

LITTER

Written by

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FADE IN:

OPENING MONTAGE:

Various HOME VIDEOS and PHOTOS of healthy, happy DOGS at their respective homes. INTERCUT each dog video or photo with its corresponding GRAVE.

-HOME VIDEO: In a wheat field, a poodle retrieves a stick and brings it back to its owner who operates the video camera.

DOG OWNER #1 (O.S.)
Atta girl. Wanna go again?

-The poodle's grave: a mound of dirt marked by a simple cross made of sticks and twine.

-POLAROID PHOTO: A black lab puppy sits in a sink covered in bubbles. The polaroid is labeled "Bubble Trouble!"

-A small plot of freshly packed dirt, the lab's grave.

-HOME VIDEO: A terrier waits patiently as a dog treat rests on the bridge of its nose.

DOG OWNER #2 (O.S.)
Leave... Leave... Okay!

-The terrier's grave is a rectangle of dirt outlined with stones.

-PHOTO: A golden retriever poses amongst matching denim shirts, a grocery store family-portrait.

-Another plot of dirt.

-CLOSE ON The back of a DOG'S HEAD. It's eating food from a bowl.

-A rifle points down at the back of the dog's skull, the face behind the rifle is blurry, out-of-focus. The dog inhales the food, unaware.

EXT. ROAD INTO TOWN - DAY

A strip of asphalt leading to nowhere.

A wooden PENNY the size of a hula-hoop marks a faded sign:
"Welcome to COPPER HILL."

Below the sign: POPULATION 300. Spray-painted across the town's population "NO DOGS" in big red letters.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - DAY - ESTABLISHING

Dense forest covers the slaloming hills. Patches of clear-cut mar the landscape. We're in logging country.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - DAY

In a clearing, behind a fallen tree, the BUGGUM SISTERS.

The youngest sister, TONGUE (10), clears away debris from the forest floor. Judging by the stains and dirt, Tongue wears the same pair of overalls day after day. A wad of chewing tobacco bulges her bottom lip.

The middle sister, MARY-ANNE (13), twists her hair into braids. Although wearing similar garb as Jack, Mary-Anne exudes more traditional femininity. She's already bored with small-town life.

Looking down the sights of a .22, the eldest, JACK (16), waits for something to shoot. It's not obvious that she's a girl with her short hair tucked under a ball cap and thick Carhartt jacket.

Tongue finds a bottle cap caked with earth. She squints at the red and gold bottle cap before pocketing it.

Tongue digs in the front pouch of her overalls and pulls out a wire loop. She ties one end to a sapling and positions the loop. Tongue is setting a SNARE TRAP. Finally, Tongue takes out a hunk of dried meat and baits the snare.

Jack eyes Tongue, who is clearly making too much noise for her liking.

JACK

You done? Good, now sit your ass down and quit spookin'.

Tongue sits her ass down next to Mary-Anne.

TONGUE

(whispers proud)
That's a slip right there.

MARY-ANNE

(whispers)

You don't bait slips. Rabbits don't eat that shit.

TONGUE

(whisper)

The rabbits I catch do.

MARY-ANNE

(whispers)

You couldn't catch a fart in a can.

Tongue glares at her sister then cracks a grin.

Mary-Anne screws up her face, pushes Tongue away.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)

Come on that's nasty!

Jack turns away from her rifle.

JACK

Can't you two shut up for a minute?

TONGUE

She was askin'!

MARY-ANNE

Ain't my fault you can't catch nothin'--

JACK

Shut up.

(beat)

What's it gonna be? You settlin'?
Or we leavin'?

TONGUE

(nonchalant)

I'm settled.

JACK

Mary-Anne?

Mary-Anne relinquishes a nod.

Jack reassumes her position behind her rifle.

Tongue turns her attention to her overall pouch, pulls out a strip of Juicy Fruit.

Mary-Anne watches Tongue unwrap the gum.

Tongue notices her staring. She rips the gum in half, then into quarters and throws a quarter to her sister.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - EVENING (HOURS LATER)

An egg-yolk sun splinters through the trees.

Tongue sleeps against the log, her head droops forward like a plant starved of water.

BANG!

The gunshot snaps Tongue upright.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

The sisters rove through the brush. Tongue walks with a noticeable limp, her right leg drags every step.

They stop:

Grounded in the foliage, a young doe wheezes and mewls. Its hooves twitch at the air, still trying to flee.

Tongue watches with indifference as Jack unsheathes a hunting knife from her hip.

Off screen, Jack ends the deer's pain with a rend and gurgle.

Tongue spots another, larger doe trotting side to side at a distance, observing the slaughter.

Tongue stares at what she can only assume is the fallen deer's mother.

TITLE: LITTER

INT. BUGGUM HOME - GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a mason jar. It's home to half a dozen bottle caps, all red and gold.

Tongue's hand drops the bottle cap she found in the forest into the jar.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - PARENT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A wood-panel TV plays an episode of Jeopardy. Trebek reads a clue.

TREBEK (O.S.)
 (filtered through TV)
 In the first of several Nobel Prizes won at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center, the high rate of new particle production was traced to a new kind of particle, the charm type of this.

BILL
 What is a quark.

BILL BUGGUM (40s), the girls' father, sits up in his bed. He watches the game show with weary focus. A bowl of pork and beans rests on his lap. His spoon tremors in his hand.

CONTESTANT (O.S.)
 (filtered through TV)
 What is a quark.

ON TV: Trebek "Correct."

Dinner in their laps, the girls eat facing the TV. Jack looks at their father, who never takes his eyes off the screen.

JACK
 Eat up, Daddy. Don't make me eat it for you.

Army memorabilia marks the room: A framed PHOTO of Bill in full fatigues surrounded by his three daughters and a woman, presumably the girl's MOTHER. They're all smiling.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - KITCHEN - LATER

Judging by the decor, or lack thereof, the family lives just short of squalor.

Jack washes the dishes. Mary-Anne dries. Jack looks over her shoulder towards the staircase.

JACK
 (yelling upstairs)
 Tongue, you're gettin' picked up in
 10.

PARENT'S BEDROOM

ON TV: Pixilated ducks fall out of the sky.

Tongue and her father fire plastic guns at the TV.

TONGUE
I don't wanna.

JACK (O.S.)
You gotta.

TONGUE
Why?

JACK (O.S.)
'Cause I said.

TONGUE
Why?

JACK
Whoop ya ass that's why.

TONGUE
Waitin'.

Tongue continues firing at the TV.

ON TV: A dog pokes its head up from out of the bushes.

Tongue stares at the dog on the TV. She shoots at it.

INT. JAMES RAE'S TRUCK - NIGHT

JAMES RAE (40s) idles behind the wheel. He wears an adult-sized cub scouts uniform, cap included. James is a clean-cut, napkin-in-lap type guy -- one of the few in Copper Hill.

Sitting beside him in the middle seat, JIMMY RAE (6) looks like a miniature version of his father. (Whenever we see Jimmy, he is wearing his cub scouts uniform.)

Wearing the same cub scout uniform as Jimmy and James, Tongue piles into the passenger seat and yanks on her seat belt. She doesn't look at Jimmy.

JAMES
All set, kiddo?

TONGUE
Mhm.

James rolls out.

CUB SCOUTS (PRELAP)
 On my honour, I will do my best
 To do my duty to God and my country-

INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

James leads four junior CUB SCOUTS (aged 6-10), including Tongue and Jimmy, through the Scout Oath. Tongue mumbles the words.

CUB SCOUTS
 -and to obey the Scout Law.
 To help other people at all times;
 To keep physically strong,
 mentally awake, and morally
 straight.

James makes the cub scout sign: his right arm straight out, fingers making "wolf ears." A little too close to a Nazi salute.

The cubs follow suit. Except Tongue, whose arm is bent at the elbow, wolf ears floppy.

James gives Tongue a reassuring smile and she begrudgingly straightens up.

LATER

Sitting in a circle, each scout has two strips of rope. They follow along as James demonstrates a Hercules knot. Jimmy sits in his father's lap.

JAMES
 Remember, "Right over left, left
 over right - makes a knot both tidy
 and tight."
 (beat)
 But be careful, if you double over
 with the same hand, like this...

James demonstrates a granny knot.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 Now you have a granny knot, which
 is vastly inferior to the Hercules
 knot--

TONGUE
Whaddaya call this one?

Tongue holds up her rope that resembles a noose. James looks a bit concerned.

JAMES
That's a poacher's knot. Where did you learn that?

TONGUE
My sister Jack. I use it for my wires.

JAMES
Wires?

TONGUE
Slips.

James stares at Tongue.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
Y'know, snares. For rabbits.

JAMES
Cubs don't usually make snares, but thank you for sharing, Lily.
(beat)
Okay, a fisherman's knot.

PRELAP: The *CLICK-CLACK* of a projector switching slides.

LATER

Projected on a canvas screen: A black bear.

The room dark, James flips through the animal slide show.

The cubs' faces are glazed over; they've seen this slide show a hundred times. Tongue looks especially bored.

JAMES
Black bears are rare but dangerous. If you spot one, stay calm. Do not run. Make yourself big and back up slow the way you came.

Click-clack.

ON SCREEN: A copperhead snake.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 Never provoke a copperhead. If you
 get bit, don't panic, keep your
 heart rate down and get help.

Click-clack.

ON SCREEN: A snarling DOG. Foam covers its gritted teeth.
 James stares at the slide. He clenches up.

Then:

Click-clack.

ON SCREEN: An eastern mountain lion.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 Mountain Lions...

EXT/INT. JAMES RAE'S TRUCK (MOVING) - NIGHT

James' truck rolls to a stop outside the Buggum house.

JAMES
 ...And always keep your safety on
 when walking. Barrel pointed to the
 ground.

Tongue nods; she's heard this before.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 I know I'm not your father. I can't
 tell you what to do.

TONGUE
 Don't stop ya.

James smiles as Tongue opens the truck door and gets out.

JAMES
 Just... be careful.

TONGUE
 Always am.

JAMES
 Don't go shootin' nobody.

TONGUE
 Never do.

JAMES

See you next week. We're makin'
belt buckles.

TONGUE

I wear overalls.

She slams the door.

EXT. STORM DRAIN - NIGHT

Water trickles out of the concrete mouth of a large culvert,
its insides coated with graffiti.

Bandana hanging around his neck, CARL MYERS (17) shakes a can
of spray paint in his hand.

Mary-Anne sits on the lip of the drain. Her feet dangle over
the steady stream.

MARY-ANNE

What about Asheville? Or Boone?

CARL

I'm not leavin' one small shit town
for another. I'm goin' big. New
York. Tokyo. Antarctica.

MARY-ANNE

Think we can afford that?

CARL

We?

MARY-ANNE

(coy)
Shut the fuck up.

CARL

You're a little young, Buggum. I
can't be holdin' your hand the
whole time.

MARY-ANNE

I can hold my own hand.

CARL

Just sayin'. Gotta be tough.

MARY-ANNE

You don't think I'm tough.

CARL
Not tough enough.

Mary-Anne takes Carl's provocation as a challenge as he pulls up his bandana and sprays a rough outline of a face onto a bare patch of concrete.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tongue lies wide-eyed on the top mattress of a bunk bed. Mary-Anne's bottom bunk is empty.

In the corner, Jack sleeps on a mattress on the floor.

Tongue rolls over. On her side board, stars have been etched into the wood. She slides a pocket knife from under her pillow, unfolds the blade, and begins to carve a fresh star.

JACK
Go to sleep.

TONGUE
Not tired.

JACK
Get tired.

TONGUE
Mary-Anne's not gettin' tired.

JACK
Come on--

TONGUE
All ride home James Rae wouldn't stop jawin' my ear off. "Too young to hunt. Too young to trap." Hell does he know? Shoulda told him to shut his trap.

Tongue pauses her carving.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
When d'you think Mama's comin' back?

JACK
She's not.

TONGUE
Is so. She told me. Said she was gonna surprise us. Remember, Jack?
(MORE)

TONGUE (CONT'D)
 (pause)
 Jack?

JACK
 I'm sleepin', Tongue.

TONGUE
 (to herself)
 She's comin' back.

