

ASHES

by

Bobak Esfarjani

APA  
T: 310.888.4200

Rosa Entertainment  
T: 310.470.3506

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OPEN ON BLACK.

A thick, dense black. Suffocating.

PUSH through the black. Slowly, it DISSIPATES. The black thins out further and further, until we're clear through...

...and hovering HIGH ABOVE a powerful **WILDFIRE**.

Enormous, towering FLAMES rage relentlessly. BLACK SMOKE rises, clogging the air, choking out the sun. The fire consumes all in its path, ripping through the dry, brown, brittle California hillside.

It's overwhelming. It's terrifying. It feels endless.

Peppered around the fire are clusters of FIRE ENGINES. They look like toys from this high POV. They spray their flaccid streams of water into the engulfing fire.

An AIR TANKER zooms high in the sky. It rolls to the left, to circle back over the flames. Its tank opens, and a huge supply of RED MIST dumps from the bottom of the plane.

The red flame retardant wafts down onto the violent flames.

But the flames don't let up a bit.

INSIDE THE AIR TANKER -- the **PILOT (30s)** is on his headset.

PILOT

Spreading fast to the southwest. No fire lines in that direction, so it's gonna keep moving. But we're trying up here.

The air tanker whips back around. It dumps another ton of flame retardant onto the blazing snake trail.

PILOT (CONT'D)

Fucking winds are picking up too. Our containment's slipping. And we need to restock.

The air tanker rolls again, zooming away from the flames now.

We FOLLOW as it flies over nothing but dry vegetation, and frail trees -- kindling heaven essentially.

PILOT (CONT'D)

(fuck)

It's coming over the ridge.

The air tanker then leads us over the ridge....

...and nestled just on the other side of the hill, right in the path of the advancing fire, is a sprawling NEIGHBORHOOD.

EXT. CEMETERY - SAME

A bucolic cemetery. Landscaped grass. Lush vegetation.

A procession of cars is parked along a narrow road within the cemetery. Among the hearse and cars sit several FIRE ENGINES.

Each of the fire engines have their ladders extended high and out, over the narrow road. An AMERICAN FLAG drapes off each of the buckets at the end of the ladders.

AT THE GRAVE SITE

Mourners listen to a PRIEST give a eulogy MOS. The eulogy does little to soothe. The guests weep and hold each other.

Among the mourners are a dozen men and women standing at attention and SALUTING. The men and women all wear formal FIREFIGHTER uniforms: navy, double-breasted jackets, gold trim sleeves, dress cap.

While the mourners wail, these firefighters remain steady.

**CHIEF WIGGINS (50s)** stands with the firefighters. We see frustration come over him as he looks into the DISTANCE--

--and sees an isolated firefighter, decked out in the same dress uniform, also saluting. This is **KYLE (30s, earnest)**.

Kyle's expression isn't nearly as centered as the other firefighters. He's distraught. His lip quivers.

The priest finishes his eulogy. A beat. Then, we HEAR each of the fire engines let out THREE RINGS OF A BELL.

Kyle turns to the engines, his face now filled with shame.

EXT. CEMETERY - LATER

Only the fire engines remain. The group of firefighters lean against one of the engines, all glued to their phones.

ON A PHONE -- is a news feed of THE WILDFIRE.

ANCHOR ON NEWS FEED

With 250,000 acres already destroyed, the wildfire is on its way to becoming California's largest.

(MORE)

ANCHOR ON NEWS FEED (CONT'D)  
All nearby counties must stay alert  
to their warning systems should  
they need to evacuate.

**DEPUTY CHIEF DANIELS (40s)** sucks his teeth, shaking his head.

DANIELS  
We're gonna be called in, folks.  
It's only a matter of time.

The firefighters murmur in excitement - they live for this.

Daniels looks up to see Chief Wiggins walking off.

DANIELS (CONT'D)  
It's moving, Chief. It's moving.

Chief Wiggins lifts a hand in acknowledgement. But he's not interested in having this talk now. He's headed to Kyle.

Kyle sits against the tree now, but he stands and brushes himself off as Chief Wiggins comes over to him.

WIGGINS  
Why're you over here alone?

KYLE  
I came to pay my respects, sir.

WIGGINS  
If you wanted to do that, you could stand with the rest of us.

Kyle looks away. He swallows hard.

KYLE  
I couldn't face Joy. She's a widow because of me. But I still wanted--

WIGGINS  
Hey. You gotta stop that, you understand? You followed protocol, you did nothing wrong.

KYLE  
It's not that simple--

WIGGINS  
Of course it is. You were doing your job. So was Chris. You came back from work, Chris didn't. There's nothing more to it.

Kyle shakes his head, trying to wish all of it away.

KYLE

The warehouse was caving in, Chief.  
And we'd been expecting it for  
hours-- but I didn't retreat, and  
Chris didn't want to question me--

Chief Wiggins curtly lifts his hand. Kyle stops. His eyes  
fall. He clenches and unclenches his fists, frustrated.

WIGGINS

Enough. I've read your statement  
many times. The investigation  
cleared you. All you're doing now  
is isolating yourself from your  
brothers and sisters over there.

KYLE

I'm not ready--

CHIEF

Well you need to get ready. I  
didn't come up here during the  
service out of respect to Chris's  
family, but my patience for your  
moping is waning.

Kyle bristles.

KYLE

You didn't have to hear him scream  
You didn't have to watch him die.

A tense beat. Wiggins shakes his head. He looks Kyle over,  
disappointment filling his face. Wiggins then turns to walk  
off. But Kyle grabs his arm--

KYLE (CONT'D)

Chief--

Wiggins turns.

KYLE (CONT'D)

(hesitant)

This big one. If it's not  
contained... If we're called in...  
I don't know if I...

Wiggins pulls his arm away from Kyle. His eyes narrow.

CHIEF

You've made it perfectly clear,  
son. We can't count on you.

Wiggins then marches off, leaving Kyle with his heavy shame.

EXT. CALIFORNIA HILLSIDE - EVENING

The wildfire is vibrant and violent in the distance. The black smoke now indistinguishable from the night sky.

**MARY (40s, seen a few things)** takes a drag from a cigarette, watching the destructive light show.

Mary's hair, which is pulled into a ponytail, is greasy and unwashed. Her clothes are haggard and dingy. But Mary is lean and strong, and her piercing eyes warn us to stay away.

Mary smokes just outside a small, dilapidated CABIN that's tucked away under dry brush and forlorn trees.

The cabin struggles to keep its form. The planks are bowing. The roof is more patches than not. It's rusty, rotted.

Mary takes another drag. She's a few feet from the edge of the hillside. There's nothing but a wide open view of California woods ahead of her.

Mary keeps her eyes on the dancing flames.

ROBERT (O.S.)

Bandages.

Mary turns to see **ROBERT (40s, intense)** stumbling out of the cabin. Robert is over 6 feet tall, and though he's just as unkempt as Mary, every inch of him is lean muscle too.

Robert grits his teeth. His forearms are SOAKED IN BLOOD.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I need bandages.

Mary isn't jolted by Robert's bloody arms. She simply takes another pull of the cigarette and turns back around.

Robert drops down on a tree stump waiting. He grunts in pain.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

She was sleeping. She looked so beautiful. I just had to touch her.

Robert squeezes and opens his eyes. His arms ooze blood.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Mary. Please.

A beat. Mary then flicks her cigarette into the woods ahead.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Don't. You could start a fire--

Mary gives Robert a look. He quiets. Mary then crosses to the SHED that sits nearby. She shuts the door after she enters.

Robert takes in the marvelous sight of the raging forest fire as he waits. A beat.

Mary exits the shed with an INDUSTRIAL-SIZED PACKAGE of bandages, and an INDUSTRIAL-SIZED BOTTLE of hydrogen peroxide.

Mary kneels in front of Robert, and drenches his arms in the peroxide. As the blood washes away, the source is revealed -- MULTIPLE GASHES ON EACH ARM. The skin's been TORN.

Mary wraps one of Robert's arms in bandages. She's a pro.

ROBERT (CONT'D)  
(embarrassed)  
She just looked so still. And  
sweet. I had to touch her.

Mary ignores him as she wraps. She moves to the other arm.

ROBERT (CONT'D)  
I-- I was thinking we could do  
story time with her again. She's  
been a good girl. She really has.

MARY  
Not this time apparently.

Robert doesn't respond. Mary finishes. She stands.

MARY (CONT'D)  
What's the punishment?

ROBERT  
Nothing. It was my mistake.

Robert rises to his feet. His attention is on the fire now.

ROBERT (CONT'D)  
You think it'll head this way?

MARY  
I don't know.

ROBERT  
Radio says it might.

MARY  
Then it might.

Robert shuffles in place. His bandages REDDEN already.

ROBERT  
What should we do?

MARY  
What does the radio say?

Robert sighs. He shakes his head.

ROBERT  
I shouldn't have gotten close. I know. I'm sorry--

MARY  
You're always sorry. You're always getting close. You're always touching her. You're always being you.

Robert shakes his head, hurt. Mary glares at him. Then:

MARY (CONT'D)  
If it heads this way, then we'll move. That's my master plan.

Robert nods. A beat. He turns to head back into the cabin.

MARY (CONT'D)  
The hose.

ROBERT  
What? It's not cleaning time yet--

MARY  
I know. The hose is punishment.

Robert looks at Mary for a beat. He silently confirms.

Robert crosses over to the cabin. He unravels a HOSE that extends from a nozzle jutting out of a pipe from the cabin.

Robert drapes the loose hose over his shoulder, and opens the front door of the cabin, carrying the hose INSIDE with him.

Mary takes one last look at the fire, and then turns to follow Robert back into the cabin.

On her way in, she TWISTS ON the water to the hose.

INT. FIRE STATION - BUNKS - EVENING - LATER

A piercing FIRE ALARM shoots through the darkness.

Firefighters burst out of the rows of bunks almost in unison.

Blankets and sheets fly off as the firefighters instinctively hustle to the stairs, and to the fireman's pole.

In an instant, the sleeping quarters are empty.

The FIRE ALARM continues to blare. And then we see the sleeping quarters are actually only ALMOST empty, because...

...still lying in bed, eyes full of defeat, is KYLE.

INT. FIRE STATION - CONTINUOUS

The fire station operates in total CHAOTIC SYMMETRY as the crew hustles to get on the road:

- a male firefighter pulls on his turnout pants and jacket.
- a female firefighter tests the hose to her breathing apparatus, which is nestled in her jacket.
- a female firefighter does a routine check of the fire engine, racing around it, marking her clipboard.

Everyone is SHOUTING, INSTRUCTING, and HUSTLING to get out as quickly as possible.

Kyle stands on the perimeter, taking in the perfect synchronicity. He's torn that he's not a part of it.

Wiggins stands in the nexus of it all, barking orders.

WIGGINS

Katie, your crew's three miles east  
of the tail for the fire line.

A FEMALE FIREFIGHTER (20s) gives the chief a nod.

FEMALE FIREFIGHTER #1

Yes, sir.

Wiggins turns his attention to Daniels.

WIGGINS

Daniels, you're spearheading the  
evac, we need every last one of  
those folks out of there. No matter  
how stupid they are for staying.

Daniels is nearly dressed. He cracks his neck, and swings his arms back and forth, getting himself pumped.

DANIELS

Told you this puppy was coming.

Wiggins spots Kyle standing nearby.

WIGGINS

Kyle.

KYLE

(unsure)

Yes sir?

WIGGINS

Pack up some of that casserole  
Gonzalez made last night. And the  
salad. Could be a long night. Also,  
maybe use this time to prep  
breakfast for the morning crew.

Kyle swallows. A flash of disappointment crosses his face. He nods lightly, then heads to the kitchen, as the rest of his peers get ready for the big show.

EXT. FIRE STATION - EVENING - LATER

Half a dozen fire engines pull out of the station, one by one, their SIRENS BLARING, their LIGHTS FLASHING.

Nearby traffic moves aside, and HONK their horns in support. Nearby residents, old and young, WAVE to the trucks as they leave to go on their mission.

Kyle stands at the garage entrance, and watches the cavalry take off without him.

INT. FIRE STATION - BUNKS - NEXT MORNING

A FIRE ALARM blares.

Kyle jolts awake in the bunk room. He's in his boxers. All the other bunks are still empty.

Kyle races to the POLE in the room and slides down into

THE STATION

Where he sees THE MORNING CREW of firefighters rushing around, grabbing their gear, and preparing to head out.

THEN -- DANIELS hustles over to Kyle. Daniels is covered in SOOT. His eyes are BLOODSHOT.

DANIELS

Yo, Kyle. Come on, get dressed.  
We need all bodies on the scene.

(MORE)

DANIELS (CONT'D)

The shit's only getting bigger. I just came back to refill the engine.

Kyle hesitates.

KYLE

I -- I told Chief Wiggins that I wasn't ready for--

DANIELS

No, no. Wiggins died last night. Backdraft. Him and three others. Come on, get dressed. Hurry.

Kyle's face drops at that news.

KYLE

What...?

DANIELS

Let's go! Let's fucking go!

Kyle has no time to process. He barely manages a nod, and then rushes to the supply room to get his gear.

EXT./INT. FIRE ENGINE - LATER

The crew cab of the fire engine is PACKED with fire fighters all decked out in their full fire fighting gear. They rumble along, no window to see what's waiting for them outside.

Kyle sits among them. His head is down, focused. He then lifts his head to take in the rest of the firefighters.

Some have CLEAN gear, others's gear is nearly BLACK.

Most of the firefighters are anxious. A handful are scared.

Kyle makes eye contact with a FEMALE FIREFIGHTER #2. Her gear is especially dirty. Her face red from overheating.

KYLE

How bad is it out there?

FEMALE FIREFIGHTER #2

Now you feel like coming out?

Kyle tightens, not knowing how to respond.

THEN -- the fire truck comes to an abrupt stop.

The back doors swing OPEN...

...to a thick ORANGE hue waiting outside. SMOKE immediately fills the truck.

The firefighters pull up their oxygen masks. Kyle as well.

Daniels manifests through the smoke as he charges over.

DANIELS

We're here to evacuate every single  
last one of these idiots that are  
still here. Knock 'em out if you  
have to.

