeble defiance.

Father SIGHS, looking at Micah.

FATHER (CONT'D)

See? You can smell it already.

He raises the knife upwards over his head. Micah begins turning his head.

FATHER (CONT'D)

No.

Micah looks back at his father, whose intense stare is filled with purpose and knowledge.

This isn't a discussion.

This is an education.

FATHER (CONT'D)

You need to watch this.

MICAH

I'm scared.

FATHER

This is what you need to do.

Father grabs the deer's head and lifts it up slightly.

FATHER (CONT'D)

You need to see how life is. This is how we treat animals. They don't have souls. They have no feelings. All they are is food. The sooner you separate the two, the faster you'll join us.

He raises the blade.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Now watch.

He brings the knife down.

INT. SCHOOL ROOM - DAY

Mother walks passed Micah on the couch, pulling her keys from her bodice. She goes toward the backroom toward the chest freezer.

Slowly, he gets up and quietly follows.

He peeks over the edge of the wall as-

Mother opens the chest freezer.

She rummages through it briefly, her back to him.

Briefly, he makes out the top of a FROZEN HUMAN HEAD on the top inner side of the freezer.

She pulls out a frozen bag package full of what looks like chopped-up leg chunks. She pulls it out and locks the freezer.

Micah moves away from the wall.

INT. SCHOOL ROOM - NIGHT

Micah, working on school, listens more closely to parents as they talk from the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Mother and Father sit at the table, talking casually.

MOTHER

She's approaching four days of being up there. How soon for removal?

FATHER

How full are we on the freezer?

MOTHER  
About four days' worth.

FATHER  
I don't like cutting it that close.  
Didn't know we had so little.

MOTHER  
I've perhaps been a bit too generous in  
the portions.

FATHER  
It's all right. Just cut down a bit  
from now on. Sunday night should  
provide ample time.

MOTHER  
Three days? Will we have a replacement  
by then?

FATHER  
I've already scouted a prospect.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Micah's eyes widening at their words.

MOTHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Three days.

He gives a small GASP. Panic.

A MONTAGE OF IMAGES:

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

- Micah continuing with his musical score...
- Micah doing math by himself...
- Micah cleaning up with Mother...

INT. KITCHEN (as scenes switch, we close in on attic door)

- Micah eating lunch with Mother...
- Mother cooking, Micah putting dishes away...
- Micah reading a schoolbook while Mother prepares dinner...
- Father grabs a drink from the fridge...
- Micah, alone, watching the door.

Finally, the attic door consumes our vision. BLACKNESS.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Micah stands outside, the air brushing against him. His eyes scan the many mounds that litter the otherwise-picturesque landscape.

Counts them silently.

His head hangs.

He looks back up. His eyes narrow.

INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

Rose looks up at Micah comes up the stairs.

ROSE

You're one to spoil a girl, aren't you?

He smiles thinly. He comes over and sits near her.

MICAH

Well, it'd be hard not to come see the only girl I've ever met, wouldn't it?

He catches himself and grimaces.

ROSE

Ever? Really?

He says nothing. She catches his reaction. Awkward silence.

ROSE (CONT'D)

I mean... sorry.

MICAH

Why are you sorry?

ROSE

I know we really haven't talked about this side of things.

MICAH

I know. I didn't want things to end with the way they were.

ROSE

(nods)

With just us talking.

MICAH

No drama, no... no confronting reality.

ROSE

We both know it couldn't be this way forever. Not with that reality staring us both in the face.

To make her point, she lightly clicks her fingernails against the metal bars of her cage.

ROSE

We might as well talk about it. We've got nothing to lose.

MICAH

What's there to tell?

ROSE

How about this - I ask a question, you ask a question. I'm sure you have questions of your own.

MICAH

Are you sure you want to do this?

ROSE

Yes. I'm sure. You first.

MICAH

(beat)

Why don't you care if you live or die?

ROSE

There's nothing left for me out there. I have nothing to miss and no one to miss me. My life was over the moment your parents broke open my door. Now... I just want it all to be over.

(beat)

What kind of life have you lived here? Am I really... it?

MICAH

I've never seen another person before. Well, other than mother and father. No one.

ROSE

How is that possible?

He shrugs.

ROSE (CONT'D)

No one at all? Just you three?

Micah nods his head forlornly.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Why?

MICAH

Because that's the way things are. The way I was raised.

He eyes her carefully. The curiosity from before has been replaced by a fiery ache.

MICAH (CONT'D)

(softly)

My turn.

(beat)

Are you... evil?

ROSE

What? No. I'm not. Micah-

His eyes narrow helplessly at her. Confused. Conflicted.

MICAH

(softly)

They said that there are no exceptions. They would never lie to me. Never.

ROSE

My God, Micah... what have they been telling you?

MICAH

That everyone out there is evil. Demons. And that our duty is to sacrifice you for the glory of the Lord.

ROSE

God... but what about the bells? I've heard them. What did they tell you about that?

MICAH

That the bells are just a snare. Like the Sirens in the Odyssey.

ROSE

Micah... the people that ring those bells are good. They're who your parents pretend to be. It's a church.

MICAH

A church? What's a church?

ROSE

A place of worship for people who want to follow and obey God. It's the kind of building that you can instantly recognize. Old. A bell at the top, usually underneath a large arch. It's where people join together to worship.

MICAH

But... how could demons worship God?

He looks white.

ROSE

Micah? What are you thinking?

All the pain and confusion begins to pour out of Micah in a rapid volley of emotions.

MICAH

I don't know what to think. I... don't know anything anymore.

ROSE

They've kept you in a shell. It's not your fault what they did to you. But the world's not like they say.

MICAH

(heartbroken)

But they wouldn't lie to me.

ROSE

From the sound of those bells, that church can't be too far off. Go find it if you don't believe me.

MICAH

I-I can't.

Awkward silence. Micah SNIFFS, wiping his nose.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Do you think someone will find you?

ROSE

I always thought the police were good at this kind of thing.

MICAH

Police?

ROSE

They're... peacekeepers. They protect the good people and take down the bad people. They spend a lot of their time looking for people like your parents.

MICAH

How do they know when something's wrong?

ROSE

People in trouble call them on the phone. 911. That's the number anyone can call and it will get them help.

MICAH

911. Telephone. And they just come?

ROSE

As fast as they can.

MICAH

But... no one called 911. Did they?

Slowly, she shakes her head.

MICAH (CONT'D)

(beat)

Why did they bring you here? Where is your family? Why are you here alone?

A sad, horrified look from Rose.

ROSE

They... I don't want to talk about it.

Micah touches the bars, his eyes pleading.

MICAH

I need to know. Please.

His earnestness is raw.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Please...

She SIGHS. A deep, prolonged sigh of remembered pain and suffering.

ROSE

My parents and I... we were at home. It was dark. Past midnight, I think.

*INTERCUT: ROSE'S FLASHBACKS (BLACK-AND-WHITE)*

*INT. ROSE'S HOUSE - NIGHT*

*Rose in bed, sleeping.*

ROSE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I remember waking up screaming.

*A HAND - reaches out and slams over Rose's mouth. Her eyes snap open in utter panic.*

*She struggles with every inch of her power, throwing both her and her assailant on the floor.*

ROSE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I fought... but it wasn't enough.

*A needle from her assailant is injected into her neck.*

*HER VISION - slowly becomes fuzzy until it's black*

ROSE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...and my world went dark.

*INT. ATTIC - AFTERNOON*

*Rose awakens on the cold hard floor of her cage. She bolts upright, scouring the area.*

ROSE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I woke up in a nightmare.

*ROSE'S DAD and ROSE'S MOM (both early 40s) are in separate cages.*

*Rose's Dad is lying on the floor of his cage, face white and blood gushing from an unseen wound. Forced breathe.*

*Rose's Mom reaches between her bars toward him, but can't make it far enough.*

ROSE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Me, my parents, trapped in this hell.

*INT. ATTIC - NIGHT (PRESENT)*

*Rose is crying now.*

ROSE (CON'T)

My mom tried reaching through her cage

bars, doing all she could to comfort dad and me. "It's going to be alright, Rose. It's going to be alright."

She takes a deep breath, quivers.

ROSE (CONT'D)  
All I could to was cry.