She scores the final line to her new star.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - PARENT'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Mary-Anne sifts through her mother's jewelry box. She palms a pair of earrings.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - BATHROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON a flame. Mary-Anne sterilizes a darning needle with a lighter.

She steels herself in the mirror, lines up the needle to her earlobe but stops.

She moves the needle to the upper ridge of her ear. She pierces the cartilage and slides the needle through.

EXT. BUGGUM HOME - BACK YARD - DAY

The girls' house sits in a sprawling, unkempt property surrounded by pine. No sign of neighbours.

Bent over a picnic table, Tongue squints cockeyed down the sights of her BB Gun.

POP.

TONGUE
 Dang.

Planted on the roof of an old dog kennel, dimpled Barbie Dolls take the fire.

Tongue tilts the stock of her gun, shakes in the next round, pumps the cocking lever three times and aims...

POP.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

Dang it.

Tongue turns to Jack who sits on an over-turned bucket biting her nails.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

When do I get my .22? Pellets don't fly straight.

Jack gets up and joins Tongue at the picnic table. She takes the BB gun, pumps thrice and lines up a doll.

POP.

A pellet dents the Barbie's chest.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

The wind died. You know it did.

Jack offers the BB gun back to Tongue.

JACK

You'll get yours.

TONGUE

When?

JACK

When you're ready.

TONGUE

Drives me up the wall when say stuff like that. Know that, Jack? To the goddamn ceiling like a squirrel with a tail fire.

JACK

I know.

TONGUE

Then why you keep sayin' it?

JACK

'Cause I like seein' you all upside-down.

Jack smirks as grumbling Tongue pumps the cocking lever.

EXT. TRESTLE - DAY

A single flower reaches through a crack in the tracks like some tired symbol of perseverance -- only until Tongue's foot stomps it down.

BB gun slung around her shoulder, Tongue limps along the tracks lagging behind her sisters. Jack stops so she can catch up.

TONGUE

Quit stoppin'. I wanna be back here.

Tongue hobble-jogs past her sisters.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

I'll run laps 'round you if I want.

Jack and Mary-Anne share a look: stubborn ol' Tongue.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - DAY

Far ahead of her sisters, Tongue hustles up to the same clearing as yesterday.

As she crests the hill, her eyes fix onto something. Something rustling. She hears this low whine, like when a train hits a patch of rusted track.

Tongue creeps closer. She stops.

TONGUE

That's...

Hind leg caught in her snare trap, a DOG struggles to free itself. The dog is medium-sized and looks like a German Shepard-Terrier mix.

Upon seeing Tongue, the dog's whine bends to a growl. It moves quickly and its hind leg yanks back, only tightening the wire.

In shock, brain-blood pounding the back of her eyes, Tongue tries to think. She eyes the dog. It looks healthy.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

You don't look sick to me.

EXT. TRESTLE - MOMENTS LATER

Tongue runs back down to Jack and Mary-Anne who have just reached the end of the trestle.

MARY-ANNE
Where's the fire?

TONGUE
(catching her breath)
Couple turkeys headin' down the hill.

Tongue flaps an arm to the left.

JACK
Turkeys?

TONGUE
Big ol' fat ones. A family. We can still cut 'em off if we're quick.

JACK
They'll circle back. We'll stick to the clearing.

Jack pushes past Tongue.

TONGUE
Fine. But I'm gonna roast me a gobbler.

Tongue heads to the left, praying her sisters follow.

MARY-ANNE
Good luck baggin' one with that pea shooter.

Tongue keeps stride.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
(to Jack, but loud enough for Tongue to hear)
Tongue just doesn't want us to see her empty slip.

Jack watches Tongue go, pitying her youngest blood. She turns to Mary-Anne.

JACK
Come on.

They follow Tongue down the hill.

EXT. LUMBER MILL - DAY

A rusted lumber mill lies dormant, shut down. The sound of a SAW in the distance.

BEHIND THE LUMBER MILL

A whirring blade eats through the rings of a tree.

Carl operates a portable sawmill. His visor upturned, Carl squints through the maelstrom of saw dust.

Carl's scraggly, whiskey-perfumed father, DENVER MYERS (35), loads up the next tree set for the mill. Denver sees a slug riding the tree. He rotates the log so that the slug is in line with the blade.

DENVER

For my next trick.

Denver lifts a half-empty mickey from his back pocket and takes a pull. He glances over to his son and nearly chokes on the firewater.

Denver runs over, kills the machine. He smacks Carl hard on the back of the head, making his visor flip down.

DENVER (CONT'D)

You fuckin' stupid?

Denver pulls a safety lever down, securing the log in place.

DENVER (CONT'D)

Know how many arms this thing's chewed off?

(beat)

Life's out to fuck you. Don't go buyin' it dinner.

Denver points to the static saw blade.

DENVER (CONT'D)

Touch it.

CARL

Touch it?

DENVER

You dumb *and* deaf? Touch it.

Carl touches his forefinger to a blade tooth.

DENVER (CONT'D)

That sharp?

Carl stares.

Denver pushes his son's finger down.

DENVER (CONT'D)

That sharp?

Carl winches, pulls his hand away.

Denver shakes his head.

DENVER (CONT'D)

Soft as baby shit.

He fires the machine back up before heading back over to his post.

Operating a forklift, James delivers the freshly cut lumber to the side of his truck. His son Jimmy sits in his lap.

EXT/INT. JAMES RAE'S TRUCK (MOVING) - DAY

Stacked with lumber, James's truck trundles down the road.

James and Jimmy pass by Penny Hill Elementary - the tiniest school house you've ever seen.

James stares forward as he reminisces.

JAMES

Remember when you brought Mom's lemon squares to school and Rebecca Townsend took one sniff and puffed up like a chipmunk? They don't make kids like they used to.

(beat)

Maybe I'll whip us up a batch.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - PARENT'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Bill hits eject on the VCR and pops in a VHS tape from a stack. He hits play. The Jeopardy opening theme song filters through the TV speakers as Bill gets back into bed.

The girls fork down another dinner.

MARY-ANNE
This turkey sure tastes an awful
lot like pork'n beans.

Tongue pays no mind to Mary-Anne, concerned with her thoughts alone.

TONGUE
What happened to Cheerio?

Jack glances at Tongue.

JACK
Eat up, Tongue.

MARY-ANNE
(provoking)
She stopped eatin'. Eyes crossed up
all sigogglin'. She'd let out this
whine. Kept me up all night.

Mary-Anne makes a whiney crying sound.

JACK
Don't rile her up.

MARY-ANNE
What? That's what happened.

JACK
It's not what happened.

TONGUE
Well what happened then?

BILL
(to the TV)
What is Tallahassee.

JACK
Nothin' happened.

TONGUE
I'm just askin'. What's wrong with
askin'?

JACK
'Cause I said.

TONGUE
'Cause why?

JACK
 'Cause I'll rip your name outta
 your mouth that's why.

Tongue stands up, her nervous energy taking hold.

TONGUE
 I just wanna know how what caused
 the sick -- how it started. Nobody
 tells me nothin'.

JACK
 Settle down.

BILL
 (to TV)
 Who is Augustus.

Mary-Anne continues to try to spook her little sister.

MARY-ANNE
 Nobody knows.

TONGUE
 Whaddaya mean *nobody*.

MARY-ANNE
 Some say it was gas from the mine,
 some say bad chow from the
 government. But I know the truth: a
 coyote screwed the Hewitt's hound,
 and it spread the sick to Mickey--

JACK
 Quit shittin' out nonsense.

BILL
 (to TV)
 What is the Warsaw Pact.

MARY-ANNE
 Ain't no nonsense.

TONGUE
 Well tell me what really happened
 then--

JACK
 Maybe when your balls drop.

BILL
 What is...

Bill's face twitches as he tries to remember the answer.

BILL (CONT'D)
Wrong! Wrong!

Bill's outburst sends his dinner airborne.

Jack gets up to calm her father. She holds him close.

JACK
It's alright, it's alright...
You'll get the next one.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - KITCHEN - EVENING

Tongue does the dishes. She checks her shoulder before scraping leftovers from a plate into the front pouch of her overalls.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - FRONT DOOR - EVENING

Knapsack tight around her shoulders, Tongue creeps out the front door.

EXT. TRESTLE - DUSK

Tongue bikes down the tracks as the sun hangs low.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - NIGHT

Flashlight leading the way, Tongue hurries up the same hill.

She stops.

The dog is still trapped in the snare, just as she left it. The dog tries to spin around to see Tongue, once again yanks its bad leg and bark-whimpers, helpless.

TONGUE
Hey... It's okay. I ain't gonna do
nothin'.
(pause)
You ain't sick, are ya little guy?

The dog spins onto its back revealing its bulging belly, rows of protruding nipples -- she's PREGNANT.

Tongue cranes her neck forward.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
You ain't no little guy.

MOMENTS LATER

Tongue pops the flashlight in her mouth.

With a rope noose looped along a stick, Tongue ropes the dog's neck, leashing the animal.

TONGUE
Easy, big Mama.

Tongue fastens the leash to a tree.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
If I cut you loose, you gotta
promise not to get all crazy on me.
Alright?
(beat)
Alright.

Tongue takes out her knife and carefully unties the wire from the sapling.

The dog hops free from the tree but the wire is still tight around its back leg. The dog spins to face Tongue, who holds her knife at the ready.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
(softly)
It's okay. It's okay.

The dog growls, on guard but it appears equally worn out. Tongue backs up slow.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
You're just hungry.

Tongue takes a handful of dinner scraps from her pouch. She tosses them to the dog.

The dog sniffs then devours the food.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
Big hungry Mama. Eatin' for four or
five I reckon.

Tongue chucks another handful of scraps. She scans the trees with her flashlight.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
Wonder if Mr. Mama's around...

EXT. DEEP WOODS - NIGHT

The dog in tow, Tongue leads the way.

Tongue flashes her light back on the dog: it's favouring its right hind leg, the wire still embedded in its fur.

TONGUE
You got a bum leg too.

Tongue times her steps so that her limp matches the dog's.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
We're the same.
(realizing)
That's my fault.

EXT. FOREST OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT

Tongue and the dog edge out of the woods onto a yard of tall grass. About 100 yards away, a boarded-up bungalow basks in blue moonlight.

TONGUE
Let's hope she's still open.

EXT. ABANDONED BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Tongue creeps through a lawn of high thistles and pale trash, around the side of the dilapidated house.

TONGUE
Wait here.

She Hercules knots her dog rope to a cinder block.

Tongue reaches the front door, listens, knocks...
Nothing.

She reaches for the knob but it's missing, long removed.
Tongue nudges the door with her foot. The door yawns open...

TONGUE (CONT'D)

Hello?

(pause)

Anyone campin' out?

She pans her flashlight, revealing the interior: empty, stripped-down, forgotten.

INT. ABANDONED BUNGALOW - BEDROOM - DAY

Tongue enters an empty room. All that remains is a rusted bed frame wraithed by a once white sheet.

Tongue pulls the sheet off the frame and spreads it in the corner.

EXT. ABANDONED BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Tongue exits the house to find the dog waiting for her.

TONGUE

Don't get your hopes up.

INT. ABANDONED BUNGALOW - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tongue gets the dog's attention with a few more scraps. She tosses the food onto the sheet.

TONGUE

Go get it.

The dog sniffs for the food as Tongue ties the leash to the bed frame.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

Not that I don't trust you.

The dog finishes the scraps and looks up at Tongue for more. Tongue pats her empty pouch, shows her open hands.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

All out, girl. I'll bring more tomorrow.

(beat)

Must be thirsty.

Tongue pulls off her knapsack and takes out a water bottle. Tongue realizes that the spout is too narrow for a dog to drink from.

She looks around for a bowl.

INT. ABANDONED BUNGALOW - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Flaking wallpaper, busted cupboards. The copper wiring has been gutted from the walls.

Tongue flicks the light switch. Nothing.

She tries the sink. Dry.

Opens the fridge. The smell makes her retch.

She keeps looking. Checking drawers, cupboards.

TONGUE

Fucker.

Looking up, her eyes land on a little domed light chained to the ceiling.