(then)

Let's do it! Let's do it!

All the firefighters rush out of the truck. They split up, disappearing into the smoke.

Kyle drops out last. His head swivels, taking in the sight.

He can't see more than a FOOT IN FRONT OF HIM. His eyes blink, adjusting to the bright orange hue. His breath slows.

It's RAINING ASH.

Kyle cranes his head and sees the MONSTROUS FLAMES of the forest fire devouring the woods just hundreds of feet away.

SUDDENLY -- Kyle DARTS back as two firefighters CHARGE toward him with a YOUNG GIRL writhing on a gurney.

She's been strapped with a gas mask. She's still in her pajamas. She breathes weakly.

Kyle's brow furls. And he charges into the smoke.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. CALIFORNIA HILLSIDE - SAME

A butcher knife drops down HARD THROUGH a chicken's neck, and into a tree stump. The chicken head plops to the ground.

A small pen of live chickens clucking mindlessly sits by the tree stump. They jut their necks front and back. The decapitated chicken head drops in among them.

Mary kneels down and grabs the head out of the pen. She tosses it across her shoulder, out into the woods.

BLOOD DRAINS from the headless chicken, staining the stump.

Mary turns her attention to the wildfire -- It's closer now.

Robert steps out of the cabin. His forearms still bandaged. He's drenched in SWEAT. He stretches his back.

ROBERT  
Breakfast almost ready?

Mary throws the headless chicken into a BUCKET of headless chickens.

MARY  
Almost.

Mary wipes her forehead. She grabs another dopey chicken, and drops it on the tree stump. She SLAMS the butcher knife down.

Robert's attention turns to the wildfire.

ROBERT  
It's changing directions.

Mary doesn't respond.

ROBERT (CONT'D)  
It's going to pass through here.

MARY  
I know.

ROBERT  
So what are we going to do?

Mary looks at Robert. His hulking frame sags with fear.

MARY  
You're not really asking me. You already know what you want to do.

ROBERT  
We pack up and go. Just minimally. Some food. A few guns. We have plenty of rope, plenty of chain to--

MARY  
And where do you want to go?

ROBERT  
Your sister's. I thought that was always the contingency plan.

MARY  
We made that plan five years ago. I haven't spoken to her in those five years.

(a beat)  
(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)  
 Plus... we were delusional to think  
 we could ever do that...

Robert exhales. He wipes the sweat from his brow. His bandages display a vague red outline of his gashes.

ROBERT  
 Well, we can't just burn up here.

A beat. Mary looks at Robert with tired eyes. Robert immediately shakes his head, pushing away Mary's look.

ROBERT (CONT'D)  
 No. Cut that shit out right now.  
 That's not the solution. Not now,  
 not before, not ever.

A beat. Mary swallows. She nods, knowing he's right.

MARY  
 The fire could still turn. We could  
 be getting upset about nothing. We  
 could end up dying on this  
 godforsaken hill of old age.

Mary SLAMS her butcher knife into another chicken.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. CUL-DE-SAC - SAME

The firefighters are in full command of the cul-de-sac:

- A firefighter carries an OLD MAN over his shoulder, pulling the OLD MAN'S wheelchair behind him.
- A firefighter BREAKS DOWN a door. His partner races into the house as the door collapses.
- Two firefighters escort a terrified group of KIDS. The kids are wrapped in shock blankets. The ash falls on them.
- A firefighter yanks a TV out of a man's hands, while a different firefighter pushes the man toward the cluster of fire engines and ambulances that sit waiting.
- Five firefighters carry an impossibly obese man out of his house, having to break the door frame with AXES as they do.

INT. HOUSE - SAME

Kyle hurries through a smoke-filled home, shouting:

KYLE

Hello! Hello is anyone in here?!

Kyle bursts into a room. No one in there. He launches back into the hall, and then bursts into another room. Empty.

KYLE (CONT'D)

You need to evacuate now! Hello?!

Kyle then bursts into a bedroom--

--to find an OLD KOREAN WOMAN crying in the corner. She wears a surgical mask. But it's worthless in this amount of smoke.

Kyle rushes over to her.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Come on! You need to come now!

The Old Korean Women simply weeps and SHOUTS at him in Korean. She kicks and slaps at him.

Kyle reaches for her, when he HEARS--

YOUNG KOREAN WOMAN (O.S.)

Help! Please God help us!

Kyle turns to see that in the en suite, a YOUNG KOREAN WOMAN (30s) is holding the lifeless body of a KOREAN TEEN (18).

Kyle rushes over to the woman. He notices a couple of WOODEN BOARDS OF WOOD lay scattered on the ground. The window in the en suite has two boards nailed across it.

YOUNG KOREAN WOMAN (CONT'D)

My brother! He's dead! He's dead!

Kyle drops to his knees. He checks the boy's pulse. A tense beat as the young woman looks at Kyle with hope.

Kyle pulls the teen out of her arms, and hoists him over his shoulder. The Old Korean Woman SCREAMS at him.

KYLE

No! No, he's alive!

The young woman scrambles up to her feet, and rushes over to the old woman, forcing her to stand.

EXT. CUL-DE-SAC - CONTINUOUS

Kyle emerges from the house into the cul-de-sac, carrying the Korean Teen. The women are just behind him.

Firefighters race a gurney over to Kyle, and Kyle lays the boy down on it. The firefighters immediately pivot and rush the gurney away. The Korean women hustle after them.

Kyle watches them all take off. He exhales deeply.

Kyle looks up. The FLAMES devour the hillside.

He spots a different air tanker flying high above, this time dumping gallons of WATER onto the flames.

Daniels runs over to Kyle.

DANIELS

Need your help! Got a guy down here  
who's literally fighting us! He's  
swinging a fucking baseball bat!

Kyle nods, ready to work. He takes off with Daniels.

FADE TO:

EXT. CUL-DE-SAC - DUSK

The cul-de-sac is officially emptied.

Only two fire engines remain out of the bevy of vehicles.

The smoke has dissipated enough that the remaining firefighters lift up their masks to eat dinner.

Kyle's among them. He leans against the fire engine, and takes a bite of his sandwich. He watches a group of firefighters joke and goof off.

Kyle's face is covered in soot. He's overwhelmed.

Daniels comes over and squeezes Kyle's shoulder.

DANIELS

Good work out there today.

KYLE

Thank you, sir. Glad I could help.

DANIELS

I know you've been struggling  
recently. But you stepped up...

Kyle shakes his head.

KYLE

Please. Let's not talk about that--

DANIELS

And you came through today. You held your own, never hesitated, and had all of our backs. You're a good man, Kyle. Know that.

Kyle forces a nod. He's grateful, but there's still a lingering guilt within him. A beat.

Daniels then gestures toward the forest fire.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

Looks like it's heading west from here. Out of our jurisdiction.  
(then, at the fire)  
FUCK! YOU!

The other firefighters laugh and all start screaming FUCK YOU at the fire. Kyle can't help but chuckle.

Kyle then nods toward the hillside.

KYLE

Nobody lives up there, right?

Daniels shrugs.

DANIELS

There are always a bunch of forgotten cabins and shacks up in hills like those. Vagrants will sometimes hideout. Kids looking to get high or drunk.

Daniels bites into his sandwich.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

But this whole area's been on notice to evacuate for days now.

KYLE

So we know that area is clear?

DANIELS

Look, we did the best we could here. No way for us to get a truck up there either. Ambulances are all slammed. But like I said, Kyle, they've been on notice for awhile.

Daniels pats Kyle's back, and shuffles over to join the group of decompressing firefighters.

Kyle looks to the hillside, watching the flames. He frowns.

EXT. CUL-DE-SAC - MOMENTS LATER

Kyle makes his way behind a house. He crosses through the backyard, and finds a MOUNTAIN BIKE in the grass.

Kyle hops on the bike. He rides away.

EXT. CALIFORNIA HILLSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Kyle rides through the patchy California hillside. He's sweating in his full firefighter gear. But he presses on.

MOMENTS LATER

Kyle comes upon a broken down shed. He hops off the bike and pushes open the door. Nothing inside but a nest of raccoons.

The raccoons HISS at Kyle. He slams the door shut.

MOMENTS LATER

Kyle comes across a well-kept cabin. Kyle hops off his bike and knocks on the front door. No answer.

Kyle tries for the door knob. It's unlocked.

Kyle steps inside, and sees the entire place has been packed up and evacuated. Only the couch, rug, and tables are left.

Kyle nods, pleased.

MOMENTS LATER

Kyle turns a hard corner with the mountain bike. He stops to catch his breath for a moment.

Kyle looks back down toward where he came from. He can't see the cul-de-sac. Nothing but woods all around him.

Kyle eyes the fire. It's larger and breathtaking from this new point of view. But there's no ash in the air here. Not much smoke either. Not yet at least.

Kyle frowns, looking back at the obscured path back home.

But Kyle continues on.

MOMENTS LATER

Kyle rolls to a stop in front of a small, dilapidated CABIN.

The cabin struggles to keep its form. The planks are bowing. The roof is more patches than not. It's rusty, rotted.

Beside the cabin is a small shed. Behind the shed is a bruised PICKUP TRUCK that's parked under trees and brush.

Kyle hops off the bike. He crunches through the dead grass, making his way to the front door.

Kyle notices a CHICKEN COOP tucked in a corner. Half a dozen chickens cluck about. Kyle then clocks a tree stump that's stained with BLOOD. A BUTCHER KNIFE juts out the top of it.

Kyle reaches the front door of the cabin. He knocks.

KYLE

Hello? Anyone in there?

No answer. Kyle knocks again.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Hello? My name is Kyle Wilcox, and I'm with the Lassen County Fire Department. We need you to evacuate the premises if you're in there.

Still no answer.

A beat.

Kyle reaches for the door handle, but before he can turn it--  
--MARY opens the door from inside.

MARY

Can I help you?

KYLE

Oh, hi. Yes, I don't know if you heard me, but I'm Kyle Wilcox from--

MARY

I heard you. We're fine, thanks.

Mary moves to shut the door, but Kyle puts his hand out, stopping it from closing. Mary's eyes narrow.

KYLE

No, ma'am. You're not. I don't know if you missed it or something, but there's an enormous fire headed this way, and you have to evacuate right now--

MARY

I don't have to do anything. This is my property.

KYLE

Yes, it may very well be. But it won't be anyone's property once the flames engulf the place, so you need to come with me and--

ROBERT (O.S.)

She said we're fine.

Kyle looks up and sees Robert approaching behind Mary.

With his shoulders back, and back straight, Robert looms behind Mary. Kyle doesn't miss Robert's strong frame.

Kyle swallows hard, instantly on alert. But...

KYLE

Look, I don't want anything from you two other than your safety--

ROBERT

Please leave.

KYLE

I can get a car for you up here. I see you even have a truck. We could load some stuff into, and be gone in a minute--

ROBERT

Now.

Mary and Robert darken. A beat. Kyle hesitates. He doesn't understand the animosity that's radiating off these people.

KYLE

Okay. I can't force you to leave. That's your choice, but just tell me why you're against--

Robert grits his teeth. He reaches over Mary, and grabs the door to slam it in Kyle's face--

--when Kyle jams his foot inside.

ROBERT

What're you--

KYLE

What was that?

A beat. Robert and Mary don't respond.

Kyle furrows his brow. He tilts his head... TO LISTEN.

MARY

Get your foot out of my--

KYLE

That! You hear that?

MARY

I said get your--

But Kyle ignores Mary, and PUSHES his way

INSIDE

into the dark, dingy cabin.

It's a hoarder's wonderland. Everything from BOOKS to CANNED FOOD is STACKED and PILED in the main room of the cabin. There's a filthy couch, a throw rug, and a small table.

But Kyle isn't taken by any of that. Instead, he slowly moves forward, at FULL ALERT, hoping to pick up a frequency...

ROBERT

Mister, get the fuck out of--

KYLE

That!

Before Mary and Robert can say a word, Kyle RACES through the main room, and heads to a door at the end of the hall.

Mary's eyes gently shut.

As Kyle marches to the door, we can HEAR what Kyle can hear--  
--a faint SCREAM.

Kyle grabs the door handle, and thrusts the door open--

Kyle's face TURNS WHITE.

His eyes WIDEN IN ABJECT TERROR.

The room he opened has a cement floor with a DRAIN in the center. The walls are SOUND PROOFED. There are NO WINDOWS. The door is the only entrance/exit.

**CHAINED BY HER WRISTS TO ONE OF THE WALLS, bloody, bruised and filthy is a NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL.**

This is **Emily**.

Emily is SCREAMING at the top of her lungs, and with the door now wide open, we're awash in her TERROR.

EMILY  
HELP ME! DEAR GOD, PLEASE HELP ME!

Kyle is in SHOCK. He hesitates, but then turns--

Just as ROBERT CHARGES AT HIM--

Kyle DUCKS--

--and slams ROBERT up against a wall, while Robert grasps for him. Robert's head SMASHES against the dusty cabin wall.

Kyle stumbles up to his feet, bumping against the wall behind him. Kyle cuts around a corner, as Emily SCREAMS behind him--

EMILY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
HELP ME PLEASE! PLEASE HELP ME!

Kyle turns out of the hallway, and into the main room--

--the FRONT DOOR is ajar just ahead--

WHAM -- Kyle drops hard. Robert has caught up to him. He's wrapped Kyle up by the legs.

Kyle frantically kicks his legs, slipping loose and kicking Robert HARD, his firefighter boot BLOODYING Robert's face.

EMILY'S ROOM

Emily thrashes with all of her might.

EMILY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
PLEASE DON'T LEAVE ME HERE--

Mary SLAMS the door shut, choking Emily's pleas. Mary frowns.

MAIN ROOM

Kyle scrambles away from Robert's grasp. He gets to his feet--

--and Robert TACKLES him again. They CRASH into the small table in the room, splintering it.

Robert climbs on top of Kyle, SLAMMING him to the ground by his shoulders, but Kyle starts PUNCHING Robert in the ribs.