*INT. ATTIC - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)*

*Rose lies in her cage, sobbing. Sharing looks with her parents - as that is all she is capable of doing.*

*Father steps up the stairs and looks at them all with a manic look of emotional hunger and hate. Here we see a truly terrifying image of Father - one that cements his villainy and cruelty. Here, Father's smirk shows he enjoys the slaughter.*

ROSE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I cried when your father came upstairs  
and put my dad on that table.

*Father drags Rose's Dad out from his cage. Mother reaches out in agony, screaming.*

*Father locks his limbs into place on the butcher table.*

*Rose's Dad locks eyes with Father as Father stands over the helpless man with a hacksaw and an ax. Pleading strictly through his eyes.*

ROSE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I cried when I saw your father stand  
over mine and hurt him.

*Father, without hesitation, lowers the ax into Rose's Dad's gut with a mighty downward swing.*

*Rose screams out in agony, both arms outstretched out of her cage toward her dying father.*

ROSE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
My mom's wracking sobs made it worse.

*THE AX - upwards and downwards, upwards and downwards. Father's swings are vicious and cruel. The level of blood on the tip of the ax grows larger with each attack.*

*ROSE'S EYES - flowing with the worst kind of tears. She meets her mother's eyes.*

*Rose's Mom, a numb shell of who she once was, looks at her daughter. The despair that threatens to break her slowly gives way to her more primal motivation: supporting her daughter.*

ROSE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I had to watch it all. My father. My mother. Every gruesome second of it.

*Rose's Mom is hooked up to the bloody table.*

*ROSE'S MOM'S EYES - never leave Rose. The most selfless look of love and devotion a mother could ever sustain. Our focus on just her eyes never wavers for even a second.*

*ROSE'S MOM'S EYES (CONT'D) - a sudden jerk of her head. The eyes don't blink. A single trickle of blood flows across her brow across her eye down to her cheek.*

ROSE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

You have no idea what it was like. To feel helpless as the people you love most-

*Mother is like an angel crying tears of blood.*

INT. ATTIC - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Rose trails off. No anger. No fear. Just resignation.

MICAH

So that's why you're so resigned.

ROSE (CONT'D)

We didn't do anything to deserve what happened. But it didn't matter. Not for them. And now not for me.

She begins to tear up. She angrily wipes the tears away, but they keep coming.

MICAH

You shouldn't give up on life so easily.

ROSE

(voice rising)

You think giving up has been easy?? That I want this?? What recourse do I have? They took everything.

MICAH

You're still here. That's gotta be

worth something.

ROSE

I just... want it to be over.

HER FACE - the same look of helplessness and confusion he had. Slowly, her stifled attempts of control turn into shoulder-shaking sobs. She buries her face in her hands.

MICAH

Rose...

Micah hesitates just for a moment.

He reaches his hands through the bars.

Rose falls into his arms, embracing him through the bars as fully as she can.

Micah presses his torso against the bars.

They hold one another desperately as she cries. Micah rubs her hair comfortingly.

His face shows a shock. A wonder. He has no idea what this all means. But it means something.

MICAH (CONT'D)

It's okay. I've got you.

Slowly, her SOBS subside until they are just WHIMPERS.

Micah doesn't let go.

ROSE

(whisper)

I hope it won't hurt too much.

MICAH

I'm sorry.

ROSE

It's not like I want to die. I just... don't want this. I can't stand this.

MICAH

Then why... why did you decide to talk to me? Why didn't you just stay silent until I finally went away?

ROSE

Because... in all the darkness around me, you've a light to hold onto and remind me of... before. I wanted that.

(beat)  
Thank you for giving that to me, Micah.  
Even if just for a little while.

MICAH  
(heartbroken)  
I don't.... I--

OUTSIDE - a car pulling in.

Micah jumps in panic.

MICAH (CONT'D)  
They're here. I have to go.

He looks desperately at her.

MICAH (CONT'D)  
I'll come back tomorrow night. I  
promise.

ROSE  
Micah...

MICAH  
I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

With another look at her, Micah turns off the flashlight  
and runs down the stairs.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

He gets to the foot of the stairs and shuts the door.

From the window, he can see the headlights to the car turn  
off.

He locks the latch and runs back toward his bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

He puts the key back into its hiding place and gets into  
bed. Slows his erratic breathing. Calms.

THE front door softly CREAKS open. There is a shuffling  
rather than a walking.

He gets out of bed and peaks from his doorway toward the  
front door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mother and father carry a man's body wrapped up in some  
sort of wrap. The man doesn't struggle. Unconscious.

Father accidentally drops one of the man's legs on the floor with a thud. He quickly pulls it back up.

MOTHER

You'll wake Micah. Quietly.

Micah's eyes widen in panic.

Another "tenant."

Micah's look changes to sudden worry.

FATHER

I know. Just get this upstairs.

MOTHER

Drop him here. I'll open the attic.

They set the man down as mother disappears into the kitchen to open the attic. As they do, Father's jacket shuffles slightly, revealing a-

TRANQUILIZER PISTOL

Micah GASPS slightly. His eyes light up with an idea.

FOCUS ON TRANQUILIZER PISTOL.

MICAH'S EYES - watch with a sudden idea.

Father looks down at the man with disgust.

Suddenly, his head goes up. Sensing something.

Micah inches his head farther alongside his door rim.

Father's head turns toward Micah's room. His eyes narrow. He starts walking toward Micah's room.

INT. MICAH'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Micah soundlessly rushes to his bed and gets beneath the covers. Puts his head under his pillow. He looks underneath a small hole in his pillow toward the door.

Father's shadow extends through the entire room as he looks inside.

Micah holds his breath.

Father just stands there, looking directly at Micah's shape in the bed.

MOTHER (O.S.)

(whispers)

What are you doing over there? Come help me.

Father looks at Micah for one more moment.

FATHER

Coming.

Father turns and exits the doorway, his massive shadow retreating with him.

Micah lets out a SIGH OF RELIEF. He stays where he is. Thinking.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mother and Father read the Bible while leaning against one another on the couch. Mother points to something.

Micah watches from the kitchen. He stands up when he sees they're engrossed in their work.

INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The door opens, revealing Micah quietly coming in.

Micah skitters slowly on the floor, looking for the tranquilizer.

UNDER THE BED - nothing.

THE CABINETS - nothing.

MICAH

Where are you...?

He looks toward the closet. He opens it slowly. Hangers hold dozens of clothing pieces, but behind them...

THE TRANQUILIZER GUN hangs next to a REVOLVER.

Below it is an OLD TELEPHONE.

Micah smiles.

The bedroom door suddenly opens. Micah jumps back in panic. The clothing settles back.

There stands Father, whose inherent confusion is instantly replaced by that dangerous glint.

FATHER

What are you doing here?

Micah takes a nervous step back.

MICAH

I... I, uh...

Father takes two slow steps into the room.

FATHER

What... are... you... doing?

MICAH

I was just--

Father lunges at him with a powerful backhand. It connects, sending Micah sprawling onto the bed.

Tears blur Micah's vision.

FATHER

(roaring)

Why are you in our room?? Do you belong here?? Do you???

Micah tries to get to the other side of the bed. Father grabs his leg, pulls him closer, grabs him by his shoulders, and savagely shakes him like a rag doll.

FATHER

Well???

Father smacks him again. Hard. Then again. And again. Quickly, all Micah can do is lie limp in Father's grasp.

MICAH

Please... stop...

Father's hands curl into fists and the smacks quickly become punches. He's beating the living shit out of his son, his eyes black in manic rage.

This is the glimmer we've seen.

This is the real Father.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Stop it!

Mother runs into the room and throws herself onto her husband.

Father struggles, raising his bruised fist up again to bring down.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

STOP!

Her voice brings his eyes toward her. She grabs his face and makes him look right into her eyes.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Look at me. We're not like them. We'll never be like them. You hear me??

Like a violent beast lulled to silence, the manic nature of his eyes slowly dissipates. HUFFING DEEPLY, he looks at his beaten son in his grasp. He lets go, shocked at himself.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Oh, Micah.

She passes Father and pulls Micah into her arms. He begins to cry as she cradles him.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

It's okay. I've got you, honey.

Father's fist slowly becomes unclenched. His breathing slows. His eyes seem to show a caring, but it will never truly allow itself to show. Instead, he pulls himself up like a proper father.

FATHER

Son... you can't come in here. You know that.

MICAH

(crying)

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

FATHER

I know.