MOMENTS LATER

Grunting with each push, Tongue edges the fridge along the linoleum.

With the fridge in place, Tongue opens the door, fights off the stink, and climbs the racks like rungs.

On top the fridge, Tongue inspects the light fixture. She starts unscrewing the burnt-out bulb.

INT. ABANDONED BUNGALOW - BEDROOM - LATER

Tongue tears a strip of duct tape with her teeth and cross-layers the strips to cover the hole in the now dismantled light fixture.

She pours water into the makeshift dog bowl, checking for leaks. It holds.

Tongue places it by the dog.

TONGUE

Here you go.

Tongue watches the dog lap away. The wire snare is still wrapped around the dog's hind leg.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

Can I get that for ya?

Tongue creeps toward the dog's back leg.

The dog bares its teeth, snarls at the encroaching Tongue.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

Okay. Okay.

Tongue retreats.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

What do I call you...

Big Mamma? Nipple. Pin Ball.

Hammerhead.

Done drinking, the dog lies down on its side, flashing Tongue her bulging stomach.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

Belly. I reckon that's suitable.

This is your new home, Belly. Wish
it was nicer.

(beat)

Can't wait for you to meet my Mama.

She loves dogs.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - BATHROOM - NEXT MORNING

Wrapped in a towel post-shower, Mary-Anne tidies up her split-ends with a pair of safety scissors. She finishes up and pops the scissors into her make-up bag.

Next, she takes out a black sharpie. She pulls the top off and uses the marker as eye liner.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Jack knifes lard into a hot skillet. Hunks of potato follow the sizzle.

Tongue tries to slip by her older sister. Jack stops her with a bowl of oatmeal.

JACK

Before you weasel outta here, feed
your daddy.

TONGUE

What?

JACK

Come home late, pay the piper. I'm
the piper.

Tongue takes the bowl.

JACK (CONT'D)

Two pills, orange bottle. Crush up
and mix in. Ten mouthfuls.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - PARENT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Tongue spoons up a gob of oatmeal as Trebek interviews the
contestants on the TV.

TONGUE

All aboard the oatmeal express.
Next stop, my daddy.

Bill accepts the food without taking his eyes off of the
screen.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

What d'you think made the dogs
sick? I know the Myer's dog got it.
And Buffalo got it. And RC's little
pup. It's like when Emmett gave the
school chicken pox.

Tongue puts the spoon down. She leans in real close.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

(whispers)
Wanna know a secret?
(beat)
I found one.

Bill, eyes still on the TV, mumbles to himself.

BILL

Shootin' em was good.

Beat. Tongue's reaction's says it all.

TONGUE

What'd you say?

Bill doesn't answer.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
How'd they get sick?

Bill continues to stare at the TV like nothing happened.

Tongue takes the TV remote and lowers the volume.

She speaks as if giving a Jeopardy clue:

TONGUE (CONT'D)
This is how the dogs got sick.

BILL
What is...

Bill's face curls, not sure of the answer.

TONGUE
This person knows how the dogs got sick.

BILL
Who is Guthrie.

Amazed it worked, Tongue wraps her arms around her father.

TONGUE
Thank you, Daddy.

She takes off for the door only to double back and grab the remote. She turns the volume back up.

EXT. BUGGUM HOME - GARAGE - LATER

A deer carcass--skinned and gutted--hangs from the ceiling by three reinforced coat hangers.

Sitting on the ground, Anne-Marie dips a Q-tip into a bucket of white house paint. She's painting her finger nails.

Holding a toolbox, Jack steps in front of her, blocking her sun light.

JACK
Seen the mower?

MARY-ANNE
Can you move? You're in my light.

Jack takes a step over.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
Tongue took it.

JACK
Why'd she take it?

MARY-ANNE
(smart-ass)
Probably to mow something.

JACK
Mower's busted. Where'd she go?

MARY-ANNE
Just rode off with it.

Jack steps back into Mary-Anne's light.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
(smart-ass)
It's busted. Maybe she's gettin' it fixed.

JACK
Shut up.

MARY-ANNE
Quit askin' questions then.

Mary-Anne wiggles her toes at Jack.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
Wanna get my toes?

MONTAGE OF TONGUE BIKING INTO TOWN -- AN UPBEAT OLLA BELL REED FOLK SONG PLAYS OVER THE MONTAGE

--Secured with two ropes, the lawn mower trundles along behind Tongue on her bike.

--Tongue bikes down a dirt road that stretches out for miles.

--Just like her walking, one leg dominates while biking. This gives an odd bob to her cycling.

--She passes by a herd of sheep.

--Tongue turns onto a paved road. She checks behind her as the lawn mower nearly tips over.

--She rides past a gas station. Its sign weathered and discolored, the only pump in Copper Hill.

--Tongue pedals past the one-room school house.

--She takes another turn, coming to the main patch of homes: bungalows and cabins, many of them boarded up and abandoned.

END MONTAGE

EXT. GUTHRIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Tongue walks up the stone path of a cozy cottage. A mailbox has the words "GUTHRIE" printed on it.

She goes to open the door but MRS. GUTHRIE (60s, floral dress) swings the door open first. Mrs. Guthrie is all smiles, like too-sweet birthday cake.

MRS. GUTHRIE
 Good morning my little mountain
 girl.
 (off the mower)
 It's -- what day is it?

Tongue plays dumb.

TONGUE
 Dang it. I flipped my Saturdays
 with my Tuesdays. Guess I had
 mowin' on my mind.

MRS. GUTHRIE
 Well fill your boots. I ain't
 stoppin' you.

TONGUE
 I don't wanna over cut. I'll come
 back Saturday.

MRS. GUTHRIE
 Whatever floats your boat.

Mrs. Guthrie goes to close the door.

TONGUE
 Hear that? My tummy's a rumblin'
 like washing machine. You got any
 left overs?

INT. GUTHRIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kitschy floral patterns plaster the walls and furniture, contradicting the stag head mounted over the mantle.

Tongue sits on the flowery sofa.

MRS. GUTHRIE

Here we are.

Mrs. Guthrie hands her a plate of cold mashed potatoes and a can of soda with a straw tucked through the tab.

TONGUE

Thanks.

(pause)

You know, on my way here, I was thinking in my head -- didn't the Guthrie's used to have a dog?

Mrs. Guthrie perks up.

MRS. GUTHRIE

Reuben! Our baby. Would you like to see some photos?

MOMENTS LATER

Mrs. Guthrie hefts a box of photo albums onto the coffee table.

TONGUE

Is that...

MRS. GUTHRIE

I take Reuben's picture everyday. It makes you appreciate what you got. Don't worry, I'll just show you his greatest hits.

Mrs. Guthrie cracks opens the top photo album.

Various Polaroid PHOTOS of REUBEN -- a big black lab. Each Polaroid has a caption.

CLOSE ON a photo of Reuben as a pup having a bubble bath. The label reads "Bubble Trouble!" (It's the same photo we saw in the opening montage.)

MRS. GUTHRIE (CONT'D)
 Reuben was a good boy. As loyal as
 the stars in the sky. But not half
 as bright.

A deep belly laugh burbles out of Mrs. Guthrie.

MRS. GUTHRIE (CONT'D)
 He'd bark at trees he didn't like,
 and the colour red.

TONGUE
 I believe dogs are colour blind.

MRS. GUTHRIE
 Not Reuben. He saw the whole
 spectrum.

She flips the page.

MRS. GUTHRIE (CONT'D)
 He wasn't much of a walker--more of
 a dancer!

A photo of Reuben on his hind legs "dancing" with a younger
 Mrs. Guthrie holding his paws. The label: "Reuben's got the
 Moves!"

MRS. GUTHRIE (CONT'D)
 But he loved cruisin' more than
 anything.

A photo of Reuben hanging out the window of a pickup. It's
 labelled "Reuben on the Go!"

MRS. GUTHRIE (CONT'D)
 One day Pauly strapped a pair of
 goggles onto Reuben, wrapped a
 scarf around his neck, and drove up
 and down the strip. Everyone was in
 hysterics. Pilot Reuben was the hit
 of the summer.

TONGUE
 I reckon I wouldna minded seein'
 that.

MRS. GUTHRIE
 Who wouldn't?

Another photo of Reuben between a younger Mrs. Guthrie and a
 man, presumably her husband.

They're posing with Reuben who has a birthday hat strapped to his head. The label reads "9 Years Young!"

MRS. GUTHRIE (CONT'D)

This was... This was a happy time.

Mrs. Guthrie succumbs to her memories.

MRS. GUTHRIE (CONT'D)

Reuben went blind soon after that.
Progressive retinal atrophy. Both
eyes turned to big white gum balls.

(beat)

He had a good life. Good as any dog
in Copper.

She flips the page.

Tongue tenses up at what she sees:

CLOSE ON a photo of Reuben: His eyes are solid white marbles.
Despite his eyes, Reuben looks happy.

TONGUE

Did the sick make him go blind?

Mrs. Guthrie shakes her head, unsure.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

Whaddaya think caused the sick?

MRS. GUTHRIE

(deflecting)

Oh, I don't know.

Guthrie flips another page. Suddenly the photos of white-eyed Reuben turn into brown patches.

LOOKING CLOSER... It's a mound of dirt.

TONGUE

Is that...

Mrs. Guthrie closes the photo album.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

What caused the sick -- if you had
to guess.

Mrs. Guthrie shakes her head.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

If you had to.

MRS. GUTHRIE

Doesn't matter once James' Rae came round with that wheelbarrow.

TONGUE

James Rae? What'd he do?

MRS. GUTHRIE

It's time you run on outta here.

TONGUE

Can you just tell me?

MRS. GUTHRIE

It's not polite to ask. Your Mama never teach you--

Mrs. Guthrie stops herself, realizing what she said.

TONGUE

Please?

MRS. GUTHRIE

I don't chew my cabbage twice.

She rises to her feet.

TONGUE

Why can't you just tell--

Guthrie turns mean.

MRS. GUTHRIE

Child, you best learn to shut up.

Tongue shuts up.

EXT. GUTHRIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Mrs. Guthrie pushes Tongue out the door. Tongue turns.

TONGUE

Sorry about Reuben. He seemed like a decent dog.

MRS. GUTHRIE

I reckon I can mow my own lawn from now on.

Tongue understands. She picks up her bike.

EXT. BUGGUM HOME - FRONT YARD - DAY

Towing the mower behind her, Tongue bikes up the drive and throws her bike onto the lawn.

Jack works under the hood of an ATV, tinkering with its oily innards.

JACK

Since when you mowin' on a Tuesday?

TONGUE

Since whoop ya ass.

INT. PARENT'S ROOM - DUSK

The girls and Bill eat another bland dinner in front of another Jeopardy tape. Tongue's plate remains nearly full.

TONGUE

Alright. Goin' crawin' if anyone wants to join.

She gets up to go.

MARY-ANNE

You're not catchin' any craws at night.

TONGUE

Best time. Ask RC.
(off Mary-Anne's make-up)
You got marker on your face again.

JACK

You barely ate.

TONGUE

Still all filled up from lunch.

EXT. GIRL'S HOME - DUSK

Tongue flicks on a plastic, battery-powered lantern. She hangs it on her bike's handlebars.

From the upstairs window, Jack watches the lantern float off through the darkness.

EXT. ABANDONED BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Tongue rides up the long driveway. No signs of life besides cricket trill.

INT. ABANDONED BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Tongue enters through the front door. The house welcomes her with an eerie stillness.

TONGUE

Belly?

INT. ABANDONED BUNGALOW - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tongue pushes open the door: Belly hunches over in the corner, on guard.

TONGUE

Hey--

The room's odor crinkles up Tongue's face.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

Shit.

MOMENTS LATER

Tongue picks up Belly's poop with a plastic grocery bag. She chucks it out the window.

TONGUE

Sorry 'bout that, girl.

(beat)

Here.

Tongue pulls tonight's dinner from her pouch. She moves towards Belly, which triggers a light snarl.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

It's okay, Belly. It's okay.

Tongue gets close enough so Belly to catch a whiff.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

Maybe it ain't no T-bone, but don't get too excited.

Belly finally accepts the food.

