

THE MAN IN THE YARD

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FADE IN:

EXT. WHEAT FIELD - DAWN

Sunrise over a wheat field, stretching off into the horizon. Thousands of looming stalks stand perfectly still. Unseen crickets chirp their final songs.

YOUNG GIRL (V.O.)  
Once upon a time, there lived three  
little pigs.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - EARLY MORNING

The wheat field ends abruptly at A THIN, DIRT COUNTRY ROAD. On the other side of the road, acres and acres of unkempt, five-foot-high, cereal ryegrass grow wildly.

YOUNG GIRL (V.O.)  
One day, the pigs decided it was  
time to leave their mother's home.  
So, off they went to build houses  
of their own.

EXT. FIELD OF RYEGRASS - CONTINUOUS

The unmarked road turns and jets onward through the field. Next to the road, the last crooked remnants of WHAT WAS ONCE A BEAUTIFUL OAK TREE reach toward the sky; its remaining limbs gray, bare, and broken.

YOUNG GIRL (V.O.)  
The first little pig made his home  
out of straw. After it was built,  
he sat down to eat his dinner,  
until he heard a knock on the door.

EXT. FIELD OF RYEGRASS - CONTINUOUS

The road dead-ends at a single destination: a fenced in residence. A sign on a METAL GATE reads: "PRIVATE PROPERTY." Behind it, a gravel driveway winds into the distance.

YOUNG GIRL (V.O.)  
It was the big... bad... wolf. He  
could smell the pig inside.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

The driveway leads to A WHITE, THREE-STORY, VICTORIAN FARMHOUSE, surrounded on all sides by endless tall ryegrass. And nothing else. For miles.

YOUNG GIRL'S (V.O.)  
 "Little pig. Little pig. Let me in," he growled. "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin."

EXT. FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The house is old, but has been kept in decent shape. The bushes in the yard are in desperate need of landscaping and the potted plants on the porch are all dying.

YOUNG GIRL'S (V.O.)  
 "Then I'll huff... and I'll puff... and I'll blow your house in!"

IN THE BACKYARD, a JEEP sits in front of a garage. Behind the garage, a BLUE TARP covers A DAMAGED PICKUP TRUCK; its front end is smashed in and it's missing the two front tires.

INT. CHILD'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Inside, ANNIE (6) sits on her bedroom floor and reads "THE THREE LITTLE PIGS" to A SMALL STUFFED PENGUIN. She flips to the next page and eyes its illustration apprehensively: it's the Big Bad Wolf, teeth snarling, approaching the Little Pig.

She glances down at her Penguin, considers, then flips back to the page before.

ANNIE  
 But... then the wolf asked really nicely and the pig said okay and let him in and they painted water colors and became best friends.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - SAME TIME

CLOSE ON the sleeping face of RAMONA (35), who suddenly JOLTS awake with a STARTLED GASP. *Nightmare*. She lies on the right side of a large bed; the other side is empty. On her left ring finger, we spot a WEDDING RING.

On her bedside table, Ramona notices that her digital clock is blank. No time. Not even a blinking "12:00." Nothing. She flicks a lamp a few times. Nothing. *Power's out.*

RAMONA  
(HEAVY SIGH) Wonderful.

Her left arm is in a CAST. Sitting up, she carefully swings her right leg off the bed and straps it into a BOOT CAST on the floor. She WINCES from the most subtle of movements.

She peers anxiously at a SMALL SILVER KEY on her bedside table. After a beat... she quickly buries it in the drawer.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ramona opens a medicine cabinet and grabs a PILL BOTTLE that reads "PAROXETINE ANTI-DEPRESSANT." She takes one.

In the light from the window, we see that her cast has "ANNIE" written many times in big, sloppy letters and in varying colors. In one spot, tinily written, is "BEN."

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Using a CRUTCH, Ramona hobbles slowly back into her room. *Crutch... step... crutch... step...* She grabs her IPHONE from a dresser. It has 1% battery. She types in her password and as it unlocks, it dies immediately.

Ramona GROANS. She plugs the phone into a charger -- no charge. *Duh.*

RAMONA  
Right. (SIGH) Shit.