Awkwardly, Father pats Micah's back.

Then he walks out. He has nothing left to say.

Mother holds Micah tighter.

MOTHER

Shhhh... it's okay.

MICAH

(shaky)

I don't understand...

MOTHER

He just wants to keep you safe. And to be safe, you need to follow the rules.

MICAH

His eyes... mom, they scared me. I  
couldn't breathe, they scared me so  
much.

Mother sighs.

MOTHER

(beat)

Your father... is a man of few words. A  
man of God, but also a man of anger.  
That was what he was called to be. If  
it wasn't for him...

She trails off, remembering. Takes a DEEP BREATH.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

He is who he is. All we can do is  
accept that. He's your father, Micah.  
That you can't change.

Micah, tears streaking his eyes, nods.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

You okay now?

Micah nods.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Okay. I have to go deal with your  
father. I'll take care of him. Okay?

MICAH

Okay.

She kisses his head.

MOTHER

I love you, Micah.

MICAH

I love you, too.

She gets up and leaves the room. Micah gathers himself.  
Looks toward the door once she leaves. He peeks out.

Mother sits next to an unresponsive and stoic Father on the  
couch, whispering to him. It looks like a slave pacifying a  
king, it's so unnatural.

Micah looks back at the closet. His body sways in deep  
pain. He looks up toward the ceiling where he knows Rose  
is. Conflicted to his very core.

Finally, seeing his opportunity and knowing that he'll never have another chance, he limps back in the closet.

There's the tranquilizer pistol.

He grabs it from the rack and puts it into the back rim of his pants. He slowly limps out of the room.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY (LATER)

Micah, shirtless, stares blankly at his bruised torso. He gingerly rubs lotion on the worst of the bruises on his arms, face, and ribs, grimacing as he does. The left side of his face got the worst of it.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY (LATER)

Micah kneels on the grass as he looks up. Contemplating. Meditating. His eyes are closed.

THE CRUNCH of grass from behind him. His eyes open.

FATHER (O.S.)

Micah?

Micah turns around and sees Father slowly approaching.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Do you want to talk?

Micah shrugs and looks ahead. Father comes down to where his son sits and squats down. He looks up at the sky.

FATHER (CONT'D)

See anything interesting up there?

MICAH

No. Nothing at all.

FATHER

Now why do I not believe that?

Micah doesn't reply.

Father gingerly puts his hand on Micah's shoulder.

Micah bristles.

Father removes his hand.

FATHER (CONT'D)

What are you out here for, son?

MICAH

Answers.

FATHER

(beat)  
I'm sorry.

MICAH

For me looking for answers?

FATHER

For what happened in there. I  
overreacted and crossed the line.

MICAH

No, you didn't. I saw it in your eyes.  
That's what you're like all the time.  
It's just... it took this long for the  
real you to come out.

FATHER

You know that's not true, Micah.

MICAH

Then why is it that Mother is always  
afraid of you? That you're able to kill  
all those people so easily?

FATHER

We've told you, they're not real  
people-

MICAH

You still kill them.

FATHER

We don't kill. We sacrifice.

MICAH

I can't do what you do. And I can't  
blot out everything and everyone else  
that exists out there just because it  
makes me feel better about my faith.

FATHER

What are you talking about?

MICAH

Life can't be just... us. There is so  
much more to life and to the world  
and... You're keeping me out of it.

FATHER

We explained this to you. Time and time  
again now. We need to separate

ourselves from the evil of--

MICAH

The world. Yeah, I know.

FATHER

Mock if you want, it doesn't change the truth. Nothing else matters. We are God's chosen ones for glory.

MICAH

Tell me about the bells.

FATHER

What bells?

MICAH

The bells you keep telling me are nothing but traps? Are they really?

FATHER

(angrier)

Of course they are.

Micah looks in anger at Father.

MICAH

The more I see the damage we do, the more I believe God has nothing to do with us.

FATHER

(low)

That's blasphemy.

MICAH

It's blasphemy to think? To not just blindly follow without logic or morals? What about all the Word's inked parts?

FATHER

Lies.

MICAH

Who says?

Father glares.

FATHER

We're done here. Come back inside when you feel more agreeable. When the Devil doesn't have his hooks buried deep in you.

Micah doesn't turn.

FATHER (CONT'D)

You know what the worst sin is, Micah? Unbelief. Doubt. And for someone raised so carefully within the confines of the Word... you're not just disappointing me... you're disappointing the Lord.

MICAH

That's only if the God you say we worship is the God who's up there.

Father clenches his fists.

FATHER

Remember your loyalties, son. Without loyalties, without family... what are you?

He begins to turn to walk away. His last words are a threat:

FATHER (CONT'D)

Nothing but dead, godless meat.

With that, he leaves.

Micah waits until Father is well out of range, then GASPS in horror of himself. He closes his eyes to focus.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Micah sits silently with his parents as they eat.

He eyes the meat on his plate, just vaguely hiding his disgust. He looks up slightly at his parents, neither of whom look at him.

He eats the mashed potatoes, but leaves the meat on one side. Mother notices.

MOTHER

You don't like it.

MICAH

Just not that hungry.

She doesn't push and he doesn't elaborate.

INT. MICAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Micah massages the tranquilizer gun beneath his covers as he looks at the clock. 10:30 PM. No engine. No car leaving.

He's confused. He gets up silently and looks out his bedroom door.

Mother and Father are still awake in the living room. Micah looks at the clock in his room. They're not leaving for night. Odd.

Slight panic as he realizes he won't be able to see her. That panic is washed over with determination.

He needs to see her.

She only has three days left to live and he needs to decide what to do about that. He's not ready to make a decision. All this evident on his face.

He lies back in bed and watches the clock.

10:30 PM.

- which slowly morphs into -

12:10 AM.

Micah, still wide awake, hears his parents pass his room and walk toward their bedroom. Their door SHUTS. Silence.

He stays there, watching the clock.

12:10 AM.

- which slowly morphs into -

1:00 AM.

Micah gets up from the bed again, this time with the tranquilizer in hand as well as the keys and his flashlight.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Micah, breathlessly, walks soundlessly along the hallway. Between his way to the living room is his parents' room.

HIS BARE FEET - careful to not creak on the floor at all.

He stands right in front of their door now. He presses his ear against their door.

The SOUND OF LIGHT SNORING from both of them.

He backs away from the door and continues on his trek toward the attic.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Micah, extremely anxious, fumbles with the key to the attic door. He puts the key in and opens the door. It begins to SQUEAK. He opens it slower.

Once the door is opened, he slips the lock on the back of the door and soundlessly shuts the door behind him, hoping that it would still look locked if someone passed it.

INT. ATTIC - BOTTOM OF STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Micah, upon closing the door, hears the man muttering.

MAN (O.S.)

Who's there? Who's there??

Quickly, afraid of discovery, Micah rushes as quickly as possible without creaking to the top of the stairs. He aims his flashlight blindly toward the cages. The man is in the cage directly to Rose's left.

MAN

Don't kill...!

Micah blindly aims. Fires. The YELLING stops. THUMP.

Micah continues up the stairs, careful to do it quickly.

ROSE (O.S.)

Micah, what are you doing?

MICAH

Shhhh!

He raises a hand to his lips. She stops. He slowly, with one foot put carefully in front of the other, makes his way toward her.

As he walks toward Rose, he flashes his light beam toward the unconscious man in the cage. The gleam of-

A POLICE OFFICER BADGE, WITH THE NAME "GLEN HOLLIS" ON IT

-on the man's belt catches the light.

The tranquilizer dart hit the man (Glen) in the neck.

Micah sits down directly in front of her cage.

They speak in hushed tones.

MICAH

Coming to see you.

Rose looks worriedly toward Glen.

ROSE  
What did you do to him?

Micah raised his tranquilizer gun. She misunderstands, her eyes widening in horror.

ROSE  
You didn't...

MICAH  
No, no... tranquilizer gun. Knocked him out pretty solid.

ROSE  
Why are you whispering?

MICAH  
Because they're still downstairs.

ROSE  
(alarmed)  
Your parents?

Micah nods.

MICAH  
We need to be quiet.

ROSE  
Then why are you here?

MICAH  
Why? You don't want me here?

ROSE  
I mean... why are you risking all that coming to see me?

Micah's expression shows his struggle between telling her about her expiration date and keeping it from her.

