

BL  **DLIST**



FRESH BLOOD SELECTS

BITTERROOT

by

Matthew Kaler

(406) 240-9382

matthew.kaler@gmail.com

EXT. BITTERROOT RANGE. MONTANA. - DAY

Early autumn. A wide agrarian valley lopes below a wall of immense mountains, their sawtoothed peaks topped with snow.

Dead pines, blacked by forest fire, create a mosaic with the living green trees that also carpet these mountains.

A horse and rider trot alone through a meadow. They follow a creek leading west into a canyon between two monolithic peaks.

EXT. WILDERNESS. CANYON MOUTH. - LATER

The rider, face shadowed by a grey Stetson, lead-walks the sorrel mare beside the creek. Cottonwoods blaze over them in a gold arch, light suffusing through the canopy.

The waters BURBLE. Leaves drift down.

An elk BUGLES.

The rider lifts her head: this is MARNIE GRAHAM (55).

A bone-deep stoic, hers is a face met by more years outdoors than moments of emotional candor, and a philosophy asserting brutality as implicit in nature's beauty.

Her eyes narrow. Damn near raptorial. When they lock in it is with precision.

She pats the mare's neck and kisses her on the nose before turning the horse around.

EXT. FOREST MEADOW. - LATER

Marnie trots beside the creek as it wends in riparian crescents through the occasional aspen copse.

She one-reins the mare to a stop.

Her eyes train on something in the distance.

EXT. CREEKSIDE. - LATER

The tableau is gothic-Western: a SHE-WOLF lies in the grass, forepaw clamped in a bear trap. Next to her rest the bones of a horse put down as bait. Ravens loitering on the rib cage.

The wolf's leg is torn to exposed bone and tendon, and her mouth bloodstained from gnawing at the limb.

From across the creek, Marnie watches.

Stuck to the barbwire fence between her and the wolf is a sign declaring: *Coalthorpe Ranch - Trespassers get shot!*

The mare WHICKERS from the ridge above, sensing a predator.

At this, the wolf opens her yellow eyes, so near the end that she can't even lift her head. A moment for empathy.

Marnie just turns heel and marches back up the slope.

EXT. RIDGE. - MOMENTS LATER

After checking the horse's cinch, Marnie grabs the saddlehorn. Pauses. Spits.

MARNIE

God damn you.

She produces a fence-tool and coil of rope from the saddlebag, then picks up a branch and tucks it in her belt.

Lastly, she slides a lever-action .30-30 out of the scabbard.

EXT. CREEKSIDE. - MOMENTS LATER

Across the creek, Marnie sets the rifle down and cuts the barb wire. Rips off the crude sign and tosses it away.

She takes a step, rope in hand-

The wolf raises her head and SNARLS.

Marnie drops the rope. She retrieves the rifle, chambers a round and aims. BANG.

The shot ECHOES as the ravens scatter.

Approaching slowly, Marnie scans the earth before her.

She kneels to stroke the wolf's glossy coat. Its head burst into viscera and bone shard.

We follow the path of her eyes working over the earth.

She parts grass on a second trap to SNAP it closed with the branch.

Then, she kneels to dig up the trap's anchor chain with her hands.

EXT. RIDGE. - LATER

Fingers bloodied, Marnie tucks both traps in the saddle bag.

The horse tries to spin away. That wolf scent evoking a primal panic.

She grabs the mare's bridle to steady her.

MARNIE
Live with it.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCH. - EVENING

Marnie's two-story ranch house is weatherbeaten, ringed by a wraparound porch, and set in a clearing.

Two paddocks abut a timeworn barn on the house's eastern side. In the yard stands a high-fenced garden hijacked by tall weeds and topped with ratty Tibetan prayer flags.

West of the house, a pasture ambles into a decrepit apple orchard before meeting the forest.

Two peaks loom behind this. Between them, cliffs mark the canyon, made smaller with the distance.

INT. GRAHAM BARN. - SAME

The barn interior is lit by a single fluorescent light over a workspace; dust and cobwebs cover its tools.

Marnie drops the bear traps drops in a wooden trunk and closes the lid.

Reaching for the light, she pauses at a mawkish wood sign hung by the switch. Two bears embrace and etched wood lettering reads: *An Old Bear Lives Here with His Honey.*

She shuts off the light.

INT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. KITCHEN. - MOMENTS LATER

Marnie limps into the spare kitchen, age showing in her gait, and pours herself a straight whiskey.

The door yawns open behind her. Fallen leaves skitter inside like orange crabs, obeying the breeze.

Light rims the doorframe, illuming her silhouette. She hangs her head: a western archetype upended by loneliness.

She empties her drink. Pours another. Walks to an anachronistic answering machine, red light blinking, to hit play:

LILY (O.S.)

Mom, the bank is now calling me about money, which is a cosmic joke. I'm worried. Not just about the house... I want- Call me. Please. I'm so tired of talking into-

Marnie cuts it off. Downs her second whiskey.

MARNIE

Wish in one hand and shit in the other, darling.

She drops her hat upside-down on the table.

Marnie then pours a third drink and fetches a can of black beans from the fridge.

Lid tilted open, fork in hand, she pulls up a kitchen chair to sit beside an empty recliner in the living room.

There, she eats her cowgirl dinner cold.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. PORCH. - LATER

Clutching drink some-number-beyond-three, she reclines in a rocking chair.

CALYPSO, a precocious alpine goat, nuzzles her free hand. She scratches his chin. He BLEATS.

MARNIE

Noboby's keeping you here, Bub.

Marnie nods off as Calypso settles for grazing the yard.

The sun vanished behind them, the peaks darken, chased by night's star-pinned curtain. *Last Best Place* indeed. The stillness is scored by the music of birdcall and wind...

When lights suddenly flare in the sky: three white orbs with shimmering tails.

The meteor shower streaks then goes out-

A smaller, fourth meteor blazes red but refuses to dissipate.

It lands somewhere far in the canyon wilderness.

A long beat.

Then a distant BOOM.

Gusts ripple from the canyon. Marnie stirs awake, splashing whiskey on her lap. Blinking, she wobbles to her feet.

Calypso nuzzles her hand and she leads him into his paddock, latching the gate.

EXT. CANYON WILDERNESS. CRASH SITE. - NIGHT

In a narrow passage between steep granite cliffs, a canteloupe-sized meteorite glows with a red pulsing light.

It THRUMS. Obsidian shards glisten in concentric circles around its crater.

Slowly, eerily, a fissure bisects its crown: the presage of an otherworldly birth.

From the shadows, earwigs and centipedes throng toward the light by the hundreds, scrambling up and into the fissure-

EXT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. - DAY

Marnie climbs into a rattletrap 1974 Ford truck. The sky over her gray and windswept.

She wears her Stetson and a hangover's bags under her eyes, both well used. The starter grinds; it won't turn over.

She tries again. No luck. Smacks the steering wheel.

Tries a third time and the ENGINE COUGHS to life.

EXT. BITTERROOT, MONTANA. MAIN STREET. - LATER

The Ford rolls down a street dozing in a time-capsule of small town America with one-and-a-half feet in the grave.

As a descriptor, "town" is an overstatement. Blink three times and you'd just about miss it.

A Post Office, General Store, and "DJ's Diner" render empty. The occasional trailer appears behind these structures.

She parks next to a brick building with "Farmers State Bank" on its marquee.

INT. BANK OFFICE. - MOMENTS LATER

The office is decorated in 70's wood finishing. Seated at a large oak desk adorned by a framed photo, bowl of caramels, and tissues is CLIFFORD (65), avuncular and portly.

Marnie sits across from him. Her Stetson on the left knee and right hand drumming her fingers on the other.

CLIFFORD
You're carrying two mortgages
already.

MARNIE
Who can you speak to?

CLIFFORD
We're being absorbed by National
United Bank. Some outfit in
Illinois. After that, goddanged
truth is, they're shutting us down.

He turns the framed picture on the desk toward her. In the image, two adorable little girls play in the desert.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D)
You've seen my granddaughters?
Cuter than a bug's ear, both of
'em. Me and Cathy are trying to
spend more time down in Tucson.

MARNIE
Who's going to handle my mortgages?

CLIFFORD
Their affiliate branch in Missoula.
But that ain't the issue, Marnie.
You're headed toward a 'judicial
foreclosure'. Know what that is?

MARNIE
Not intimately. But I can guess the
gist.

CLIFFORD
The bank is gonna tell you how much
they want and when. There's just
one choice: pay up.

MARNIE
When isn't that the case?

He breaks eye contact, wilting under her intensity, stands to look out the window, leaving the photo to face her: passive but not aggressive.

CLIFFORD

(back turned)

Thirty-six years I've worked with farmers and ranchers like your family. Today, ain't nobody from here can afford to stay.

His shoulders shake and he starts to cry.

She walks around the desk to offer his own tissues. He takes one.

She slides over the caramel bowl. He takes one of these also.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D)

I hate sayin' it but you'd be better off selling to Coalthorpe.

MARNIE

I'm not selling to a shitmaggot.

End of discussion. She walks to the window to let him sob.

Outside, rain falls on denuded trees. At the towering horizon, high-elevation snow sweeps across the peaks.

She watches an elderly couple walking to their truck, both in matching cowboy boots. The HUSBAND, tall with coke-bottle glasses, holds an umbrella over his WIFE.

CLIFFORD (O.S.)

Look at me, blubbering and all.

Opening the door for his wife, the husband steals a kiss.

Stung, Marnie turns back to Clifford, now dabbing his eyes. He holds out the caramel bucket.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D)

You sure?

But she nods *no*, and dons her hat.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCH. - AFTERNOON

Marnie stands at the garden fence. The earth inside desiccated and congested with waist-high weeds.

She grasps the wire with both hands and drops her head.

MARNIE

I'm sorry, Bob.

Wiping her eyes, she sees the gate to Calypso's pen left open. And the goat gone.

She cocks her head as a distant BLEATING sounds from the forest.

EXT. FOREST. CREEKSIDE. - LATER

Marnie stands on the bank. Calypso grazes nearby, tied to a tree. She puzzles the lack of creek water, reduced to a trickle over newly exposed, mossy stones.

She marches up the creek.

EXT. CREEKSIDE. - LATER

A "Coalthorpe Ranch" sign on barbwire announces the property boundary. Behind it, the creek has been diverted onto Coalthorpe land where fresh earth is piled in a pseudo-damn.

Behind this, a tractor sits idle. Beside it, stands Marnie.

She slips a hunting knife from her belt, going for the nearest tire-

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Now, I know you seen the sign, and
I'm damn sure you can read.

Spinning, she finds STEVEN (34), lean, once handsome but detoured to alcoholism and a growing meth habit.

He grins onto yellow-stained teeth. The weight of a history is palpable between them.

MARNIE

What the fuck are you doing?

STEVEN

I could kindly ask you the same.

MARNIE

This is illegal, Steven.

STEVEN

Trespassin'? I won't argue that.

MARNIE

You might get away with chickenshit traps, but he can't take my water.

STEVEN

Your water. This is the Coalthorpe Ranch.

He rests a hand on the pistol holstered on his belt.

She notices the hunting knife in her hand and re-sheathes it.

MARNIE

So I've heard. Is he home?

STEVEN

(to a walkie-talkie)

Got the neighbor lady here to see
the big man.

(to Marnie after a
garbled reply)

Your lucky day.

EXT. COALTHORPE RANCH. CLEARING. - MOMENTS LATER

Steven sits on an ATV and starts it. Over the ENGINE:

STEVEN

(grinning)

Grab onto my waist and hold tight.

MARNIE

I'll walk.

STEVEN

Five miles? You'll miss your shot.

She grimaces, yet instead of obeying, sits on the carrying rack, facing away from him. Small victories.

EXT. COALTHORPE MANSION. - LATER

A mansion fashioned from enormous timbers and exposed stone in a garish, protruding modernism bulges like a tumor from a meadow gutted and replaced with lawn grass.

Nearby an enormous barn / monument to overcompensation gapes with open doors.

At the bottom of the mansion's steps, unwilling to cross the threshold, Marnie waits.

The double doors, stuck with elk antlers as handles, open and out plods ROGER COALTHORPE (57), balding with a gray goatee.

He carries an unearned sense of self-importance. A man of inherited money and the compensatory fangs for a world reminding him of it.

COALTHORPE

Hello again, Mrs. Graham.

MARNIE

Your ranch hand is illegally
damming the creek.

COALTHORPE

If that's the case then rest
assured I will remedy the issue. My
campaign is vigilant toward all
illegalities.

MARNIE

Keep your people off my land. I'll
mind my business and leave you to
yours.

COALTHORPE

Straight to it, then. Okay. Your
ranch would make me the largest
landowner in the county. Which I
plan to be soon. I will give you
twenty percent over value.

MARNIE

No chance.

COALTHORPE

Think of it as an investment.

MARNIE

In what?

COALTHORPE

Your future. I can see it clearly.

MARNIE

As pig shit.

COALTHORPE

(smiles)

This is the best deal you'll get.

As if on cue, a young female STAFFER appears at the open
door.

STAFFER

Sir, it's time.

COALTHORPE

(to Marnie)

Like I said, best deal you'll get.
This happens with or without you
benefitting.

A silent beat.

COALTHORPE (CONT'D)
So be it. I hope I can count on
your vote.