Tongue goes to pet Belly. The dog balks.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
It's okay. I ain't gonna hurt cha.

Tongue inches closer. Belly bares teeth.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
(softly)
It's okay.

Tongue pushes forward despite her better judgment.

Finally Tongue touches Belly's head. Belly continues to bare her teeth as Tongue pets her gently.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
(softly)
It's me. It's just me.

She continues petting Belly, who eventually calms down and finishes up her dinner.

Tongue looks down at the wire snare still tied around Belly's hind leg. Tongue reaches for the wire and, after delicately loosening the ties, removes it at last.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
That's better, ain't it?

This small victory fills Tongue with absolute joy. Belly looks at her freed leg, then at Tongue as if to say "Thank you."

TONGUE (CONT'D)
You're a good girl.

Belly lies down on her side and Tongue does the same.

Suddenly Belly shoots up, twists towards the window.

Tongue hears it too: a motor approaching...

Tongue hitch-steps to the window, panic rushing over her.

THROUGH THE WINDOW: Jack's ATV rips up the drive.

She runs back to Belly.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
You shut up now. Don't say nothin'.

INT. ABANDONED BUNGALOW - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jack comes through the door to find Tongue sitting on the floor, hunched against the wall.

JACK
Thought you were crawin'.

TONGUE
Code for peace and quiet.

JACK
Bull fuckin' shit.

Jack starts poking around.

JACK (CONT'D)
What're you hiding?

She goes for the bedroom door.

TONGUE
Jack...

Jack stops.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
Please don't hurt her.

INT. ABANDONED BUNGALOW - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Jack stands over the big-bellied dog, trying to digest what she sees.

TONGUE
Caught her in the slip.

JACK
Tongue.

TONGUE
I know...

JACK
We gotta get rid of it.

TONGUE
Jack... She's fine.

JACK
Cheerio looked fine too.

TONGUE
She's tied up. Not goin' nowhere.

JACK
Don't matter. He'll shoot it, then
us.

TONGUE
Who?

JACK
Nobody.

TONGUE
It's a mama, Jack. You gonna kill a
mama.

JACK
You are. Tomorrow morning. Didn't
bring my rifle.
(beat)
Come on.

Jack grabs Tongue by the arm and drags her out of the room.
Tongue stares back at Belly as she leaves.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

A small tire rolls off-kilter, spinning-up dust. The tire
belongs to a wheelbarrow.

A hand, bloodied and torn, hangs over the metal rim of the
wheelbarrow. It's child-sized.

An array of Cub Scout badges are pinned neatly to the chest
of a powder blue uniform.

PULL UP to see that it's James Rae wearing the uniform, only
his features are warped, dog-like: a protruding snout-nose,
elongated ears, black-marble eyes.

The James-dog-humanoid slowly turns, looks directly into the
camera and BARKS--

INT. BUGGUM HOME - GIRL'S ROOM - DAWN

Jack jolts awake.

Mary-Anne is still asleep.

Jack gets up to find Tongue's top bunk empty.

JACK

Jesus H.

EXT. ABANDONED BUNGALOW - MORNING

Using a shovel, Tongue finishes filling a grave. Jack's rifle is leaning against the bungalow.

Tongue looks up to see Jack motoring towards her on the ATV. She pats down the loose dirt as Jack arrives and dismounts.

JACK

Expect me to believe it's in there?

TONGUE

Believe the hell you want.

Jack notices that Tongue has tears rolling down her cheeks.

Jack heads over and checks the window into the bungalow's bedroom: empty.

Jack retrieves her rifle. She stops: dots of blood speckle the bungalow porch and wall.

Jack walks over to Tongue and puts a hand on her shoulder.

JACK

Let's go.

TONGUE

I'm walkin'.

Tongue shoves her shovel into Jack's arms.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - GIRL'S ROOM - DAY

Mary-Anne rummages through her make-up bag. She pulls out a gold tube, removes the top and twists the bottom: a rounded peak of cherry red lipstick rises.

CLOSE ON a photo: a younger Bill and his WIFE, the girls' mother. She's kissing Bill on the forehead, her lips the same cherry red.

Mary-Anne applies the lipstick in a mirror atop her dresser.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Tongue rides her bike into the parking lot. She back-heels the kickstand and dismounts.

INT. GAS STATION - MOMENTS LATER

A few LOCALS hunch on stools, necks bent towards the Keno screen. A couple turn and acknowledge Tongue as she enters, including a policeman, OFFICER FORD (50s).

TONGUE

Howdy. How's Lady Luck treatin' y'all today?

MAGGIE

She's bagged my treasure and taken off with my husband.

MAGGIE (50s) sits with perfect posture sucking on an E-cigarette.

A wizened old man, FLOYD (60s), scratches his head with his pencil nub.

FLOYD

You ain't got no husband Mags. And Lady Luck don't exist. 'Specially not here in Copper Hill. Might find her in Gold, or Silver.

DENVER

Guess I'll be movin' then.

Denver slurps a Big Gulp that is most certainly spiked with booze. He fills out a fresh Keno sheet.

DENVER (CONT'D)

(to Tongue)

4, 14 or 40?

Manning the counter, RC (28) pipes up.

RC

Hey, hey, hey - don't go corruptin' my favourite customer named after a body part.

Tongue flashes four fingers to Denver, who smirks and scratches in the bubble.

RC (CONT'D)
And who needs luck when you know
what's comin'.

RC reaches behind him and stacks two cases of .22 bullets on
the counter. He grins to Tongue, "Right?"

TONGUE
Not this time.

Tongue wanders down an aisle and returns with a can of spam.

RC
You on that stuff? Your daddy's vet
cheques ain't that bad.

TONGUE
Crawdads go mental for it.

RC
That so.

TONGUE
Jump right outta the water and into
your bucket.

RC rings up the spam.

RC
I'll have to give it a try then.

TONGUE
And some Juicy.

Tongue adds a pack of gum to her Spam. She digs loose change
from her several pockets making up a little pile. It's not
enough.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
I reckon just the spam.

RC
Don't sweat it.

TONGUE
Yeah?

RC gives Tongue a nod. Tongue loads the spam into her front
pouch.

RC
Tell your daddy I say 'Hi.'

TONGUE
I will. Thanks, RC.

RC
You bet.

Tongue goes to leave but stops. She hesitates on her words:

TONGUE
(whispers so only RC can
hear)
Hey... You know, back in the day,
how the dogs got sick?

RC
(normal voice)
How the dogs got sick? What's got
you askin'?

Officer Ford's ears perk up.

TONGUE
Knowin' beats not knowin'.

OFFICER FORD
The pain this town suffered, that's
something you can't never not know.

TONGUE
I was just a lil' biscuit when the
sick came 'round.

MAGGIE
It was the mine. Residue got into
the water. Twisted them pups right
up.

FLOYD
Wasn't that. Lime ticks carried the
sick, swoll' with it. They'd crawl
up all four legs at once, bury in,
wouldn't never let go.

DENVER
Y'all jokin' right?
(to Tongue)
It was bats from up in them hill
caves. Rabies, the worst kind.
LaPoint's collie got bit. She
passed the sick 'round faster than
a bible in a whore house pardon my
mouth.

TONGUE
LaPoint's collie?

DENVER
Lunatic called it "Rooster."

OFFICER FORD
Patient zero.

Tongue makes note of this.

RC
Bats? I thought it was rats.

TONGUE
What about James Rae? Did his dog
get sick?

A strained awkwardness rises in the room: shoulders tense up,
eyes shift away.

MAGGIE
Some questions don't want answers,
sweetheart.

TONGUE
Fine, I'll ask him myself.

Denver gets off his stool and crouches in front of Tongue.

DENVER
(quietly)
The sick was real hard on Mr. Rae.
Don't go askin' him--

TONGUE
Questions can't hurt you.

DENVER
Let me assure you, they can.

TONGUE
I reckon--

DENVER
(stern)
You got a listenin' problem,
Buggum? Leave the man be. You
hearin' me?

Tongue musters a nod.

INT. JAMES RAE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Remodelled, stainless steel appliances -- the kitchen is clean and new.

James dusts a plate of lemon squares with confectioners sugar.

By his side, Jimmy frowns at the sweet falling powder.

INT. JAMES RAE'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

James sits at the table reading a novel, a plate with two lemon squares in front of him.

He takes a small bite. He presses his index finger down on a few fallen crumbs and brushes them back onto his plate.

At the other end of the table, Jimmy sits in front of a plate of untouched lemon squares. He plays with a bottle cap. It's red and gold, the same as the one Tongue found in the woods.

After a moment, James lowers his book. He doesn't make eye contact with his son.

JAMES

When you were two you fell asleep
into your spaghetti.
You were right there, waitin' for
your supper. You were so hungry,
bouncin' around, workin' yourself
up. When supper was finally ready
you had tired yourself out and down
you went--face first into your
plate like something outta Saturday
mornin' cartoons.

(beat)

I'd never seen your mom laugh like
that.

After a moment, James turns back to his book.

EXT. JAMES RAE'S HOUSE - DAY

Tongue stops her bike outside James' well-to-do home. The house stands out in size and affluence compared to the other houses in Copper Hill.

Tongue leans her bike against the white picket fence and heads up the walkway.

Something makes her stop:

Propped against the side of the house... the wheelbarrow.

Tongue casts aside trepidation and continues.

She gets to the front door, reaches for the doorbell, but stops... A layer of sheet metal has been mounted over the doggy door.

Tongue stares at the sealed doggy door, something not sitting right in her gut.

EXT. MYER'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

Mary-Anne and Carl hang out in a massive metal bin full of water -- a dumpster pool.

Mary-Anne is all dolled up: new cherry lips, hair up to show off her earrings. She's wearing her mom's old lingerie as a bathing suit.

CARL

Got her off the lot on Sunday,
cleaned her yesterday, filled her
today. You're on the Maiden voyage.

MARY-ANNE

It's nice. Spacious. Bet she took
awhile to fill up.

CARL

All mornin'. Two hoses. Now I just
gotta figure how to make it hot.

MARY-ANNE

Try spankin' it. Callin' it names.

Carl smirks.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)

How much you spend on it?

CARL

Some.

MARY-ANNE

Thought you were savin'?

CARL
I got cash.

MARY-ANNE
Enough?

CARL
More than you.

Mary-Anne's skeptical.

CARL (CONT'D)
(playful)
I can see through your bathing
suit.

MARY-ANNE
That's cause it's a bra. I wear
bra's now.

CARL
How many socks you got stuffed in
there?

MARY-ANNE
(mocking)
Ha. Ha.
(beat)
Notice anything else?

Mary-Anne flashes her new earring towards Carl.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
Did it myself. Didn't hurt.

Denver flies out of the screen door slurping down the last
drops of his liquor Big Gulp. He flings the empty drink into
the dumpster pool.

DENVER
How's she handle?
(beat)
Is that...

Denver makes his hands into binoculars.

DENVER (CONT'D)
Mary-Anne?

MARY-ANNE
Hi, Mr. Myers.

DENVER

Denver. I barely recognized you.
Lookin' more and more like your
mama each day. Atta girl.

Mary-Anne shrinks, uncomfortable.

DENVER (CONT'D)

(re: Carl)

Not sure what you're wastin' your
time with this loser for.
'Specially when I'm available.

Denver laughs as if he's joking.

DENVER (CONT'D)

Ran into the littlest Buggum at
RC's. Pokin' her nose into other
people's business.

MARY-ANNE

What was she doin'?

DENVER

Askin' 'bout the sick.

(beat)

You oughta slap some sense into
that one.

MARY-ANNE

Everyday.

DENVER

Well, keep it up.

Pause.

CARL

I'd kill a dog.

DENVER

That's cute.

CARL

I would. Cut its tail off like a
trophy.

Denver turns cold remembering the past.

DENVER

You don't know what we had to do.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Tongue rides her bike back down the same dirt road as before. Instead of turning right towards home, she keeps going, heading away from the town centre.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

Tongue walks her bike along the uneven tracks.

She's looking down at her feet, deep in thought, until something breaks it:

Tongue bends down and picks up... a bottle cap. It's red and gold. She pockets it and keeps going.