Instead, he merely smiles.

MICAH  
I just really wanted to see you.

Rose eyes the bruises on Micah's face.

ROSE  
What happened to you?

MICAH  
I tripped.

ROSE  
Did your father do that to you?

MICAH  
No.

ROSE  
(beat)  
He did, didn't he?

Micah doesn't answer.

ROSE (CONT'D)  
Why did he do that?

MICAH  
(softly)  
It wasn't on purpose.

ROSE  
He beat you. Look around you, Micah.  
This is not what someone who loves  
someone else does to them.

MICAH  
I don't want to talk about it. Please.

ROSE  
(beat)  
Okay.

Awkward silence.

ROSE (CONT'D)  
Thank you for last night.

MICAH  
Why?

ROSE  
You made me see what I'd be missing by  
giving up. Even though I know there's  
nothing I can do... I now know I don't  
want to give up. Not yet.  
(beat)  
You made me want life.

Micah's pain returns in his big eyes.

MICAH  
I'm glad.

Micah looks again at the lock on her cage.

MICAH (CONT'D)

I'm sorry I can't just get up and free you right now.

He hangs the key upwards to show her.

MICAH (CONT'D)

I don't have the right key. This only opens the attic door. My parents always carry the rest, so they have the only way of getting in.

Micah aims the flashlight down toward the bottom of the cage.

All the cages have an electric cord attached to them, while the cords all converge into an electric wattage battery.

An electric charge.

MICAH (CONT'D)

And I can't open it some other way. They booby-trapped the cages. If I try opening without a key, I think you'd be electrocuted.

ROSE

If you put your mind to it, I know you'll find a way. Just do what you think is right, Micah.

Awkward silence.

MICAH

Can I ask you something?

ROSE

Of course.

MICAH

Can you tell me about... out there? What's it like?

ROSE

There's so much to tell. What do you want to know?

MICAH

Everything. Is it good? Bad? What does the music sound like? What kind of books are out there? Food? Everything.

ROSE

Look, I know that's what this is about. Why you need to see me. Why you're putting yourself in harm's way to talk to me. You're trying to make a choice.

MICAH

I don't... I...

ROSE

You want to humanize me.

(beat)

You want to make me "real" enough to choose to save me. But you're afraid. And that fear is trying to push you to just obey your parents and see me as nothing but meat. Right?

He nods.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Do you still look at your dinner the same way?

Slowly, he shakes his head.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Then the damage is already done. You can't look at me that way. Not anymore.

(beat)

Look at me. I understand. I do.

Micah SIGHS. Looks toward Glen.

MICAH

Do you know him?

ROSE

No. He hasn't said much, either. He's just been banging and yelling. I doubt he even noticed me.

(beat)

Why? What's wrong?

MICAH

He changes things, doesn't he? I don't know if I can get around him again and come see you.

ROSE

You'll find a way. Look at what you did now. That was pretty clever.

Micah looks at her, helpless. Wearing his emotions on his sleeve for the first time.

MICAH

I do want to do the right thing.

ROSE

I know you do.

MICAH

But how can you be so sure about me?  
You don't know me. How do you know  
anything when I don't even know myself?

She looks at him and, finally, gives a small smile.

ROSE

It's your eyes. They... remind me of my  
father's.

(beat)

You're not like them, Micah. You are a  
good person. You can fake a lot. But  
you can't fake the eyes.

She reaches out and touches his arm.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Look how you've ignored everything you  
know, that you've grown up with, coming  
here. For better or worse... I trust  
you.

MICAH

I--

CREAK! A noise from downstairs. Someone's walking around.  
Micah SHAKES.

ROSE

(whispers even lighter)  
What was that?

MICAH

(whispers)  
Someone's awake.

The CREAKING continues into the kitchen.

The two remain petrified.

After a moment, the FRIDGE DOOR OPENS. Then CLOSES.  
Silence.

Micah holds his breath in anxiety, staring toward the stairway, waiting for light to shine up signifying the person had seen the door's lock undone.

Finally, after another agonizing moment, the CREAKING OF FEET continues and goes toward the other side of the house.

Micah SIGHS IN RELIEF.

ROSE  
Do you think...?

MICAH  
No. We wouldn't be here now if the lock had been seen. We're okay.

ROSE  
Micah.

MICAH  
Yeah?

ROSE  
I want you to know... I won't blame you. If you choose not to save me.

MICAH  
I wish it didn't have to be you or them.

ROSE  
(softly)  
You can't have it both ways.

MICAH  
I know.

They lean their heads against one another and just sit silently.

DISSOLVE TO:

BONG! BONG! 2 AM from the GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

Micah moves his head from Rose's.

MICAH  
I need to go.

ROSE  
Don't come back if you are putting yourself in danger. Wait until they're out of the house from now on, okay?

MICAH

(beat, softly)

You shouldn't be so worried about me. I don't deserve it.

ROSE

Yes, you do. As weird as it is to say... you're my friend, Micah. And don't want you to get hurt because of me.

(beat)

Good night, then.

As he gets up to dash off, but before he does, he looks at her for a long moment.

MICAH

You know what's sad?

ROSE

What?

MICAH

You're the best friend I've ever had.

He smiles glumly and leaves.

As he passes the cage with Glen inside - we see the dart is still in his neck.

INT. MICAH'S BEDROOM - DAY

BIRDS CHIRPING. Micah's eyes flutter open. He smiles for a moment... then panic enters. He GASPS at a memory.

MICAH

Oh, no...

He practically jumps out of bed and throws on a pair of pants and a shirt.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Micah runs into the kitchen, breathless.

Father sits at the table while Mother cooks.

She already has plates ready for Glen and Rose. Upon his entrance, Mother looks at him questioningly. Father doesn't. Still cold about last night, no doubt.

MOTHER

My, you're in a hurry this morning.

MICAH

Sorry. I, uh... just had a nightmare.

MOTHER

You okay?

MICAH

Yeah, I'm fine.

His brain is working a mile a minute. Trying to plan a way of getting upstairs and getting the dart before his mother finds it.

He looks around desperately. He sees the edge of the living room. Gets a plan.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Micah walks into the living room and looks at the -

LARGE BOOKSHELF

- that towers above him.

He GROANS LIGHTLY.

MICAH

Oh, this is gonna hurt.

He jumps up to the second shelf and hangs on it with all his might.

Slowly, the bookshelf begins to wobble. A bit more. He pulls back until...

The bookshelf CRASHES down on him with hundreds upon hundreds of books.

He rolls with the fall and just gets the bookshelf SMASHING DOWN on his left foot. He YELLS OUT IN PAIN.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Micah, are you okay?!

Mother and Father both rush into the living room and see the damage.

Mother YELLS out, going toward Micah and pulling him out of the way. Father looks at the bookshelf in frustration.

FATHER

What happened?

Micah fakes tears - but not the pain.

MICAH

(breathless)

I'm sorry! I was trying to get a book to read on the top shelf and it... and I pulled too hard...

MOTHER

It's okay. We'll clean this up. Go and get yourself a washcloth.

Micah nods in pain and gets up.

MICAH

I'll be right back.

He hurries off.

INT. MICAH'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

In downright panic, Micah grabs the attic key.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ever so quietly, he enters the key into the latch, opens the door, and closes it behind him.

INT. ATTIC - CONTINUOUS

Micah, petrified of discovery, tiptoes toward the cages. He gets to Glen's cage. He remains unconscious.

He looks toward Rose's cage. She remains asleep.

Micah slowly puts his hand inside the bars toward Glen's neck. The dart remains where he shot it.

He grips the tip of the dart and gingerly pulls it upwards.

GLEN'S HAND - suddenly grabs Micah's wrist. Micah opens his mouth to cry out but Glen yanks his arm forward and roughly pulls him against the bars, covering Micah's mouth with his hand.

GLEN

(fierce whisper)

Don't you say a word.

Micah's eyes are wide in bottomless fear. He shakes.

Glen stands, his grip still strong, and looks Micah dead in the eye.

GLEN (CONT'D)

Are you calm?

Micah shakily nods.

GLEN (CONT'D)

Now I need you to listen to every word I say. And think well before you speak. Where am I?

Micah only shudders.

GLEN (CONT'D)

Speak, boy.

MICAH

L-- let go of me.