He turns heel and strides back up the stairs.

EXT. CANYON. CRASH SITE. - EVENING

The meteorite pulses red light. THRUMMING.

Dead centipedes begin to spill from its fissure...

Followed by a foot-long centipede. This is THE CREATURE in
its first biological iteration.

It crawls over piles of dead insects and rodents before
slipping into the dark.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCH. GARDEN. - SAME

Marnie is doubled over to catch her breath. It's been a long
walk home.

She stands to stare through the garden fence into the forest.

A man's figure appears at the treeline. He's tall and thin
with a grey beard.

Her hand catches at her chest in sudden shock. He stares back
at her.

She wrenches her eyes shut, INHALING RAGGEDLY.

Opens them.

He's gone. Just mist encircling mute trees in his place.

EXT. BITTERROOT SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT. - MORNING

Marnie SLAMS her truck door and strides toward a concrete
jailhouse of one cell that's always open.

INT. OFFICE. - MOMENTS LATER

MARNIE
-and now the son of a bitch is
stealing my water.

Sheriff SAM MURRAY (63) sits at a paperwork-strewn desk,
wearing the uniform and ten-gallon hat of his station.

He peers at Marnie over his glasses. There's a resignation in
him balanced with deep melancholy.

SAM

I'll contact his people about the creek. But did you actually see anyone on your property?

MARNIE

Are you listening?

He sets down the file in his hand.

SAM

You look like you need coffee.

MARNIE

No, Sam, I don't need coffee.

He sighs. Then rises to pour a cup.

SAM

This isn't new. Your complaints are now bordering on the paranoid. Coalthorpe is a candidate promising jobs in a state without any. In short, he's the next governor.

She folds her arms over her chest.

SAM (CONT'D)

Just sit down.

She relents to move a stack of files from a chair and sit.

MARNIE

He's not even from here.

SAM

Folks are afraid and that makes them angry. He feeds off of it.

Sam offers the coffee. She just looks at him.

MARNIE

Like a parasite.

He sets it on the desk corner near her. Returns to his seat.

SAM

I haven't seen you in two months.

MARNIE

The place won't keep itself up.

SAM

Does it have to?

She flinches.

SAM (CONT'D)
Since Arnette passed I've been
meeting with some folks at the
diner. Nothing too sentimental.

MARNIE
Thank you, Dr. Freud.

SAM
Lily has been there a few times.

MARNIE
If you don't do something, I will.

SAM
You're not going to leave.

She takes the coffee and puts her feet up on his desk.

He finds the correct form and holds a pen in hand.

SAM (CONT'D)
Please describe the incident in as
much detail as possible.

INT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. KITCHEN. - NIGHT

Marnie splashes another drink into her glass.

She sways back to the porch but something in her periphery
catches her.

A door is open down the hallway from the kitchen.

She sets the drink down and walks to it. Slow, apprehensive.

With one hand on the knob, she peers into a study congested
with biology books. Dust blankets the room. Curtains drawn.

Despite seeming pained by it, she steps inside-

INT. OFFICE. - CONTINUOUS

to a desk against the wall adorned with photos:

- A younger Marnie and tall, skinny man with black hair and a
trimmed beard stand on a summer lakeshore; between them,
holding one hand of each, is a beaming little girl.

- Marnie, closer to present age, smiles, leaning back from a
dinner table into the tall man's shoulder, his beard grayed.

The figure at the treeline and man in the photos is her late husband ROBERT GRAHAM (57).

She looks at his image, her eyes welling...

When the POP-POP-POP of far-off gunshots shatters her strained reverie.

EXT. PORCH. - MOMENTS LATER

A mile toward the canyon, lights flash, followed by the ROAR of an ATV. More GUNSHOTS.

Marnie scans the landscape. Then heads inside.

For a few beats the doorframe stands empty.

Until, double-barreled ten-gauge in hand, hat on her head, Marnie fills it, neither sober nor agreeable.

EXT. FOREST. - LATER

Less than a mile off, the canyon opens like an inverted maw.

Seated on her horse, Marnie watches ATV lights flaring from the treeline on the Coalthorpe side of the creek.

She trots onward.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCH. CANYON MOUTH. - LATER

A clearing ringed by thick pines. The wolf's body dumped on the trail beside with barbwire and a "Coalthorpe Ranch" sign wrung around its neck.

Marnie dismounts.

The ATV ENGINE and lights fade into the woods across the creek. She aims anyway. FIRES the shotgun at nothing.

But only the mare spooks and CLOPS west into the canyon.

EXT. CANYON. - LATER

Narrowed, steep granite walls loom over the creek.

Marnie finds the mare grazing at scrub grasses on the bank. She jabs the shotgun into the scabbard. Then doubles over and VOMITS.

Purged, she kneels to splash water on her face. Up the creek, a reddish light flickers.

The light dissipates to reveal a figure, staring at her:
Robert, one hundred paces ahead.

Just as before, she wrenches her eyes shut. Then opens them.

He's still there.

MARNIE

Bob?

She takes a step forward, yet the spectre recedes into the shadows.

EXT. CANYON WILDERNESS. - LATER

The daylight now bluish-gray. Marnie rides the mare beside the creek where yellow larch needles carpet the trail.

The mare stops, stiffens on instinct. Again, Robert manifests at a bend ahead, unmoving, staring at her.

And again he turns and disappears.

The mare relaxes, and Marnie continues on.

EXT. CANYON WILDERNESS. - LATER

The passage is so tight and shale-strewn that Marnie has to lead-walk the mare.

Robert stands on a rise, his form silhouetted by a red aura. The mare refuses to continue.

Robert vanishes over the rise. Marnie yanks at the hackamore rein but the mare won't obey.

So she loops the rein around a pine bough and hikes on.

EXT. CANYON WILDERNESS. IMPACT SITE. - LATER

The canyon widens to a boulder-strewn passage where the meteor's red light pulses over shale.

From behind, the horse WHINNIES, echoing off the granite walls that rise high above Marnie on both sides.

She creeps toward the meteor, its red glow, its cracked open crown.

Dead centipedes rest around it en masse. They CRUNCH under her boots...

She reaches to it. As her finger makes contact the light goes out, plunging the canyon into darkness.

WIND KEENS off of the granite walls.

Something SKITTERS and Marnie whirls around but sees nothing.

Backing away, she turns quickly, slips and faceplants onto the shale. Blackness.

INT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. - DREAMSTATE

In her house, in another time, Marnie actually smiles. The room lit with ethereal, white-gold sunlight.

She stands beside Robert, seated with a book in his lap in the living room recliner. He SNORES.

MARNIE

Honey.

He wakes, eyes focusing with delayed recognition.

ROBERT

Hi, love.

Are you going riding?

MARNIE

I'll be back soon.

She pats his shoulder. The walls dissolve-

EXT. DREAMSTATE. PORCH. - CONTINUOUS

And Marnie is suddenly on the porch, watching the surreal image of herself riding into the canyon.

Then, she looks through the window to Robert in his chair.

She taps the glass but he doesn't respond. Eyes closed. His body begins to tremor.

The world around her darkens and refigures into-

EXT. DREAMSTATE. MEADOW. - NIGHT

A clearing under silver moonlight where a HUMAN FIGURE, back turned, pallid skin clothed by rags, hair fallen out in clumps, crouches spider-like over Robert's body on the earth.

The figure takes loud SMACKING bites from Robert's stomach.

Robert turns to look at her, being eaten alive. The figure lifts its head: it wears Marnie's own face, the eyes obsidian-

EXT. IMPACT SITE. - DUSK

Marnie wakes with a GASP.

A single raven is perched on her chest. They look to each other.

Then the bird flies off.

She sits up and reaches to her head, matted with blood.

A last blade of sunlight slivered into the canyon shows that the meteorite has crumbled into ash.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. - NIGHT

The ranchouse is lit by a floodlight on the barn.

Marnie is greeted by a battered Subaru next to her truck and a careworn young woman seated on the porch: her daughter, LILY (30). A triumvirate of empathy, anxiety, and need yet not without her mother's toughness.

Marnie stops at the door.

LILY
Jesus, mom, you look like hell.

MARNIE
Lillian, you have a knack for timing.

Marnie walks into the-

INT. KITCHEN. - CONTINUOUS

Lily follows. Marnie pours herself a drink.

LILY
What happened to you?

MARNIE
My horse spooked.
(takes a gulp)
Bucked me off.
(another)
And the devil kissed me as I lay
under the stars.

Marnie turns to her daughter. Nods to the sink.

MARNIE (CONT'D)
I guess I only have water for you.

Marnie sit at the kitchen table. Lily follows suit.

She shifts her chair and reaches at Marnie's head but is shooed off.

LILY
You should see a doctor.

MARNIE
Tell me something I don't know.

LILY
We need to talk about the bank.

MARNIE
Go ahead.

LILY
Cliff called me and I wasn't
surprised to learn that you're
behind on the mortgage, just by how
much. You could ask for help.

Marnie finishes the drink.

MARNIE
Or you could just give it.

LILY
Is everything an argument?

MARNIE
In order to argue, I have to-

LILY
(interrupting)
Give a shit. Yeah, your favorite
line.

Marnie fetches a refill. The last defiance left to her.

LILY (CONT'D)
Do you want this to happen?

Marnie shakes her head.

MARNIE
Today has been... strange. You
could do more than show up
unannounced.

LILY
I need you to work with me.

MARNIE

Same here.

LILY

Okay. I can help with some of the money.

MARNIE

That's it?

LILY

No.

MARNIE

Ah, conditions.

LILY

You have to talk to someone. A counselor. Anything. There's a group in town, Sam and a few others.

MARNIE

And if I say "no"?

LILY

Is that what you're saying?

MARNIE

Let me sleep on it.

LILY

You probably have a concussion.

MARNIE

Going in your sleep is luckier than most get.

Both women glance at the empty recliner in the living room.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

You don't need to stay and play nursemaid. I'll call you.

Lily stands. She stops at the door.

LILY

It shouldn't be me worrying like this.

She wants to say more but can't voice the words. So, without speaking them, she departs.

EXT. FOREST. COALTHORPE RANCH. - NIGHT

A small clearing hemmed by pines. Steven shuts off the ATV but leaves the headlight on.

After he checks the setting on a bear trap, he hits a meth pipe.

His glassed eyes dart at a SKITTERING in the dark. He unholsters his pistol.

Nothing but the nighted forest.

Until the trees caught the headlights begin to bleed. Slow as sap.

It takes a beat for him to notice.

Paranoia settles in his bones but, obeying the tweaker's curiosity, he approaches and touches the blood.

It terrifies him. Yet not enough. He's hypnotized.

The forest darkens around him and he's-

INT. DREAMSTATE. APARTMENT. - DAY

In a cramped, moldy bathroom a WOMAN, clearly a junkie at the tail end of many bad life choices, ties off her arm.

She she TAP-TAP-TAPS her vein. Stops. Looks straight at us.

WOMAN

My baby.

Steven enters the frame and sits beside her. She brushes the hair out of his eyes.

STEVEN

I won't let you.

He takes the needle from her, breaks it against the tub.

WOMAN

Stay with me. Keep me safe.

She spreads her legs like an invitation.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

We can play our special game.

Steven hesitates at the psychosexual confusion, the moment ensnaring him.

They embrace.

STEVEN

I will, mama...

She wraps her arms around him.

Then her legs.

Her limbs morph into black arthropod legs and cut into his back. The room snaps to-

EXT. CANYON WILDERNESS. - NIGHT

Steven kneeling in the grasses, lit by the headlights.

Red mist slides over the tall grass as its blades part for the slithering movement of...

The Creature emerging in centipedal form, now tripled in size, to wriggle around and climb his body.

STEVEN

I will.

Both of his eyes turn completely black as the Creature reaches his mouth.

INT. CHURCH. - NIGHT

Lily sits in a folding chair in a circle of people, experientially diverse but united in purpose.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

It was knowing that the way I was living was broken. One day. Then another. I wouldn't have made five years without that attitude.

APPLAUSE. Lily joins in distractedly. She's fixated on something ineffable beyond this room.

EXT. CHURCH. - LATER

A street lined with deciduous trees, wet from recent rain.

Leaning against the church, Lily's breath mists as it drifts up into a streetlight's amber glow.

Across from her stands a wiry, bearded man. NABIL (40's). Thoughtful, even in his diction. Resigned to himself.

He smokes with unreserved pleasure.

NABIL

Don't let anybody rent space in
your head.

LILY

Then don't be pat.

NABIL

We start somewhere. Shared sayings
to populate with your own meaning.
The dream of a common language.

She unfolds her arms, accepting this.

LILY

Yeah. I majored in English, too.

NABIL

I didn't. Law students don't often
break domain. Just former lawyers.
Sobriety and middle age can make
poets of us.

LILY

She is a trainwreck. It's miserable
to watch. I guess that's the poetic
tragedy.

Nabil stubs the ember of his cigarette out under his boot.

NABIL

You want my advice?

LILY

It's inherent to your sponsorship.

NABIL

You can fill the same vacancies
with altruism that you did with the
bottle. Put all your energy into
what you can control. You don't own
her grief. Then accept the rest, as
pat as it may sound.

She stares past him to the neon broken over wet concrete.

LILY

What if I can't?

NABIL

Then congratulations.