EXT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - DAY

Tongue follows a driveway riddled with pot holes.

She comes to what resembles a junk yard -- a cabin behind it.

Tongue moves past a festering couch lined with garden gnomes, a truck with grass growing on the dash.

Other stuff too: art, sculptures. A miniature Eifel tower made from broken fishing rods. A pillar of cheap lawn chairs melted together.

Tongue drops her bike as she comes to the cabin's screen door, the door behind it wide open.

She knocks on the wood sidings.

TONGUE

Hello?

(pause)

Mr. LaPoint?

(pause)

William Buggum's littlest here.

(pause)

Anybody home?

Tongue hears a floorboard creak.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

(trying to joke)

I heard that.

A guttural voice answers her.

LAPOINT (O.S.)

Get on home.

TONGUE

Plan to. Just a quick question
first?

Tongue waits for an answer. Nothing.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

How'd Rooster get sick? Word is she
was the first.

A massive silhouette of a man lumbers up from a chair, the
door slams in Tongue's face.

EXT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - SIDE YARD - DAY

Tongue snoops around the side of the cabin.

She sees something: a small grave marked with a rebar cross.
A worn leather collar hangs around the rusted metal.

Staring down at it, Tongue sees something in her periphery.

She spins around:

A scuzzy brick shithouse of a man, LAPOINT (50s) holds a
mauling axe.

LAPOINT

Fly on outta here.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

Tongue wheels her bike back the way she came.

She sees a bird singing in a tree.

She stops, watches the bird for a moment, then makes her
finger into a gun and aims. Pow.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - PARENT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tongue helps her father brush his teeth. He speaks with the
toothbrush in his mouth.

BILL
 (to the TV)
 What is a cerberus.

Tongue wipes Bill's mouth with a cloth.

TONGUE
 (under her breath)
 What's wrong with you.

Jack stands at the door watching.

Tongue sees her and looks away. When Tongue turns back to the door Jack is gone.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tongue plunks her newfound bottle cap into her jar with the rest of them. She climbs into her bunk.

On her pillow, a photograph.

CLOSE ON the photo: A toddler and Tongue's mother. They're hugging a golden retriever. Cheerio.

Tongue takes in the photo.

After a moment, she leans the photo against her side board. The carved-out stars border the photo like a picture frame.

PRELAP: A heart-stopping BOY'S SCREAM.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Being pushed in the wheelbarrow, Jimmy Rae's mangled corpse comes to life and SCREAMS for help.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jack springs up in bed. She glances over: Mary-Anne's bunk is empty.

JACK
 Christ.

Jack rolls back over. After a moment, she rolls back and gets out of bed.

Tongue's bunk is empty too.

JACK (CONT'D)
Are you fuckin' kidding me.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

Jack rips through the night on her ATV.

EXT. ABANDONED BUNGALOW - NIGHT

The ATV is parked so that its headlights shine onto the grave that Tongue dug.

Four or five feet into the ground, Jack continues to dig.

She stops.

In the grave: a squirrel with a bullet hole through its gut.

EXT. TRAPPER'S HUT - NIGHT

Tongue's lantern bobs in the dark.

She approaches a one-room wood hut nestled in the trees.

INT. TRAPPER'S HUT - NIGHT

Tongue slinks through the front door with her lantern.

Netting, bones, and strips of fur hang from the walls and litter the floor. Also, a pile of coloured, never-lit birthday candles.

TONGUE
Hey girl--

In the corner, Belly is tied up to a busted gun wrack. Her body is contorted, her head reaching for her tail.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
You alright?

Tongue steps towards Belly. She peers over the dog.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
That's...

A newborn puppy flounders on the floor close to Belly's stomach.

Tongue can only stare at the slick pup as it mewls and squirms, testing out its new body.

Tongue switches to midwife as Belly continues to give birth.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
Breathe girl. You're doin' good.
Keep goin'.

EXT. STORM DRAIN - NIGHT

Mary-Anne kisses Carl. She's really into it. Carl's not, he backs out for a breather.

MARY-ANNE
You kiss good.

CARL
Wish I could say the same.

Mary-Anne rolls her eyes.

MARY-ANNE
(teasing)
You're so tough. How 'bout you show
me how tough you are.

Her hand reaches down and grabs Carl's crotch. She massages for a moment before:

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
Shouldn't it be...?

Mary-Anne's words don't help. He pulls back and hikes up his bandana.

Carl picks up his spray can and turns back to his graffiti art: a portrait of a woman. He uses black spray-paint to shade the cheek bones. It's elegant, tasteful - not your typical graffiti tag.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
Let's set a date.

CARL
For what.

MARY-ANNE
What do you mean 'for what.' To
leave.

CARL
Already set one.

MARY-ANNE
And when's that?

CARL
Whenever I feel like.

MARY-ANNE
You ain't goin', are you?

Carl shakes his can of spray paint, ignoring her.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
You never were. Just another Copper
lifer.

Carl yanks off his bandana, turns serious.

CARL
I'm leavin', just not with a little
baby.

MARY-ANNE
I'm not a baby--

CARL
When y'all go hunting, who fires
the rifle? Who kills the buck? Who
hangs it? Skins it? Guts it? Who?

Beat.

CARL (CONT'D)
That's what I thought.
(beat)
Soft as baby shit.

Mary-Anne fights off tears as Carl turns back to his
painting.

The sound of a motor approaching...

They look up as Jack pulls up on the quad.

JACK
Climbin' the Myers' family tree?

MARY-ANNE
Get lost.

Jack notices Mary-Anne is on the brink of tears.

CARL
Big sis pickin' up the baby.

JACK
Hey Myers, keep talkin' and I'll
beat you like your drunk daddy beat
your poor Mama.

CARL
(threatening)
What'd you say.

Jack stands her ground.

CARL (CONT'D)
He's a drunk but at least he's not
a fuckin' retard.

Jack stares Carl down.

JACK
(to Mary-Anne)
Come on, we gotta find your dumb
sister.

INT. TRAPPER'S HUT - MORNING

Tongue wakes on a bed of fur scraps.

In the corner, four newborn pups nurse their mother.

TONGUE
Mornin', Belly. Mornin', Honey Nut.
(beat)
Y'all don't have the sick.
(beat)
And I'm gonna make sure it stays
like that.

EXT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - SIDE YARD - DAY

Tongue heads around the cabin to find a SWAMP on the lee side
of the property. A wooden rowboat moors in the reeds.

Knee deep in the swamp, LaPoint reels in on his rod. He wears
hip waders and a fisherman's hat barbed with fishhooks.

TONGUE

LaPoint.

LaPoint spins around, nearly falling over. He lumbers through the water towards shore.

LAPOINT

What'd I say?

TONGUE

I just wanna know how the dogs got sick.

LaPoint drops his fishing rod and pulls his maul out of a chopping block without breaking stride towards Tongue.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

Please. I...

LaPoint moves in. He two-hands the maul. Just as LaPoint closes in on Tongue--

TONGUE (CONT'D)

I found one.

Beat. LaPoint stops.

LAPOINT

Found one.

TONGUE

A dog.

LAPOINT

Ain't no dogs.

TONGUE

Snagged one in a slip up in the South hills past the trestle.

LAPOINT

Uncivil thing to do, foolin' an old man like me.

TONGUE

Ain't foolin'.

LAPOINT

That the truth?

TONGUE

Yes sir.

(beat)

I wanna make sure it doesn't get
what the other dogs got.

LaPoint spits on the ground, mulling things over.

LAPOINT

Yer daddy know you're here?

TONGUE

Daddy don't care.

EXT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - SWAMP - LATER

On the shore, LaPoint knots a flatfish lure to his line.

TONGUE

So how'd your collie get the sick?

LAPOINT

Didn't.

TONGUE

What?

LAPOINT

Got shit in your ears?

TONGUE

Rooster didn't get sick?

LAPOINT

No dogs did.

Beat.

LaPoint wades into the swamp. Tongue kicks off her shoes and wades in after him, soaking her overalls to the waist.

TONGUE

Well what happened then?

LaPoint casts out, the lure splits the murky green.

LAPOINT

I reckon you wouldn't believe it if
the lord rose outta the water and
telled you himself.

TONGUE
That what you fishin' for?

LaPoint almost smirks.

LAPOINT
Roost was scared of strangers.

TONGUE
Yeah.

LAPOINT
A boy came by. Climbed the fence.
Was a good fence. Tall and strong.
Still not sure how he got over.

TONGUE
And Rooster bit him.

LAPOINT
Did more than that. Tore him up
real bad.

TONGUE
Who? Which boy?

CUT TO:

INT. JAMES RAE'S TRUCK (MOVING) - SAME

Jimmy rolls a bottle cap between two fingers.

LAPOINT (V.O.)
Jimmy Rae. James' boy.

James drives along. His expression is pensive as usual, but up-close his eyes seem distant, listless.

TONGUE (V.O.)
I didn't know Mr. Rae had a son...

INT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - SWAMP - CONTINUOUS

LaPoint jigs his rod.

TONGUE
So Roost bit him real bad?

LAPOINT
I tried running but my legs
couldn't go that fast.
(MORE)

LAPOINT (CONT'D)
 (to himself)
 They were all tangled up. Didn't
 know which was which. Never heard a
 boy scream like that.

TONGUE
 Roost killed Jimmy?

LaPoint shakes his head.

LAPOINT
 James blamed me and Roost. Come
 roarin' up, said Roost had rabies.
 What could I say. Man's boy dead in
 the dirt.

Tongue watches LaPoint struggle with his story.

LAPOINT (CONT'D)
 James took his boy's tore-up body,
 put it in a wheelbarrow. Him and
 Denver Myers wheeled him round
 town, went around and shot all the
 dogs.

EXT. BUGGUM HOUSE - FRONT YARD - SAME

James' truck slowly pull up next to the girl's house.

James sits there watching the house, calm, almost robotic.

LAPOINT (V.O.)
 James snapped that day. Reckon he
 still believes the sick came
 'round. In his mind, he was doin'
 his duty, doin' us a favour.

EXT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - SWAMP - CONTINUOUS

Tongue tries to process all this.

TONGUE
 Nobody fought back?

LAPOINT
 Couple. You.
 (beat)
 Good most didn't. James woulda shot
 anythin' between him and a mutt.
 (MORE)

LAPOINT (CONT'D)
 And Denver woulda shot ya too just
 'cause he could.

TONGUE
 What about Officer Ford?

LAPOINT
 Law turned a blind eye, as did
 most. Easier to believe a lie
 sometimes than face the truth.

TONGUE
 But... I...

LAPOINT
 The town's the one who got sick.
 But it's harder to put down a town.
 (beat)
 James and Denver killed every last
 dog in Copper that day... except
 Roost.

TONGUE
 What happened to Roost?

LAPOINT
 I did him myself.

Pause.

TONGUE
 How old was Jimmy? When he died.

LAPOINT
 Reckon he would be a year or two
 older than you now. Good kid. Loved
 dogs... Funny how life is: Love
 bein' what takes you to the edge.

Pause.

LAPOINT (CONT'D)
 You really find one up in the
 hills?

TONGUE
 Yes sir.

LaPoint starts to reel in.

LAPOINT
 Come 'ere.

EXT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - SIDE YARD - DAY

Tongue follows LaPoint to the rebar cross: Rooster's grave.

LAPOINT

I loved Roost more than anything
that walked God's earth... but you
go shoot that dog you found right
between the eyes.

The leather collar hangs off the cross. CLOSE ON the dangling metal tag attached. Etched into the metal, an outline of a ROOSTER.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

Tongue heads home, LaPoint's words percolating in her head.

Something steals her attention:

Mary-Anne bikes up the tracks towards her.

TONGUE

Shit.

Tongue stops and waits for what's coming.

Mary-Anne rides up to Tongue and hops off.

MARY-ANNE

Where the hell you been?

TONGUE

Up your ass.

MARY-ANNE

Jack's rippin' 'round town lookin'
for yours.

Tongue shrugs.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)

There's talkin', Tongue.
Denver tellin' me to keep an eye on
you. And Mrs. Guthrie? James Rae
been parked outside the house for
an hour.