GLEN

Now you listen well, boy. I'm a police officer. Glen Hollis. Now for the last time, where am I?

MICAH

I'll scream, and they'll come.

The man (now Glen) eyes him shrewdly.

GLEN

If you were going to scream... you would have done it.

Glen eyes Rose, still sleeping.

GLEN (CONT'D)

(comprehending)

You're not supposed to be here, are you?

MICAH

I don't know what you're talking-

GLEN

The truth.

Micah looks down.

GLEN (CONT'D)

Look at me.

Micah looks up.

GLEN (CONT'D)

(softly)

What are you doing, son?

MICAH  
I'm seeing her.

GLEN  
For what?

MICAH  
Let go of me.

Glen looks at Rose. Back at Micah. Gets it.

GLEN  
What? She think you're her hero? That  
you'll save her?  
(beat)  
I know we're not the first to be here.  
You didn't save them. So why are you  
making her hope she'll get out alive?

Micah shuffles from Glen's grasp. Glen releases his grip.  
Micah moves away.

MICAH  
I'm doing my best.

MOTHER (O.S.)  
Micah, please bring the trash can!  
We're almost done!

MICAH  
I need to go.

He walks quickly toward the steps.

GLEN  
You're the last chance we have.

Micah hightails it out of there.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Micah rapidly locks the door and shoves the key in his  
pocket.

MOTHER (O.S.)  
Honey?

Mother walks in just as Micah picks up the garbage can.

MICAH  
Bringing it now.

She smiles back, taking the garbage can. She walks out with  
it. Micah's smile disappears.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Micah goes passed Mother with a windbreaker toward the exit.

MOTHER

Where are you off to?

MICAH

Just for a walk.

MOTHER

Okay, have fun.

He nods and walks outside, pulling A COMPASS out of his pocket before his mother can see.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

He steps passed the barrier and keeps walking.

He pulls out his compass and the tranquilizer pistol. He looks down at the watch on his wrist. 9:30 AM.

EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Micah walks through the empty forest, his eyes like those of a hawk in paying attention to where he's going and how to get back.

DISSOLVE TO:

A WATCH. He looks down at the time. 12:00 PM. Listens.

MICAH

(to himself)

Come on, where are you...?

CLANG! The first sound from the bells! He looks at the compass. Directly to the north. He begins running faster through the forest toward the sounds.

CLANG! Micah keeps running. CLANG!

Micah's face, conveying a depth of purpose.

CLANG! This last one ECHOES for a moment.

EXT. FOREST - DAY (LATER)

Micah steps out of the forest, finally.

A dirt road meets his eyes. No cars. No houses. Grass flows like a portrait as far as the eye can see.

Micah eyes his surroundings.

Then... to his left... he sees it.

A SMALL CHURCH

He looks at it from afar in wonder.

MICAH

(softly)

An old building with an arch over a  
bell...

He walks toward it.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Micah pushes open the doors of the church.

Inside is a small congregation. PASTOR WILLIS (50s) stands at his podium in the front. A large cross adorns the back of the church. The rest is sparse.

They all look toward the doors. Silence.

Micah's heart stops. He slowly begins backing up. Maybe Mother and Father were right...

Willis smiles warmly, opening his hands in welcome.

WILLIS

Come in, son. Sit down.

Awkwardly, Micah sits in the very back pew where no one else sits. Willis CHUCKLES.

WILLIS (CONT'D)

You can sit closer. We don't bite.

The others LAUGH LIGHTLY. Micah puts up a small smile but doesn't move. Willis doesn't push.

WILLIS (CONT'D)

I apologize if our attention is a  
disservice to you. We don't get many  
newcomers around here.

Micah nods. Willis looks back at his podium.

WILLIS (CONT'D)

Please open your Bibles to the Psalms.

Micah sees everyone open their Bibles. He looks down, his hands empty. Willis notices.

WILLIS (CONT'D)

There's a Bible in the back of the pew  
in front of you, son.

Micah looks up and there's a Bible. Nodding thanks to the  
pastor, he takes it and opens it.

His eyes widen.

Here is a Bible untouched. No ripped pages. No inked-out  
spots. His eyes begin whirling through this new-found  
treasure, hungry for the truth.

WILLIS' VOICE FADES - into complete silence as Micah reads.  
His confusion grows all the more serious; his expression of  
betrayal all the more full. But with all that... there is  
still elation. Truth discovered.

INT. CHURCH - LATER

Micah continues reading when Willis' words speak out.

WILLIS

What have we seen time and time again,  
ladies and gentlemen? Our world tries  
convincing us the Lord our God is dead  
- if he ever existed at all. The world  
belongs to politics and entertainment.

He SIGHS.

WILLIS (CONT'D)

And if they do admit anything, they try  
to turn God into the enemy. Saying only  
a cruel and hateful God would allow the  
atrocities that haunt our world.

Then he smiles.

WILLIS (CONT'D)

But what they and everyone else who  
doesn't believe misunderstands is what  
kind of God we believe in. We don't  
believe in a God of hate or sadism.

(beat)

We believe in a God of love and  
justice. A God who demands love amongst  
his creation and justice. This is not a  
God who demands sacrifice. Jesus Christ  
took care of that, didn't He?

Those amongst the congregation nod approvingly.

Micah stares, enraptured, at Willis.

WILLIS (CONT'D)

What I'm trying to convey this morning is that the first step in us truly living in this world with the knowledge of God is making sure we are viewing God through His terms, not ours.

(beat)

All of us make the mistake of trying to encase God in our own limited minds. But God is bigger than what we could imagine. Our first step to worshiping him should be bowing before him and begging for the grace of understanding.

(beat)

Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Micah bows his head. Tears in his eyes.

INT. CHURCH - LATER

The sermon is over and the congregation is leaving. Many of them pass Micah with a pat on the shoulder or a smile.

But Micah sits, waiting, until they've left.

Willis still stands at the podium, gathering his papers.

Quietly, Micah - Bible still gripped tightly in his hands - heads toward the pastor. Willis looks up and smiles.

WILLIS

I was hoping you would stay.

Willis approaches. Micah tenses. Willis puts his hand out.

WILLIS (CONT'D)

Pastor Willis.

Micah slowly takes the hand offered to him. The embrace is short and sweet, yet comfortable and at ease. Micah looks a bit less worried.

WILLIS (CONT'D)

What's your name, son?

MICAH

(softly)

Micah.

Willis smiles again - that strange pure smile that Micah hasn't seen before.

WILLIS

Well, a pleasure to meet you, Micah.  
Where are your parents?

MICAH

They... didn't want to come.

WILLIS

I understand. Unfortunately, we have quite a few family outcasts like you amongst us. You are among friends.

(beat)

Did the sermon help you?

MICAH

I... think so.

Micah fidgets slightly. Willis lets him take his time.

MICAH

Uh, I...

WILLIS

Yes, Micah?

MICAH

I was wondering... uh, I mean... if it would be all right if I...

WILLIS

Just speak your mind, son. Don't worry.

Micah gestures to the Bible in his hands.

MICAH

Could I have this?

The smile on Willis' face grows to such a degree that it fills his entire face. His joy takes Micah aback.

Willis pushes the Bible in Micah's hands closer to his heart.

WILLIS

(softly)

Of course you can.

Micah smiles back. Willis searches Micah's face for something. He looks concerned.

WILLIS (CONT'D)

I sense something is troubling you. Do you want to share it with me?

MICAH

I think I need to solve this on my own.

WILLIS

We're never alone. The Lord is always with us, surrounds us.

MICAH

(beat)

I don't know if he's with me.

WILLIS

Do you believe?

MICAH

I... I don't know.

WILLIS

May I take your hands?

Bewildered, Micah nods. Willis takes Micah's hands in his and closes his eyes.

WILLIS (CONT'D)

Dear Heavenly Father... I pray here for your son Micah, who holds a deep pain for one so young. Something he feels he can't be forgiven for.

(beat)

Please show him the way, Father. Shower him with your saving grace and the knowledge that he can lean on you for anything that troubles his soul. Be with him now, in his time of need, and show him Your eternal love.

(beat)

In your holy name, amen.

As he lets go of Micah's hands, Micah collapses in sobs.

Willis holds him up in his arms and slowly rubs his back in comfort.

WILLIS (CONT'D)

Let it out, son.