Once. Twice. The third time, Robert rolls off of him. Kyle gets to his feet again--

Kyle looks up just in time to see Mary AIMING A RIFLE--

Kyle sprints to the door, and DIVES OUT as Mary SHOTS, BLASTING a hole through the front door--

OUTSIDE

Kyle gets back up on his feet. The sky is DARKER. The black smoke from the wildfire is starting to migrate over.

Kyle tries to catch his breath as he races behind the cabin.

A beat.

Mary steps out of the cabin, rifle drawn. She scans the front yard. No Kyle.

BEHIND THE CABIN

Kyle collects himself. He scans the lawn for some kind of weapon... he FINDS it. A rusty SHOVEL.

Kyle launches forward, and grabs the shovel--

Mary slips around the side of the cabin, into the backyard, her rifle drawn-- no Kyle to be seen.

Mary continues forward cautiously.

Her eyes dart around, looking for Kyle. Her ears are perked, listening for Kyle, her--

WHOOSH -- Mary's legs come out from under her, and she DROPS flat on her back, SLAMMING the back of her head down hard--

The rifle flies out of her hand.

Kyle crawls out from UNDER the cabin. He swiped at Mary's legs with the shovel.

Kyle grabs the rifle. He points it at Mary.

KYLE

Stay the fuck dow--

BANG! Kyle crumples to the ground, SCREAMING in pain.

As Kyle collapses, he reveals ROBERT standing behind him--

--holding ANOTHER RIFLE.

Kyle's LEG GUSHES BLOOD from the gun shot. In utter agony, Kyle futilely attempts to start CRAWLING away.

Mary rises. She picks her rifle up from the dusty earth.

She then SLAMS the butt of the rifle down on Kyle's face.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. CABIN - EMILY'S ROOM - LATER

Kyle's chin is lowered to his chest. He's not moving. Blood drips from his lip. His hair is matted in sweat.

A long beat.

Kyle slowly lifts his head with agony. He grits his teeth, trying to control the overwhelming pain.

Sitting across from him, watching him anxiously, is EMILY.

Her eyes are wide with fear. And wide with hope.

EMILY

Hey-- are you, are you okay?

Kyle blinks hard, processing the fact that he's sitting across from this girl whose ARMS ARE CHAINED to the wall.

Kyle looks down and sees his leg has been expertly BANDAGED up. Kyle's breath shortens as he starts to understand...

...and it's in that moment when Kyle realizes his own arms are sticking STRAIGHT UP and BACK AGAINST the concrete, sound-proofed wall.

Kyle tries to drop his arms... but he CAN'T.

They're held by CHAINS.

A beat. Kyle lets out a CARNAL SCREAM and pulls his arms down with every inch of strength he can muster.

KYLE

No! NO! NO!

EMILY

Shhh! Please, shhh! Don't!

Kyle YANKS harder and harder. The chains RATTLE and CLANG against the wall. But they don't budge.

Finally he stops. Emily watches him, pained. Only Kyle's breath and dripping sweat make any sound in the room.

Kyle's eyes move to the DOOR. From his perspective the door seems to be a thousand miles away.

KYLE

LET ME OUT OF HERE! LET ME OUT NOW!

EMILY

Hey! Shut up! Shut up!

Emily slides forward across the dirty floor until her chains become TAUT. She KICKS at Kyle with her bare, filthy feet.

EMILY (CONT'D)

They'll punish us if you keep shouting! They'll punish us both! You have to be quiet in here!

Kyle abruptly stops shouting. His energy drained quickly. He's exhausted, bleeding, and in shock. He can barely sit up.

Kyle looks at Emily with heavy eyes. She's TERRIFIED.

A beat. Emily's fear tempers Kyle's own for a moment. He swallows a dry, hopeless swallow.

KYLE

Are you-- are you okay?

Emily can't help but chuckle, despite herself. Kyle watches her, bewildered.

EMILY

No.

Kyle lets out a long exhale. He takes a moment and adjusts, repositioning his injured leg so it's more comfortable.

Emily slides back up against the wall. She tucks her feet in.

The two simply look at each for a long beat. Finally:

KYLE

What's your name?

EMILY

Emily.

Kyle clears his throat. He tries to breathe normally.

KYLE

Hi Emily. My name is Kyle. How long have you been here?

Emily's eyes drop.

EMILY

(quietly)

How long has it been since 2013?

Kyle's eyes WIDEN.

KYLE  
(breathless)  
Fuck me.

Kyle then appraises Emily, truly seeing the full range of her condition for the first time:

Her clothes are tattered, mildewy and barely holding together. Her hair is greasy, knotted. Her lips are bone dry.

Her skin is coated with a mixture of dirt and sweat. Her face is filthy. Her cheeks are stained red. Her eyes are gentle.

And the SCRATCHES.

The BRUISES.

The SCARS.

There are too many to count.

Emily tucks into a tiny ball, feeling the weight of Kyle's eyes. Her chafed wrists dangle from their chains.

EMILY  
Please stop looking at me.

A beat.

Kyle's eyes fall from Emily.

They fall to the ground.

And all the hope drains from Kyle's face, as he watches his bandage grow RED with his blood--

HARD CUT TO:

INT. CABIN - EMILY'S ROOM - LATER

WATER splashes Kyle's face. He GASPS for air.

Robert looms above him, holding an empty bucket.

Robert's face is cleaned up from his fight with Kyle, but it's bruising now. He glares down at Kyle.

ROBERT  
You pissed yourself.

Robert grabs another bucket full of water. Kyle tenses, and tries to turn away, but Robert empties that bucket on Kyle too, drenching him.

The water recedes to the drain in the center of the room. It has a yellow hue to it.

Kyle looks to Emily, who's tucked in a defensive position, shielding her face, abdomen, and genitals -- it's clear this isn't her first time doing this.

Kyle looks back up at Robert. Kyle RAGES.

KYLE

What-- what the fuck is this, man?!  
What're you doing here-- to her--  
what the fuck is this place?!

Robert wipes the sweat from his brow. The room is hot. A thick, claustrophobic kind of heat.

KYLE (CONT'D)

I'm a firefighter with the Lassen  
County Fire Department, asshole!  
You think you can do to me what  
you've been doing to this girl?

Robert ignores Kyle. Instead, he glances at Emily. He notices the back of her long shirt is stained YELLOW as well.

Robert sighs.

He grabs a third bucket, lumbers over, and dumps it on Emily's bent back. She YELPS in protest, but doesn't move.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Hey! Leave her alone!

ROBERT

She pissed herself too.

Kyle wills himself to try and stand--

--but he immediately CRUMPLES, yelling in pain. His leg's still too injured.

Robert gestures at it.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I need to change that bandage.

Kyle gasps for breath. He grits his teeth.

KYLE

Don't fucking come near me.

A beat. Robert nods. He moves to the door, and KNOCKS.

It opens. We spot Mary standing just outside the door.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
Hey! Hey! What's the plan here you  
fucking psychos?! What's the--

Robert SLAMS the door behind him as he leaves.

A quiet beat.

Emily unfurls from her defensive position.

Kyle swallows hard.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
What's his name?

EMILY  
Robert.

KYLE  
And the woman?

EMILY  
Mary.

KYLE  
Are they married?

EMILY  
I don't know.

KYLE  
Do you know them? Are they  
relatives? Were they neighbors, or  
friends of your parents--

Emily shrugs. Tears slowly come to her eyes.

EMILY  
You're not going to help me, are  
you?

KYLE  
What? What're you--

EMILY  
You ran away at first. When you  
first saw me.

KYLE  
No, no I wasn't running away. I had  
to get away from them before I  
could come back for you, I'd never--

EMILY

And now your leg is hurt. You can't even stand. You're not going to help me. You're stuck in here. You're like me now.

Emily starts crying. Her legs slide out from under her, and she come as close to lying on the ground as she can with her arms outstretched and chained above her.

Kyle hesitates. He doesn't know what to say. There's nothing he can say at this point.

INT. CABIN - MAIN ROOM - SAME

The air in the cabin is thick.

It's dusk. A few strips of orange cut through the collecting clouds of smoke outside and shine into the cabin.

The door is open, and Mary tosses the final pieces of the splintered table outside the door. She's sweating.

She turns to Robert, who's sitting on the couch, his head in his hands, unmoving.

MARY

We have to kill him.

Robert looks up at Mary. His look is even.

ROBERT

Then what?

MARY

Then we leave.

(pause)

It's getting darker out there. The fire is moving this way.

ROBERT

So we should've left days ago.

MARY

Yes. Like you said.

Robert shakes his head, frustrated. Mary ignores it.

MARY (CONT'D)

We can still leave. We have time. But we need to kill him.

Robert exhales. He leans back on the couch, challenging.

ROBERT

Then they find his body. And hunt us forever.

MARY

Who's "they?" No one ever comes up here--

Robert leaps to his feet.

ROBERT

I don't know -- the police, or other firefighters, or who the hell knows who else?! And he came up here. He came up here!

MARY

His body will be ash by then.

Robert jabs at his teeth indignantly.

ROBERT

His dental records. They can identify anyone that way. One fucking tooth sticking out of a pile of ash. Should we take all his teeth out of his mouth and bring them too?

Mary's eyes narrow.

MARY

You need to calm down. Don't you talk to me like that.

A beat. Robert settles. His eyes drop to the ground.

ROBERT

We can't kill him.

MARY

Then what do we do with him?

ROBERT

I-- I don't know.

Mary smirks.

MARY

Good plan, Robert. Always thinking two steps ahead, aren't you?

ROBERT

If we kill him, we--

MARY

So we fucking bury him. So they can't find his body or his fucking teeth. Or we kill him, throw him in the truck, take him with us, and dump him a hundred miles down the road somewhere.

Robert swallows hard.

ROBERT

We're not killers, Mary.

Mary looks at Robert coldly.

MARY

Yes we are.

ROBERT

That was... that was different.

Flustered, Robert has to turn away from her. A beat. Mary marches over to Robert.

She has to crane her neck when she's standing this close to him, but her presence matches his inch-for-inch.

MARY

You need to man up here, understand me? This isn't time for patience, or thinking outside of the box. We need to do what's best for us.

ROBERT

And if someone comes looking for him? Then what? We didn't stay hidden this long by killing people.

MARY

Look outside. Hell is opening up out there. It's a hundred degrees in here already. No one's coming up here for him. They can't. No matter what, he's on his own.

INT. CABIN - EMILY'S ROOM - LATER

Kyle groggily comes to.

When he does, Kyle is STUNNED to see--

--EMILY bent over him, tending to his wounded leg. She's COMPLETELY FREE of her chains.

KYLE

How-- how are you--

EMILY

Hold still.

Emily's torn part of her shirt, and soaked it in the remaining water from the buckets. She removes Kyle's bandage, and dabs his festering wound with her makeshift rag.

Kyle winces.

KYLE

How are you free?

Emily stops working. She looks at Kyle, and grabs her right thumb. She then YANKS her right thumb completely back, virtually hiding it behind her palm. It's disgusting.

EMILY

I learned how to break my thumbs.  
It doesn't hurt anymore.

Kyle nods gently. Emily returns to tending to his wound.

KYLE

Do they know?

EMILY

I didn't think they did. I just did  
it so I could move. I'm not strong  
enough to fight Robert. Or even  
Mary. I just did it to walk around.  
(pause)  
But one time they caught me walking  
around.  
(pause)  
That's how I got these.

Emily turns and lifts part of her shirt. Her back is covered in HORRENDOUS SCARS. Kyle has to look away, it's so horrible.

She turns back around, facing Kyle.

EMILY (CONT'D)

So I don't really do it anymore.  
Doesn't really help me.

A beat. Kyle thinks. He looks to the door. It remains still.

KYLE

Can you undo my chains?

Emily is confused.

EMILY

No. They're locked.

KYLE

I know, but is there like a key, or a bolt, or even like a loose nail or something, somewhere that you could use to try and pick the lock?

EMILY

I-- I don't know.

Emily stands. She examines Kyle's shackles.

KYLE

Look for any kind of opening that a key would normally go into, or anything else we could jab in there to pry my cuffs open.

Emily now desperately searches Kyle's cuffs.

EMILY

I... I don't see anything.

KYLE

Keep looking. Or any point of metal that's thin or weak. Where the chains meet the cuffs maybe. Do your best.

EMILY

I... I don't...

SUDDENLY -- Emily runs back to her side of the room.

She smoothly POPS her thumbs out of place, and slips her hands back in her cuffs.

EMILY (CONT'D)

They're going to come back with dinner soon. I'm sorry.

KYLE

No, no it's okay. You did good.

Kyle looks down at his wound that's now UNWRAPPED.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Shit.

Kyle scoots over, and slides Emily's rag under his leg.

Emily watches, trembling. Kyle nods to her, encouraging.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Thank you for sharing your secret with me, Emily. I promise you that we'll get out of here, okay? We'll get out of here together--

Kyle is interrupted by the door OPENING--

--and Mary walking in, aiming a PISTOL directly at Kyle. She carries a metal, banged-up bucket in her other hand.

EMILY

Don't kill him! Don't kill him!

Kyle's breath intensifies. He tries to remain calm.

Mary ignores Emily. She keeps her eyes on Kyle.

MARY

How'd your bandage come off?

KYLE

It's hot in here. It slipped off.

Mary's jaw tightens.

EMILY

I swear, if you kill him, I'll--

MARY

Settle down.

Mary then abruptly tucks the gun away. She turns, and kneels in front of Emily. They're face-to-face.

MARY (CONT'D)

It's dinner time.

Mary pulls a skinned, cold, HEADLESS CHICKEN from the bucket.

EMILY

I-- I can't eat that...

Mary closes her eyes in frustration.

MARY

Eat.

EMILY

No-- it's not cooked, and, and it's bleeding! Kyle, Kyle help me!

Kyle can't see what Emily's being forced to eat. Mary obscures his point view.

KYLE

Hey! What're you doing to her?!  
What're you feeding her?!

Mary ignores Kyle. She keeps her attention on Emily, whose face is WHITE, and is frantically keeping her lips tight.

MARY

Listen to me, you shit. You're not going to give a performance just because you have an audience now. You're going to eat your dinner. The same dinner you always eat.  
(then)  
Look, extra bloody. Your favorite.