TONGUE

What's he want.

MARY-ANNE

He's worried. Said you're askin'
folk about the sick... Since when
you dumber than a box of rocks?

TONGUE

You sound like Jack.

MARY-ANNE

(softer)

I'm not Jack.

(beat)

What's goin' on, Tongue? You can
tell me.

Tongue weighs her options.

TONGUE

I gotta show you somethin'.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - EVENING

Mary-Anne trails Tongue through the brush.

Layered in the trees: the trapper's hut.

Mary-Anne checks behind her before carrying on.

INT. TRAPPER'S HUT - NIGHT

Tongue enters followed by Mary-Anne whose eyes grow wide.

Mary-Anne walks over and lies down on her tummy to properly
ogle the nursing puppies: Their eyes tightly shut, fur still
slick with amniotic fluid.

Tongue joins her, delighted to finally share.

MARY-ANNE

They're all slimy.

TONGUE

Yeah. Popped out just the other
night.

(points)

This one looks kinda like Cheerio.
I named it Honey-Nut.

MARY-ANNE

I wanna name one.

TONGUE

There's four, so we all get to name one: you, me, Jack and Mama.

Mary-Anne turns to Tongue.

MARY-ANNE

Tongue, Mama ain't coming back.

TONGUE

She's comin' back. You'll see. She loves dogs, just like me.

MARY-ANNE

Tongue--

SLAM -- the door flies open bashing against the wall.

Tongue spins around: Jack.

TONGUE

Jack.

Tongue spins back to Mary-Anne whose brow curls with guilt.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

You... why...

MARY-ANNE

She made me.

Tongue's eyes well up.

TONGUE

(to Mary-Anne)

You fucker...

JACK

Not her fault, Tongue. I gave you a shot and you fucked it up.

Jack unsheathes a hunting knife from her hip and moves towards Belly.

Tongue begins to sob. She grabs onto Belly, shielding her from Jack.

TONGUE

Why, Jack?

JACK

Move.

TONGUE
Why?

JACK
Buck up.

TONGUE
Just tell me why.

JACK
It's either them or us.

TONGUE
Why them or us?

JACK
Cheerio got sick and we put her--

TONGUE
She didn't. No dogs did.

JACK
Tongue--

TONGUE
James Rae shot Cheerio. Didn't he.
Didn't he, Jack?

Jack stares at Tongue.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
There never was any sick. You know
there wasn't.

Jack can't find her words.

TONGUE (CONT'D)
Tell me the truth, Jack. Tell me
the truth.

Jack erupts into a cold rage.

JACK
James Rae shot her in the gut. You
jumped in tryin' to help and
Cheerio nearly ripped your foot off
its bone. Your own dog gave you
that limp.
(beat)
If he finds this one. He'll shoot
it, then us.

TONGUE

It doesn't have to be this way.

JACK

Move.

TONGUE

It doesn't have to.

JACK

Move, Tongue.

MARY-ANNE

They're harmless, Jack.

JACK

This ain't a discussion.

Jack pulls Tongue off of Belly. Tongue lurches at Jack but Jack pushes her to the ground.

Tongue buries her head in her hands.

TONGUE

It doesn't... It doesn't.

Jack kneels down and grips her knife.

Belly looks up at Jack, unconcerned with the weapon, as if sensing something deep inside of Jack, a tenderness.

Jack grabs Belly by the scruff.

She takes a breath.

Raises the blade.

Then...

Jack glances at the weeping Tongue. Then to Mary-Anne who stares back, stone-faced.

Jack turns back to Belly and her pups.

JACK

(to herself)

Christ.

Jack lowers the knife.

Tongue gets up, hobbles over and wraps her arms around Jack.

TONGUE
(whispers)
Thank you.

Jack takes off her ball cap and flexes the brim.

JACK
Thank the hair on your head. Thank
the goddamn dirt. Don't thank me.

TONGUE
Can't help it.

INT. TRAPPER'S HUT - NIGHT - LATER

Jack sits against the wall away from Belly. She looks disappointed in herself.

Tongue and Mary-Anne eyeball the puppies.

MARY-ANNE
I'm namin' this cute one, "Carl."

JACK
(to Mary-Anne)
For all I know you're full of pups
after the other night. He's a scum
bag, y'know.

MARY-ANNE
(off the puppies)
This one looks like a real nosey
bitch. Let's name it Jacquelin.

Mary-Anne mock-smiles at Jack.

TONGUE
What are you gonna name yours,
Jack?

JACK
Nothin'.

TONGUE
(joking)
That's a weird name.

JACK
Don't get attached.

MARY-ANNE

Maybe James cooled off by now.

JACK

Not forgettin' somethin' like that.

TONGUE

Well we gotta call the little fella something. Everyone needs a name.

(to Jack)

Sure you don't wanna name it?

JACK

Call it whatever, I don't care.

TONGUE

"Whatever" it is.

(to the puppy)

That's you.

Jack rolls her eyes.

JACK

No tellin' nobody about this. I gotta figure out what to do with 'em.

(beat)

Got that?

Tongue nods.

JACK (CONT'D)

Top secret.

TONGUE

Top secret.

JACK

I'm lookin' at you too, Mary-Anne.

MARY-ANNE

I see ya.

JACK

No visitin' during the day.
We don't wanna draw attention.
We'll nail shut the door. Go in and out through the window.

Tongue nods.

JACK (CONT'D)
 I hope y'all appreciate the gravity
 of this. If anybody finds out...
 That's that.
 (beat)
 Understand?

Tongue and Mary-Anne nod.

INT. TRAPPER'S HUT - DAWN

Early sun streams through slits in the walls.

Mary-Anne wakes up next to Tongue who is still asleep. Mary-Anne looks around: no Jack.

She turns to the puppies, studying them.

EXT. TRAPPER'S HUT - DAWN

Mary-Anne joins Jack on the porch.

MARY-ANNE
 You're soft as jelly.

Tucked in her bottom lip, Jack pushes down a clump of chewing tobacco with her tongue.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
 Thought you quit.

Jack shrugs.

JACK
 When was the last time you seen her
 cry like that?

Mary-Anne thinks.

MARY-ANNE
 When Mama left.

Jack nods, spits dark brown slime.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
 What're we gonna do.

JACK

If I knew you wouldn't be askin'.
 (beat)
 Find a way to ship 'em outta here,
 I don't know.

She plucks the wad of chew out of her lip and tosses it.

JACK (CONT'D)

Wake up your sister.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAWN

The three sisters ride home on the ATV, oldest to youngest,
 all squished on the one seat.

EXT. BUGGUM HOME - MORNING

The girls roll to a stop and off load.

JACK

Come here. I wanna show you
 something.

EXT. BUGGUM HOME - BACK YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Jack leads her sisters to the edge of their property along
 the tree line.

She stops: a small cross made of sticks and twine is planted
 in ground (it's the same cross from the opening montage).

TONGUE

Cheerio?

Jack nods.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

Why'd you let him do it?

Jack pauses.

JACK

Sometimes you can't stop what's
 comin', even when you can see it a
 mile out.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

(beat)

You tried harder than anyone. And you was three.

TONGUE

(serious)

Imagine what I can do now.

JACK

I think that's why Mama left, when she saw that a toddler was the one tryin' to protect her family.

For the first time Jack's steely exterior softens; the weight of the sisters' tough life bearing down on her.

Mary-Anne notices. She wraps her arms around Jack. Tongue follows suit.

MARY-ANNE

Remember when she'd make us those hats out of newspaper and we'd turn the sofa into a pirate ship?

Jack smiles small.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Not your fault she left. It's not.

Beat. Jack fights back tears.

TONGUE

She's comin' back anyway.

Jack and Mary-Anne ignore Tongue as the sisters hold each other in front of their old dog's grave.

INT. TRAPPER'S HUT - DAY

Belly lies on her side as some puppies nurse, some mill about, days stronger.

After a moment, Belly's head swivels, something coming.

Belly listens as footsteps approach...

Finally...

Mary-Anne pushes open the door.

She presses a finger to her lips.

MARY-ANNE
Don't tell nobody.

Mary-Anne tiptoes towards Belly. She bends down and pets the puppy "Whatever."

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
How ya doin' little guy?

She carefully picks him up. Belly whimpers as she watches her puppy go.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
Don't worry, he's not goin'
nowhere.

Mary-Anne cuddles the pup.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
(to the puppy)
It'll be like piercin' an ear. Only
hurt for a second.

From her pocket, Mary-Anne takes out her safety scissors.

Belly BARKS.

EXT. STORM DRAIN - DAY

A bandana masking his nose and mouth, Carl finishes up his spray-paint portrait of a woman. The shading is beautifully chiaroscuro.

Mary-Anne arrives. She can hardly contain herself.

MARY-ANNE
(off the portrait)
Aw, I look so good.

Carl ignores her.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
Close your eyes.

CARL
I'm good.

MARY-ANNE
Come on, close 'em.

Carl sighs and shuts his eyes. Mary-Anne reaches into her pocket.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
Taa-daa!

Carl opens: a small black tail dangles between Mary-Anne's fingers. Carl pulls his bandana off his face.

CARL
What is that.

MARY-ANNE
Pretty cool, huh?

CARL
Give it.

MARY-ANNE
Come get it.

Carl comes forward. Mary-Anne expects a kiss but Carl grabs the tail.

CARL
What is this? Ain't no rat...

MARY-ANNE
No it ain't.

CARL
What is it.

MARY-ANNE
Guess--

CARL
Fuckin' tell me, Mary-Anne.

MARY-ANNE
It's a dog, you dummy. My trophy.

Carl looks anything but impressed.

CARL
You're kiddin' right?

Mary-Anne's smile fades.

CARL (CONT'D)
Where'd you get this?

MARY-ANNE
What?

CARL
You know what happened to this town?

Carl flings the tail back to Mary-Anne.

MARY-ANNE
I thought--

CARL
You thought what?

MARY-ANNE
I thought...

CARL
That this would impress me? We'd run off into the goddamn sunset?

MARY-ANNE
You said... you said you gotta be tough.

Beat.

Carl starts packing up his spray-paint cans.

CARL
You fucked up, you know that?

MARY-ANNE
You ain't gonna tell nobody.

Carl heads up out of the drain.

MARY-ANNE (CONT'D)
Carl? You ain't gonna tell nobody.

CARL
Just mom.

MARY-ANNE
What?

Confused, Mary-Anne turns to the portrait. She realizes it's a portrait of Carl's mother.

Carl climbs out of the drain, leaving Mary-Anne in a wake of rejection.

She hurls the tail into the mouth of the culvert.

INT. BUGGUM HOUSE - PARENT'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Bill and the girls eat in front of commercials.

Food untouched, Mary-Anne scratches the paint off her nails.

Jack takes notice.

JACK
Plans tonight?
(beat)
Mary-Anne?

Mary-Anne shakes her head.

JACK (CONT'D)
You wanna come with us?

MARY-ANNE
I'm good.

Mary-Anne picks up her plate and leaves the room.

JACK
Boy trouble.

TONGUE
Reckon.

INT. MYERS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Beer in hand, Denver watches sports highlights.

Behind him, sitting up on the stairs, Carl watches his father. He debates in his head what he should do.

After a moment, Carl descends the stairs.

CARL
Dad.

INT. BUGGUM HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Jack and Tongue strap up. Jack follows Tongue out the door when--

MARY-ANNE (O.S.)

Jack?

Jack turns to see Mary-Anne lingering in the kitchen.

JACK

What's up? You comin'?

MARY-ANNE

I...

(beat)

Where you think Mom is?

JACK

What's that?

MARY-ANNE

Where she flew off to.

JACK

Dunno.

MARY-ANNE

Guess.

JACK

Somewhere in the Midwest maybe...
Bakersville? I think her brother
lives there.

(beat)

Why.

Mary-Anne shrugs.

JACK (CONT'D)

You sure you don't wanna come?

Mary-Anne shakes her head and walks away. Jack eyes her sister as Mary-Anne heads up the stairs.

EXT. BUGGUM HOUSE - NIGHT

Jack fires up the ATV. Tongue holds tight around Jack's waist.