Micah holds the Bible ever tighter in his hands.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY (LATER)

Micah walks up to his house and looks at its fullness. His gaze goes upwards toward the attic window, where he knows

Rose sits waiting for him to save her.

His hand goes toward his hip bag, over the hidden Bible.

He walks into the house.

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Micah walks into the house... straight into Mother. Her furious expression pushes him back a few steps.

MOTHER

Where were you?

MICAH

I...

MOTHER

You weren't in the circle. Do you know how worried I've been? Do you know how close I was to leaving the circle myself to look for you?

MICAH

I'm sorry.

MOTHER

Sorry doesn't fix this. I want to know what you think you were doing.

MICAH

I... I went into the forest. I wanted to... catch a demon myself.

Sudden worry appears on her face.

MOTHER

What?

Micah licks his lips worriedly.

MICAH

I... wanted to catch one. Be like you. Show you and Father that I am ready.

Mother sways slightly, as if he had delivered a blow.

MOTHER

Micah... darling...

She kneels down, her look entreating.

MOTHER

Don't you know how dangerous that is?

MICAH

I'm sorry. I just want you to be proud.

Her look shows she never expected this response. She is completely taken aback. Her panic and anger have been replaced by a more docile, parental form of protectiveness.

MOTHER

You don't need to get a demon to make us proud. You just need to obey. And you didn't obey today. You put yourself in harm's way.

MICAH

I know. I won't do it again. Really.

Mother SIGHS.

MOTHER

I know you won't.

(beat)

Just go to your room right now, okay? I won't mention this to your father, but only if you promise not to do it again.

MICAH

I promise.

INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

Glen, lips pursed, glowers at Micah as Micah sits between the two cages. Rose looks from person to person, curiously, as she eats.

MICAH

So... sorry for shooting you.

Glen's eyes shift toward his own neck. He cranks his neck sorely.

GLEN

You're a decent shot, I'll give you that.

MICAH

I need to tell you both something.

ROSE

What is it?

MICAH

A couple days... I heard... they're going to kill you. Both of you.

ROSE

When?

MICAH

Tomorrow night.

ROSE

Why didn't you say anything before? Why not release us now?

MICAH

I still need the keys to the cages. I can't get in otherwise.

GLEN

How soon can you get them?

MICAH

Tomorrow. Definitely.

Micah looks at Glen, vulnerable.

MICAH (CONT'D)

(sighs)

And when I do? What will happen?

GLEN

The police will deal with them. And we'll take care of you. Take you to the city. Put you in a foster care program where you'll be treated the way a child should be treated.

MICAH

But what about my mom and dad?

GLEN

What do you think should happen to them?

MICAH

I don't want anything to happen to them. Why can't I just save the two of you and be done with it?

GLEN

You know it's not that simple.

MICAH

(softly)

I want things to stay the same.

GLEN

You erased that possibility the moment  
you opened the attic door, Micah.

Tears well up in Micah's eyes.

ROSE

Micah, you have to leave with us.

MICAH

I like my life. I don't want yours.

GLEN

You don't have a choice if you free us.  
You can't just release us and expect  
them to forgive you with open arms.  
What do you think your father will say?

Micah flinches, instinctively rubbing his bruised cheek.

GLEN (CONT'D)

(softly)

The same father who I'm guessing did  
that to your face. And that was for  
something far less than this, wasn't  
it?

Micah nods.

GLEN (CONT'D)

You have two choices. Neither are ones  
you want to do, I know that. I know  
you're scared. We'll take care of you.  
You and Rose. But your parents need to  
be punished for their actions. And you  
know they'll kill you if you stay.

MICAH

They wouldn't.

GLEN

I can see it in your eyes. You don't  
believe that any more than I do. They  
won't let this slide. If you stay...  
they will kill you.

Micah takes some steps back, horrified. He doesn't want to  
think about this... doesn't want to consider...

GLEN (CONT'D)

Micah?

MICAH

I can't... I won't--

He quickly runs toward the stairs as fast as he can.

GLEN (O.S.)

Micah!

ROSE (O.S.)

Micah, come back!

Micah gets to the bottom of the stairs.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Micah locks the door and puts his back against it. MUFFLED YELLING can be heard, but it is indecipherable.

He sinks down, putting his face on his knees, and cries.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

On the couch, Mother and Micah sit. Micah, eternally stoic, looks through his personal Bible study with a heart of ice. Mother looks at him quizzically, but lets it go.

EXT. BACK FIELDS - AFTERNOON

Micah, in a nervous daze, shifts uncomfortably as he looks from side to side outside. He sits on the ground and calms.

He takes the cage key out of his pocket and shifts it between his fingers. A tear falls down his cheek. He SIGHS DEEPLY, putting the key back in his pocket.

He vaguely catches sight of the dead tree with the rose. He slowly walks toward the tree again, this time with a more determined posture and expression.

He gets to the chalk line and crosses it without a beat.

He plucks the rose from its branch and gingerly turns it over in his palm. His anxious breath slows.

MICAH

(whispers)

I am not afraid.

MOTHER (V.O.)

Micah!

He begins for the house, the rose still in hand. As if forgotten, once he's close to the door, the rose slips from his fingers and almost floats to the ground. Beautiful.

INT. HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Micah sits in his room, quietly reading his new Bible. Waiting for his Mother.

Mother passes his room, a towel and new clothes in her hands. He looks up.

THE SOUND OF THE BATHROOM DOOR CLOSING.

He gets up, puts the Bible beneath his pillow, and walks out of his room.

EXT. BATHROOM - DAY

Micah gets to the bathroom and puts his head to the door.

The water is RUNNING. Mother is HUMMING LIGHTLY.

He looks worriedly toward the living room. Father sits there, pulled deep into his studies.

Micah's hand goes hesitantly toward the handle. Turns it.

He ever so gently opens the door.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mother takes a shower with the shower curtain covering our view. Her shapely silhouette is all that can be seen.

Micah quickly searches the room with his eyes.

On the counter are THE KEYS.

He quickly shuts the door and walks quietly toward them.

He sees the key he needs. The one with three slits at its base. The cage key. He reaches out his hand...

MOTHER

Hello?

Micah GASPS and stops.

Mother's silhouetted hand goes for the curtains.

He quickly grabs the keys and puts his hands behind him.

MICAH

It's me, mother.

Her hand stops. Even while the curtain is up, she puts her arms around her chest.

MOTHER

Micah, what are you doing in here?!

BEHIND HIM - he fingers through the keys to find the one with three slits.

MICAH

I-I'm sorry. I needed, uh... I needed to wash my hands.

BEHIND HIM - he finds the key. Begins pulling it off the chain loop.

MOTHER

Well... can't you go into the kitchen?

MICAH

We don't have towels there. I'm sorry.

Mother SIGHS.

BEHIND HIM - he pulls the key off the chain.

MOTHER

Just... be quick, okay?

He pockets the key and places the key-chain back.

MICAH

Yes, ma'am.

He turns on the faucet and washes.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Micah looks up from "The Odyssey" as Mother and Father stand up from their chairs. He stands up and walks toward his room. Then he turns and hugs them tightly.

MOTHER

What's this for?

MICAH

Nothing. I just... want you to know that I love you. I love you so much.

They release.

MOTHER

We love you, too, son. Sleep well.

Micah nods and head for his room.

MICAH'S FACE AWAY FROM THEM - he GULPS ever so slightly and

fighters the tears that threaten to endanger his secret.

INT. MICAH'S BEDROOM - LATER

Micah's eyes open as he hears the TRUCK PULL AWAY. But instead of jumping right up, he moves slowly. He gets to the side of his bed and bends down, kneeling on the floor with his hands folded on top of the bed.

He looks up at the ceiling. Here, we truly see a little boy lost in an adult world.

MICAH

Dear God... please help me do what it is I'm about to do. I know what is good. What is moral. What's right. Please help me, Lord. I'm scared.

He lets out a SHIVERED EXHALE.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Guide all my steps on this journey, Lord. And if nothing else... please know... I did the best I could.

He crosses himself and stands up. He breathes in and out a few times to calm himself. Then he opens his eyes, resolute to his cause.

INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

INSIDE CLOSET - Micah's hands grab the automatic revolver from its handle and begin to close the door. Stops. Pauses over the telephone. Grabs that, too.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Micah plugs in the telephone cord to an outlet and brings the receiver to his ear.