Tears come to Emily's eyes. Her legs kick frantically.

KYLE

Mary!! Leave her alone!!

This gets Mary's attention. She turns to Kyle, irritated he knows her name.

MARY

Not good, firefighter. Not good.

Mary then looks back at Emily, who's nearly breaking down.

EMILY

I'm sorry. I'm sorry for anything I did that made you mad today. I'll be quieter, I mean it. Just please--

Mary then JAMS the bleeding, limp chicken carcass into Emily's face, SMEARING Emily's face with its BLOOD.

MARY

Shut up! Eat! Eat!

KYLE

Mary!! Stop it!!

ROBERT marches in--

Kyle clocks that Robert LEFT THE DOOR OPEN--

But before Kyle can do anything, Robert drops down in front of him, and starts PUNCHING Kyle's wound--

Kyle WAILS in pain--

Robert POUNDS the wound over and over again, soaking his knuckles in Kyle's blood.

Kyle GASPS, and then blacks out--

--just as Mary's able to force the dead chicken into Emily's mouth.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. CABIN - EMILY'S ROOM - LATER

Kyle JOLTS his head to the side, and SPITS UP BLOOD. He coughs violently, gagging and wheezing. He finally settles.

Kyle drops his head against his arms, which still dangle from the shackles above him.

His eyes move to Emily. Her head is drooped.

The ends of Emily's hair are BLOODY. Her feet and legs are smeared in BLOOD. She sits motionless.

Kyle looks to his leg wound. His leg is BANDAGED again.

Kyle inhales, and wills himself to sit up. He spits up another wad of blood, and clears his throat.

He's finished just sitting around.

KYLE

Emily.

Emily doesn't move.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Do you want to get out of here?

Emily doesn't move.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Do they always do that? Do they always both come in here at the same time when you're aggressive to them? To back each other up?

Emily's doesn't move. But, she answers:

EMILY

Yes.

KYLE

Good. Because they can't close the door if they're both in here.

A beat. Emily lifts her head gently. She meets Kyle's eyes.

KYLE (CONT'D)

The door locks from the outside,  
right? So every time they're in  
here together, they have to keep it  
open, or they'd get locked in here.

Emily blinks. Her mouth is stained a FRESH RED from blood.

EMILY

But they can both take me down  
together. I've tried to--

KYLE

Yeah. But now you have me.

Kyle gestures to the door. He then sits up more, and pulls his arms down, pulling his chains TAUT.

KYLE (CONT'D)

It's late, isn't it? I've been out,  
what, a few hours?

Emily nods.

KYLE (CONT'D)

And they haven't come in since...  
dinner?

Emily shakes her head.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Maybe they're asleep. Or fighting.  
They don't know what to do with me.  
Mary seems like she wants to kill  
me, and Robert... who knows. But  
someone gave me a new bandage.

EMILY

So what're you saying?

Kyle gives Emily a gentle smile.

KYLE

I'm saying do that gross thing with  
your thumbs and come over here.

A beat. Emily cracks her THUMBS, and slips out of her cuffs.

She meekly crosses over to Kyle, creating FOOTPRINTS OF BLOOD as she does. Finally, she stands looking down at him.

Kyle looks up at her, earnestly.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
I need you to pull down on the  
chains while I'm pulling too, okay?  
We'll free me together.

Emily tentatively reaches over. She grabs Kyle's chains.

Kyle collects himself.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
One. Two. Three--

Kyle then starts PULLING DOWN on the chains with all his strength. Emily PULLS DOWN on them too.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
There you go. Keep pulling.

Kyle's face turns red as he strains.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
Climb up onto them. Just hang from  
the chains. Your whole weight.

Emily awkwardly grabs a hold of the chains, and climbs up on them. She wraps her legs, and drops her full weight on them, yanking as she does. Kyle is pulling too.

They both grit their teeth, and give it their all, but--

The chains don't budge.

Emily finally drops off, frustrated. She turns to head back to her half of the room.

Kyle collects his breath.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
No. Don't do that. Don't give up.  
This is a war of attrition. Do you  
know what that means?

Emily sits against her wall. She pulls her knees into her chest, and drops her head on her knees. She shakes her head.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
It means which group can wear down  
the other first.

Kyle's breath settles. He looks at Emily, encouraging.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
When we fight fires, big fires, it  
can feel impossible.  
(MORE)

KYLE (CONT'D)

How are a bunch of men and women supposed to put out a huge, terrifying fire? How are we supposed to defeat something so scary, so powerful?

Emily is listening. Kyle continues.

KYLE (CONT'D)

But you see, we don't try and put it all out at once. That *would* be impossible. What we do is attack the fire little by little. We try and contain it, we drop water on it from the air, we use our trucks to stop it on the ground. And slowly, we defeat it. It may be bigger and scarier than us, but we fight harder than the fire does. And that's why we win. Because we wear it down before it wears us down. Because we outlast it.

Emily's eyes sparkle, yet Kyle can feel the fear of defeat radiating off of her. The fear to try. So he pushes:

KYLE (CONT'D)

You and I are going to keep pulling on this chain. Over and over. It can't stay bolted in forever. We'll wear it down. We'll outlast it. And we'll outlast Mary and Robert. Then, we'll be free.

And with that, for the first time, Emily emits HOPE.

KYLE (CONT'D)

So get back up there.

Emily stands back up, crosses back over to Kyle, and climbs back onto the chains. She dangles from them as Kyle pulls with all his might.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Now, tell me what tomorrow will look like.

BEGIN MONTAGE.

INT. CABIN - EMILY'S ROOM - MORNING

The next morning. Kyle and Emily each lie uncomfortably and in a restless sleep. They're both chained up.

EMILY (V.O.)

Every morning, we-- I get a hose  
down from the night before.

The door to Emily's room opens, and Robert marches in,  
dragging behind him the GARDEN HOSE.

Without warning, Robert BLASTS Emily with a hard stream of  
water, JOLTING her awake. She YELPS in alarm.

Emily's screaming startles Kyle awake -- his first image in  
the morning is Robert hosing Emily. Kyle seethes.

Kyle LUNGES forward, but is held back by his chains.

Robert ignores him. He keeps the hose trained on Emily.

EMILY (V.O.)

Robert says he does it to keep me  
clean. That the only way someone  
like me can get clean is to get  
hosed down. They haven't let me  
take a bath or shower since I got  
here. I only get hosed.

Emily's bowed over, trying to shield herself from the force  
of the water however she can.

Robert steps forward, looming over her. He angles the hose to  
hit Emily all over -- her face, her body, between her legs.

KYLE

She's fucking clean already!

Robert then abruptly shuts off the hose.

The water slides off Emily, toward the drain. It's hued pink  
and yellow. Robert steps back so it doesn't stain his boots.

Emily coughs. She then slinks into her protective position.

A beat. Robert then turns, and SPRAYS Kyle.

EMILY (V.O.)

I used to get soap. Smelled like  
flowers. But they took it away.

But Kyle doesn't wilt. He just GLARES at Robert.

INT. CABIN - EMILY'S ROOM - DAY - LATER

Emily's now damp rather than soaking. She sits with her legs  
crossed. She stares up at the ceiling, mumbling to herself.

Kyle, also drier, watches her, concerned.

EMILY (V.O.)

After cleaning time I try to tell myself a story. A story in my head. Stories about anything. Sometimes I pretend the chains are snakes, and I'm trying to get free from snakes.

Emily stares directly up at a spot on the ceiling -- the spot is discolored, and warped from water damage.

EMILY (V.O.)

There's a spot on the ceiling that kind of looks like a cloud. Sometimes my stories are on that cloud or behind it somewhere. Somewhere I can't see.

The door to the room pops open. Emily immediately tenses.

Mary comes in now. She carries the bucket of DEAD CHICKENS.

EMILY (V.O.)

Then comes breakfast. Which is a lot like dinner.

Emily starts SCREAMING again upon the sight of the bucket.

Kyle surreptitiously yanks down on his chains as Mary goes through the horrible routine of trying to feed Emily again.

His chains still don't budge.

INT. CABIN - EMILY'S ROOM - LATER

Emily and Kyle sit in total silence. The room is sweltering.

Emily is out of her cuffs, and is rolling one of Kyle's pants legs up. He's drenched in sweat, as is she.

Emily rolls up her own shorts as she moves back to her side of the room. She ties her shirt so half of it is up.

Emily sits against the wall, not bothering to cuff herself.

Both her and Kyle and are drained from the heat.

EMILY (V.O.)

Then it's nothing. That's the worst part. The nothing. At first I got games. Then books. Then paper and a pencil.

(MORE)

EMILY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
But for a long time I have nothing.  
They won't even come in for hours.  
I don't know how much time goes by  
during the nothing parts. I just  
know they're hard.

KYLE  
Hey.

Emily looks at Kyle.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
I'm thinking of a number 1-10.

Emily BEAMS.

INT. CABIN - EMILY'S ROOM - LATER

The door swings open.

Robert marches in. Mary waits in the doorway-- with her RIFLE  
trained on Emily.

Emily is cuffed again, but she FLAILS when she sees Robert  
approaching, holding a handful of CRUMPLED CLOTHES.

Kyle braces himself, knowing where this is going.

EMILY (V.O.)  
Sometimes they change me.

Robert tears Emily's shorts off of her as she desperately  
tries to kick him off. She has no underwear on.

Robert sits down on Emily's legs, immobilizing them, and  
scoots a new pair of shorts onto her.

Kyle looks at Mary in disgust.

KYLE  
You get off on this?

Mary doesn't even acknowledge Kyle.

Robert then tears off Emily's tank-top, which has buttons  
sewn into the shoulder straps, allowing Robert to take it off  
without unchaining her. Emily whimpers, her breasts exposed.

Kyle grills Mary.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
She's just a young girl. You were a  
young girl once.

Robert slaps a new tank-top on to Emily.

Robert then gets up, and leaves the room without looking back. Mary gives Kyle a glare, then SLAMS the door shut.

Kyle looks at Emily who's nearly hyperventilating, ashamed.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Attrition. It's a war of attrition.

But in this moment, Emily doesn't have the strength to do anything but cry. So Kyle simply turns away, and let's her.

EMILY (V.O.)

Those are the normal days. The days  
when they don't hit me. Or burn me.  
Or cut me. Or rape me.

(pause)

I try not to guess when those days  
are coming.

INT. CABIN - EMILY'S ROOM - LATER

Emily, in her new outfit, is hanging from Kyle's chains again. Kyle grunts and pulls down.

KYLE

Come on. Keep at it. Keep at it.

Emily PULLS and PULLS, and then finally drops off the chains.

Her palms BLEED, sliced from dragging on the chains.

Emily moves back over to her side of the makeshift prison, and slips her hands back in her cuffs, dejected.

KYLE (CONT'D)

It's okay. It's okay. We'll get  
this. Attrition. It's attrition.

Emily curls up. She looks up at Kyle, hope radiating from her pained eyes. She gives him a light nod.

Kyle swallows hard, determined to rescue her.

END MONTAGE.

FADE IN:

INT. CABIN - MAIN ROOM - EVENING

Mary stands at the window, pensively looking outside.

Her hair's pulled back. She wears a tank-top and shorts. It's too hot not to. Her face is covered in a sheen of sweat.

Mary watches the endless ROARING FIRE. It's closer than we've ever seen it. Engulfing and monstrous, the wildfire rips through the distant hillside without pause.

The sky around the fire is BLACK, eliminating any clue as to what time of day it is. ASH gently falls like it's the first day of snow. Mary's front lawn is covered in a layer of ash.

Robert paces behind her. His shirt sleeves are rolled up to his shoulders, sweat stains around his neck and armpits.

ROBERT

The highway's closed by now. Even if we left this exact moment, we'd run into barricades.

(then)

But we *can't* leave this moment because you--

Mary whips around furious.

MARY

No. Because you don't have the courage to do what needs to be done. As usual.

Robert's stung by this. He grits his teeth.

ROBERT

And you're delusional, thinking that everything will just bend our way. "It'll be fine, Robert."  
"We'll only spend a month, maximum, in those hills, Robert." And then five years later here we are.

Robert COUGHS hard, getting worked up. Mary glares at him.

MARY

You keep thinking there's a light at the end of this tunnel, that's your problem. That if we just hold on for one more day, it'll be okay.

Mary turns back to the fire. Its chaotic flames are almost elegant. Mary's face drains of tension as she watches them.

MARY (CONT'D)

There is no end to this tunnel.

A beat. Robert wipes his face.

ROBERT

Not this again. Please. We don't  
have the time to just wallow in--

Mary keeps her eyes on the fire.

MARY

Do you remember when we first found  
this place?

Robert stops pacing. His shoulders drop.

ROBERT

Yeah. Of course.

MARY

It was a godsend. A place where we  
could just be tucked away, and no  
one would find us. No one would  
hurt us. Where we could escape  
judgement.

ROBERT

Stop. I told you. I'm not  
philosophizing with you anymore.  
That isn't what's happening here--

Mary turns to Robert. No longer angry with him. Just in pain.

MARY

Judgement is coming for us, Robert.

Robert stomps over to the window and gestures to the fire.

ROBERT

That's not judgement! That's the  
byproduct of some asshole who  
didn't put out a camp fire or who  
flicked a cigarette into the woods  
as he drove by! That's all it is!

Mary looks at Robert sincerely.

MARY

Like you said, the highways are  
closed off. No matter which  
direction we'd take at this point,  
we'd run into a police presence.

Mary moves to Robert. She puts her arms around his neck.

MARY (CONT'D)

So maybe we just stay here... and  
let the fire come for us...

Robert looks Mary over. Her eyes are wide with shame.

ROBERT

Maybe... maybe I'm wrong, maybe the highways aren't blocked yet and--

Abruptly, Mary turns angry. She PUSHES Robert away.

MARY

Of course they are! It's chaos out there. And if we run into police, then what? They'll ask why we didn't evacuate. They'll want to understand why a couple lunatics were willing to stay in the path of the biggest fire in a decade. And if they found Emily...

Mary trails off.

She digs her nails through her hair, tensing. She starts SLAPPING her forehead, frantic.

MARY (CONT'D)

WE ARE SO FUCKED! WE ARE SO FUCKED!