She looks up quizzically.

NABIL (CONT'D)
You're human.

INT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. BATHROOM. - NIGHT

Marnie stares at her reflection in the mirror, hair matted brown with blood. She daubs it away, but doesn't wince.

Underneath the grime there is no wound. Just a pink line. Searching the rest of her head reveals nothing.

She looks to her reflection in the mirror, but finds no answers there.

INT. LILY'S APARTMENT. - SAME

Lily tosses her keys on a coffee table beside a futon. Her place speaks of half-attention to decoration.

The fridge opens onto Lily staring at a pickle jar and sparkling waters, one of which she removes. Shuts the door.

On the futon, she kicks off her shoes and turns on the TV. The local news is a shitshow, courtesy of a red-faced anchor.

NEWS ANCHOR
Tonight we, eh, want to bring you a
feel good... well actually, just a
story on-

She shuts it off, staring at her ghostly reflection in the black screen.

We might notice that Marnie and her have the same intense gaze.

She checks her phone: no messages. No surprise, either.

Then turns to a tower of books beside the futon and picks up a worn paperback titled *Telephone Ringing in the Labyrinth*.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCH. - DAY

In foreground, Marnie chucks portions of a hay bale from a wheelbarrow.

The mare paws dirt greedily ten paces behind. Calypso watching from his adjacent paddock.

EXT. BARN. - DAY

The mare is tied to a post on the barn's mountain-facing side.

Marnie slides the saddle off and walks in.

EXT. PORCH. - NIGHT

A SNORING Marnie is passed out her chair, glass empty and nearly rolling out from her slack grip to the ground.

Curling out of her hand... almost falling...

EXT. ORCHARD. - DAY

The unkempt trees peppered with fat apples. Calypso, gorging the fallen fruit, eyes Marnie, creeping on him with a bridle in hand.

MARNIE

How in the hell do you get out?

EXT. FOREST. GRAHAM RANCH. - DAY

The pseudo-damn is gone and the creek flows uninterrupted. Fresh earth is returned on the opposite bank.

MARNIE

Well done, Sam.

No tractor in sight. She won this battle.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. PORCH. - NIGHT

Again, Marnie SNORES in her chair. This time, she cradles the whiskey bottle like a doll.

EXT. FOREST. GRAHAM RANCH. - MORNING

Raven perch silently in pine branches. The saddled mare grazes in the background.

Marnie stands over the body of a tiny whitetail fawn. This is no natural death.

We scan its carcass: perforated with large holes in its rotted flesh, each ringed with a viscous black liquid.

Its tongue and eyes are missing.

She taps it with her boot and dozens of ticks pour out from its nose, mouth... and eye sockets.

The ticks stop. Roll over and die as if one organism.

INT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. KITCHEN. - NIGHT

Marnie's appraises her reflection in the window over the sink.

After rinsing out a whiskey tumbler, she stares back at herself, the image blurring...

EXT. DREAMSTATE. CREEKSIDE. - DAWN

Marnie stands beside the clear waters as the day blooms rosy along eastern pines.

At a break in the foliage, she notices a woman across the creek, back turned. Naked and visibly pregnant.

Marnie calls to her but no sound escapes her mouth.

The woman turns: Lily's face but with obsidian eyes.

Marnie whips around to look for help, finding only the wild.

The Lily she turns back to find is now a child (seen earlier in the photos), clothed and seated on the riverbank.

From the foliage behind her slinks a python-sized centipede.

The Creature encircles Lily.

Young Lily just points to Marnie. And smiles like the mad do.

INT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. KITCHEN. - NIGHT

Marnie starts from the dreamstate, still at the sink. Sweat drips from her forehead.

She pours a glass of water and chugs it. Then cocks her head to a WHICKERING and BRAYING outside.

EXT. ORCHARD. - MOMENTS LATER

Fat apples sags the trees. Above this hangs a rind of moon. Shotgun in hand, Marnie treads into the orchard.

Something HUFFS out of the dark.

Marnie raises the shotgun at movement in the overgrowth.

MARNIE

You are on private property.
Come out slow.

Racks in a round: CLACK-ACK. No need to announce the rest.

A beat.

Then a sow Grizzly emerges from under a tree twenty paces on, face smeared with apple guts.

On either side of the sow appear two yearlings. They follow their mother's attention.

Marnie keeps the shotgun raised, backing up slowly.

The Griz HUFFS at Marnie who continues her careful retreat.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

We don't have a problem, big bear.
I'm just a cowgirl headed home.

Starting forward, the Griz bumps her head on a low-hanging bird feeder. Its rotted wood splits and seeds stream down.

The Griz drops her head to the seed. Her yearlings follow suit and nuzzle the grasses.

A CLICK as Marnie engages the safety. She backs away. Lowers the shotgun and jogs to the house.

INT. GENERAL STORE. - MORNING

MARNIE

(verbosity as symptom of
social isolation)

So our dog back then was a blue heeler, and we knew there'd been a mountain lion around from two dead deer. I open the door to the barn and there's the cat, holding that blue heeler in its mouth. But the dog's still alive, just looking at me. Scared shitless. The cat is crushing its skull and I'm standing there, frozen. The dog passes out but is still dangling from the cat's jaws like a sock. So what do I do? I grab two paint cans sitting there and bang them together, screaming at the bitch. She drops the dog and stares at me for a full five seconds. Then struts out the barn door, passing right beside me. She couldn't be roused to give a shit about the situation one way or the other.

(beat)

That dog lived about eight more years.

A CLERK (17-going-on-any-zip-code-but-this-one), itching for the smart phone beside the register where Marnie has piled boxes of bullets, listens, obeying her social contract.

CLERK

Will this be cash or credit?

Marnie hands over a wad of crumpled bills.

EXT. PARKING LOT. - MOMENTS LATER

As Marnie sets the bags of shells in her truck bed-

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Mrs. Graham?

She turns to see GARY (40's) taking visual inventory of her stockpile. Then her appearance. Neither are a great look.

His jet-black hair combed in an oily part; a push-broom for a mustache. He wears a corduroy blazer and snakeskin boots.

She doesn't know him.

MARNIE

That's not me.

GARY

How's the ranch holding up?

MARNIE

Like I said, guy.

GARY

It'd be a shame if something happened to a nice woman like you, alone up there.

Marnie grabs a box of .30-30 shells.

MARNIE

I am about to open my door and find my rifle. Don't be here when I do.

She shakes the box.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Tell your boss it won't be that easy for him.

GARY

I'm just a friend of Lily's. Tell her I said "hello".

He smiles. Then walks away.

INT. MARNIE'S TRUCK. MAIN STREET. - MOMENTS LATER

Marnie drives past Gary climbing into a new white truck in the opposite lane; "Coalthorpe Ranch" painted its door.

TICK (28), built like a brick shithouse and equally intelligent, sits at the wheel. They don't notice her.

She drives on. Shakes her head.

Then jerks the wheel and skids around the block.

Marnie floors it, the truck ROARING up a dirt alley between trailers.

INT. MARNIE'S TRUCK. - MOMENTS LATER

She waits a block off Main. The Coalthorpe truck passes.

A beat before she pulls out. Patient. She's a hunter.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. - LATER

Marnie's truck stops where the concrete road transitions to dirt. In the country, a tail can wait a long way back.

To her right, dust strings in a line above the road, indicating a recent passing.

Following her quarry's trail, the truck turns.

INT. COUNTRY ROAD. TRUCK CAB. - LATER

Marnie stops on the dirt road where it intersects with another running perpendicular.

Her eyes follow the dust-line down the road for a mile to find the truck as a receding white dot.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. COALTHORPE RANCH. - LATER

Beyond barb wire, a field rolls toward the horizon. The fence wearing a familiar "Coalthorpe Ranch" sign. Marnie's truck is parked behind a patch of cottonwoods off the road.

She stands in the trees with her binoculars and watches a decrepit trailer deep into the property.

Through her binoculars she sees:

The "Coalthorpe Ranch" truck parked next to another like it. Then the door to the trailer opens. Gary and Tick exit.

Followed by Steven. Her paranoia is gaining ground.

She drops the binoculars and sets her jaw. Her eyes narrow.

EXT. INTERSTATE. - MORNING

Marnie's pickup merges onto a four-lane highway. The traffic, if you can call it that, remains spaced by miles.

EXT. MISSOULA. - LATER

She exits at a "Missoula City Center" sign. A town appears inside a bowl-like valley ringed by mountains.

At its center, buildings bunch together, the tallest only ten stories. "City center", but not a city.

INT. BANK. - LATER

The office evinces a maximum in minimalism. A corporate banker with buggy eyes, ELLEN (late 20's), sits across from Marnie, well-dressed with a suitably cold mannerism.

ELLEN

The bank's position is clear. If you make the required payment then we will lift the foreclosure.

MARNIE

When did you graduate college?

ELLEN

This is my fifth year in this position.

MARNIE

I've taken dumps older than you.

ELLEN

(plastic smile)

If there isn't anything else, Mrs. Graham, we're finished here.

MARNIE

Yes we are.

Marnie stands. She slowly begins to tip over her chair, angling it sideways.

Looks at Ellen, who won't drop her poker face.

The chair tilts.

Farther...

Farther... Marnie, daring a response, gets nothing...

Until the chair plops over.

She finger guns Ellen and turns heel.

EXT. MISSOULA RIVER WALK. - AFTERNOON

Gray light ripples on the Clark Fork River. Marnie stands on a concrete path on the riverbank.

A scenic downtown is bisected by the river, at whose center a surfer rides a man-made wave; two other surfers paddling in a queue.

She watches their repeated cycle. Ride and fall. Repeat.

Then checks her watch. Pushes her hat up her forehead.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. - LATER

Marnie leans against her truck, parked on a street lined with deciduous trees, watching students scamper out of school.

Trailing them is Lily, seeing her kiddos off individually: handing back a book, straightening a backpack, high-fiving.

She's outside of her head for once and happy. It's not a trait either woman knows well.

Lily spots her mother and crosses the street.

Leaves helicopter around the women as they face each other. Lily folds her arms across her chest.

LILY

I thought you were opposed to
unannounced visits.

MARNIE

Been thinking about what you said,
and there's some merit to it.

LILY

'Some' merit. And you drove all the
way to Missoula to tell me this.

MARNIE

I told you I'd follow up.

LILY

You said you'd call me. That was
over a month ago.

(holds up her hands)

What is it? I'm tutoring in fifteen minutes.

Marnie scuffs the sidewalk with her boot. Looking to spent leaves for an articulation that evades her.

MARNIE
That group you talked about. It'd be good just to hear some noise.

LILY
That's a start.

MARNIE
You said you could maybe help out.

LILY
With the ranch?
With daddy's insurance money?

MARNIE
It's your money.

LILY
Okay. But I need you to meet with us Thursday at 5 at the cafe. We'll figure something out after.

Marnie looks to her daughter.

MARNIE
That can work.

LILY
Mom, is there anything else?

MARNIE
I'll see you soon.

Lily crosses the road.

Only on the other side does she turn to wave goodbye.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. - EVENING

Marnie steps out of her truck to see the mare and Calypso sprinting in their enclosures. Then her front door ajar.

After pulling a .357 revolver out from under the truck seat, she approaches the house.

Both ANIMAL CRIES commingle as she climbs the stairs into the-

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

pistol raised. A raven, perched on the back of the Robert's recliner in the adjacent living room, CAWS.

In spooked reflex she fires: BANG.

The chair explodes and round penetrates the wall behind.

The raven, untouched, flaps past her and out of the door.

She steps back onto the-

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

following the bird's flight to where carrion birds circle in a dark helix above the forest.

She tucks the pistol in her belt and heads in that direction.

INT. MISSOULA. RESTAURANT. - NIGHT

Lily fusses with her hair in the black mirror of her cell phone, seated alone at a table. The place buzzing around her.

A man approaches the table: CHARLIE (27), disingenuous, sporting a hipster beard and man bun, handsome.

CHARLIE

Lily?

She half rises from her seat then remains in it..

LILY

Hi.

After briefly extending her hand, she pulls it back and stands. They hug.

CHARLIE

You actually look like your profile.

LILY

Oh. Yeah, you too.

Charlie sits. They pause, silent in the inherent awkwardness until a WAITRESS arrives.

WAITRESS

Can I get you started with anything to drink?

He eyes her breasts.

CHARLIE
(not deferring)
What's the hoppiest beer you have?
I'm talking a thousand IBU.

EXT. STREET. - NIGHT

Charlie is tipsy, his arm around Lily as they walk the street. He hits a key fob in his hand and a BEEP answers ten paces ahead.

CHARLIE
I mean, the market is expansive. We
will can a lot of economic growth
in the next five years. That's the
startup world: risk and reward.

He moves in for a kiss in which he attempts to inhale her face.

Lily pulls away.

LILY
Easy, cowboy. You're drunk.

CHARLIE
Had to make up for you not joining
in.

LILY
I don't drink.

CHARLIE
Boo.
(not getting it)

LILY
I'm also not into hookups.

CHARLIE
Me neither. I can be open to more.

While charismatic, his is an almost pathological lack of sincerity.

Lily considers it. She pulls him to her and they kiss again, softer.

LILY
Your place?

INT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. - MORNING

Sam inspects the wounded recliner.

SAM

The cannonball hole is your handiwork, I reckon?