INT. BUGGUM HOUSE - GIRL'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Teary eyed, Mary-Anne listens as the quad fades into the night.

SERIES OF SHOTS

--Mary-Anne shoves clothes into a suitcase.

--She grabs her mirror and other knickknacks from her dresser.

--She digs in her make-up bag and takes out a powder case. She opens it up to reveal a small wad of cash.

--She sees the photo of her mom kissing her father on the forehead. CLOSE ON her mom's cherry lips. Mary-Anne grabs the photo.

INT. BUGGUM HOUSE - PARENT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bill watches Jeopardy, answering along as usual.

In the doorway, Mary-Anne eyes her father, the golden tube in her hand. She walks over, climbs up onto the bed next to him.

Mary-Anne takes off the top and waves the lipstick under her father's nose. She looks for a reaction. Nothing.

She applies the lipstick, presses her lips together and kisses her dad on the forehead.

MARY-ANNE

Bye, Daddy.

BILL

(to TV)

What is the Thames.

Mary-Anne smiles sad, wipes her eyes, and walks out the door.

INT. TRAPPER'S HUT - LATER

Jack sits against the wall.

Tongue reaches into her knapsack and pulls out Rooster's leather collar.

JACK

Where'd you get that.

TONGUE

A ghost.

Tongue pulls out a pair of pliers. She uses the pliers to snip off the "Rooster" metal tag.

Tongue reaches back into her knapsack and pulls out a bottle cap hanging by a string, "BELLY" etched into the metal.

Tongue ties the bottle cap tag to the collar and wraps the collar around Belly's neck.

She sits back, satisfied, then:

TONGUE (CONT'D)

Did you know Jimmy Rae?

JACK

Couple years younger. Mostly kept to himself at school. Good kid far as I remember.

(beat)

No daddy should have to bury his own boy.

Pause.

Tongue turns back to the puppies. She squints at something...

TONGUE

Whatever's missin' his goddamn tail.

Jack gets up and walks over: Whatever's little nub of a tail.

JACK

Did it come like that?

TONGUE

No way.

JACK

You sure now?

Tongue nods. Her and Jack lock eyes.

EXT. TRAPPER'S HUT - NIGHT

Jack and Tongue rush off into the night.

EXT. ATV (MOVING) - DAWN

They barrel down the dirt road chasing the rising sun.

INT. BUGGUM HOUSE - FRONT FOYER - DAWN

Jack busts through the door with Tongue on her heels.

JACK
Mary-Anne?

We follow Jack as she races up the stairs into:

GIRL'S BEDROOM

Mary-Anne's bed is empty. Jack notices Mary-Anne's bare dresser.

JACK
Fucker.

TONGUE (O.S.)
(through parent's room)
Jack!

We follow Jack into:

PARENT'S BEDROOM

Jack enters to find Tongue next to a sleeping Bill. On his forehead, a red lipstick print.

EXT. BUGGUM HOUSE - FRONT YARD - MORNING

Jack jumps back on the quad.

JACK
I know where she's headed.

TONGUE
I'm gonna help look--

JACK
Stay here. In case she comes back.
And look after Daddy.
(beat)
Two pills crushed in oatmeal. Mix
it good. Ten bites.

Jack fires the engine back up and takes off.

Tongue watches her go.

She turns to go back inside, but stops. Tongue doubles back and goes into the garage, passes the deer carcass and comes to a cabinet.

Tongue opens it: Jack's rifle.

EXT. ROAD INTO TOWN - MORNING

Lugging her suitcase, Mary-Anne sees her destination: a bus stop on the single-lane highway.

Mary-Anne picks up the pace, determined.

A truck pulls up behind her, slows down, matching her speed.

Mary-Anne looks over her shoulder. She stops. The colour drains from her face.

Behind the wheel, James Rae gives a little wave.

INT. JAMES RAE'S TRUCK (MOVING) - MOMENTS LATER

Reflecting in the side mirror, the bus stop falls away into the distance.

Mary-Anne clutches her suitcase.

James drives slowly, carefully. Jimmy in the middle.

JAMES

Thank goodness I found you. Your sisters are in a mix up.

(beat)

Big bag for a such a little gal. Where you headed?

Silence.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I'm on your side, y'know.

EXT. BUGGUM HOME - FRONT YARD - DAY

A beat-up truck we haven't seen before rattles up the drive.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - FRONT DOOR

The door swings open, steel-toed boots step in... Denver. He grips a hammer in his hand.

DENVER
Anybody home?
(beat)
Mary-Anne? Girlies?

He walks over and opens the fridge.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - GIRL'S BEDROOM

Denver pokes around eating an apple.

He opens a top dresser drawer. He fishes out a pair of underwear with end of his hammer.

He stuffs the underwear in his back pocket.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - PARENT'S BEDROOM

Denver sticks his head in. He grins at Bill watching his Jeopardy.

DENVER
What is... PTSD!

BILL
(to TV)
What is Princeton.

FROM THE TV: Contestant, "What is Princeton." Trebek, "Correct."

DENVER
You always did have tight screws.

Denver plops down on the bed next to Bill.

DENVER (CONT'D)
(offering apple)
Bite?

Denver sees the lipstick mark on Bill's forehead.

DENVER (CONT'D)

(excited)

Billy-boy, what is that? What is that. Brain-dead and still gettin' more action than me. You keepin' Joanne locked in the shed this whole time?

BILL

(to TV)

Who are the Chicago White Sox.

DENVER

Well, good chat.

Denver climbs out of bed. He notices a quarter-sized hole in Bill's sock.

Denver fingers Bill's sock hole. Bill freaks. He kicks wildly, catching Denver on the jaw.

DENVER (CONT'D)

Ho-ho! There he is!

EXT. ROAD INTO TOWN - DAY

Jack motors down the road.

She passes the "Welcome to Copper Hill" sign. Below it, the "No Dogs" graffiti.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Jack heads towards the bus stop. As she crests the road, Jack sees that the bus stop is empty.

She rides up to the bus stop and peers up and down the lonely strip of highway.

She U-turns back around.

INT. MYERS HOUSE - FRONT FOYER - DAY

Jack barges through the front door.

JACK

Hey. Hello?

She follows a trail of empty beer cans into the living room.

JACK
 Keep tellin' yourself that, see how
 far it gets you.

Jack leaves to let Carl to stew in his guilt.

EXT. TRAPPER'S HUT - DAY

Denver trudges through the woods, still carrying his hammer.

Tongue comes around the back of the hut, Jack's rifle in arm,
 pointed to the ground.

TONGUE
 Mr. Myers. What're you doin' here?
 This ain't the beer store.

DENVER
 This ain't the little shit store
 neither, but here you are.

TONGUE
 Grouse been showin' up 'round here.

DENVER
 That so.

Denver flips his hammer.

DENVER (CONT'D)
 I'm grabbin' my gun rack off the
 wall.

TONGUE
 Don't you need a gun to hang first?

DENVER
 The Buggum's. Such kidders. Saw
 your daddy today. Laugh fuckin'
 riot that guy.

Denver comes to the front porch.

DENVER (CONT'D)
 Been inside?

TONGUE
 (shakes her head)
 Nailed shut.

Denver tries the door. Locked.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

Don't believe a ten-year-old, Mr. Myers?

DENVER

Ain't that I don't believe you. Sometimes a man's just gotta see for himself.

Denver steps closer to Tongue, his attention still on the hut. Right when he's within arm's reach of Tongue, Denver spins and grabs for Tongue's rifle.

Belly BARKS, distracting Denver for a split second, long enough for Tongue to lift the barrel into Denver's gut.

They freeze.

TONGUE

I'll do it.

A shit-eating grin spreads across Denver's face as he slowly raises his hands off the gun.

DENVER

There it is.

TONGUE

Best get goin' back to where you came.

Denver backs up slow.

The sound of someone coming: they turn to see Jack striding their way.

DENVER

(to Tongue)

You think you're doin' good. You're not. Believe me, you're not.

TONGUE

It's not that I don't believe you, Mr. Myers... Sometimes a girl's just gotta see for herself.

Tongue keeps her rifle trained on Denver as he walks back.

Jack and Denver cross paths. Their eyes meet, gleaning all they need to know as Denver heads off.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

Find her?

JACK

Not yet.

TONGUE

What'd we do?

JACK

We get goin'.

INT. JAMES RAE'S TRUCK (MOVING) - DAY

Mary-Anne sits frozen in the passenger seat.

JAMES

You knew my boy, right?

Still tucked beside his dad, Jimmy presses a bottle cap into the meat of his palm.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Bright kid. Real bright. He'd draw these maps of Copper Hill, treasure maps. He'd hide bottle caps around town, mark 'em on his map. He'd give the maps to me and his mom to go searchin' for 'em.

(beat)

He was working on a new one when the dog attacked him. Ripped into his arm and neck. Ripped him up like a chew toy.

(beat)

Know why chew toys squeak? To replicate the sound of an animal sufferin'... Breaks your heart, hearin' your child cry like that. Like an animal.

James finally looks over to Mary-Anne.

JAMES (CONT'D)

That's why I'm here. So no one ever has to hear that noise again.

EXT. DEAD END ROAD - DAY

Denver leans against his parked truck.

James and Mary-Anne roll up and park behind him. Denver ambles up to James' open window.

DENVER
 (re: Mary-Anne)
 You snagged one. The pretty one at that.

Denver waves an arm towards the woods.

DENVER (CONT'D)
 Floyd's trappin' cabin. About twenty north.
 (beat)
 Reckon they're gone by now.

EXT. TRAPPER'S HUT - DAY

Denver shimmies through the window.

James and Mary-Anne watch. James holds Jimmy's hand.

INT. TRAPPER'S HUT - MOMENTS LATER

The stink hits Denver and Mary-Anne as James Rae comes in through the window.

DENVER
 Fuckin' shit box.

Denver crouches down in the now dog-less corner. Mary-Anne sees the pair of underwear sticking out of Denver's back pocket.

DENVER (CONT'D)
 (to Mary-Anne)
 Where'd they go?

MARY-ANNE
 How would I know.

DENVER
 You're one of 'em.

Denver steps up to Mary-Anne and puts a hand on her shoulder.

DENVER (CONT'D)

Ain't you?

Denver walks two fingers along her shoulder, up the side of her neck and up to her head.

DENVER (CONT'D)

I want you to use that big brain of yours and think real hard. Do that for me?

Mary-Anne keeps her eyes locked on the floor.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - DAY

Jack hustles through the woods with Belly on a tight leash next to her.

Tongue falters along behind them, the puppies poking out of her overall pockets.

TONGUE

Jack.

Tongue stops to catch her breath.

JACK

What?

TONGUE

I know where to go.

EXT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - SWAMP - DAY

LaPoint fishes in his tiny green sea.

TONGUE (O.S.)

LaPoint.

He turns to see Tongue standing alone.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

I got somethin' to show you.

LAPOINT

(to himself)

Shit.

EXT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - FRONT YARD - MOMENTS LATER

LaPoint follows Tongue around the side of the cabin.

Standing amongst the moldering junk: Jack, Belly and the four puppies.

INT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - DAY

LaPoint's space is packed with a mix of fishing gear and artwork: a wall of fishing rods, jars of lures, but also sculptures, large and small, in various stages.

Tongue eyes what appears to be a sculpture made of deer antler racks -- a big sphere of chaotic horns.

LaPoint falls back into his chair, takes off his fisherman's hat and rubs his temples.

LAPOINT

James gonna figure it out if he
hasn't already.

He watches the puppies mill about their mother on the floor.

TONGUE

We didn't know what to do.

JACK

Still don't.

LAPOINT

You got two options. One bad, one
worse.

LaPoint holds up two stub fingers.

LAPOINT (CONT'D)

One: Y'all take off the way you
came. Run and hide 'til you're
found.

(beat)

Two: We say a prayer and do what
shoul'da been done already.

TONGUE

But... can't we explain to him that-

LAPOINT

James won't stop 'til it's done.
And he'll do it the wrong way.

Jack gives Tongue a sobering look, "He's right."

LaPoint puts his hat back on and pushes out of his chair.