INT. ANNIE'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

ANNIE  
...and then the big bad wolf wanted  
to play dress up. So--

Ramona opens Annie's bedroom door and peeks her head in. She spots the book in her daughter's hands and smiles.

RAMONA  
(teasing)  
The big bad wolf plays dress up,  
huh?

ANNIE  
I changed it 'cause Penguin doesn't  
like the scary parts.

Ramona eyes the stuffed Penguin then nods, understanding.

RAMONA  
Did you sleep in here all night?

ANNIE  
No. I slept with Ben.

RAMONA  
(disappointed)  
Oh. (BEAT) Well, next time, don't bug him. If you can't sleep, you can come in my bed, okay?

Ramona smiles. Annie doesn't.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Outside Annie's bedroom, Ramona closes the door.

TEEN BOY (O.S.)  
The power's out, this sucks.

She turns to see BEN (13) outside of his room. He holds an XBOX GUN CONTROLLER and has A HEADSET on his head.

RAMONA  
Good morning to you too.

BEN  
How long 'til it comes back on? My Call of Duty friends are probably gonna think I've been kidnapped.

RAMONA  
Hey, you're lucky you still have video game privileges after what Mrs. Adams told--

BEN  
(GROAN) Mom, I told you. It wasn't "a fight." Mrs. Adams is full of crap and you know it.

RAMONA  
(SIGH) Ben, can we not, please? Not this early.

Relying on her crutch, Ramona heads toward the stairs.

BEN  
So, shouldn't we like, call the power company or whatever?

RAMONA  
Um... I can't actually.

BEN  
Why not?

RAMONA  
(sheepish)  
Phone's dead.

BEN  
(SIGH) Mom, you do realize that  
cell phones need to be charged in  
order to work, right?

He aims his gun controller at her. She swats it away.

RAMONA  
I had it plugged in, but it didn't  
charge! I don't know why.

BEN  
Suurrre.

Ramona begins to descend the stairs. She has to carefully  
put both feet on each step. *First step... second step...*

BEN (CONT'D)  
Well, I guess I'll go... read the  
Bible like some Amish kid.  
(then, insinuating)  
By the way, if you let your son get  
his own phone like he asked, we  
wouldn't be in this here pickle.

RAMONA  
Not now please.

*Third step... fourth step... fifth step...*

Unbeknownst to Ramona, Ben raises a middle finger, flipping  
her off behind her back. Then he storms back into his room.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

The stairs end in the first floor foyer, by the FRONT DOOR.  
It's a sturdy, wooden door with a large, reliable bolt lock.

*Eighth step... ninth step...*

Ramona finally finishes her descent of the stairs, wipes a  
bit of sweat from her forehead, and takes a DEEP BREATH. She  
readjusts her crutch, and turns into...

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...the living room, which is being flooded with white light from three large windows. As she hobbles through the room, we settle on A LARGE FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH above the fireplace.

Its subject is A HANDSOME BEARDED MAN wearing a state-required orange vest. He kneels next to a dead ten-point buck. The butt of his REMINGTON 700 HUNTING RIFLE is on the ground and he smiles proudly.

Ramona avoids looking at the photograph and crutches into...

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

...the kitchen. One step in--

BARK BARK BARK! A LARGE BROWN DOG jumps out of nowhere.

RAMONA

Jesus! (ANNOYED SIGH) Charlie.

CHARLIE, a Rhodesian Ridgeback Pitbull mix (he's a big dog) wags his tail wildly. Underneath the dog's right eye is A CUTE TAN SPOT. His COLLAR jingles as Ramona pets him.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Yes, hi. Hi, Charlie, hi.

Excited and playful, Charlie tries to jump up on her.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Easy, easy!

She pushes him aside and the chaotic dog bumps into the kitchen table, knocking a POTTED TULIP to the floor -- CRASH!

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Charlie! Come on, boy. Out. Out!

Charlie runs wildly toward the BACK DOOR. Ramona unlocks it, opens it, and the dog takes off outside.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

(SIGH) Christ, that dog.

She closes the door again, locks it, and looks at the broken pot, now in two pieces, its dirt spilled all over the floor.

ANNIE (O.S.)

(GASP) My flower!