She shrugs.

MARNIE

It was dark.

SAM

But your poor aim is not why we're here.

(off her salty look)

Look at it from my side: the only evidence being a door left open and B&E by bird.

MARNIE

The tour isn't over yet.

EXT. FOREST. GRAHAM RANCH. - LATER

Sam and Marnie trek through wild grasses, the pines above blocking out the daylight.

SAM

If I didn't trust you, this might be unnerving.

MARNIE

I thought I was losing it. An old lady in the woods. Until...

They stop under a large ponderosa.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

I saw this.

An elk's body is jumbled into a moldering pile. Viscous rot glistens in its abdomen, torn open as if some "Thing" hatched therefrom. Its insides are expressionistic.

The surrounding grass is flattened in an S-shape, and a serpent-pattern wends into the shadows.

The vegetation rendered gray and brittle in a three-foot radius around the carcass.

Sam loads chew into his lower lip.

SAM

This is a bit peculiar.

MARNIE

Coalthorpe had his boys poison the creek. He doesn't want to wait me out, he wants to win.

Sam circles the carcass.

SAM

But all I have is a carcass torn at by all manner of four-legged thing. Not even boot prints or tire track.

MARNIE

You're right on that last bit.

He spits again, tips back his Stetson.

SAM

I'll put in a call to FWP but there's not a lot else to be done. And I think you already know that.

EXT. WILDERNESS. - NIGHT

Steven and Tick stand around one of the Griz yearlings, now dead, leg mangled in a trap. Tick holds a lantern, lighting the clearing in chiaroscuro.

Steven frees the trap jaws and picks up the body. His speech is performative and stilted.

TICK

What're we doing here, man?

STEVEN

Friend you will see soon enough.

Steven walks into the trees, carrying the yearling.

Tick looks around for a clue, has none, so he follows.

EXT. WILDERNESS - MOMENTS LATER

A red mist sifts through trees. Steven cuts open the yearling's stomach. Tick stands behind, dumbfounded.

Steven reaches into the innards. He lifts the glistening intestines to his mouth. Takes a bite. Sets them aside.

The Creature moves toward them, unseen but parting the tall grasses in S-curves.

It emerges only to slither into the yearling's stomach.

INT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. - NIGHT

Rain PATTERS the metal roof. Marnie stands next to the recliner, tracing the bullet hole tenderly with a finger.

She looks up to stare through the window to the treeline.

The treetop silhouettes appear to writhe in fierce wind against the starry, moonlit sky behind.

Then her eyes fall on the Tibetan prayer flags strung over the garden, lit by the barn's floodlight.

The flags hang limp: there is no wind.

EXT. WILDERNESS. - NIGHT

Steven turns to Tick, now kneeling, face smeared with gore.

The yearling's stomach pulses as the Creature snakes its insides.

A red mist slides over the ground to where Tick kneels, his eyes clouded over in black.

TICK

Yes. I do.

He stands.

INT. COUNTRY ROAD. - DAY

Marnie drives a dirt road. Her window down and left arm slung over the door. The day painted in autumnal golds.

She passes a farmer's field, its ten acres arranged in green rectangles that signal the season's last haying.

A tractor putters down a row between these fields. The General Store CLERK at its wheel. An Australian sheep dog bounces beside the tractor.

Marnie waves as she passes.

But the Clerk doesn't notice. Her eyes fixed on the phone in her hand. Driving a tractor while texting. Sign of the times.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCH ENTRANCE. - LATER

A green cattle gate stands shut across the dirt road. A laminated piece of paper is duct-taped on a top bar.

Marnie stands before the paper. She leans in and squints. Behind her, the truck IDLES, door open.

She scans the lettering to discern:

"Notice of Judicial Foreclosure".

As is habit, she slides the chain off the catch and starts to open the gate. Then stops. Leaves the chain.

And returns to her truck.

INT. BITTERROOT. STOCKMAN'S BAR. - DAY

The place defines "shithole" with postmodernist verve. A mute TV flashing cable news and lightless juke box are Marnie's only company.

The door opens in a rectangle of daylight around a lawman's silhouette. As it closes, Sam removes his Stetson and blinks.

He sits next to Marnie. She doesn't break gaze from the TV.

SAM

Saw your truck out front.

She sips her whiskey.

MARNIE

Keep it up and you might make detective.

He pulls out his wallet sets it on the bar.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

You drinking?

SAM

Not heavily. I'm on duty.

She side-eyes him.

SAM (CONT'D)

I take it you've seen the notice.

MARNIE

Funny what a piece of paper can do to a decent afternoon.

SAM

There's still time if you can muster the money. I'd do more if I could.

MARNIE

Try getting suddenly rich and generous.

SAM

Let the world do its work. It's gonna get on with it anyway.

MARNIE

"Ineffectual Systems and The Men Who Deliver Their Notices." That's a title for my memoirs.

SAM

A bit wordy, especially for you.

Enter the bartender, DONNA (50), wearing a tank top that reveals arm flab and indistinguishable tattoos on each shoulder, carrying twenty years of hard living in her face.

She ran out of fucks to give a decade ago.

Sam nods 'hello'.

DONNA

Hell, Sheriff, it ain't Thursday.

SAM

Breaking the routine, dear.

DONNA

The usual?

SAM

Please.

DONNA

(to Marnie)

Howabout you, hon?

Marnie taps the bartop with two fingers: "hit me".

Donna fishes out a Pabst tall-boy from the fridge below the bar, pops the top and sets it sweating in front of Sam.

She pours straight whiskey in Marnie's empty glass.

DONNA (CONT'D)

Holler if you need me. Smoke break.

And with that she ducks into the adjacent kitchen.

MARNIE

I'd estimate she takes four to six hours of smoke breaks per shift.

Both take a respective drink.

SAM

When I say "the world", I mean nature. Everything returns to a balance. Not on our clock, though.

MARNIE

According to the notice on my gate, I'm not afforded a luxury like patience.

SAM

I come here after our support group. That's a contradiction, but most things are.

MARNIE

Stop yourself before you invite me again.

SAM

Nope. I'm through lecturing. Too old to give a shit.

MARNIE

Now there's a title.

They toast, CLINKING glass to aluminum can.

INT. BAR. - LATER

On TV, Coalthorpe stands outside a school, his soundless mouthing of words to reporters an appropriate metaphor.

Donna, behind the bar for once, steps over to top Marnie off, alone at the bar again.

MARNIE

Leave the bottle.

Donna does. Marnie slaps a twenty on the bartop. Jams on her hat and stares daggers back at the TV.

Dismounting her stool, she nearly falls, bottle in hand.

EXT. BAR. PARKING LOT. - MOMENTS LATER

Not someone who should be driving, Marnie sways into her truck. She SLAMS the door shut.

Rain begins to fall. She turns the key, but it won't start.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. COALTHORPE RANCH. - LATER

No vehicles outside the shitbox trailer where Marnie previously spotted Gary, Tick, and Steven. No lights on either.

Marnie's truck is again parked behind the cottonwoods.

INT. MARNIE'S TRUCK. - MOMENTS LATER

She sets the binoculars on the dash, useless in the rain and fading light, and takes long a swig from the bottle.

She looks to the .357 on her lap.

Lifts the pistol, considering it.

Turns the weapon over. She thumbs back the hammer-

But decocks it.

Tosses the pistol in the passenger seat and cracks her window to draw in a DEEP BREATH. There's still fight left in her.

She grips the wheel with both hands, knuckles whitening.

A RAGGED EXHALE.

Marnie grabs the whiskey bottle and steps out into the rain.

From the truck cab, door left open, we watch her stumble to the barb wire fence and scramble over it.

EXT. FOREST. - LATER

Marnie stands under the umbrella-like coverage of a ponderosa. The bottle slides out of her hand.

She kneels to retrieve it and, from this angle, spots something in a clearing further into the forest.

EXT. CLEARING. - MOMENTS LATER

Rain pastes Marnie as she moves leaves off of the griz yearling's body, split vertically and spread open.

Tendrils of black, viscous organic matter string its insides.

These tendrils connect to a translucent web under the leaves, tunnelling into the earth like roots.

CAW-CAW-CAW.

The keening of ravens above. She looks up.

Ravens swoop from the trees above Marnie and dive at her. First one. Then three. Then a murder.

Fleeing, she breaks through thick vegetation to step into-

EXT. DREAMSTATE. GARDEN. - NIGHT

Her garden under moonlight. Robert awaits her, arms open, his skin porcelain and eyes totally dark.

She rushes toward him.

They embrace. She kisses him.

Then he pulls back. His mouth is stitched shut.

It rips partially open and he yanks her to him for a perverse kiss, smearing blood on their faces.

Marnie breaks away and Robert turns from her.

When he turns back, Robert now holds an infant covered by rags, CRYING. And he offers the baby to her.

Reduced by need, she takes the bundle and unfolds the rags onto: centipedes swarming a rotted raven carcass.

She drops the rancid bundle and backs away. Closes her eyes. Opens them to see:

Robert straddling Calypso's body in the grass. The goat's tongue lolling lifelessly from his mouth.

Robert looks to her, cocks his head sideways. His mouth rips the stitches to open, revealing teeth painted by his blood.

He begins to eat from the goat's body.

She can't stop herself and falls on the body to join in his hunger. LOUD SMACKING mastication.

Then, horrified, she pulls away and rises, only to trip, fall and find herself-

EXT. CLEARING. - DUSK

On her back in the clearing, staring upward to the black branches veined across gray sky.

Ravens perched silent thereon. The day nearly over.

PLOP. A raven's body drops dead beside Marnie as she rises into a seated position.

PLOP. PLOP. They die as if one being. She springs upward...

PLOP. PLOP. PLOP. PLOP... And runs. Anywhere but here.

INT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. KITCHEN. - NIGHT

Marnie stumbles inside and pours a whiskey.

She picks up a glass in one, and pistol in the other, both hands shaking violently.

INT. BITTERROOT. DJ'S CAFE. - AFTERNOON

A near-empty greasy spoon diner. Lily and Sam sit in a corner booth drinking coffee. She drums her fingers on the tabletop.

SAM

Just like your mama.

Noticing this, she stops to tuck the hand underneath the table.

SAM (CONT'D)

So are you seeing anyone?

Lily looks at her hands.

LILY

Nope. The dating scene here over thirty is... rocky.

SAM

You'll find the right person.

LILY

What about you?

He COUGHS on his coffee.

SAM

Those days are over.

LILY

I know the feeling.

She looks at a clock on the wall, and Sam follows her gaze.

LILY (CONT'D)

This is probably worthless.

SAM

All you can do is offer.

He sips his coffee.

SAM (CONT'D)
Just don't burden yourself with any
illusion of control.

LILY
I keep hearing these sort of koans.

SAM
'Cones'? You thinking about ice
cream?

Lily chuckles.

LILY
A Buddhist riddle, unsolvable. The
lack of reason shows us the
uselessness of looking for answers,
but in this exists an
enlightenment. Or something.

SAM
Sounds like most of my hangovers.

LILY
You're a regular Montana monk.

SAM
(winks)
Not as dumb as you look.

They each smile.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. PORCH. - AFTERNOON

Marnie sits on the porch steps, bedraggled by hangover and
fear.

She breaks from her bloodshot daze and looks at her watch.

INT. CAFE.- LATER

A back booth in the diner, still empty-ish. In this way it
sponsors a confessional atmosphere.

Two others arrive to join Lily and Sam at the booth. VIVIAN
(56), witty, and JOSEPH (71), warm and attentive.

JOSEPH
You mind, Sam? Gotta sit with my
back to the wall. Courtesy of
Vietnam.

SAM
Of course. Sorry, Joe.

Sam slides out of the booth so Joseph can slide in.

Vivian sits next to Lily then hugs her, sideways-style.

VIVIAN

It's good to see you again, dear.

LILY

You, too.

SAM

Let's start with check-ins. Vivian,
would you like to go first?

VIVIAN

Well, it's no secret that this time
of year is the one when I miss my
sister the most.

Even we pull back so as not to violate their intimacy.

EXT. CANYON MOUTH. - EVENING

The sky drains of its color above the ominous charcoal
outline of the two peaks.

INT. CAFE. - EVENING

The group sits with empty coffee mugs in front of them.
Stephanie holds Lily's hand, dabbing tears from her eyes.

JOSEPH

My daughter asks me, "Dad, aren't
you lonely?"
I tell her, "I'm alone, but not
lonely."

The cafe door swings open and Marnie rushes in. Wild eyed,
hair spraying from under her hat. She looks like ten miles of
bad road on an opioid detox.

Lily greets her with a hope soon derailed by disappointment.

MARNIE

We need to talk.

SAM

I'm glad you joined us, Marnie.

MARNIE

Not about this.

Lily SIGHS. Marnie casts her a look before returning to Sam.

SAM
No judgement here.

MARNIE
I know what they're doing. I saw
the animals.

SAM
Please, sit down.

MARNIE
(to Sam)
The land is poisoned.

Lily begins to tear up. Vivian pats her back.

The group assesses at her, each having been there once and
maybe resenting this reminder.

MARNIE (CONT'D)
I need you to *fucking* listen.

SAM
Okay, Marnie. What exactly makes
you think it's been poisoned?

Joseph and Stephanie look to each other. She nods.