Robert grabs Mary's hands, and pulls them back. She tries to wriggle free, but he won't let her go. He pleads:

ROBERT

Hey! That's enough. Please stop!  
That's enough!

Robert's hurt watching Mary act this way. Finally she settles. Mary keeps her head low.

MARY

(desperate)

We can't leave. We can't let them talk to Emily...

Then, Robert gets an idea.

ROBERT

Maybe--

Mary lifts her head, looking up at him.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Maybe we don't try to leave the hillside. Maybe we just try to get over the ridge.

Mary blinks.

MARY

Not try for the highway?

ROBERT

No. No, because all we have to do is get out of the path of the fire, right? We can weather some smoke and ash and all that, but it's the fire we have to avoid. We don't have to go to another county. We could just go like ten miles over the ridge. The news reports know which direction the fire is moving, so we just stay away from it.

Mary calms as she processes this idea.

MARY

There'd be no police presence over the ridge. That area hasn't been told to evacuate.

ROBERT

Exactly. And the truck could take us there. It can make it. And then when we get there, we figure it out, but at least we'll be out of the way of the fire.

(pause)

And we wouldn't lose Emily...

A beat, as Mary mulls this over. She then nods to herself.

Mary MARCHES away from Robert, toward the hall. She GRABS a rifle that's leaning against the wall.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Where are you--

Mary turns the corner into the HALLWAY--

ROBERT (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Mary!

She then FLINGS OPEN the door to--

EMILY'S ROOM

--and finds Emily, UNCHAINED, DANGLING from Kyle's chains.

Kyle and Emily both stop trying to break him free. They look at Mary. A beat. Emily sways on the chains.

Kyle's eyes WIDEN. So do Mary's.

KYLE

Fuck.

MARY

Fuck.

Emily then LEAPS off of Kyle's chains and--

--LUNGES at Mary, but Mary juts out the rifle, and FLINGS Emily across the room--

Mary then marches over, and JAMS the rifle into Kyle's face--

Just then, Robert BURSTS into the room--

ROBERT

Mary, no!

Then Robert sees Emily get back up, and lunge at Mary again, but Robert intercepts her, and SLAMS her to the ground.

Emily KICKS and SCREAMS. She SCRATCHES and tries to BITE Robert. Robert has her pinned with one arm, and reaches for Mary with the other.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Mary, please!

Mary pushes the rifle deeper against Kyle's cheek. He turns his head, which is squeezed back against the wall.

MARY

Let me do it, Robert! We have a good plan now! Let me do it!

Kyle twists and struggles to move away, but he can't. The rifle barrel presses deep into his cheek.

Emily finally gets her MOUTH onto Robert's arm, and SHE BITES IN, and TEARS OFF a chunk of skin. Robert SCREAMS.

Robert lifts his fist to punch Emily, but Mary YELLS.

MARY (CONT'D)

Don't you fucking hurt her!

Robert stops. He then smothers Emily's mouth with his palm, easily lifts her up, and carries her back to her chains.

He cuffs Emily by her ANKLE. She now hangs UPSIDE DOWN against the wall, FLAILING, SQUIRMING, and SCREAMING.

Robert then comes over and holds Mary by her shoulders.

ROBERT

Mary, you don't want to do this, I know you, you don't want do this.

Mary snarls. She jams the rifle into Kyle's mouth.

Emily's eyes widen, and she stops flailing. Kyle looks at her, and despite his fear, his eyes GESTURE TO THE DOOR.

Emily looks over to it-- IT'S OPEN.

MARY

We have no other choice, Robert. If we want to keep Emily, we gotta do this, we gotta do this and go.

ROBERT

They'll find us! Do you hear me?! They'll hunt us forever if we murder a firefighter in the middle of a fucking fire!

Mary shakes her head, rejecting Robert's logic. She doesn't want to hear it. She's too scared and angry to hear it.

She COCKS her rifle.

Emily pulls herself up by her leg. She grabs her chains with one hand, and with the other hand, she grabs her foot--

--and she **YANKS her foot viciously to the side, BREAKING IT.**

Emily then DROPS to the ground. FREE FROM HER CHAINS.

Kyle can't believe it. He quickly SQUIRMS and SHOUTS to keep the attention on himself.

MARY

We have to!

Kyle watches as Emily crawls toward the open door.

ROBERT

There's no coming back from this!  
You'll never forgive yourself!  
Please don't kill him!

MARY

It was always going to end this way! It was always going to end--

Mary suddenly stops.

She notices Kyle's eyes are wide with terror, but he's not looking at her... he's looking to the DOOR.

Mary WHIPS her head around to see the bottom of Emily's feet crawl out of the room, and disappear behind the door--

MARY (CONT'D)

NO!

Mary bolts out of the room, immediately losing interest in Kyle. Kyle GASPS for air.

Robert charges out of the room after Mary.

Kyle cranes his head to try and see what's going on, but he can't see a thing. He can only HEAR:

-- furniture being turned over

Kyle starts YANKING HARD on his chains.

-- screaming and cursing

Kyle hoists himself up, now hovering off the ground, his entire weight on the chains. He PULLS.

-- a GUN SHOT

Kyle's eyes widen. His face turns red. The chains DON'T BUDGE.

-- a SECOND GUN SHOT

Kyle GRITS HIS TEETH, channeling every last bit of energy he has into getting these fucking chains to finally break--

**AND THEY DO.**

Kyle plops to the ground, stunned. A beat.

-- there's commotion outside.

Kyle's hands are still cuffed together, but he's free from the wall.

-- more commotion. Then SILENCE.

Kyle swallows. He pushes himself up to his feet, grimacing. He spins the remaining loose chain around his wrists, so they don't scrape against the ground.

Kyle slowly moves out of Emily's room and into the

HALLWAY

It's empty. The few items of furniture have been toppled over to the ground. Kyle keeps moving, and peeks his head around to see into the

MAIN ROOM

which is OBLITERATED. It doesn't look like a quick fight happened in here. It looks like a tornado ripped through.

Kyle spots the results of the TWO GUN BLASTS he heard: A hole in a WALL, and a hole in the CEILING.

Kyle sees Mary standing above Robert, one hand covering her mouth. Tears roll down Mary's face.

Robert is hunched over in the middle of the floor, aggressively pinning Emily down. He screams at her.

ROBERT

I thought you stopped doing that! I thought you realized it wouldn't get you anywhere! That we'd never let you go! Do you fucking understand me?! Never!!

(then)

We'll have to find you smaller cuffs.

Kyle darts back into the

HALLWAY

He looks around for some kind of weapon. He can't find anything.

Then he looks at his own CHAINS.

IN THE MAIN ROOM

Mary paces around Robert and Emily.

Emily grinds her teeth VIOLENTLY, as her nose bleeds. She sticks her tongue out, and begins BITING DOWN on it.

Robert shoves his hand INTO her mouth.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Stop that! Stop that now!

Emily CHOMPS on Robert's thumb, almost biting it clear off.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Oww! You fucking shit-- fucking--

MARY (O.S.)

Robert!

ROBERT

She almost bit my finger off, she almost--!

MARY (O.S.)

Robert!

Robert whips his head around to find that Kyle has grabbed Mary. His chains are WRAPPED around her neck.

KYLE

Let Emily go.

Robert's eyes widen.

ROBERT

How did you...?

KYLE

Let Emily go. Now.

Robert swallows hard. Emily is no longer ferocious. In Kyle's presence, her eyes have become softer. Her look, desperate.

EMILY

Kyle... please...

ROBERT

You let *her* go.

KYLE

No chance.

Robert hesitates. He then pulls a HANDGUN from the back of his pants, and shoves it against Emily's head.

MARY

Robert!! No!!

Kyle hesitates.

ROBERT

You like her, right? You two became fast friends in there? If you don't let Mary go, I'll kill her.

Kyle wavers, unsure what to do. Mary thrashes in his arms, but Kyle YANKS the chains hard, pulling Mary closer to him.

KYLE

You're not going to kill her. You haven't for this long.

Emily squirms.

EMILY

(desperate)  
Help me, Kyle.

ROBERT

Well things are different now,  
aren't they?! You're here! And  
we're all about to go up in flames!

Robert is starting to lose it. Kyle doesn't like that.

KYLE

Listen. Emily and I are going to  
leave together right now, Robert.  
Do you understand me? Let her go,  
and I'll let Mary go, and then you--

But as Kyle is negotiating, Mary's able to swing back and  
kick Kyle directly in his BULLET WOUND.

Kyle SCREAMS and collapses to his knees with Mary. She YELPS  
as the chains drag her down.

Mary's able to wriggle out of the chains, and she scrambles  
away from a crumpled Kyle.

Robert's eyes fill with warmth as Mary hustles over to him.

ROBERT

Baby, are you--

Mary pushes Robert off of Emily, then grabs Emily by the  
HAIR, and YANKS. Emily YELPS.

Mary lifts Emily off the ground, and pins her arms behind her  
as if she's done so a million times before.

EMILY

(seething)

Let me fucking go, you bitch-

Mary SQUEEZES Emily's throat. She GAGS.

Kyle grimaces, on his knees. He tries to stand, but topples  
over right away.

ROBERT

Mary, I wasn't actually going to--

MARY

Kill him. Like I said from the  
beginning. Do it outside.

Mary storms off, dragging Emily with her.

Robert remains hunched over. He rubs his hands in turmoil.

Kyle spits up a wad of BLOOD.

The door to Emily's room SLAMS shut.

A beat.

Robert then rises to his feet. Kyle watches him, in pain.

KYLE

Come on, Robert. You don't have to  
do this. You don't want to do this.

Robert says nothing. His eyes are hollow. He simply walks over, and grabs the RIFLE leaning against the wall.

Kyle forces himself to his feet, but he's shaky.

Robert lifts the rifle, pointing it at Kyle.

ROBERT

Let's go.

KYLE

Robert, listen to me--

ROBERT

Let's go, I said!

Robert throws open the front door.

It's like a gateway to another dimension: Outside is DARK, the ASH falls like snow. There's no sun to speak of.

Kyle has no choice. He grudgingly shuffles to the front door, Robert's rifle holding him the whole way.

EXT. CALIFORNIA HILLSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Ash covers the entire grounds of the cabin, and the cabin itself. The heat is intense, suffocating.

All the chickens in the coop are DEAD.

Kyle immediately starts COUGHING from the air. Robert follows him out the door. He lifts his shirt to cover his face.

He directs Kyle out into the front yard.

KYLE

I just don't understand, Robert.  
Why not do this sooner, huh? You  
had days to kill me.

Robert doesn't respond. He pokes Kyle in the back with the rifle, signaling him to keep moving.

KYLE (CONT'D)

But if you're such a good guy that you didn't want to kill me, why keep a young girl trapped in your house for five fucking years?

Robert hesitates. But he keeps moving.

KYLE (CONT'D)

What kind of good guy does that?! What kind of good guy imprisons a young girl to humiliate and rape her daily? You think you're some kind of hero because you hesitated to kill me? You're nothing, Robert, you're nothing but a--

ROBERT

I never touched her!

Kyle ignores him and keeps walking. Robert stops and grabs Kyle's shoulder, swinging him around.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

You hear me?! I never raped her! I wouldn't-- I couldn't do that!

KYLE

That's not what she told me.

ROBERT

Of course not! Did-- did you ever see me rape her?! Or hit her?!

KYLE

So you took a break because I was there. What does that prove?

Robert's hands tremble, holding the rifle.

SUDDENLY-- he lowers it. A beat. The ash falls around them.

ROBERT

What do you think's happening here?

Kyle frowns.

KYLE

What is this? What're you doing--

ROBERT

Tell me! If I'm such a monster, why the fuck did I change your fucking bandage? Why'd I give you water?

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)  
Why didn't I just let Mary kill  
you?

KYLE  
Because you're deranged? And you're  
going to just kill me now?

Robert exhales, frustrated. He shakes, spastically.

ROBERT  
You think you understand so much  
about Emily. That you care about  
her. Well, have you been taking  
care of her for the last five  
years? Because I have. I have!

Kyle blinks. He doesn't even know how to respond to that.

ROBERT (CONT'D)  
Have you been feeding her, and  
bathing her when she refuses to  
eat, and shits herself. Have you?!

Ash collects on Kyle and Robert's hair and shoulders.

ROBERT (CONT'D)  
I bet she didn't tell you that we  
do that, did she? No, I don't think  
she did. She probably made up some  
story, some horrible story that--

KYLE  
Some story?! You stripped her naked  
and blasted her with a hose!

ROBERT  
That's the only way we can clean  
her! The only way we can do it  
without her doing this to us--

Robert frantically pulls off his shirt, spilling the ash off  
of him. Kyle steps back, totally freaked out.

Even through the haze, we can see Robert's CHEST and BACK are  
covered in SCARS.

Deep ones. Short ones. Long ones.

ROBERT (CONT'D)  
You see that?? Do you?! How else  
would you clean someone who did  
this to you?! Huh?!

Kyle glares at Robert.

KYLE

What do you want from me? You want me to feel bad for you because a young girl was defending herself?

ROBERT

Listen to me, fireman! That girl in there is sick, okay? She's SICK! She's not like a normal girl.

Kyle doesn't respond. His reaction is hard to read. Robert interprets it as permission to continue.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

She's been that way for five years, Kyle. Her mother and I have had to keep her secluded. Keep her away from other people, far away, so she wouldn't hurt them.

Kyle blinks, stunned.

KYLE

Her mother...  
(disbelief)  
You and Mary are Emily's parents?

ROBERT

Of course we are! What do you think, we're just some strangers that chained up a poor innocent girl??

Kyle coughs. The ash falls heavy. He treads carefully.

KYLE

Why would you treat your own daughter like that? *How* could you treat your own daughter like that?

Robert shakes his head again.

ROBERT

You don't understand.

KYLE

(baiting Robert)  
No, please. I think I would. I'm a fireman. I help people. Tell me.

Kyle takes one step BACK, putting all the weight on his wounded leg. It holds.

Robert shakes his head, unsure if he should continue.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Okay, so what you're telling me is that you and your wife - I take it Mary's your wife - have forced your daughter to be chained up for five years because it's good for her? Is this like a religious thing?