An upset Annie runs in (holding Penguin like always), scoops the tulip into her hands, and starts to tear up.

ANNIE (CONT'D)  
Mommy, he's dead!

Ramona hands her a COFFEE MUG from the cabinet.

RAMONA  
No, no, no. He's fine, he's fine.  
Here.

Annie gently places the flower into the mug. Then she grabs some more dirt from the floor and fills it in.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Let's give him a drink.

Ramona turns on the faucet, grabs the mug, and waters it. She then sets the flower on a windowsill for Annie to see. Its new home reads: "GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK."

ANNIE  
This is Daddy's mug.

RAMONA  
Mm-hm. It was.

Ramona stares at the mug longingly, then forces a smile.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
You hungry?

Annie nods. Ramona grabs a frying pan hanging on the wall and places it on the stove.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
(calling out)  
Ben! You want some eggs?

INT. KITCHEN - A BIT LATER

Ramona and Ben are finished with breakfast. Annie plays with her bacon. Ramona rubs her eyes, still groggy.

BEN  
...then what would make the power  
go out if the wires are all buried?

RAMONA  
Could be a problem at the plant.  
Or maybe something got to the  
lines.

BEN  
Like something underground?

RAMONA  
I dunno. I guess.

Ben sees Annie is having trouble cutting her bacon. So he grabs her knife and fork and cuts it up for her.

BEN  
It was probably a Graboid.

ANNIE  
(immediately concerned)  
A what?

BEN  
A Graboid. From "Tremors?"  
(getting into it)  
They're these big... monster worms that live in the earth... and when people walk on the ground, they grab their legs and... YUM!

On "yum," Ben snatches a piece of Annie's bacon and eats it.

ANNIE  
(annoyed)  
Mom!

Ramona smacks Ben on the shoulder.

RAMONA  
Don't get her all worked up.  
(to Annie)  
Relax, baby. It was probably just Bugs Bunny.

ANNIE  
Who?

RAMONA  
(incredulous)  
You don't know who Bugs Bunny is either? "Ehh, what's up, Doc?"

Annie shakes her head no. Ramona SIGHS.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
I have failed you as a mother.

BEN  
What about all those groceries Mr. Marcus brought yesterday?  
(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)  
Is everything gonna go bad 'cause  
there's no power?

RAMONA  
It should be fine if we keep the  
fridge closed. So, let's try not  
to open the door much.

A beat. Ben takes a drink of water.

ANNIE  
Mr. Marcus smells bad.

Ben LAUGHS, SPITTING a little water from his mouth.

RAMONA  
Annie!

BEN  
He kinda does, Mom. Gotta admit!

Ben can't help but CHUCKLE. Ramona shakes her head.

RAMONA  
Well, don't mention it to his face.  
Ever. I don't know how we would've  
gotten through the last few months  
without Fred and Nancy, so be nice.  
(BEAT) Plus, he's a veteran, so you  
have to be nice to him.  
("on the bright side")  
And hey, if the power doesn't come  
back by this afternoon... we'll  
get to eat ice cream for lunch.

Annie's eyes widen, excited. Ramona smiles, then grabs her  
plate and starts to get up. Ben notices she's struggling.

BEN  
I got it, Mom.

RAMONA  
No, no. I got it.

Ben goes to grab Ramona's plate, but she holds onto it. They  
"play tug-of-war" with it.

BEN  
Mom, I got it.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
I can get it.

BEN  
(aggravated)  
I'm trying to help you!

RAMONA  
You don't have to!

BEN  
(snapping)  
Let me DO IT!!

RAMONA  
(recoiling)  
Okay, fine.

Ramona lets go. Ben storms to the dishwasher, opens it, and starts to put the plate inside.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
But, since the power's out, you'll  
have to wash it by hand.

A beat as Ben reconsiders. Then caves.

BEN  
Okay fine, you can do it.

Ben leaves the plate in the sink and exits. Ramona rolls her eyes: *Figures*. Annie walks to the fridge and opens it.

RAMONA  
Annie. What did I say?

ANNIE  
(pouting)  
But I want a treat.

RAMONA  
I said later. Maybe. Close the  
door.

Annie does reluctantly.

BEN (O.S.)  
Uh, Mom?