VIVIAN
(on her and Joseph's
behalf)
It's getting late.

Awkward pause as both squirm from the booth.

LILY
I'll join you.

Lily shakes her head, not making eye contact. She slides out
and leaves.

Marnie sits down across from Sam in the vacated space,
neither having much left to say.

INT. STOCKMAN'S BAR. - LATER

The dive is now neon-lit and empty save for Donna. Its wood-
paneled aesthetic soaked in decades of cheap beer and busted
dreams.

Lily walks in, eyeballs the place as if the furniture plans
to bite her, then sits alone at the bar.

The local newscast, on silent but captioned, decorates the TV mounted above the bar. Donna stares at it, in thrall.

DONNA
What can I get you?

LILY
Club soda.

Donna sets the drink down in front of Lily. On the TV our drunken News Anchor shadowboxes the air.

DONNA
Unbelievable.

Lily looks up to footage of a harried Coalthorpe exiting a building, a herd of microphones in his face.

LILY
What?

DONNA
You haven't seen?

Donna reads the blankness in Lily's non-reply.

DONNA (CONT'D)
That Coalthorpe fella, he
bodyslammed a reporter yesterday. I
guess he's had a bellyful of
liberal whining. Now he's hiding
out in his California mansion.

Lily struggles to observe the no-religion-and-politics MT bartalk moratorium.

LILY
That is... something.

DONNA
Our country just keeps getting
stranger. Holler if you need
anything else.

Donna disappears into the kitchen, shaking her head.

Lily looks to her blurred face in the mirror behind the bar, its bottles trapping neon like dying embers.

INT. BAR. - LATER

Still alone, now Lily is entranced by the silent TV.

STEVEN (O.S.)
As I live and breathe.

Involuntarily tensing, she turns to see Steven, beaming, his face flushed. Behind him trails Tick.

Tick sits at a table near the door. Steven sidles up next to Lily.

LILY
I'd like to be alone.

STEVEN
Just saying 'hello', darling. It has been some time.

The stilted demeanor now replaced with false charm.

She notices his combed hair and tucked-in flannel shirt. His recent, raw shave.

LILY
No thank you.

She turns back to the TV.

STEVEN
At least let me apologize.

Intrigued, she eyes him over her shoulder.

LILY
For what?

STEVEN
It's taken fifteen years, but you were there when I lost my momma. I need to thank you. It's like I've found her again. Not the broken thing she was, but who she could've been.

She turns to face him, responding to his vulnerability.

LILY
That is big, Steven.
(looks him up and down)
I'm happy for you.

STEVEN
As a boyfriend, I caused you pain. But I was a boy then. Now I'm different.

It's all she's wanted from her mother but been denied. She tears up.

LILY

Thank you.

He smiles, touching her shoulder.

STEVEN

Can I buy you a drink?

Her fist tightens on her glass: Club soda, give me strength.

LILY

You go ahead.

STEVEN

Okay, I'll take the chill out of the night by my lonesome. Water is also on me.

We see the veins of his hands are blackened. Lily doesn't.

LILY

Sure. But afterward, do me a favor.

STEVEN

Anything, darlin'.

LILY

I'd like to be left alone.

STEVEN

Absolutely.

(to the double doors)

Donna! We're thirsty out here.

He grins. Teeth now white. Color flushes his face and he seems to transform, managing to be handsome.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. - NIGHT

Calypso's paddock gate stands open and the enclosure empty. Marnie pulls up in her truck. The mare going nuts in her corral.

INT. MARNIE'S TRUCK. - CONTINUOUS

Headlights illuminate a smear of blood trailing into the forest.

MARNIE

No.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCH. - MOMENTS LATER

Marnie drops a rifle bag in her truck bed, engine running.

EXT. COALTHORPE RANCH. TRAILER. - LATER

A field with abandoned cars claimed by weeds. Behind them: the derelict trailer, patched with particle board. Lights flicker within.

Marnie crouches beside a rusted Chevy.

As she peers around the truck's bumper, Gary, bearing a flashlight, exits the trailer and walks into the forest.

A beat.

Then she follows, carrying her rifle.

EXT. RAVINE EDGE. - LATER

Marnie watches from above as Gary stands beside a heifer's body. The earth around him carpeted in glowing red mist.

The heifer's stomach begins to pulse. Then it tears open...

A Griz yearling bursts out, splattered with cow guts: this is the Creature in another body, testing a new iteration, skin grayed and hanging in pieces.

The Creature wobbles. Its head swivels back-and-forth.

It ambles into the forest, legs moving like broken branches, not yet in control of this form.

Witnessing a Lovecraftian spectacle her mind cannot process, Marnie turns away and presses her back to a tree.

EXT. RAVINE FLOOR. - MOMENTS LATER

Marnie approaches Gary from behind, aims the .357 at his back and COCKS it.

MARNIE

Don't. Fucking move.

She circles to face him. Gary still kneeling.

His eyes completely black.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

What is this?

GARY

Not anythin'... everythin'... It is
you.. becoming the vessel...

He holds his arms outward, palms up. A flash of red light-

INT. DREAMSTATE. BAR. - NIGHT

Steven and Lily dance. He looks directly at us and smiles a lunatic smile, teeth fanged and eyes black.

EXT. RAVINE FLOOR. - NIGHT

Flinching, Marnie shakes the vision from her head.

MARNIE

Tell me what all this is.

No answer. BANG. She fires a round in the dirt beside him.

Still nothing.

So she steps forward. Jabs the pistol into his forehead,
COCKS it-

A SNARL as the Creature explodes from the darkness, battering Marnie down and the pistol out of her hands.

Gary resumes mumbling into the middle distance.

The Creature pounces on her, its skin peeling off, eyes shimmering red. She pushes it away at the neck. Those jaws snapping in an autonomic confusion of the nervous system.

And it bites into her left hand, wrenching off a chunk. Blood spurts into the air.

As she clasps this hand, the Creature is given the opportunity to strike, but instead only meets her gaze.

Its red eyes brighten-

INT. DREAMSTATE. APARTMENT. - NIGHT

Lily lies on a dirty mattress on the floor of a bedroom. Her legs spread open. A red glow between them.

Steven and Tick walk in the room-

EXT. FOREST. RAVINE FLOOR. - NIGHT

Close on Marnie as she forces herself back to reality.

The Creature straddles her, still not attacking, its spittle stringing down to her face. Then, its jaws open and wide flecks of that red light spark from within...

Her good hand searches for the hunting knife on her belt...

The Creature pushes its open mouth at hers...

Just as she finds the blade and stabs the fucker in its neck.

No sound, just labored BREATHING as it rears off of her, the blade planted hilt-deep.

Marnie rolls to her knees. Searches for her pistol.

She spots it just as the Creature steps between her and the weapon.

Then it turns on her. Jaws working the air.

When a ROAR intrudes from the ravine's crest: the Griz sow come to defend her yearling.

And the Griz charges down in a furious blur. Marnie closes her eyes, accepting: "Let it be quick".

But the Griz plows into the Creature instead, sensing the parasite in her offspring's former body.

The Creature somersaults over.

It springs up fast, lunging to bite into the Griz, clinging to her neck until shaken off.

A duststorm of violence and blood ensues: the Creature attacking and retreating in bursts.

Marnie crawls to the pistol.

She reaches it just as the Creature and Griz part.

BANG, BANG, BANG. From her knees, Marnie blasts the Creature sideways.

Undeterred, it staggers upright, moving on Marnie.

BANG. Still coming on when the Griz chomps into the Creature's hindquarters.

The Creature rips free by parting with its own flank. The bloodless flesh ripping into strings-

BANG. The last round tunnels into the Creature's head. It continues to amble weirdly toward Marnie.

CLICK. CLICK. The pistol is empty.

The Griz has sunken to her knees, injured and WHEEZING.

The Creature, half of its head caved in, pauses. Then turns to limp up the ravine, "living" to fight another day.

Springing upright, the Griz bounds onto the Creature and pins it to the earth.

She clamps the Creature's skull in her jaws. Then crushes it, ripping the head off.

Black, viscous material pours from its neck. This newest iteration of the Creature "dies".

The Griz, bloodied, torn, swaying like a punch drunk fighter, ROARS in mourning. She eyes Marnie.

Then limps into the trees.

Marnie looks for Gary. He's gone.

She raises the mangled hand to her face: index, middle, and ring fingers torn off.

Behind where the fingers should be, Marnie sees the Creature's stomach start to pulse.

Then split open.

Like a Matryoshka Doll, the Creature's centipedal form darts out of the yearling's body to escape.

Marnie is left alone with a fuller realization of the horror invading her land.

EXT. TRAILER. - LATER

No lights on. Marnie has crafted a sling for her left arm out of her coat. Seeking answers, anything to stave off insanity, she walks to the trailer.

Marnie kneels to awkwardly probe her pockets for shells.

She loads several. Drops a shell.

Retrieves it.

Doing this with one hand. She sets the reloaded pistol down.

And digs a flashlight out of her hip pocket. Clasps it alight in her mouth and picks up the gun.

She walks up the plywood steps. Careful as she tests the door handle.

Finding it unlocked, she nudges the door open. And steps in-

INT. TRAILER. - CONTINUOUS

The flashlight cuts a beam over the bodies of many animals.

Marnie GAGS as the stench; the flashlight drops.

As she picks up the light it shines on a fox tacked to the wall. Dissected. Blighted with brittle gray rot.

She continues down a narrow hall to peer in an open door...

The room is empty.

She continues to the end of the hall. She enters but this isn't the room with Lily from her vision.

Instead, mutated animals greet her. A pig's head merged with a dog's body, or stitched to it; the light offers no determination.

Some gothically weird shit has happened here.

Finally, heartbreakingly, her eyes find Calypso on the floor. Splayed open. Dead.

EXT. TRAILER. - MOMENTS LATER

Marnie MOANS as she steps outside, spitting the flashlight on the ground. She dry heaves.

INT. BAR. - SAME

The bar is decorated with empty glasses. Steven and Lily slow dance beside it. Tick is nowhere to be seen.

STEVEN
(brushes hair from her
eyes)
Are you ready?

Lily leans drunkenly into Steven, her head lolling on her neck. No reply.

INT. TRUCK. - MOMENTS LATER

Cocooned in the dimly lit cab, Marnie floors it up a dirt road. Her injured hand now wrapped in a bloody rag.

Through the windshield, her headlights pull shapes out of the night into ominous forms.

She SKIDS to a stop. Marnie claps a hand to her forehead, an image straining to penetrate her consciousness.

Fighting off the mental invasion. And losing. She MOANS-

INT. BEDROOM. DREAMSTATE. - NIGHT

Lily, semi-conscious, lying atop a dirty mattress on the floor. The open door casts a pane of light over her.

Tick fills the doorframe, shirtless, fat rolling over his Wranglers, belt buckle dangling phallically below his waist.

Steven emerges from shadow to crawl over Lily in a push-up position.

STEVEN

Now you will be unclean. Like me.

His mouth opens, widening until the jaw CRACKS. From this maw writhe black tentacles and red sparks of light.

They tease toward Lily's face... Closer...

Just about to touch as-

INT. TRUCK. - NIGHT

Marnie jolts from the vision of horrifying potentiality.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. - CONTINUOUS

The truck spits gravel and ROARS down the road.

INT. TRUCK. - LATER

Speeding through Bitterroot, Marnie slams the brakes upon passing "Stockman's Bar". Lily's battered Subaru is parked in the dirt lot with a Coalthorpe Ranch truck beside it.

MARNIE

God damn you.

She cranes the wheel with one hand.

EXT. PARKING LOT. - MOMENTS LATER

Marnie touches Subaru's hood with her good hand.

Then fetches the .357 from her waistband.

INT. BAR. - MOMENTS LATER

Unlike in Marnie's vision, Lily and Steven haven't left. But several rocks glasses do scatter the bar.

There they face each other, haloed in the room's alien neon. Knees touching.

STEVEN

We could go back there. To back then.

Marnie barges in.

Steven grins. Lily pulls herself out of a neuroleptic posture.

LILY

'ssfuckin typical.

Steven's is a glacial repose. He cocks his head like a raven.

As Marnie approaches, Lily turns away, half-nodding into, half-staring at her lap.

MARNIE

We're leaving, Lillian.

She points the gun at Steven, hand shaking.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Not one word.

Donna returns from the kitchen to eye this standoff. A lit cigarette dangles from her lips.

DONNA

We're not having any shit in here tonight. I have a headache, and I want to watch TV and smoke. You put the hand cannon in your rig and act polite, I'll leave you be. Otherwise, skedaddle because the Sheriff is on speedial.

Marnie rests a hand on Lily's shoulder. Lily spins and sways to the door.

Marnie lowers the pistol, backing out.

Steven sits oddly straight, beaming.

EXT. PARKING LOT. - CONTINUOUS

Sleet filters the lone streetlight's glow over the dirt lot. Lily stumbles outside. She VOMITS.

Marnie backs through the door, tucking the pistol in her waistband. She put her hand on Lily's back, rubbing slowly, just the way she burped the girl as an infant.

Across the lot, Tick lumbers into the streetlight.

Marnie aids Lily to the truck and opens the passenger door.

MARNIE

We need to go.

Tick moves toward them.

Lily rights herself and wipes the slop from her mouth with her sleeve.