ROBERT

No! No we're not religious nuts!

Robert grows angry. He doesn't like the direction this conversation is taking. Kyle clocks that.

KYLE

Okay, yeah, of course not. But you're doing it to protect her.

ROBERT

Yes! You think we like feeding her raw chickens or hosing her down?? You think I like treating my own daughter that way?! But that's what she needs, do you understand?!

KYLE

I'm getting there. Please, share more if you don't mind.

ROBERT

It's been so hard. So hard. She has been so difficult to keep under control, and when she gets in her moods, when she changes she's completely--

SUDDENLY -- Kyle DARTS away, through the thickness of the ash, and vanishes into the darkness. A beat.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Shit! No! NO!

Robert SHOOTS in the general direction that Kyle ran off into. Robert proceeds forward, rifle drawn.

Robert keeps moving through the ash filled grounds.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I didn't want to kill you...!  
You'll never understand! What I'm doing, what Mary's doing, is for Emily! We love her!

Robert turns a corner of the cabin---

Suddenly he's SWARMED by DOZENS OF RABBITS frantically hopping away, racing from the encroaching fire. Robert watches, mesmerized. One rabbit is ON FIRE.

Robert's face fills with sadness. Defeat etches onto it.

AT THAT MOMENT -- Kyle RACES into view, and RAMS Robert across the face with both fists clenched.

Robert drops back, hard. He CRACKS his head against the cabin. BLOOD streaks down the wood panels.

Kyle looks at Robert's limp body. Kyle hesitates.

Kyle then steels himself, and grabs Robert by the arms, DRAGGING him across the ashy ground.

Kyle leans Robert's lifeless body against the front facade of the cabin. Kyle reaches over, and grabs the HOSE that extends from the cabin.

He wraps up Robert's arms. He KNOTS the limp hose the best he can. Kyle stands and appraises his work. It's good enough.

Kyle hustles off. But as he does, Robert's arm TENSES...

Kyle hustles over to where he and Robert were last, and he picks up the RIFLE from the ground.

Kyle charges back to the front of the cabin, COUGHING.

He stops at the tree stump where the butcher knife is still embedded. He drops to his knees.

He SLAMS his cuffs on the edge of the stump. Once. Twice--

On the third time, the cuffs SNAP. Kyle tosses off the remaining scraps of the cuffs from his wrists.

He wiggles and stretches his fingers with relief.

Kyle looks up at the INFERNO that's ahead. Its power is only increasing, and it's only getting closer.

Kyle grabs the RIFLE, and moves to the cabin door.

Kyle slowly opens the front door, and carefully enters

THE MAIN ROOM

Which is empty.

Kyle takes a few more steps into the cabin, his head swiveling, looking for Mary--

BANG!

Kyle drops down as the wood panel behind him SHATTERS.

Mary slips back into the hallway, holding her rifle.

MARY  
Where's Robert?

Kyle is tucked behind the couch, searching for a solution.

KYLE  
He's okay. I tied him up outside. I  
just want to get Emily and get out--

MARY  
Did you kill him?

Kyle doesn't respond.

Mary slips back around the wall, and SHOOTS at the couch. She swings back to the hall. She shakes her head to herself.

MARY (CONT'D)  
He tried to explain things to you,  
didn't he?

Mary whips back around and blasts the couch again. She then rotates back into the hallway.

MARY (CONT'D)  
Well I'm not him.

Mary whips around again, facing into the main room, but this time, she feels the cold edge of a BARREL against her temple.

Kyle leans back against the opposing wall, hidden from Mary. His rifle pressed against her head.

KYLE  
Let's go get Emily.

Mary turns her head toward Kyle, the barrel scraping against her skin, and then resting firmly against her forehead.

Mary looks at Kyle with wide eyes.

Smoke and ash from outside is now seeping into the house through the open front door.

Mary TOSSES her rifle aside.

MARY  
Okay. You win.

A beat. Kyle hesitates. Finally, he nods for Mary to move.

Mary heads down the hallway. Kyle follows close behind.

Mary opens the door to Emily's room

INSIDE

Emily's curled up. Her chains are now REINFORCED. There's no way she's slipping out of them now. HER FACE IS BLOODY.

EMILY

Kyle?

Kyle rushes in and drops to his knees, holding Emily's face against his shoulder.

He turns to Mary.

KYLE

How could you?! How could you do this to her?!

Mary looks at him with a blank expression.

MARY

I didn't do that to her. I never do anything to her.

Mary then SLAMS the door to Emily's room SHUT. LOCKING the three of them inside.

Kyle blinks. Emily instantly transforms from wounded bird to snarling animal.

EMILY

What the fuck have you done, you stupid fucking cunt?!

Mary crosses the room and takes a seat where Kyle once sat.

Kyle clenches his jaw.

KYLE

Open that door.

MARY

Can't. The keys are outside.

Kyle rubs his face, furious. A beat. He stands, and presses the rifle against the door handle. He SHOOTS.

The bang is so LOUD Emily and Mary both grab for their ears. Kyle is knocked off his feet from the ricochet.

Mary shakes her head clear.

MARY (CONT'D)

We may have failed with the strength of the chains, but I promise you-- No one can leave if they're stuck inside here.

Mary looks at Emily.

MARY (CONT'D)

We made sure of that.

Emily seethes. She spits the blood that's pooled on her face.

EMILY

I'm not going to die in here.

Mary doesn't respond. Kyle looks at her.

KYLE

So what's the plan, huh? The fire is approaching quickly.

MARY

You didn't kill Robert, right? Then he'll come back. For me at least.

KYLE

I never said I didn't kill him.

MARY

No. Your eyes are too warm to do something like that. There's too much hope in them.

Kyle swallows hard, unnerved. Emily RATTLES her chains.

EMILY

KYLE! What are you going to do?

KYLE

I don't know, let me think for a second here--

EMILY

THINK?! That's all you've fucking done since you got here! You're not helping me like you said you would!

KYLE

Emily, please--

Emily lets out a PIERCING SCREAM.

EMILY

I'm not going to die in here!!

Emily then SLAMS her head backwards against the wall.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Get us OUT!!

Emily SLAMS it harder. Kyle is thunderstruck, watching.

Mary remains even.

EMILY (CONT'D)

GET US OUT!!

Emily SLAMS her head AGAIN. Kyle races to Emily.

KYLE

Hey! Stop that!

Emily SLAMS her head AGAIN. Mary has to look away. Kyle is desperate.

KYLE (CONT'D)

EMILY! STOP--

EMILY

GET US OUT!!

She SLAMS her head again--

BLOOD from the back of her head SPLOTCHES the wall--

Kyle looks to Mary, desperate.

KYLE

Get her to stop.

Mary's eyes tear up, watching Emily bash her head.

MARY

(to herself)

It was always going to end this way...

Emily is SCREAMING--

KYLE

Help her, Mary!!

MARY

I can't...

Kyle is LOSING CONTROL--

KYLE  
Do SOMETHING DAMN IT!!

Mary is WEEPING--

MARY  
It was always going to end like...

And SUDDENLY, the door OPENS--

-- and a FIREMAN, wearing a GAS MASK, wanders in. The Fireman lifts the mask.

**It's DEPUTY CHIEF DANIELS.**

Daniels stands dumbfounded facing a beaten and bruised Kyle with a bandaged leg, a bloodied girl chained to a wall, and a strange woman among them.

KYLE  
(barely audible)  
Daniels.

Mary's eyes INSTANTLY widen in terror.

MARY  
NO! YOU CAN'T LET HER OUT--

Mary rushes to her feet--

--but Kyle whips around and SLAMS the butt of the rifle into Mary's chest, and she drops on her back, hard.

A quiet beat. Emily's stopped bashing her head. Her eyes widen. Her breath is rapid in hope and excitement.

Daniels clears his throat.

DANIELS  
I... I heard a gun shot. A few actually. We've been looking for you. Was a bear to get up here, but someone said this was the direction they saw you go last--

Kyle doesn't let Daniels finish.

Kyle runs over and embraces him in a huge, grateful hug. Daniels pats Kyle's back.

Mary grimaces. She tries to stand up.

MARY  
...please... you can't take her.

Kyle slips a small AXE that hangs from the chief's belt.

Kyle turns and moves to Emily. He WHACKS away at her chains.

Mary pushes herself up, and LUNGES at Kyle, but Daniels moves in front of her, and easily holds her back.

DANIELS

Ma'am. Stand back. Now.

MARY

Don't do this! Don't do it--

After a few attempts, Emily's chains finally SNAP.

She drops her arms to her lap.

Emily looks to the door. It's open. She looks to Mary, who's being held at bay.

Emily can't believe it. This moment is finally here.

Kyle kneels down, and hoists Emily up in his arms.

KYLE

You're going to be okay.

Emily nods lightly.

Daniels ZIP-TIES Mary's hands behind her back.

DANIELS

Get the girl out of here.

Kyle slips out of the room, holding Emily in his arms.

She tucks her bloody face into the nape of Kyle's neck.

Mary thrashes against Daniels, but he easily sits her down, and zip-ties her to Emily's set of chains.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

We'll come right back for you,  
ma'am. But you need to calm down.

MARY

You have no idea what you've done.

Daniels backs away from Mary. He shuts the door.

EXT. CALIFORNIA HILLSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Kyle and Emily step into the smoky air.

Emily's eyes widen. She scans the grounds -- so much space.  
She scans the sky -- so big, so expansive.  
Emily inhales sharply. She COUGHS from the smoke in the air.  
Kyle blinks, the smoke burning his eyes.

KYLE

We'll be out of here soon.

Kyle hustles over to a RESCUE ATV. This is what Daniels used to navigate the hillside terrain.

Kyle sits Emily down in the back. She slumps, exhausted.

He moves to the front of the ATV, and rummages through a compartment. He grabs a SHOCK blanket, and a RESPIRATOR MASK.

Kyle slips the mask onto Emily, and wraps her in the blanket. He squeezes her shoulders encouragingly.

Daniels, now outside, crosses over to them. He grabs a FIRST AID kit from inside the ATV.

Emily COUGHS under her mask. She can't peel her eyes from the ROARING FIRE just a quarter mile away.

Daniels moves to Emily, and begins wiping down her face. Dried blood and dirt cake off.

He turns to Kyle, who's in a daze that it's all over.

DANIELS

Chained in the back of a fucking cabin. What the fuck, man.

Kyle has no words.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

I got two more respirator masks up front. You'll need one.

Kyle nods, only half-processing it all.

He looks at Emily, who's still mesmerized by the fire. Kyle gestures to it.

KYLE

How fast is it approaching?

DANIELS

The winds picked up. We're at fifteen miles an hour now.

(MORE)

DANIELS (CONT'D)

All the surrounding highways are closed off, so once we drop off this hillside, we can zip down an open road. I'll radio for an ambulance to be waiting for us when we're coming south on the 5.

Emily blinks blankly. The ash collects on her head. She still can't believe she's outside.

Kyle clocks how overwhelmed Emily is. He squeezes her hand.

KYLE

It's okay. It's really happening.

Emily looks at him. Kyle smiles at her. It's unclear if Emily is smiling back because the mask obscures her face.

Daniels turns to Kyle.

DANIELS

You understand we're not calling for a second unit to come get the woman. She has to come with us.

Emily tilts her head, listening. Kyle nods, understanding.

KYLE

There's a man too. Well, there might be. I don't know.

Daniels nods.

DANIELS

You did what you needed to do to survive. No one will doubt that. But as far as willingly leaving people up here to die. To possibly burn to death... we can't--

KYLE

No. I know. I know.

Kyle coughs. He wipes the ash from this face.

KYLE (CONT'D)

I'll go in and get her. Then I'll see what happened to her husband.

DANIELS

(disbelief)  
Husband?

Daniels shakes his head to himself.

Kyle grudgingly turns, and trudges back to the cabin.

Emily sits up straight, watching him head inside.

Daniels holds Emily's shoulders.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

It's going to be okay. That fucked  
up woman will be in jail for a  
long, long time.

Emily turns and faces Daniels.

Her expression is impossible to read under the mask.

INT. CABIN - MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Kyle steps back into the cabin. It's now nearly filled with smoke. He covers his face with his sleeve.

He moves inside.

KYLE

Mary? Mary I'm coming in for you.

Kyle opens the door to EMILY'S ROOM hesitantly -- When there's no commotion, he swings the door open completely.

Mary's on the ground. Unmoving.

Kyle snips the zip-tie to the chains, but leaves the zip-ties around Mary's wrists. She turns to him, ashamed.

MARY

Just know... Just know that we did  
our best to keep her locked way.

Kyle is shaken by Mary's words. A beat. He swallows hard.

KYLE

Let's go you fucking lunatic.

Kyle roughly drags Mary out of Emily's room, into the--

HALLWAY, and then out of the HALLWAY into the--

MAIN ROOM, and then out of the MAIN ROOM--

OUTSIDE

Where he drags her across the ground to the ATV--

Where Kyle STOPS suddenly. He drops Mary.

His face goes WHITE.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
What the fuck--

Kyle hustles over to the ATV where--

--Daniels lies on his back, the small axe STICKING OUT OF HIS CHEST.

BLOOD pools around Daniels. He SPASMS.

And EMILY IS GONE.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
Daniels!! Daniels what happened?!

Daniels splurts blood. His body convulses aggressively.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
I'm... I'm going to help you, I...

His body convulses less aggressively. Then, it just stops.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
No! NO!! DANIELS!!

Mary remains curled on the ground. She snarls righteously.

MARY  
See! SEE! I TOLD YOU! I TOLD YOU!

Kyle whips around to Mary, who's nearly CACKLING.

MARY (CONT'D)  
You didn't listen to me! You didn't listen to me!!

The air is hot, thick with ash and smoke, and only getting more suffocating by the minute.

Kyle's head swivels, trying to piece together what happened.

Kyle then hustles over to the corner of the cabin... where he had tied up Robert...

...but Robert's GONE. The hose lies TORN.

Kyle then spots what else is missing: Robert's TRUCK IS GONE.

Thick, obvious tracks tell Kyle the truck's been driven up into the woods.