He hears a DIAL-TONE. His sense of wonder is cut short with his determination. He looks at the numbers.

Which a steady finger, he pushes 9. Then 1. Then 1. Listens.

He looks startled at the moment when the person on the other end answers.

MICAH

Hello?

Silence.

MICAH

I'm... my name is Micah. I need help.  
My mother and father... they kill  
people. And they're going to kill again  
tonight.

Silence.

MICAH

I don't know where I live. But there's  
a little girl and a police officer  
locked up in my attic. We have bodies  
buried in the backyard. We need help.  
Please come.

He hangs up. Pulls the cord out of the outlet just as the  
PHONE BEGINS TO RING.

He looks at the revolver in his other hand and shoves it in  
the back of his pants' pocket.

INT. ATTIC - CONTINUOUS

Rose and Glen wait as they hear the ATTIC DOOR OPENING.  
Moments later, Micah comes running up.

GLEN

Do you have it?

Determinedly, Micah holds up the new key. Glen and Rose  
both SIGN IN UTTER RELIEF.

He walks over to Rose's cage first. He places the key into  
the lock. Rose looks at him with such a deep gratefulness  
that it takes his breath away.

ROSE

I never doubted you.

He turns the key. The LATCH CLICKS and the door opens.

Rose, hesitantly, steps through the threshold. As if barely  
believing that she is finally free.

After taking a few steps, she throws her arms around Micah  
in a flood of affection.

Micah smiles and goes over to Glen's cage. He opens the  
cage quickly. Glen comes out with his head high.

Glen puts his hand comfortably on Micah's shoulder.

Micah looks a bit put off by the motion. Too much like his

father.

GLEN (CONT'D)

You made the right choice, son.

Micah just nods.

All three start for the stairs. Micah stops at the steps, afraid. Takes a DEEP BREATH.

Rose takes his hand softly.

GLEN

Come on.

They step down first, Glen following. At halfway down the stairway, the door below suddenly CREAKS OPEN.

Mother and Father stand in the doorway, looking up. Micah freezes in panic.

MOTHER

Micah, no...

FATHER

(fiercely)

What have you done?

Micah stands in the middle of the steps, frozen.

TWO HANDS - fall on both Micah and Rose's left shoulders. A tight grip digging into each of them.

Glen's hands.

The rest of his body is in shadow above them.

GLEN (O.S.)

(whispers)

You should have listened, Micah.

Micah whirls around and there stands Glen - but a different sort of Glen than we saw last.

Gone is the fatherly mentor who wants to help. Gone is the man of positive authority. All that is left is the unbridled sadism of evil.

Glen yanks them both back of the stairs. Mother and Father swiftly follow. He whirls at them.

GLEN

No! You two stay. I want them to myself for a bit.

MOTHER

Please... don't hurt him, he didn't know-

GLEN

(interrupts)

Bullshit. He knew. And now he has to suffer the consequences.

MOTHER

Don't...

GLEN

I need to remind him how things are supposed to work around here.

Micah tries to make a break for it, but Glen grabs a fistful of his hair and yanks upwards. Tears of pain well up in Micah's eyes. Glen grabs Micah's key and tosses it to Father.

GLEN (CONT'D)

(to Father)

I think you dropped this.

He SLAMS the door shut and LOCKS it from the inside.

INT. ATTIC - CONTINUOUS

Glen nastily throws Micah and Rose into one of the opened cages and locks the door. Rose quivers in Micah's arms.

ROSE

(small voice)

What are you doing?

MICAH

He's their partner. A third man.

ROSE

(aghast)

You're one of them? But... the badge-

GLEN

Have you found yourself wondering how they've been able to get away with murder all this time?

(beat)

I get to help them hunt without the dirty work and I even get one hell of a meat tray afterward.

MICAH

Why lock yourself up here? To gain what?

GLEN

They told me about the missing key. And your sudden questions. I could just smell that you had broken the rule. Never go into the attic.

MICAH

But why were you up here--?

GLEN

Because I guessed. Your parents didn't believe me, of course. Said they raised you better than that... how you would never betray them. But I insisted. "Put me up there as a victim," I said. "Let's see if he'll make a move." And you did.

(beat)

It was all a test. And you failed.

(beat)

I'm almost sorry to have to do this to you, Micah.

His almost exhilarated expression says the opposite.

GLEN (CONT'D)

But you broke the rules. And what happens when little boys break rules?

With purposeful slowness, he strolls toward the weapons at his disposal on the walls.

He picks up an ax and tweaks the sharp edge of it. His inhuman eyes catch Micah's.

GLEN (CONT'D)

They get punished so they won't break those rules again.

He SLAMS the sharp end of the ax into the table. Both Micah and Rose jump in terror.

Glen leaves the ax embedded in the table and continues on his search. His hand crosses other weapons - hacksaw... weed-cutter... butcher knife... baseball bat... machete...

His hand stops toward the machete. He smiles thinly.

GLEN (CONT'D)

(to Rose)

This should do it, don't you think?

Rose and Micah shrink back deeper into the cage.

Glen frowns.

GLEN (CONT'D)

Perhaps you're right. Bit too extreme.

His hand moves back toward the baseball bat.

GLEN (CONT'D)

How about we save that for last?

He grabs the baseball bat and slowly advances toward the cage like a predator.

GLEN (CONT'D)

Still think it was worth it, boy?

HE SMASHES THE BAT AGAINST THE CAGE. They are at the far back of the cage now.

GLEN (CONT'D)

(conversational)

Do you know how much shit I've had to deal with from your parents because of this?

He slowly opens the cage back up.

He SWINGS the bat toward Micah.

CRACK!

Micah's left leg collapses in the attack.

Glen begins SWINGING, faster and harder. Manic.

Micah shields his face from the blows, his arms and torso getting most of it.

ROSE

Leave him alone!

Rose jumps on Glen, throwing them both backwards outside of the cage. She scratches his face with her nails. He YELLS, grabbing her by her neck and throwing her backwards.

Before she can get up, he SLAMS the door shut. He holds the right side of his face in agony, bloody.

Micah COUGHS in pain, unable to move or breathe.

Glen removes his hand. Five deep bloody gashes on both sides of his face. He throws the bat toward the cage.

GLEN

Bitch!

Moving with all the speed of hell, he grabs the machete from the wall and throws the cage open. He snatches Rose from the cage and locks the door behind him.

MICAH

No...

Micah tries reaching behind him for the revolver in his belt, but he has no strength.

Glen throws her onto the butcher table and locks her hands into the restraints. She kicks him in the face, but he holds her legs down long enough to lock them in as well.

Once she's locked in securely, Glen BREATHES DEEPLY. Composes himself by fixing his collar and smoothing his chaotic hair back.

GLEN

Well now... that was invigorating.

He slowly makes his way downstairs. THE SOUND OF THE DOOR opening. Back up come Mother, Father, and him.

Mother sees Micah's bruised form and SOBS.

MOTHER

Micah...

Glen holds her back.

GLEN

His lesson isn't finished yet. Contain yourself, woman.

Father looks flatly at the situation in front of him.

GLEN (CONT'D)

It's almost over.

He goes toward the butcher table and looks at Rose's terror-filled face.

GLEN (CONT'D)

You done?  
(beat)

Good. Then let's continue, shall we?

He takes the machete and grazes it against her temple. He gets really close to her face.

GLEN (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Here's what's going to happen. You're in the unfortunate position of being Micah's visual aid on what happens when he tries to play with his food.

Rose's eyes trail the blade.

GLEN (CONT'D)

But as a visual aid, it can't be too fast. Can't be too slow. So...

He DIGS the blade through her arm. She SCREAMS.

GLEN (CONT'D)

I know, I know. Hurts like hell, but that didn't hit a single artery. Being a cop comes with its own brand of medical knowledge.

She GASPS for breath. He pulls the blade out. She GROANS.

Mother looks away.

GLEN (CONT'D)

Did you know there are over eighty places on the human body where one can be shot or stabbed without any permanent damage?

He raises the blade and cuts into her shoulder. Another SCREAM.

His casual voice lowers to a LETHAL GROWL.

GLEN (CONT'D)

And we're gonna find all of them.

He's about to stab again when...

Micah LAUGHS, COUGHING.

Curious, Glen lowers his weapon and gazes at him. Mother and Father's eyes follow.

GLEN (CONT'D)

Dare I ask what's so funny?