LILY

Not goin' anywhere with you,
bitssh.

Lily breaks away, stumbling. Marnie grabs her by a trailing arm and swings Lily around like a dance partner.

With this, Marnie now stands between Tick and Lily.

She reaches for the pistol but he closes fast, pinning her arm to her side.

He catches her head with his other hand and SMACKS it against the truck, then flings her into the mud.

TICK

(to Lily)

You have to choose.

Mouth bleeding and forehead gashed open, Marnie pushes herself up from the mud.

As Tick reaches for Lily, the side of his face is met with the .357 butt, splattering teeth from his mouth.

Lily scrambles into the truck and closes the door.

Tick throws a haymaker. Marnie sidesteps it. Then she rears up a leg and brings it down into his shin. Hard.

A CRACK as it caves in the wrong way. He collapses.

The truck STARTS, Lily in the driver's seat. Its headlights cast on Steven, outside of the bar, a bemused spectator.

Marnie trains the pistol on him as she walks around the truck to the driver's side door. Lily scootches over and Marnie steps in.

Tick picks himself up. Steven steps into the rain and puts a hand on his shoulder.

The truck sprays mud and water as it speeds away.

INT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. LILY'S BEDROOM. - LATER

Adrenaline replaced by the effects of the booze, Lily mutters in a half-conscious state as Marnie guides her into bed.

Marnie swings Lily's feet up to join the rest of her. Then pulls her muddy boots off one-by-one.

Marnie sits in a rocking chair next to the bed and pushes the hair back from her daughter's face.

Lily reaches to her mother's swollen lips.

LILY

Mom.

Marnie touches the hand at her face.

MARNIE

It's okay.

LILY

You're hurt.

MARNIE

It's okay.

Lily nods off. Marnie remains there, holding her daughter's hand until she, too, closes her eyes.

EXT. DREAMSTATE. PORCH. - AFTERNOON

A window shimmers, reflecting the sun behind it.

Framed behind the glass: Robert in his recliner. He spasms and chokes. Mouth frothing.

Marnie stands at the window. She bangs her fists on it.

INT. KITCHEN. - SAME

Woken into a vicious hangover, Lily wanders into the kitchen.

She feels around the sink and pours a glass of water, then chugs it.

Refilling a second glass, she looks outside. Lily drops the glass. It SHATTERS.

She looks wildly around the kitchen, then grabs a knife.

INT. DREAMSTATE. PORCH. - SAME

Marnie stops hammering on the window.

MARNIE

NO!

Suddenly, the chair is empty.

Robert steps into the window frame. Inches from her, eyes blackened.

He presses a hand to the glass. She meets it there with her own.

The window spiderwebs.

EXT. GARDEN. - MOMENTS LATER

The floodlight attached to the barn casts down on the garden.

Where Marnie stands. The Creature, encircling her body, is now large as a python.

They levitate as one.

Lily rushes in to grasp the Creature in one hand, pulling it away from her mother's body.

Exposed, the Creature's centipede legs grope and contract like scissors.

A beat of hesitation.

Lily looks to her mother's face above, eyes clouded black. Same as the veins in her neck and face.

Then, Lily drives the knife into the centipede. The blade slips and cuts her other hand but she keeps sawing.

Finally, she pierces the exoskeleton-

A WAIL erupts from the trees.

Marnie and The Creature drop, collapsing onto Lily. The Creature slithers under the garden fence.

Marnie sits up. Her eyes normalized. She clutches her daughter's shoulders and stares at her, wide-eyed.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCH. - PRE-DAWN

The grays of approaching daytime creep across the ranch house and barn.

Rain drizzles over bare trees.

INT. KITCHEN. - SAME

Marnie and Lily avoid eye contact across the table. Lily sits with her knees to her chest, wearing a hangover under her eyes. We might notice the family resemblance there.

Both drink coffee.

LILY

Well... that was the most fucked up thing I've ever seen.

MARNIE

Now we know.

LILY

For once we actually have a point of agreement.

Lily sets her cup down and rests a hand on her mother's injured hand, wrapped in a fresh bandage.

Marnie nods. The fears for her sanity lifting. She looks to the cut on the back of Lily's hand.

MARNIE

Come here.

Lily obeys, following to the kitchen sink. Marnie runs water over the cut.

She retrieves iodine and gauze from a cabinet.

LILY

What about you?

Marnie bristles but finishes wrapping the wound.

She fills another cup of coffee and returns to the table.

Lily lifts her mother's injured hand, pulling away the wrapping: the fingers are growing back, skin fused into pink stubs.

LILY (CONT'D)

How is any of this possible?

MARNIE

A while back I found a meteorite that landed the canyon. Things have been strange since.

LILY

I saw something in Steven. He wasn't there.

(beat)

But what is it, mom?

MARNIE

You remember the mare we had when you were ten? When she went colic, or best as the vet could make out? No explanation. One afternoon we move the herd to the south pasture and her ears are forward, full of piss and vinegar, not even skittish at the wind. The next morning I find her rolling in the dirt like it's her damned job. When she did stand it was only to kick her stomach until the skin ripped off. Less than a day after a good ride and the vet is leading her into the trailer for the long needle.

LILY

And that's enough for you?

MARNIE

There isn't an answer. It's inherent to the word "alien".

LILY

We need to call for help.

MARNIE

To tell them what? We're alone and without any evidence.

Lily brushes Marnie's matted hair from where the scalp was cut to the skull hours before: now healed into a pink line.

LILY

Okay, then we should leave.

MARNIE
This is my home.
(beat)
But you should.

Lily stands to forage for the truck keys on the counter.
She opens the door. Rain PATTERS the metal roof outside.

LILY
Mom. Please. We can just go.

Marnie stands. Her eyes find Robert's garden out the window.

MARNIE
I can't. The same way I feel its...
not what it wants but a hunger. Now
its in my head, showing me these
images, like dreams. I know, in my
bones, that if I run...
I've seen myself.
(beat)
Dying.

EXT. DREAMSTATE. COUNTRY ROAD. - MORNING

The land flat to the horizon, simmering with mist. Marnie's Ford parked at an angle in a cornfield. Driver's door open.

Lying on the earth, Marnie WHEEZES. Face wizened to a nightmarish shadow of herself, a skeletal crone with skin gray and thin as paper.

INT. KITCHEN. - PRE-DAWN

LILY
Maybe that's what it wants you to
believe.

MARNIE
Should I bet my life on it?

LILY
You do that by staying.

MARNIE
Take the truck. I choose to stay
here, and I'm not giving that over.

LILY
Alright.

Lily closes the door.

LILY (CONT'D)

We stay.

EXT. BARN. - DAY

Marnie sets down the ten-gauge shotgun, slides the door open, and enters.

Lily follows her inside.

The lights blink on. Marnie yanks a tarp off of the wooden trunk.

She opens it and hands the two bear traps to Lily.

A beat as both observe the "And Old Bear Lives Here..." sign.

Marnie straightens it. She then removes an oil lamp and closes the trunk.

INT. LIVING ROOM. - EVENING

The two women hold a 2x4 up to the living room window flush with others already nailed there.

MARNIE

Go ahead.

With her good hand, Marnie extends the hammer.

LILY

You do it.

MARNIE

Remember when you were a little girl and we built that treehouse?

LILY

I was eleven, and it collapsed that winter.

MARNIE

My arms are getting tired.

Lily takes the hammer.

EXT. RANCHOUSE. - SAME

A window is blocked out by wood.

The BANG of a hammer commences.

EXT. BITTERROOT RANGE. - EVENING

Jagged peaks darken as clouds converge over them, roiling and sparking with lightning.

INT. KITCHEN. - NIGHT

Two pistols: the .357 and a 1911 .45, sit beside the ten-gauge shotgun and .30-30 repeater on the table next to boxes of shells.

Standing over the arsenal, Marnie uses her finger to dot their number in the air.

Outside, THUNDER BOOMS.

Marnie glances into the hallway where light falls from an open door.

She walks down the hall.

Inside: Boards nailed over the lone window. Lily sits at Robert's desk, lamp on, with a book in her hands.

At the door, hesitant, Marnie bores into Lily.

MARNIE

What are you doing?

LILY

(not looking up)

Research.

MARNIE

I'd prefer if you didn't.

Lily sets the book down.

LILY

There being no precedent for what's happening, I think it's smart to ask some questions.

MARNIE

Asking what can't be answered does jack shit. You just take the next step. Which doesn't include poking around where you're not wanted.

LILY

Then why keep the room this way?

MARNIE

Because that's how it was.

LILY

Exactly. His books are here, not packed up, so I'm using them. This one-

(taps the book cover)

Talks about "spillover", how animals pass disease to humans. Parasites and host manipulation...

Lily gives her mother the *you get it?* look.

MARNIE

You're going to make me ask.

LILY

I have a theory.

MARNIE

What a surprise.

Lily stands, excited, gesturing with her hands.

LILY

Okay. So let's say this is a parasite. But it's sentient.

MARNIE

Obviously.

LILY

It would have to adapt. And being attached to a meteor, it would have to be very adaptable. Think of it as a psychic parasite.

MARNIE

And?

LILY

From what you've said, you were the first life form of higher intelligence it encountered here. The first human, and I'm talking maybe ever. It's testing as it infects, even controlling some of the others, but maybe it needs you. The healing being an exchange, like rent for the body.

MARNIE

This isn't comforting.

LILY

But it is. This thing won't risk harming you. That means you can get close enough to kill it.

MARNIE

Is this how you usually spend your weekends?

LILY

A boring life keeps me sober.

Marnie scoffs.

MARNIE

Not me.

Lily points toward the window.

LILY

We need to find it out there. It's what he would've done.

Finally, with no lack of tension, Marnie steps inside.

MARNIE

You're an artist at evoking him for your own purpose.

Lily rises, and shows her mother the open page. Pointing.

LILY

Daddy was a good biologist and he taught me to look at things the same way. This is reasoning.

MARNIE

We're better off here than in the dark being hunted by Steven and his mindfucked goons.

LILY

Then how long do we wait?

MARNIE

Not too much longer.

LILY

Well, you are the qualified expert on living in stasis.

MARNIE

I don't have time for your shit.

Lily sets the book down.

LILY
I'm just trying to talk to you
while we still can.

MARNIE
Then let's sit down in the kitchen.

LILY
At a table decorated with shotguns.

MARNIE
A thick book isn't going to stop
them.

LILY
Not alone. But thinking will.

MARNIE
You do enough for us both. Too
much. It sure as hell isn't a trait
you got from me.

LILY
That's such bullshit. But, hey,
anything to keep from looking in
the mirror, right?

Thunder BOOMS again. Followed by HOWLING WIND.

Marnie abandons her strained civility.

MARNIE
You want to talk, then what can I
help you with? What can I dig up in
our history that explains why you
drank a fucking hole in your life?
Because I can't reason it out.

LILY
Just modeling for you, mom. You've
picked up on it well of late.

Marnie looks to the sky. Breathes deep. Rain hammers the
metal roof when-

The power goes out, plunging the house into darkness.

MARNIE
Stay here.

Marnie feels her way back down the hall to the kitchen...

She fumbles around in a drawer...

then sparks a match, casting her features in sculptural relief, and lights the oil lamp on the table.

Marnie snaps open, then snaps shut the .357 cylinder.

Lily enters the room.

LILY

I understand why you don't talk,
but it's what we do with family.

MARNIE

Right now I only care about where
you're going to hide.

LILY

I want to know I was honest.

MARNIE

We make it to tomorrow and I'll
share my feelings on any subject
you like.

LILY

Mom, you are the only person left
that I love.

(beat)

Can't you say it back?

MARNIE

And what is it, exactly, you want
to validate about "love"? A subject
so important we can't get on with
living out the night?

LILY

Nothing. I'm thirty years old and
you know what? Do you know how many
times I've said "I love you" to
someone romantically; how many
times that's been said to me? Not
once.

MARNIE

That's your choice. I live with
mine.

Marnie picks up the shotgun and checks the shell she already
knows is in the pipe.

LILY

What have you chosen, then? To sit up here as seasons pass and the place rots. You've buried your love. For anyone.

Marnie slams the shotgun down.

Grabs Lily by the arm and leads her into the adjacent living room.

MARNIE

You want an ideal.

Marnie points to the recliner.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

This is real.

(slapping the headrest)

He sat here awake, trapped in his body and choking on his vomit. I wasn't with him. All those years and that's how it ends: alone.

LILY

You couldn't have done anything.

MARNIE

Yeah? Keep telling me what you don't know.

Then the inherited temper as Lily storms to the door and grabs the handle.

Marnie follows, pushing Lily aside, and yanks it open.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Get out of here.

Marnie grabs the truck keys and slaps them into Lily's hands.

LILY

No.

Lily won't budge.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. PORCH. - CONTINUOUS

The rain torrential. Lighting lances the sky.

Like petulant child, Lily is yanked by one arm into the yard and the storm's wrath.

They stop at the truck. Marnie bangs her fist on the hood.

MARNIE
Go. While you can.

She opens the driver's side door.

LILY
If this spreads, how far do you
think I can run?

Lily throws the keys into the darkness and barges back inside, leaving Marnie to stand alone in the rain.

INT. SAM'S LIVING ROOM. - NIGHT

An arm chair is parked in front of an old TV wearing rabbit ears. Where Sam sits with a glass of milk in his hand, absorbed in the TV's glow. No sound. We don't see the screen.