Kyle's eyes narrow. He marches back over to Mary.

He grabs her, and yanks her over to the ATV.

MARY (CONT'D)  
I told you! I fucking told you!

Mary starts COUGHING VIOLENTLY.

MARY (CONT'D)  
Now she's out there! She's out there! She's out there...

Mary begins to CRY.

Kyle finds the spare zip-ties, and ties Mary's already bound hands to the edge of the ATV.

KYLE  
She didn't do anything. Your husband did.

Kyle hustles over to Daniels, and lifts his body off the ground. He lays him in the back of the ATV.

Kyle covers him with Emily's discarded shock blanket.

He slips on an extra respirator mask.

He then jumps in the driver seat of the ATV.

Mary has settled a bit. Now, she's simply TERRIFIED.

MARY  
We can't... we can't abandon her...

Kyle guns the ATV.

It charges across the front yard of the cabin, and up into the hillside, following Robert's tracks.

EXT. CALIFORNIA HILLSIDE - WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

The fire looms in the distance. The sky is black above us. The air is clogged. You can barely see a foot ahead of you.

The ATV's headlights weakly light the terrain ahead of Kyle and Mary, as it rumbles up the steep California Hillside.

Mary COUGHS hysterically. Kyle ignores her.

As the ATV angles its way up a particularly steep part of the hillside--

--the headlights catch something ROARING TOWARD THEM--

--Kyle JERKS the ATV to the side -- as ROBERT'S TRUCK ZOOMS past, in reverse, and tumbles down the hillside.

MARY

Robert!

Kyle turns to watch the huge truck crash through the woods, and then disappear in the smoke.

KYLE

He wasn't in there. No one was driving.

Mary continues to cough, but settles a bit, believing Kyle.

The ash falls twice as thick here. It's nearly total darkness. The orange hue is now a bright RED.

Kyle stops the ATV. He pops open the door and steps out.

MARY

I want to come with you.

Kyle ignores her. He grabs a RIFLE from the back. It lies next to Daniels's covered, lifeless body.

MARY (CONT'D)

Listen to me, Kyle, please.

Kyle stops. This is the first time Mary's called him Kyle.

MARY (CONT'D)

You need to understand something.  
My husband didn't kill your friend,  
okay? He couldn't even kill you.  
Why would he kill a total stranger,  
and then drive up here and then  
just abandon the car if he did?

Kyle doesn't respond. Mary hesitates, but presses.

MARY (CONT'D)

She killed your friend.

Kyle doesn't move.

MARY (CONT'D)

And then Robert got loose, and went  
after her. You have to see that.

(pause)

Whatever you think of Robert and I,  
you have to understand that we kept  
our daughter under those conditions  
for a very real reason.

Mary COUGHS again. She spits up BLOOD this time.

MARY (CONT'D)

What we've done to her has been horrible. It's been monstrous. We threw away our lives keeping her locked away from the world. But we did it because we had to.

Mary gathers her strength. Her face melts of all aggression. She's raw. Vulnerable. Honest. She swallows hard.

MARY (CONT'D)

Because she's possessed by a demon.

A beat. Kyle says nothing. His reaction is hard to discern.

MARY (CONT'D)

She's been possessed for years--

KYLE

Enough of this bullshit. You don't get to do this. You don't get to torture a young girl and then create some fucking hideous reason to justify it! She didn't deserve what she got from you and your twisted husband!!

Mary leans forward, desperate. Her eyes are wide with panic.

MARY

Listen to me! Why?! Why else would we do this?? We're not bad people! We're not monsters! But we had to protect her! Especially after she--

Mary is so overwhelmed, her coughing INTENSIFIES.

MARY (CONT'D)

(coughing violently)

Please... I can't breathe...

Kyle coldly watches Mary gasp for air. Watches Mary choking.

The ash falls around them, as thick as snow.

A beat.

Kyle finally reaches behind the driver seat, and pulls out a RESPIRATOR MASK. He forcefully it slips down over Mary's head. Her breathing slowly settles.

Kyle turns and marches off. Mary calls after him:

MARY (CONT'D)

You have to be careful, Kyle! She doesn't need you anymore so you have to be careful!

Kyle doesn't turn to acknowledge her. Instead he keeps moving into the woods, further into the darkness, until he's gone.

A beat.

Mary yanks at her zip-ties, trying to get free.

Mary then STOPS. She cranes her neck. She sees MOVEMENT.

Mary struggles to get a sense of what's ahead of her, her eyes burning from the ash. The MOVEMENT approaches.

MARY (CONT'D)

Emily?! Emily is that you?!

Mary frantically YANKS at her zip-ties with all her strength.

MARY (CONT'D)

Come to me, Emily! COME TO YOUR MOTHER--

The MOVEMENT clarifies -- it's ROBERT.

Robert has a cloth wrapped around his face. He's covered in dry blood and soot. He cautiously approaches the ATV.

Mary tenses when she sees him.

MARY (CONT'D)

He's gone. He went into the hills.

Robert then charges over. He searches the ATV for anything to help Mary -- he finds it. Scissors.

Robert snips off Mary's ties. He wraps his arms around her, and hoists her out of the ATV.

She then SLAPS the hell out of him..

MARY (CONT'D)

She's gone because of you.

ROBERT

You're right. I'm sorry.

A beat. Robert cranes his head, gesturing to the hillside.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

She's still up there somewhere.

MARY

You think.

Robert nods.

MARY (CONT'D)

We kill Kyle. No more explanations,  
no more fucking attempts at  
understanding. We'll kill him and  
disappear with Emily.

Robert nods in agreement.

EXT. CALIFORNIA HILLSIDE - WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Kyle cautiously makes his way up the steep hillside.

The climb is laborious. The ground is unstable. There's so  
much smoke in the air, Kyle's essentially blind.

Kyle keeps his gun lifted, moving forward.

His mask is decorated with a layer of ash.

Kyle doesn't quite know where he's going. Then he SEES--

--a DEAD DEER lying on its side.

Kyle moves toward it, investigating.

The deer's innards have been RIPPED OUT of its body. Its  
innocent eye stares still, and coldly to the dark sky.

Kyle covers his face with his arm, disgusted.

He then WHIPS AROUND --

A BLUR of MOVEMENT disappears back into the darkness.

KYLE

Emily! Emily is that you?!

Kyle heads toward the movement.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Emily! It's Kyle!

Kyle lowers his weapon a bit.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Come with me! We can get out now!

The blur of movement disappeared into a dense wooded area.

Kyle heads into the wooded area.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
Emily, are you--

THEN, from the shadows:

EMILY (O.S.)  
Why did you save her?

KYLE  
Emily, where are you?! You can't breathe this air up here for very long--

EMILY (O.S.)  
She locked us up in that prison, and you were going to save her--

KYLE  
I couldn't just leave her there to die... That's not who I am. That's not who you are either. But we're going to lock her up too. For a long, long time.

EMILY  
She locked me in that prison for FIVE YEARS, and you saved her!

KYLE  
Emily-- please, just come out here--

Kyle's thoughts are interrupted by a GUN SHOT.

The shot RIPS through Kyle's JACKET--

BLOOD sprays from his arm, and stains the ground--

Kyle immediately dives down for cover.

There's ANOTHER SHOT. Then ANOTHER.

Kyle can't see a thing. He's buried in ash and leaves.

He belly-crawls to an even darker area for protection.

A beat.

MARY and ROBERT emerge. Mary's rifle is drawn.

MARY  
Come out right now, fireman, and I'll make this quick.

She FIRES another shot.

Kyle tucks himself against a thick set of brush. He pushes on his arm, applying pressure to the bullet wound.

ROBERT

We know we clipped you. You don't want to bleed out, out here. Come out, and we can finish the job.

The fire RAGES in the distance. It's magnificent.

MARY

Emily? Emily are you up here?  
(pause)  
Or are **you** up here right now?

Mary steps forward. She rotates, addressing the woods.

MARY (CONT'D)

If I'm speaking to **you**, then this ends right now! Emily's body can't sustain this much smoke.

Mary takes another step forward. Robert is on high-alert, covering Mary's back.

MARY (CONT'D)

You're not going to win. If you stay out here, your body will die, and your whole presence will disappear. And the five years of torture you put us through -- yourself through -- will end up having been for nothing.

Kyle crawls around a tree, trying to see Mary and Robert.

He spots the rifle he dropped just a few feet away.

Mary continues to cross through the woods.

MARY (CONT'D)

Come with us. Right now. And we'll go to a new location. One even further away and more isolated. And we'll even let you roam free if--

Suddenly Emily interrupts her--

EMILY (O.S.)

I want to be out in the world! I'll come with you if you release me back into the world!

Robert steps forward, indignant.

ROBERT  
Take me then!! I'll take you out  
into the world! I've begged you to  
take me instead--!

A beat. Emily SNICKERS. Robert grits his teeth.

ROBERT (CONT'D)  
Let my baby go! Let go of her you  
fucking monster! Let go of--

Robert then SCREAMS. He drops to his knees.

Robert's been SHOT IN THE BACK. He collapses to the ground.

MARY  
Robert!

Mary whips around, and FIRES a shot into the darkness.

She drops down. She wraps her arms around Robert.

MARY (CONT'D)  
ROBERT!!

Mary then looks up to see Kyle emerging from the shadows. He keeps his rifle trained on Mary.

KYLE  
Get up slowly.

Mary slowly starts to rise. She eyes her rifle on the ground.

KYLE (CONT'D)  
Don't touch it.

MARY  
He fought so hard to keep you  
alive. He was always trying to do  
the right thing--

KYLE  
I'm not fucking around here, Mary.  
Step back, right now.

MARY  
But there's no right thing for us--

Then: MOVEMENT. Kyle turns to see EMILY emerge from the darkness--

And in that moment, Mary LEAPS onto Kyle--

--and the two go TUMBLING down the hillside.

WE STAY WITH Robert. He grimaces, trying to breathe under his mask. He looks up at Emily as she approaches him.

She's filthy. Her face is covered in soot. Her eyes are bloodshot. She looks weak... and DANGEROUS.

Robert is delirious. He's losing strength. He COUGHS.

ROBERT

Emily... Emily is that you...

Emily slowly makes her way over to Robert. A beat. Robert weakly stretches his arms out for her.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Emily... Emily come to Papa...

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE HILL

Kyle tumbles to the bottom of the hill and SLAMS against a tree trunk.

Mary comes tumbling behind him just moments later.

A beat.

Mary struggles to her feet first. She grabs a nearby branch, marches over to Kyle, and JABS it into Kyle's WOUNDED LEG.

Kyle SCREAMS. Mary lifts the branch, and JABS it in again.

MARY

You'll have to kill me to take her!

Mary lifts the branch to stab Kyle again, but Kyle is able to roll away.

AT THE TOP OF THE HILL

Emily now looms over Robert, she stares down at him, hate filling her eyes.

Robert's face is drained of color.

ROBERT

Emily... I love you...

A beat.

Emily SCREAMS and LUNGES at Robert's face.

She starts CLAWING HIM VIOLENTLY, RIPPING OFF HIS SKIN.

Robert SCREAMS in horrendous pain.

Emily JABS HER THUMBS into Robert's already lifeless eyes. She WAILS and ROARS as her thumbs sink in, and blood SPLASHES HER FACE.

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE HILL

Kyle battles back up to his feet. Mary stands ready.

KYLE

Robert's going to die up there--!

Mary ROARS and charges at Kyle.

Kyle grudgingly grabs a large BRANCH from the ground, and SWINGS it at Mary as she runs toward him.

It connects with her face, knocking her back, and down to the ground, LACERATING her face.

A beat. Kyle looks down at her.

The flames of the ENCROACHING FIRE roar high behind Kyle. Ash rains down gently, darkening the bloody ground.

Kyle exhales. He kneels down, and HOISTS Mary onto his shoulders. He can't not save her. It's in his nature.

Kyle marches back up the hillside to the

TOP OF THE HILL

Where he finds Emily, crumpled over Robert's lifeless body.

A beat, as Kyle sets Mary down.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Emily?

Emily stops. She turns and looks at Kyle.

Her hands are BLOODY. Her face is BLOODY.

Robert's face is nothing but MUSH.

Kyle's breath is caught in his throat. His face turns white.

KYLE (CONT'D)

(breathless)

What-- what have you--

Emily stands. She lowers her head. She clenches her bloody fists. Emily takes a step forward. She moves with anger.

EMILY

He hurt me so much, Kyle. He hurt me everyday for so long. I had to hurt him. I had to.

Kyle takes a step back.

KYLE

Look, Emily, whatever just happened, you did it out of anger and fear, and people will understand that, okay? But we need to get out of here--

Emily eyes Mary, who's now painfully pushing herself up to her feet. Kyle sees Mary rising, but he doesn't move.

EMILY

Are we taking her with us?

KYLE

Yes. Of course.

A beat. Emily wipes the blood from her mouth.

EMILY

No.

Emily's rejection is guttural. She's no longer helpless and desperate. She has authority.

Kyle swallows, feeling Emily's demeanor darkening.

KYLE

Emily, I know what she did to you was terrible, but we need--

Suddenly, Mary GRABS Kyle's shoulder. Kyle spins to her. Her face is ASHEN. She's PETRIFIED.

MARY

You have to be ready, Kyle. Do you understand me? Ready to take action immediately--

KYLE

Take action? Take action for what--

CRACK. Bones BREAKING. Kyle turns toward the noise.

Emily stands in the same place, but now her SHOULDER is completely MISALIGNED.

Kyle's EYES WIDEN.

KYLE (CONT'D)

What--

CRACK. Emily's other shoulder lurches BACKWARDS.

CRACK. Her left knee TWISTS inwards.

CRACK. Her right foot CONTORTS backwards.

Her body is contorted beyond comprehension. It's **INHUMAN**.

Then, Emily TALKS. And it's no longer Emily's voice. It's the voice of something so horrible, we wish we never heard it.

EMILY

She will not live beyond today.

Kyle is frozen in place.

Mary PULLS at his arm.

MARY

Kyle! We have to run! Now!!

The Thing that Emily has become BOUNDS toward them, moving more like animal than human.

MARY (CONT'D)

KYLE! RUN!