LAPOINT (CONT'D)

But what do I know that y'all
don't. It's all happened already.
And it'll happen again all the
same.

LaPoint gives his back door a little kick and heads out to the swamp.

Tongue stares at Belly and her puppies. Finally, her eyes meet Jack's. They come to a silent agreement.

EXT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - SWAMP - DAY

LaPoint dumps a third can of tuna into a bowl.

Tongue has her arms around Belly. Tears line her cheeks.

LaPoint walks over to Jack and motions for her rifle. Jack hands it over. He checks the chamber and cocks the gun.

LAPOINT

(to Tongue)

Say somethin' if you're gonna say
it.

Tongue gushes as she squeezes Belly, the dog blissfully unaware of what's to come.

TONGUE

I knew we'd be best friends as soon
as I seen you... You're just like
me, you know that? You're just like
me.

LAPOINT

Alright.

LaPoint takes Belly by the collar. He notices that it's Rooster's old collar. A hint of hesitation warps his brow.

He leads the dog to the bowl of tuna. Belly begins to eat.

LaPoint mumbles a prayer under his breath. He raises the rifle to the dog's head.

He takes a breath...

TONGUE

Wait. Wait.

Tongue walks over to LaPoint and puts her hands out.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

She's my dog.

LaPoint looks at Jack, who gives him a little shrug, "Okay."

LAPOINT

(to Tongue)

You sure now?

Tongue nods.

LaPoint hands Tongue the rifle.

TIME SLOWS as Tongue raises the gun...

The back of Belly's head as the dog eats. (It's the exact same shot from the opening montage.)

The rifle points down at the dog's head, the face behind the rifle blurry, out-of-focus. (Also from the opening.)

PULL FOCUS to see that it's Tongue staring down the length of the barrel.

LaPoint studies Tongue. He watches as the humanity fades from her eyes, a pliable innocence hardening into a callous.

Tongue's finger bends to the trigger.

She exhales...

And...

LaPoint's hand comes down on the barrel.

Tongue stands frozen in shooting position, her bony frame shaking, as LaPoint takes the rifle from her grip. He heads towards the cabin.

Finally, Tongue looks over at her sister. Tears are running down Jack's face.

Belly licks the last flakes of tuna from the bowl.

INT. TRAPPER'S HUT - DAY

Mary-Anne sits between James and Denver on the floor. Denver massages the nap of Mary-Anne's neck, her muscles flexed.

DENVER

Relax.

Jimmy climbs on James' back, his arms wrapped around his father's shoulders.

JAMES

(to Mary-Anne)

The longer we wait, the bigger the risk. Y'know that, right?

(beat)

Sometimes you gotta be cruel to be kind.

Denver's hand moves up Mary-Anne's neck to her hair, stroking it gently.

DENVER

Where'd they go?

No answer.

Denver grabs a handful of hair. He tugs. Not too hard.

DENVER (CONT'D)

Where?

MARY-ANNE

I don't know.

He tugs a little harder. Mary-Anne grunts, stifling the pain.

DENVER

Look at me when I'm talking.

Mary-Anne looks up at him, steely-eyed.

DENVER (CONT'D)

Where.

MARY-ANNE

Fuckers-ville.

He yanks down hard. Mary-Anne cries out.

James just stares forward, letting it happen.

JAMES
Cruel to be kind.

His eyes find the ground. He sees something...

James gets up and bends down. He picks something up: the "Rooster" tag from the collar.

MONTAGE -- A SAD, SLOW OLLA BELL REED FOLK SONG PLAYS OVER.

--James' and Denver's trucks rip off.

--Tongue pets Belly. LaPoint waits by the window. Jack sits steady, rifle in her lap.

--In her backyard, Mrs. Guthrie stands over Reuben's grave: a sapling grows out of the dirt. She snaps a photo with her Polaroid camera.

--Maggie and Floyd fill in the bubbles of their Keno sheets. RC wipes the counter.

--Still couch bound in his living room, Carl simmers in guilt. He debates in his head. Finally he launches off the couch, toppling over beer cans. He picks up the phone.

--Bill ejects a Jeopardy tape from the VCR and pops another episode in.

END MONTAGE

INT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - DAY

Tongue, Jack, LaPoint and the dogs wait for what's coming.

JACK
(to herself)
Gotta feed daddy.

Engines rumble up the road. LaPoint looks through the window to see James' and Denver's trucks pulling up.

LAPOINT
I reckon you'll be feeding him soon.

JACK
Got a plan?

LAPOINT

Keep the dogs out of sight. He don't need to see 'em. And don't say nothin'. I'll try reasonin' with the man... Maybe there's still somethin' left in him.

Tongue gathers up the puppies, gently loading them into her pockets.

Jack takes Belly by the collar.

JACK

Come on, girl.

INT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Knock, knock, knock. The doorknob rattles from the outside.

JAMES

(through door)
LaPoint.

LAPOINT

Mr. Rae.

JAMES

(through door)
You gonna open this or am I?

LAPOINT

We gonna talk reasonable?

JAMES

(through door)
Do I not sound reasonable?

LaPoint steps over, unlocks the door and steps back.

LAPOINT

Open.

Slowly, James enters holding Mary-Anne by the arm in front of him. He holds a magnum pistol in his other hand. Jimmy follows his father, clinging to the back of his shirt.

Tongue stands by the back screen door, no sign of the puppies.

Jack holds her rifle in her lap, at ease.

Finally, Denver enters holding a rifle of his own.

Jack's eyes find Mary-Anne's.

JACK
(mouths the words)
You alright?

Mary-Anne nods but she's clearly not.

JAMES
So, how this gonna go?

LAPPOINT
How 'bout a drink? Denver, pour us
a round.

Denver raises his rifle at LaPoint. Everyone stiffens.

DENVER
Shut the fuck up. Where are they?

LaPoint raises his hands slowly.

LAPPOINT
Hey now. Just tryin' to lighten the
mood.

Jack eases her hands up the rifle's handle.

Denver's eyes dart back and forth from LaPoint to Jack.

DENVER
I see you, Buggum. Don't think I
don't.

LAPPOINT
How 'bout pointing that thing a
little lower.

DENVER
It's good here.

James tugs on Mary-Anne's arm.

JAMES
Give me the dogs and I'll give you
this one.

LAPOINT

This ain't "Die Hard", let the poor thing go.

JAMES

Show 'em to me.

LAPOINT

They're not here, James. Friend picked up, drove 'em on out.

JAMES

You're lyin'. Know how I know?

LAPOINT

How's that.

James stares at LaPoint with a manic energy. James starts to bark, quiet at first, almost to himself.

Tongue and Jack look on edge as James barks louder and louder, showing his teeth. Even Denver looks concerned as spit flies from James' gritted teeth.

From the closet, Belly barks back.

James stops barking. Stares at LaPoint, "That's how."

James takes a step forward towards the closet--

LAPOINT (CONT'D)

James. We can just let this be. Forgot about everything--

TONGUE

There ain't no sick! Never was!

JACK

Tongue--

LAPOINT

Let me handle--

JAMES

Oh there's a sickness.

TONGUE

No there ain't!

JAMES

It can't be stopped. It's in the air. Humans get it too, y'know. They just show it different...

(beat)

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

I have it.

(to LaPoint)

You have it.

(to Jack and Tongue)

And now you girls have it too.

LAPPOINT

Don't blame them, James. You know what happened. It was an accident. Nobody has to know.

JAMES

I don't know what you're talkin' about--

LAPPOINT

You remember what happened to your boy.

Jimmy cowers behind James, gripping his father's shirt.

LAPPOINT (CONT'D)

Tell me what happened to Jimmy.

JAMES

Rooster attacked my--

LAPPOINT

What happened to him, James.

Denver cocks his rifle.

DENVER

Shut it, LaPoint!

LAPPOINT

Tell me what happened, James--

JAMES

Your dog tore him up.

LAPPOINT

My dog bit your boy. But what happened after?

JAMES

He ripped into him like newspaper--

LAPPOINT

You shot him, James.

Beat.

LAPOINT (CONT'D)
 You were tryin' to shoot Rooster,
 tryin' to save your poor boy but
 you shot Jimmy by accident. It was
 a mistake, James, a mistake...

James shakes his head, spiralling deeper into denial.

JAMES
 No.

LAPOINT
 Coulda happened to anyone--

James lifts his magnum. BANG!

LaPoint collapses to the floor.

Tongue takes off out the back door.

Jack raises her rifle but James pivots and BANG. Jack falls
 back against the chair.

CUT TO:

OUTSIDE

Tongue beelines it across the lawn into the reeds. She pushes
 LaPoint's rowboat out into the swamp.

BACK INSIDE

James heads for the closet.

With Jimmy by his side, James opens the closet: Belly stares
 up at him on edge. She BARKS--

BANG--BANG--BANG!

James fires three shots killing Belly unceremoniously.

Mary-Anne runs over to Jack, who writhes on the floor.

MARY-ANNE
 You okay?

Jack holds her arm. A flesh wound.

Denver stares down at LaPoint who lies dead on the floor, a
 bloodstain expanding through his plaid.

DENVER

Christ, James. What the hell...

James ignores him. He walks over to Jack and Mary-Anne and picks up her rifle.

JAMES

Where's the rest.

EXT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - SWAMP - CONTINUOUS

James hustles outside. Jimmy trails right behind him.

ON THE SWAMP

Tongue rows frantically. The pups huddle on the floor around her feet.

She sees James on the shore and rows faster.

BACK ON LAND

James holsters his pistol and raises Jack's rifle, aiming it at Tongue.

JAMES' POV: We see Tongue swinging the paddles wildly, trying to get away. Next to her, on the bench: Jimmy -- no longer by his father's side.

James tilts the rifle down, does a double take. He tries to shake it off.

James rushes into the water up to his waist.

He raises the rifle again.

JAMES' POV: Jimmy is still there in the boat next to Tongue. Jimmy bends down and gently picks up a puppy. He pets it lovingly. It's the first time we've seen Jimmy smile.

A mix of shock and remorse pulses through James as he struggles to keep the rifle steady.

After a moment, James lowers the gun.

James can't take his eyes off his son as Jimmy drifts away.

EXT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - FRONT YARD - DAY

A police cruiser barrels down the drive.

INT. POLICE CRUISER (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Behind the wheel, Officer Ford. Next to him in the passenger seat, Carl. He looks resolute as his father's truck comes into view.

EXT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - BACK YARD - LATER

Jack finishes tying her shirt into a sling for her arm.

EXT. LAPOINT'S CABIN - FRONT YARD - LATER

Mary-Anne and Carl sit on the molding couch lined with garden gnomes.

Across the yard, they watch Officer Ford load James into the back of the cruiser. Denver stands nearby.

MARY-ANNE

Pretty tough thing you did,
callin'.

Carl shrugs.

CARL

You still leavin'?

Mary-Anne shakes her head, "No."

MARY-ANNE

More reason to stay.
(beat)
You?

Carl meets his father's eye.

CARL

Reckon I will now.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - EVENING

Where we first met the sisters, in the clearing, behind a fallen tree, Tongue sleeps with the puppies.

The sapling that Tongue tied her snare to stands upright, soaking up the last light of the day.

The sound of footsteps approaching.

Tongue springs awake, on guard.

Jack and Mary-Anne stand in front of her.

INT. BUGGUM HOME - PARENT'S ROOM - NIGHT

Jack, Mary-Anne, Tongue and Bill sit in bed as Trebek reads the clue for final Jeopardy.

The puppies lay on the foot of the bed.

The three sisters look worn out, exhausted - like they've aged years in a day.

Tongue looks up at her father. She takes Honey-Nut from the end of the bed and carefully places him in Bill's hands.

Bill feels the puppy crawling around. He looks down at it with indifference.

After a moment, he flicks off the TV with the remote.

The girls watch as their father moves his hand and strokes the puppy's soft new fur.

The sisters look at each other.

TONGUE

Wish mom was here to see this.

JACK

Yeah.

MARY-ANNE

Me too.

TONGUE

But she won't will she...

Jack looks at Tongue, her eyes saying "No." Jack gently shakes her head.

TONGUE (CONT'D)

That's okay... That's okay.

FADE OUT