His landline RINGS, startling him.

Keeps RINGING...

He eventually rises to answer, eyes still locked on the screen.

SAM
This is Sheriff Murray.
(beat)
Then why in the hell didn't you
call me yesterday, Donna?!
(beat)
Christ on a cracker. Okay. I'll get
into it.

He holds the phone at his side.

Over his shoulder we see the TV's image: Sam, a decade younger, opens a Christmas gift, seated in this same living room, only decorated with more domestic cheer, in pajamas.

The camera wobbles, passed from its operator to Sam, revealing a middle-aged WOMAN faking irritation at his adoration.

She fusses with her bedhead. The moment warm enough to hug you and also heartbreaking as artifact of his loss.

Against this, the dead line HUMS.

Until he finally hangs up the phone.

INT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. KITCHEN. - LATER

Marnie and Lily sit across from each other, just as that morning. Only now the table hosts their armory and a flickering oil lamp.

A kettle SHRIEKS and Lily fetches it to pour two cups of tea. She notices Marnie's hands shaking and picks up the injured one.

Lily unwraps the bandage. Marnie's fingers have returned to normal length but remain without nails.

LILY

Maybe you need something stronger.

So Lily pours two fingers of whiskey to set beside the tea.

MARNIE

Whatever you say, boss.

LILY

I'm going to resist citing my theory and just be glad you're getting better.

Marnie takes the whiskey and downs it on one gulp. She smirks.

MARNIE

Don't hold back on my account.

(beat)

Thank you. Not having anyone around, I talk to people the way I do animals.

LILY

There's still time.

MARNIE

I doubt it.

LILY

I don't.

MARNIE

Then take this.

She attempts to hand Lily the .45.

LILY

I can't.

Marnie sets the pistol down.

MARNIE

Wanting not to use it is enough.

LILY

Then I know where it is.

They sit in the quiet for a long moment...

Until, as if hit with a taser, Marnie doubles over, clasping her temples.

Lily stands over her mother, rubbing her back.

Marnie INHALES deeply, releasing her head.

MARNIE

They're coming.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCH. - NIGHT

The rainstorm rages. Winds tear horizontally and carry debris with near hurricane force in the immutable dark.

The mare WHINNIES a warning from the horse shelter in her corral.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. - SAME

A Sheriff's truck cuts through the storm, slowly rounding a corner, headlights carving out shapes on the gravel road through a blanket of rain.

INT. SAM'S TRUCK. - CONTINUOUS

Sam jams on the brakes and looks through the

WINDSHIELD / SAM'S POV

To find three tall cottonwoods, torn from their roots, fallen across the road.

He steps out, holding his hat down to keep it on. Water gushes from its brim.

SAM

Shit.

INT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. LIVING ROOM. - MOMENTS LATER

The storm pounds at the windows. The oil lamp on the kitchen table turned low.

Marnie sits with her back to a the wall, facing the kitchen door. The ten-gauge in hand and .30-.30 beside her. Waiting.

MARNIE
Lillian?

LILY (O.S.)
Yes.

Lily appears in the mouth of the hallway, the indigo edges of night drawing her silhouette.

MARNIE
When it starts, get upstairs. You
crawl onto the eave and jump down.

LILY
I heard you the first ten times.
(she chuckles)
That's how I'd sneak out in high
school.

MARNIE
We were aware.

LILY
Why didn't you stop me?

MARNIE
It was your lesson to learn.

A WAIL cuts through the rain and wind: the mare.

Marnie puts her finger to her lips.

MARNIE (CONT'D)
(sotto)
It's time.

Amidst the storm, a CREAK sounds on the porch.

MARNIE (CONT'D)
Go.

Lily slips into the hallway.

BANG. The front door is tested...

BANG. BANG. The back door is tested...

The front door splinters on the frame, then crashes down to reveal driving wind and rain but no assailant.

A flash of lightning illuminates its empty frame.

Marnie aims her shotgun at this negative space.

Another flash of lightning. Then low THUNDER.

A beat.

Longer than we're conditioned to...

A figure appears in the front door. The lamp light catches Gary's face, slack and emotionless.

He steps inside, moving at her when-

SNAP: the bear trap bites into his leg.

He falls. Attempts to jerk his leg free are met with the realization that the trap is chained to the kitchen stove.

Marnie swivels back to the open door as Tick passes through-

And she unloads the ten-gauge a second too late: BOOM.

The doorframe and wall beside it spew wood bits.

Gary rises to his knees. Working the trap for purchase with a disregard for his body because he is no longer in control.

INT. UPSTAIRS. - SAME

Lily jumps at the shotgun's BLAST. She hotfoots into her bedroom and closes the door.

But the window intended for her escape is broken, its glass on the floor. Wind SCREAMING outside.

Steven, seated demurely in the rocking chair, takes shape in the shadows as her eyes adjust.

STEVEN
Hello, darlin'.

Lily yanks open the door and sprints out.

INT. DOWNSTAIRS. - SAME

Marnie crouches in a shooter's position, searching for Tick.

Not finding her target, she moves at Gary to end him-

As Tick grabs her from the side, altering the BLAST that opens a hole in the ceiling instead of her target.

The shotgun clatters away.

Tick heaves her clean into the air and SMASHES her on the kitchen table.

The oil lamp shatters. Its flames lick the floor...

We follow the rivulets of fire across the floor to Gary's bloodied hands cranking open the trap and peeling his leg out, looking like tenderized meat.

Risen on his other leg, Gary pulls a knife from his belt.

Behind him, Tick vanishes into the hallway.

Gary wobbles over Marnie. The long blade glints in a flash of lightning.

INT. UPSTAIRS. - SAME

Feeling her way along, Lily finds a second bedroom door and opens it as lightning flashes. Then, THUNDER.

She slams the door shut, locks it behind her, and shoves a desk against it.

Suddenly, a red light fills the room, at whose center the Creature writhes in coiled centipedal form, python-sized.

It's canted legs cut the air. We witness its newest aberrance: two stubby limbs protrude on each side: small and humanoid, like baby arms.

INT. DOWNSTAIRS. - SAME

Marnie rolls over in the wreckage of the kitchen table, dazed from the impact.

Slow and deliberate, Gary grabs one of her legs.

He yanks her out of the debris and, like a farrier holding a horse's leg, pins her calf under his armpit, twisting the heel upward.

He angles the knife down to saw at her Achilles, aiming to cripple, when-

A figure in a Stetson silhouette fills the doorframe: Sam. He fires: BANG, BANG.

Drilling Gary in the back. Gary tumbles forward onto his knees.

Freed, Marnie crawls toward her .357.

As she reaches the pistol, Gary rises, eyes black, knife raised.

BANG. BOOM. BANG. BOOM. BANG. BOOM.

Both Marnie and Sam perforate Gary's torso and face, splattering his skull into patches of gore on the fridge. His body is flung backward and jerks with the volley.

He slides down the fridge, dead.

Sam helps Marnie up.

SAM

Dammit, girl. I should've listened.

MARNIE

At least you can still aim.

Sam nods.

SAM

Where's Lily?

MARNIE

Upstairs.

BANG. Sam catches a round in the back from Tick, who wastes no time closing on Marnie. The Sheriff collapses from the bullet's force.

Tick grabs Marnie's pistol, twists it back and breaks her trigger finger with a sickening SNAP.

He flings Marnie like a doll into the living room wall. A bone-jarring impact as she bounces off and onto the floor.

Tick surveys the melee, his eyes black and skin nested with dark veins.

We see the flames from the oil are inches from reaching the curtains-

Rising her hands and knees, Marnie yanks a throw rug toward her. On it lays the ten-gauge.

Simultaneously, Sam rolls to a seated position, back against the stove, attempting to aim his pistol.

Tick steps to Sam and raises a foot to stomp in his head when-

BOOM. The second barrel of the ten-gauge severs his raised leg at the knee, tearing the thigh to ribbons and spraying Sam's face with blood.

Tick spins on one foot like a perverse ballerina and drops.

The pistol slips from Sam's hand. He passes out.

Tick begins to crawl toward Marnie.

She struggles to her knees. Ejects both shells as smoke lifts from the aperture.

Dragging his bloody stump, Tick advances.

Ten feet away-

She pats her jacket pockets for shells. Nothing...

Five feet-

Her outer pockets also empty...

Three-

From the inside of her coat, Marnie claims two shells. Loads them. Snaps the barrels into place...

An arm's length away, Tick reaches for her-

As Marnie fires: BOOM. Cutting his planted forearm in half.

He drops on his belly.

She stands. Aims down. BOOM: his head explodes into a red pollen burst.

Tick's body tremors and dies. A black sludge oozes from his cleaved skull.

Marnie draws a breath. She holds her hand in front of her face as the broken finger reshapes itself into normalcy.

Behind her hand, flames shimmer: the oil lamp engulfing the curtains.

INT. DREAMSTATE. LILY'S BEDROOM. - MORNING

A warmly lit child's room. In bed, the child version of Lily seen earlier in photos. She pulls the bedcovers up to her neck.

A younger Marnie enters, holding a book.

CHILD LILY

Tell me a story.

Young Marnie sits in the chair beside the bed. She pats child-Lily's leg.

YOUNG MARNIE

Is that what you want?

INT. UPSTAIRS BEDROOM. - MOMENTS LATER

The door is shoved open, pushing the desk away.

Marnie enters to find Lily at room's center, kneeling in a cone of red light, the Creature circling her. Its humanoid baby-limbs drag lifelessly.

Unlike the other "infected", Lily's eyes remain her own, straining with resistance. Pleading to her mother.

Panicking, Marnie stomps down on the Creature's body. A CRUNCH with the impact. The red light flashes out.

Marnie SCREAMS and her body clenches. She falls backward.

The Creature skitters into the far corner and coils in on itself.

Lily regains physical agency. Looks to her mother, slumped against the wall, then to the coiled Creature.

She moves to Marnie, and they lean into each other.

LILY

I was with it... Part of me wanted
to stay... But I think I know-

MARNIE

You did good.

From downstairs: the POP and ROAR of flame. Smoke roils into the room.

But they both look at the Creature as it uncoils and clings to the wall, slithering toward the open window.

As adrenaline surges through her, Lily releases her mother.

Lily springs to the desk and plows it at the Creature, pinning it against the wall and damn near cutting it in half.

A SHRIEK seems to erupt from the room itself.

Marnie doubles over in agony. The Creature's top half rears away from the wall, flopping on the desk, legs grubbing at air.

Lily helps Marnie to her feet and they shuffle out.

LILY

You can take it, mom.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. - MOMENTS LATER

The two women, holding each other, struggle off the porch as one. Behind them the boarded windows pulse with firelight.

Adrenaline fading, Lily collapses in shock. Her nose begins bleeding.

Marnie shakes her daughter at the shoulders.

MARNIE
You'll be alright.

Lily nods, her head limp on her neck.

Smoke pours from the open door, but Marnie marches back in.

INT. UPSTAIRS BEDROOM. - SAME

The Creature's pincer legs slow and then still.

Its back to the desk top, the underbelly wavers before ripping open. From this gash, a foot long centipedal Creature crawls forth.

The smaller Creature rolls onto the desk. Gathers itself. Then skitters out the broken window.

INT. KITCHEN. - SAME

Hand covering her mouth, Marnie navigates the smoke and flames eating at the walls to find Sam still slumped against the fridge.

His eyes move to her. He COUGHS, still alive. A tough son of a bitch.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCH. ORCHARD. - SAME

Lily stands against the burning home in the background. The wind has quieted but the rain drenches her.

Steven appears from the apple trees, offering his hand. They face each other, an inverted Adam and Eve.

LILY
Will it let her live?

STEVEN
If that's what you want.

LILY
Take me there.

EXT. GRAHAM RANCHOUSE. - MOMENTS LATER

The house wracked with fire. Marnie helps Sam out and down the stairs, both hacking and gasping. In her free hand she carries her trusted .30-30.

Marnie moves just beyond the firelight's ring to set Sam down.

With bleary eyes she searches for her daughter but finds only an impression in the wet earth.

From the treeline, an ATV SPUTTERS and lights flash on.

The beams swerve into the trees and drop out of sight. Over this, the mare WHINNYING against the fire's ROAR.

Marnie sees her horse in the corral, safely distanced from the heat.

She turns to her home. Its memories, pain, and history. Her life there. Fire bursts from the windows, clawing upward, consuming it all.

Against the conflagration, Marnie's figure renders hopeless and tiny.

EXT. GRAHAM BARN. - MOMENTS LATER

The mare is tied to the barn opposite the burning house. The rain has stopped. Marnie tightens the chinch and adjusts the saddle.

Soot plastered to the sweat on his face, Sam leans against the barn.

MARNIE

She's a good horse. Once you're clear of this, she'll settle in and get you to your rig. Call in help from there.

SAM

What are you going to do?

MARNIE

I'm going to get my kid.

She eyes him up and down.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

You gonna make it?

SAM

Just a through-and-through. There's
no god-damn way I'm running.

MARNIE

Okay.

She slides the .30-30 into the scabbard. Then helps him onto the mare as he clamors up with one good arm.

While she adjusts the bridle, he scootches back on the saddle.