Mary's piercing fear snaps Kyle back to reality, and he turns and RACES off with Mary.

They RUN through the woods--

They try to dodge branches that slap them in the face--

They hop over loose debris--

They nearly trip over piles of rocks--

The deeper into the woods they go, the darker it gets.

The precipitation of ash is now a curtain that blinds them from a few feet in front, and a few feet behind.

But KYLE and MARY hear the crunch and crackle of someone racing through branches, debris, and rocks BEHIND THEM--

Kyle runs blind, and poorly with his wounded leg. He watches as Mary slips further ahead of him, then DISAPPEARS--

Pressure builds in Kyle's ears. His eyes and lungs burn from the ash, but he doesn't dare slow for a moment--

And behind him, he continues to hear the bounding-- hears it APPROACHING-- CLOSER then CLOSER then CLOSER then--

Kyle's YANKED to the side -- and DROPS down into the ground--  
--and into a SHALLOW PIT.

Kyle COLLAPSES in the pit. MARY's inside. She pulled him in.  
Mary puts her fingers to her lips.

They wait and listen. Trapped prey hoping their stalker takes the wrong turn, and loses them in the dark.

The sounds of Emily bounding to them get LOUDER... and then they get SOFTER as Emily takes off in another direction.

A long beat.

Kyle wipes his face. It's caked in dirt and ash. He GASPS for air, realizing he was holding his breath this whole time.

Kyle looks at Mary, who sits back on her heels.

She's too distraught to cry. Too forlorn to fear.

Kyle blinks, blankly.

Mary's eyes meet Kyle's. Then, she begins:

MARY (CONT'D)

She was always unhappy. Even as a young girl. Struggling. Unsettled. When she was very young, she would lie, constantly. When she got a bit older, she'd steal. So we tried every kind of discipline we could think of. Good cop, bad cop. Positive reinforcement. Negative reinforcement. Yelling. Patience. Things seemed to be working. Gradually at least.

(pause)

Then she started torturing animals.

Mary swallows hard. She drops her eyes. She's drained.

Kyle hesitates as he pushes himself up. He eyes the entrance to the pit. There's no movement. Only ash falling. Kyle then looks back at Mary.

KYLE

(breathless)

How is this possible.

Mary exhales.

MARY

The animals led to exploration of more... evil things. Cults. Seances. Anything and everything that allowed her to feel powerful, and that separated her from us.

(pause)

Then one day she came back home from a "retreat" with some friends. We were obviously lied to about where she went, and who with. And when she came back, she was different. Our Emily was gone. And there was only the evil inside.

KYLE

And that was five years ago?

MARY

Yes. And we tried everything. Doctors. Priests. The doctors didn't believe us, and the priests were a sham. They couldn't get the evil out of her. So we finally took her back to the same retreat she'd gone to herself. We took her to some pagan campfire something...

Mary struggles to keep talking. But she steels herself.

MARY (CONT'D)

...and within a few hours, she killed everyone there. Robert and I had stepped away, entrusting them with Emily, desperate for their help. But we returned to see ten dead bodies, and Emily prancing among them.

(pause)

So we grabbed her, and disappeared up in these hills.

A long beat. Kyle tries to process all of this.

KYLE

Maybe, maybe there's a way to--

MARY

(firm)

No.

Mary looks evenly at Kyle.

MARY (CONT'D)

We didn't have the courage to do what we should've done five years ago... and now my husband is dead.

A beat as Mary processes this fact. Her eyes fill with loneliness and well with tears. She wipes them harshly.

MARY (CONT'D)

He was the only person I had for all those years. We were locked away together. Now he's gone.

A beat. Kyle leans forward, trying to comfort her.

KYLE

Listen to me. We'll capture Emily. We'll tie her up. We'll take her back into civilization, and we'll figure out what's actually wrong.

Kyle looks at Mary desperately. A beat. We can't read what she thinks. She blinks away more tears.

MARY

(defeated)

Okay.

Mary places her hand on Kyle's chest.

MARY (CONT'D)

But we have to do it my way. One thing we know for sure is that she wants me dead. So I'm going to be the bait, understand? And when she's distracted with me, you'll grab her, and tie her up.

Kyle nods, ready. Mary rises. She grabs the edge of the shallow pit, and climbs out, back into

THE CLEARING

Mary stands. She scans the area, and is about to call out for Emily when--

--WHOOSH! Emily comes racing out of nowhere, and TACKLES Mary to the ground. She immediately starts BITING and CLAWING her, using her FINGERNAILS and her TOENAILS.

Emily CHOMPS down into Mary's NECK. Mary SCREAMS.

Emily lifts her head back up. Her eyes are OPAQUE. Her lips are wet with Mary's BLOOD.

The uncontrollable WILDFIRE roars behind her. The darkness is consuming. The ash is suffocating.

Mary lies limp.

Emily glares down at her prey.

EMILY

You will not survive the--

BAM! Emily is tackled to the ground. Kyle rolls with her, trying to immobilize her limbs while she THRASHES.

Her joints ROTATE and CRACK to gain the upper-hand over Kyle. Her ANKLE, WRISTS, ELBOWS, they all contort with the malleability of rubber.

They spin, and crash into a tree. Kyle is able to wrap his legs around her, and get his arms across her neck.

KYLE

Emily, please--

Emily ROARS.

EMILY

THERE IS NO EMILY.

Emily fights in a rage. Kyle is about to lose his grip...

...until MARY leaps onto the tussle. She chokes Emily's neck.

MARY

You stole my daughter!

Emily YELPS in pain. Kyle regains control. Mary weeps.

MARY (CONT'D)

YOU STOLE MY DAUGHTER FROM ME!

Emily's eyes redden as she GASPS for air.

Then, as things are about to go dark for her...

...she pleads, sweetly, innocently.

EMILY

Mommy... please, mommy...

But Mary doesn't fall for it. She doesn't let up.

And eventually, Emily PASSES OUT.

A beat.

Mary collapses.

Kyle drops his arms back.

The ash falls.

FADE TO:

EXT. CALIFORNIA HILLSIDE - WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

We're at the ATV. An inch of ash covers it.

From the woods comes KYLE. He carries an unconscious EMILY in his arms.

Mary follows them, just a few steps behind.

They're quiet. Solemn.

Kyle reaches the ATV. He lays Emily in the back, by Daniels.

Kyle grabs a few zip-ties. He ties Emily's wrists and ankles. He then ties her to the ATV itself.

Mary drops into the front seat.

Kyle sits down next to her.

A beat.

He looks over at Mary, who stares off into nothing.

MARY

We just leave Robert's body?

KYLE

I... I think it'd be difficult to explain if we brought him.

Mary looks at Kyle.

MARY

She killed your friend, Kyle.

Kyle swallows hard. He nods lightly.

KYLE

But it wasn't her that did it. And Daniels - and myself - we took a vow of protection and rescue. No matter who's caught in the fire.

A beat. Mary nods gently.

MARY

What do we say has been going on  
for the last five years?

Kyle looks at Mary, sincere.

KYLE

We say that two parents were trying  
to protect their daughter.

Kyle gives Mary a championing smile. It's the best he can  
muster at this point. And it's good enough for Mary for now.

Kyle turns on the ATV, flips on the headlights, and drives--

From here we have a SERIES OF SHOTS of our survivors  
escaping.

-- the ATV cuts through the woods, with Kyle barely able to  
make out the route in front of him.

-- Mary COUGHING painfully as they move through the darkness.

-- the ATV passing by the CABIN, and taking the same trail  
that Kyle used to get up into the hillside. Mary soberly  
watches the cabin go by. Her eyes well with emotion.

-- a shot of the WILDFIRE. The closest we've been to it yet.  
To say it's MAGNIFICENT is an understatement. To say it's  
TERRIFYING is one too.

EXT. CALIFORNIA HILLSIDE - CONTINUOUS

The ATV navigates dangerous, narrow terrain.

There's a steep drop off the cliff from this road. Mary grips  
the edges of the ATV nervously.

Kyle concentrates on driving.

Mary looks back at Emily's lifeless body. She then turns to  
look ahead... but she STOPS, and does a DOUBLE-TAKE.

Emily's FOOT is TWITCHING.

Sadness overcomes Mary's face.

She looks over at Kyle.

MARY

Kyle--

Kyle doesn't respond as he's focused on driving.

All sorts of debris has tumbled into the trail -- branches, rocks. There's even a collapsed tree.

Mary looks back at Emily again. Her foot TWITCHES faster.

MARY (CONT'D)

Kyle--

KYLE

Hold on, I can't really see--

Mary scans the ATV, and in the open compartment between her and Kyle, she sees an ash covered pair of SCISSORS.

Mary looks back at Emily one more time. Now BOTH FEET TWITCH.

KYLE (CONT'D)

What is it--

In that moment, Mary GRABS the scissors from the compartment, and JAMS them into Kyle's shoulder.

Kyle SCREAMS.

He VEERS the ATV to the right, and CAREENS into the hillside.

Mary instantly hops out of the ATV, and rushes to the back.

She grabs Emily, and drags her to the ground.

Emily's now FULLY CONSCIOUS. She WAILS and ROARS at Mary.

Kyle turns as Mary drags Emily to the EDGE of the road.

Kyle grips his shoulder and lumbers out of the ATV.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Mary, no!

Mary is nearly to the edge. Nothing but a seemingly ENDLESS drop waits for them on the other side.

Emily's jaw SNAPS as she tries to bite Mary. Her zip-ties DIG IN to her wrist and ankles, cutting her, as she squirms.

Mary then lifts Emily up. Lifts up her daughter.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Mary! Please! You don't have to do this! There has to be another way!

Mary looks over at Kyle. And for a moment, there's PEACE in her eyes. Peace amidst the ash, the snarling Emily, the unforgiving fire in the background.

MARY

I tried to tell him. I tried to tell Robert. This is how it was always going to end.

Mary then HUGS Emily tightly, and **LEAPS OFF THE EDGE.**

KYLE

No!!!!

Kyle races over to the edge, and looks down. But he can't see a thing. The whole area is covered in darkness.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. FIRE STATION - DAY

A bustling fire station.

Kyle sits, waiting. His leg in a cast. His arm in a sling.

Kyle's cleaned up. No more soot or ash.

His head hangs as he waits. Then:

NEW CHIEF (O.S.)

Kyle.

Kyle looks up at the NEW CHIEF of his fire station. The chief motions him back.

INT. FIRE STATION - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Kyle sits down at the desk. The chief sits across from him.

Kyle eyes TWO PHOTOS on the chief's desk. Photos of CHIEF WIGGINS, and DEPUTY CHIEF DANIELS. Kyle swallows hard.

New Chief gestures at Kyle's damage.

NEW CHIEF

How you healing up?

KYLE

Good. I'm okay.

NEW CHIEF

That's good to hear. Damn near lost your leg it was so infected. And the lungs? Any breathing issues?

Kyle smiles thinly.

KYLE

I've got an inhaler. But there's less blood when I cough now.

New Chief nods. Kyle adjusts, uncomfortable.

NEW CHIEF

Well, I called you in because I got some good news for you.

Kyle presumptively shakes his head.

KYLE

Look, I appreciate you reinstating me so quickly, but I think I need more time to--

NEW CHIEF

No, no Kyle it's not that. You take all the time you need.

(pause)

It's about the girl.

A beat.

KYLE

What girl?

New Chief leans back. He frowns at Kyle.

NEW CHIEF

The one you found in the cabin. The one you tried to save before her insane family disappeared with her into the hills.

KYLE

No. Yes, of course. I mean, what about her.

EXT. HIGHWAY - EVENING - FLASHBACK

WE'RE BACK to the dark, ash filled sky.

A closed highway. POLICE, FIRE ENGINE, and AMBULANCE lights cut through the thick smoke.

NEW CHIEF (V.O.)

It turns out, she was able to escape her psychotic parents. Can you believe that?

Firefighters, Police, EMTs congregate on the highway.

Suddenly, they stop what they're doing, and all PEER ahead, toward the sloping hill.

NEW CHIEF (V.O.)

They spotted her a few hours after you made it back down to the main highway. She trekked the whole terrain by foot. Unbelievable.

Through the darkness, a FIGURE MATERIALIZES--

--it's EMILY. She walks gently, painfully toward the road.

The cops and firefighters rush to her.

NEW CHIEF (V.O.)

Thankfully our people were still there. The list of injuries she sustained is just too many to count. Broken bones, ripped tendons. A broken jaw. Her feet and hands were freshly lacerated. Must've been from the climb.

A firefighter swoops in and LIFTS Emily up. She curls in his arms, desperate, hopeless. Eyes full of fear.

The firefighter races her to the back of an ambulance, as an EMT jumps in the driver side, and puts on the SIREN.

The ambulance races away.

INT. FIRE STATION - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Kyle sits, staring blankly at the New Chief.

NEW CHIEF

She spent a few days in the ICU, but seems to be healing well. She said her mother tried to sacrifice her to the fire or some shit like that, but she was able to get away. She doesn't know what happened to her mother, or father, for that matter, but she just kept running.

Kyle swallows hard. New Chief smacks the table, pumped.

NEW CHIEF (CONT'D)

I've heard you've been struggling because your buddy died on an evac.  
(MORE)

NEW CHIEF (CONT'D)

But you should know that you're a  
real hero, Kyle.

(then)

All that girl did was keep asking  
about you. "Kyle the firefighter  
that saved me." She wanted to say  
thank you.

(pause)

In fact...

The New Chief waves through his office window to another  
firefighter. She nods, and rushes off.

NEW CHIEF (CONT'D)

She's here now.

KYLE

What? No, I can't...

The new chief's office door OPENS.

Kyle turns around, as the New Chief gets out of his seat and  
heads to the door.

WE STAY ON KYLE'S FACE.

NEW CHIEF (O.S.)

Tell him what you told me, Emily.  
Tell him how his words helped you  
through the woods.

Kyle's face trembles. He's frozen in fear.

EMILY (O.S.)

You told me it was about attrition,  
Kyle. It was about who could  
outlast who. And now I realize, I  
can outlast anything.

And as Kyle's eyes widen in sheer TERROR, we--

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END.