MICAH

(strained)

It's just that... you're wasting  
time... you should use... to escape.

Glen LAUGHS.

GLEN

Escape from what?

MICAH

From your people... the police, right?

GLEN

(beat)

What are you talking about?

MICAH

They're coming for you. My parents...  
in their closet... they have a phone.

Glen's expression instantly changes. Mother and Father look  
at one another in sudden shock.

GLEN

No, they don't.

He looks at Father.

GLEN

Do you?

Father and Mother say nothing.

Micah LAUGHS again, strained.

In panic, Glen takes a few steps back. Rose GROANS again.

GLEN

(softly)

Get her in the cage.

No one moves. Glen whirls at Mother.

GLEN (CONT'D)

(livid)

Get her in the fucking cage!

Mother quickly obeys, unhooking Rose and putting her into  
the cage with Micah. She bends toward him.

GLEN (CONT'D)

Stay away from him!

Mother jerks back and shuts the cage.

Glenn whirls in unparalleled madness toward Father.

GLEN (CONT'D)

How the fuck did he get a telephone?

Glen gets right in Father's face, his face contorted in the most savage of wrath.

GLEN (CONT'D)

How could you have allowed this!? Shit!

FATHER

What can--

GLEN

Shut up and let me think! all right...  
go to your car and get my dispatch  
radio. I need to see what's going on.

FATHER

all right, just hang on.

Father runs out, leaving Glen and crying Mother.

Glen violently kicks their cage. It shakes. They jump.

GLEN

You had to call, didn't you? This  
should have been so simple!

Micah slowly shifts his head toward Mother.

MICAH

You ally yourself... with him? Why?

GLEN

Shut the fuck up!

MICAH

(whispers)

Is this... what the righteous do?

Father comes in with the police dispatch radio.

Glen roughly grabs it from him and turns it on.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

--close are you to the route?

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Roger, home base, already on route with  
Ackroyd. Shouldn't be longer than 15

minutes. Any luck at calling back?

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

The phone's been disconnected. At worst, it's a goose chase. But just in case, be careful. There have been quite a few unsolved disappearances--

Glen throws the radio violently against the wall.

GLEN

Fuck!

He takes the gun and advances to the cage.

MOTHER

What are you doing??

GLEN

We have no choice. Even if we cleaned all this shit up, they'd find the buried bodies outside. We have to kill these two, torch it all, and leave.

MOTHER

No! You're not touching him!

Father just stands there, an eerie calm about him.

GLEN

We need to destroy all the evidence. All of it. Then burn the house down.

He pulls out a pistol from his belt.

GLEN (CONT'D)

He's destroyed everything.

(quietly explodes)

All because of some fucking tart.

Glen aims his pistol toward Rose in the cage. Rose slinks back in absolute terror, looking at Micah in desperation.

Micah, in this moment of adrenaline, suddenly rises even amidst his horrible pain.

MICAH

NO!

In an instinctual and clumsy motion of naive action, Micah slides his hand into the back of his pants, pulls the revolver out, and aims it randomly toward Glen.

Glen turns and has the briefest look of surprise.

MICAH'S TRIGGER FINGER - pulls.

BAM! Glen's head explodes in a gory smorgasbord of brain matter and blood.

The body, still standing, jerks and twists violently, the gun GOING OFF as he falls.

BAM!

Father's leg blasts from beneath him as he ROARS in pain. The gun flies from Glen's hand and twirls toward Mother.

MOTHER

Micah, no!!!!

Micah, in shock, drops the revolver and it clatters outside the cage. He falls back to the floor, drained.

Father jerks upwards, leaning on the adjoined cage. His eyes look lost, horrified... and the look quickly changes into trembling rage.

FATHER

You did this. This is all your fault.  
You've destroyed our family.

He grabs Micah's revolver and aims it toward the cage.

MOTHER

NO!

FATHER

(shaking in rage)  
Shut up, cunt!  
(roars toward Micah)  
Do you have any idea what you've  
done?!?

Micah, with all that's left of his strength, moves himself in front of Rose.

MICAH

(whispers)  
Stay behind me, Rose.

She barely nods her understanding.

This only drives Father further into his blind rage.

FATHER

(livid)

You think she's worth losing everything  
for?!

Father FIRES a shot off in blind rage.

Micah's head yanks back.

ROSE

Micah!

MOTHER (O.S.)

NO!

Micah puts a hand on his shoulder. He shudders when he sees blood flowing through his fingers. His eyes catch those of his Father.

MICAH

(with effort)

Yes. She. Is.

Struggling for the energy, he moves back in front of Rose.

Father is a shark in a frenzy now. All rage. No emotion.

He aims the gun again. This time, his hands are steady.

Micah closes his eyes, holding Rose's hand tightly.

MICAH

(softly)

Don't look--

BAM!

Micah jerks backwards, knocking Rose over as they both fall on the ground.

Micah puts a hand to his chest. Nothing. Confusion etches his face. He whirls his head down to Rose. No blood.

Rose looks up, enraptured, at something behind Micah.

Micah looks back toward the front of the cage.

FATHER'S FACE - a gaping bullet hole in his forehead. His final expression is one of confusion, hate... and fear.

The gun falls from his suddenly limp hand. His eyes roll back and he collapses to the floor. Dead.

Mother lies sobbing behind him, Glen's smoking gun held in her shaking hands. She drops the gun in horror and crawls through the blood on the ground toward her dead husband.

She's violently shaking her head in denial.

MOTHER

(shudders)

No... no...

She buries her face into his shoulder, sobbing. The left side of her face and both her hands caked in the blood of the carnage around her.

Micah can only look on in complete sadness and helplessness as his mother wails.

Micah tries holding it all in. But he just can't anymore. Stifled gasps slowly become weeping.

Rose wraps her arms around him tightly.

ROSE

I've got you, Micah. I've got you.

He can't stop. He pulls her closer.

ALL THREE - on the floor, each dealing with their trauma.

EXT. FAMILY HOUSE - NIGHT

Micah, Rose, and Mother slowly walk out of the house and look off into the distance. Micah is mainly being held up by Rose. Rose has a piece of clothing wrapped around her bloody arm.

Rain comes down hard. None of them cover themselves.

Rose sits with a GRUNT on the steps of the patio. Waiting. Mother and Micah follow. Mother looks off into space, dull to the pain of the world. She begins to SOB.

Micah pulls her closer as Mother leans her head against his shoulder. Micah says nothing. Rose gives them space.

After a few moments, the VERY FAINT SOUNDS OF POLICE SIRENS can be heard through the pounding rain.

Micah shakes his head, hollow.

The SIRENS get closer.

Micah looks at Mother, his expression the epitome of desperation and longing for answers.

She matches his gaze, but it is full of the same confusion. Lifeless and hollow. There's nothing she can say.

He opens his arms and tightly embraces her.

Rose caresses Micah's arm as he holds his mother.

Soon, the SIRENS are right on top of them. Two police cars pull up and stop.

Micah pats his mother gently on her back.

MICAH

It's time.

MOTHER

(quivering beat)

I know.

Officers come out. They draw their weapons as soon as they see Mother caked in blood.

OFFICER #1

Stand up and keep your hands where we can see them!

OFFICER #2

Now!

Silently, slowly, the three rise from their spots on the patio and walk onto the grass, their hands outstretched and intertwined.

Rose... Micah... Mother. All holding each other up.

The police officers slowly approach them.

Micah hears a SLIGHT CRUNCH beneath his foot. He looks down.

The rose he had plucked. He had forgotten all about it. His head tilts slightly in curiosity.

While the stem is beneath his foot, the rose seems to somehow be perfectly preserved. The heightened color. The freshness and beauty. The light from inside the house shines perfectly within the darkness of the night onto the rose. Illuminating it with an almost hypnotic light.

Micah looks at Rose, who matches his gaze.

Slowly, he smiles ever so lightly. A smile of peculiar contentment; a spiritual peace.

ROSE

Why are you smiling?

MICAH

Do you trust me?

The police are almost on top of them now.

Rose looks deep into Micah's eyes...

ROSE

(almost a whisper)

Yes.

MICAH

(beat)

Everything's going to be alright.

She nods with the slightest of smiles.

He looks up into the sky.

ROSE/MICAH'S HANDS - his hand tightens around hers.

FADE OUT:

THE END