Marnie mounts awkwardly. A brief physical comedy ensues as they seek balance, offering some levity in the moment.

Finally, she settles in and takes the reins.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Hang on.

His good arm wraps around her waist. She heels the mare and they canter away.

EXT. COALTHORPE MANSION. CLEARING. - LATER

The mansion stands dark and cavernous with no visible occupancy.

As she ties the mare to a pine, Marnie and Sam scout the property.

They spot the ATV in front of the massive barn, inside of which a red light flickers from the window on a side door.

Sam kneels and produces a micro .38 pistol from his ankle holster.

SAM

My backup.

MARNIE

Pretty smart for an old timer.

SAM

That's how you get to be one.

They walk side-by-side toward the barn.

INT. DREAMSTATE. LILY'S BEDROOM. - NIGHT

The same warmly lit room. Child-Lily under the covers, Young Marnie in the rocking chair beside.

Young Marnie opens the book in her hands.

YOUNG MARNIE
There once was a bear in the
forest.

CHILD LILY
No. Tell me a new story.

YOUNG MARNIE
But this is your favorite.

CHILD LILY
I want you to make one up. Tell me
one about the girl who catches a
spider.

YOUNG MARNIE
I don't know that one.

CHILD LILY
Just ask yourself a question. How
does the girl she catch the spider?

Young Marnie is stuck. The Creature possesses abstract
thinking but no imagination. She closes the book and sits
beside child-Lily, patting her leg.

YOUNG MARNIE
Honey, you're so tired.

Child-Lily kicks off the covers, affecting a pout. Young
Marnie hugs her, but too tightly.

YOUNG MARNIE (CONT'D)
Lie down with me.

Kicking Young Marnie away, child-Lily rolls over. When she
turns back, Lily is her adult self, still in a nightgown.

Young Marnie grabs Lily in a forceful embrace but is shoved
off the bed and against the wall.

LILY
You aren't her.

And Young Marnie becomes the crone from the earlier
dreamstate, a wizened, ghoulish Marnie with fanged teeth.

She backs up against the door to block it. Lily rises to face
her. But instead of striking, Lily strokes the Crone's face.

INT. COALTHORPE BARN. - MOMENTS LATER

Two ranch trucks, parked side by side, face the garage door. Beside them, a pyramid of mutilated bodies rise from the concrete pad: the remains of wildlife and livestock.

Beside this, the Creature, returned to python-size, encircles Lily. It remains insectoid but departed from any single biology. Humanoid limbs have sprouted from its body.

Lily strains against her dreamstate battle.

Steven watches from a few paces away as the conjoined Lily and Creature levitate-

INT. DREAMSTATE. LILY'S BEDROOM. - SAME

Lily reaches around the Crone for the door handle. The Crone HISSES and bites into Lily's shoulder, blood spurting.

Lily takes a fistful of hair that rips free from the scalp.

The Crone releases her jaws and Lily spins her away from the door and onto the floor.

The Crone crabwalks to Lily, then grabs her leg. Lily jerks opens the door-

INT. COALTHORPE BARN. - SAME

As the barn's side door opens softly. Marnie and Sam enter.

Steven is unaware, back turned to the entrants. The Creature and Lily still levitating.

Both Sam and Marnie take aim.

SAM

Don't move.

Steven turns. Holding a pistol loosely at his side.

Marnie levers in a shell. No rule of law for her: BANG.

The shot jerks Steven cleanly into the air. He slides along the concrete to a stop. At this, Lily and the Creature detach and drop.

While Sam keeps his pistol on Steven, Marnie rushes to her daughter. The Creature flees back into the pile of bodies.

Setting down the rifle, Marnie takes Lily's hand.

MARNIE
You're not alone.

Called back to her body, Lily leans into her mother. Marnie looks at her girl.

MARNIE (CONT'D)
I'm here.

Sam lowers his pistol and climbs into the closest truck to look for a key.

A beat before the truck revs to life.

MARNIE (CONT'D)
(to Sam)
Wait.

Marnie grabs a five gallon gas can along the near wall and douses the carcass pile.

She pats her coat pockets, finding a book of matches. Lights one, then the book, dropping them onto the pile. The fire crackles to life, subsuming the bodies.

Marnie helps Lily to the truck; Steven's body twitches behind them. He rises, a hole gaping in his chest from which a dark ooze pours.

Sam slides over to make room for Marnie.

SAM
I think you should drive.

He lifts the hand from his shoulder to show it stained with blood.

Marnie aids Lily into the passenger side, shuts the door and turns to walk around the front of the truck when-

BANG. BANG. The rear window shatters. Lily covers Sam.

Marnie ducks behind the other truck.

Working her way around the driver's side, Marnie looks to her rifle: it's out of reach. Smoke clouds the barn.

Steven staggers at them, moving directly behind the running truck. He aims at Marnie, his mouth moving weirdly. Thumbs back the hammer.

In the cab, Lily shifts the truck into reverse. She floors it, the truck plowing Steven into the concrete wall.

Lily gathers herself after the impact.

She puts the truck in drive and pulls forward. The motion frees Steven's body.

It drops to the ground: PLOP. PLOP. Bisected.

His arms flail and then go still. Black liquid rolls from his open mouth. The skin on his face sallows and sinks in, flaking like charred meat.

Marnie stands over their dead opponent for a beat before surveying the room.

Despite that the carcass-pile is a roaring pyre, she sees a thin blood-trail leading out the side door.

EXT. COALTHORPE BARN. - MOMENTS LATER

The barn's garage door opens and smoke rolls forth. The truck drives out but stops.

INT./ EXT. TRUCK. - CONTINUOUS

Marnie puts the truck in park.

MARNIE
(to Lily)
Can you drive?

LILY
What do you mean?

MARNIE
He needs to get to the hospital.

Lily looks at her mother's. It dawns on her.

LILY
Mom. Please.

MARNIE
I still feel it. But I know where
it's going.

Marnie gets out. Lily follows.

LILY
Just leave.

MARNIE
You bought me time. Thank you. Just
go on ahead, you'll find your way.

Lily tears up.

LILY

Mom, I-

The words melt into a sob.

Marnie wipes the tears from her daughter's cheek.

MARNIE

I know. Always.

They hug, tightly and for a long while.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

I love you.

She kisses Lily on the forehead. Then they release each other.

LILY

You, too.

Lily climbs back into the driver's seat. Marnie follows, aiding the door shut.

Lily turns to her mother.

She nods.

Marnie nods back.

Then the truck eases down the gravel road.

EXT. MEADOW. - LATER

A new day kindles along the eastern horizon. Marnie and the mare are stopped beside the creek as the horse drinks.

Marnie strokes and soothes the mare.

Then mounts and rides toward the looming canyon.

EXT. CANYON MOUTH. - LATER

Bare cottonwood branches point to a lightening sky, bejeweled with dew.

Marnie rides under their canopy.

She slows the mare and dismounts, claiming her .30-30 from the scabbard.

The ground is spotted with blood and, as many times before, she will follow her quarry's trail this way. But alone.

After removing the bridle, Marnie rubs the mare's chin and kisses her on the nose.

MARNIE

Good girl. Time to go home.

Marnie slaps the mare's ass.

The horse trots eastward, stirrups flailing emptily.

EXT. CANYON. CRASH SITE. - LATER

The cliff walls narrow around Marnie in her passage.

She reaches the crash site. No further evidence of the Creature's landing remains, only the obsidian shards she stands on.

A gust rushes out of the wild where ragged peaks, now mantled with snow, are touched by first daylight.

She searches the ground, seeing the blood trail end.

So her eyes scan up the canyon walls.

Three hundred feet above, the granite cliffs protrude in odd cutouts.

She fixes on the northern rim: there, tucked above a jutting ledge, the red light shimmers.

It takes a breath for her to steady herself.

Her eyes find a line up the canyon wall, a game trail wide enough to offer footing, and she begins the climb.

EXT. CANYON WALL. - LATER

Gulping in the cold air, Marnie scrambles up the trail.

To the east, the canyon reveals a V-shaped section of the valley. Lines of smoke extend from the ruins that were once her home.

She turns back up the trail.

EXT. CANYON LEDGE. - LATER

The ledge points like a blade over the canyon, widening where it joins the wall.

In this bowl rests the bloated carcass of a bull elk. His head and antlers lying useless on the frosted granite.

She levers a round into her rifle and aims it from the waist, moving ponderously closer.

Her gaze is on the movement in the elk's torn-open stomach.

She drops the gun.

EXT. / INT. DREAMSTATE. RANCHOUSE. - DAY

Framed by the window, Robert sits back in his recliner and closes his eyes. The sky gray and cloudy.

Just as before, Marnie watches from the porch as Robert contorts in a stoke. Sputum trickles from his mouth.

Paralyzed, he can't breathe, and chokes, spraying out bile.

We're forced to witness this, as helpless as Marnie and for longer than we should...

Tears roll from his eyes. He looks to her through the window, GAGGING. She rushes to the door but it won't open.

She POUNDS on it.

As she rattles the handle, the door finally opens and she charges inside-

To a changed scene: Robert sits upright in his chair, a book in his hands, wearing reading glasses tipped down his nose.

Sunlight spills richly into the living room: impressionistic.

ROBERT

Hi, love.

He closes the book. She rushes to him, taking one of his hands. Kissing it.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Are you going riding?

She holds this hand to her cheek.

MARNIE

No.

ROBERT

You can stay.

The room brightens at this promise.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I need you.

She takes in the setting around her. A void inside her being filled with warmth. There is no pain here.

Marnie steps away from Robert to touch the vibrant white orchids drinking sun on the sill of the kitchen window.

She looks out that window to spy Calypso nuzzling the mare in the corral, playing.

As she moves further from Robert, his body shakes. First a tremor. Then more violently.

He begins CHOKING.

She walks back to him, taking his outreached hand. He recovers.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Help me.

But instinct compels her on, distrusting the unreality. Pain being much of what it means to live.

Two photos stand on the living room coffee table. She drops his hand to move to them.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

She picks up the first, turning it to see Lily as a girl on a riverbank, holding a rainbow trout bigger than her arm.

She picks up the second: Lily as a woman, in front of her school in autumn light, the leaves falling and fallen around her.

Robert spasms. His body clenching into an accelerated death. His hands reach up.

But she doesn't take them, looking back at the photo. Instead, Marnie pulls a chair next to him and sits.

MARNIE

It's fine, Robert. You can go.

He stiffens, eyes panicking.

ROBERT

Stay.

Marnie kisses his forehead. Brushes back his hair.

Then stands and walks out of the door.

EXT. CANYON RIM. - CONTINUOUS

Marnie wakes to the Creature's unnameable form grasping at her legs.

She kicks free of it.

The Creature coils, then charges her. As it does, she grabs the .30-30 from the ground by the barrel, swinging it like a bat and CRACKING the stock on impact.

The Creature somersaults away before darting into the elk carcass.

A beat.

Then an explosion of red light. Marnie is knocked onto her ass.

And a human fucking hand bursts from the elk's stomach! Flesh dangling. Its movement defying the joint's physiology.

The hand is followed by an arm...

a shoulder...

then a head of matted black hair.

A humanoid slides out of the elk, covered in gelatinous viscera.

The humanoid Creature before her curls in the fetal position.

In place of one arm is a row of centipede legs. The exoskeleton covers half its torso. Both legs are human but crooked.

It unfurls to wobble on them and stand, its back to her.

When the humanoid Creature turns, there is no mistaking a disfigured Robert. Flesh hangs in strips but one side of his face remains whole.

The humanoid Creature lumbers toward her, mouth moving on disconnected hinges.

THE CREATURE
(guttural hiss)
Sta... stay.

Marnie scoots backward.

The Creature sidesteps along the cliff ledge just as the sun crests the ridge, revealing it as a rotted, malevolent facsimile.

THE CREATURE (CONT'D)
(choking)
I. Lo-lo-lov-

Marnie springs to her feet. She charges and tackles the Creature off the ledge.

Both of them drop out of sight.

We stay here as the sun lights the elk and frost and stone now empty of anything living.

EXT. CANYON FLOOR. - MOMENTS LATER

The combatants lie on the shale. The Creature flails both its insect and humanoid limbs. A few feet away, Marnie coughs blood.

She spots a gash in the Creature's body where a red object, fist-sized, shines dully: its "heart".

In agony, Marnie rolls over. Crawls toward the quivering Creature.

Marnie rips out the "heart", connected tendrils snapping with her effort.

She smashes it into the earth and it shatters.

The Creature's body ceases movement.

Slowly, it disintegrates to ash.

She rolls onto her back. Sun slides down the canyon wall in a horizontal line...

Its white-gold touches her boots. She looks to their tips and smiles.

Her eyes remain open, focusing intently on something beyond the edge of sight. She reaches for this-

Then her hand drops. Her eyes still.

And Marnie Graham allows herself to die.

INT. TRUCK. - SAME

Lily's eyes are framed in the rear-view's reflection. In their intensity, their fight, those eyes are her mother's.

And the same light that will greet all life in the valley
this day pours through the windshield, exclaiming renewal.

Lily looks to Sam. He is pale but alive.

LILY
You'll be alright.

EXT. HIGHWAY. - CONTINUOUS

The truck turns off a gravel road onto the rural two-lane
highway and speeds toward town.

Frost glitters the land like a multitude of stars.

THE END.