Ramona YAWNS and rubs her eyes, still trying to wake up.

BEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Mom?!

RAMONA  
Yeah?

Ben re-enters. He looks concerned.

BEN  
There's a man in the yard.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Outside, about a hundred feet from the house, just before the tall ryegrass begins, an OLD MAN sits in a WOODEN CHAIR.

A BLACK PORKPIE HAT rests atop a mess of greasy, white hair; its wide brim casting a thick shadow, obscuring his features and making his face a haunting, lifeless blur. *Are his eyes open? Is he watching us?*

His dirty, ragged black suit looks like it belongs in a museum. A LONG BLACK COAT, slightly too big, sits atop a BLACK BUTTONED-DOWN SHIRT and BLACK VEST. TIGHT BLACK SLACKS encase sharp pointy knees. His BLACK LEATHER SHOES are worn in, but clean.

ANNIE

Who is that?

RAMONA

I... I don't know.

His long legs are outstretched in front of him and his bony gray hands dangle from the arm rests, giving him a casual, comfortable, slouch. Like the still grass around him, he doesn't move at all. *Is he breathing? Is he even alive?*

Ramona, Ben, and Annie stare silently out the front windows, each studying the lifeless stranger in their yard.

BEN

What a creep.

ANNIE

Do you think he's hurt?

RAMONA

I'm uh, not sure.

BEN

Well, either way, he's trespassing and needs to get off our property.

RAMONA

Okay, okay. Calm down.

BEN

I should go outside with a bat and chase him off the yard.

RAMONA

No you should not.

BEN  
Well we gotta do something before  
he chops down the door with an axe.

ANNIE  
(scared)  
Mom?!

RAMONA  
Ben.

BEN  
What? Ex-cuuse me for being  
concerned about the scary man  
outside.

RAMONA  
I don't see an axe, so -- chill.

BEN  
He could have somehin'.

RAMONA  
He doesn't.

A beat.

ANNIE  
He could have a grenade.

Ramona shoots Ben an angry look: "*Look what you did.*"

RAMONA  
Annie, I promise you, he does not  
have a grenade. (BEAT) And stop  
watching your brother play Call of  
Duty.

They all continue to stare. He remains perfectly still.

BEN  
You think he can see us?

ANNIE  
I think he's sleeping.

BEN  
Really?

Ben squints, trying to get as good of a look as he can.

RAMONA  
I don't think he's sleeping. He's  
just... not moving. At all.

BEN  
He almost looks...  
(afraid to say it)  
...dead.

A macabre beat.

RAMONA  
He's not dead.

BEN  
All right, I'll just go throw a  
rock at him to be sure.

RAMONA  
Stop. He's... resting. He's  
probably very confused.

BEN  
Why?

RAMONA  
'Cause. Clearly he's lost.

BEN  
Well, lost or not, he's freakin' me  
out.

ANNIE  
Yeah, he's freakin' me out, Mom.

RAMONA  
Will you both relax? It's a  
defenseless old man.

Another long, quiet beat.

ANNIE  
We should call the police.

BEN  
(pointed)  
Great idea, Annie. But  
unfortunately, we can't.

ANNIE  
Why not?

BEN  
Well, I don't want to name names,  
but a certain Mom of ours forgot to  
charge her phone last night and now  
it's out of battery.

RAMONA  
But it's perfectly okay because  
everything's fine.

BEN  
(smart ass)  
When I get a phone of my own, I'm  
gonna keep that thing so charged.  
Y'know, in case of emergencies.

Ramona ignores this. Another beat of uncomfortable silence.

ANNIE  
Is Mr. Marcus coming today?

RAMONA  
No. Tomorrow.

Putting the pieces together of their possibly tricky  
situation, Ramona nervously bites her lip, then stops  
herself, trying not to let her face show any concern.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
This man will be long gone by then.

BEN  
How do you know that?

Ramona doesn't answer.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Come on, let me go get a bat.

RAMONA  
I said no!

A beat. Ben SIGHS, annoyed.

ANNIE  
Where's Charlie?

BEN  
Yeah, is he still outside?

RAMONA  
(under her breath)  
Shit.  
(then)  
Yes.

BEN  
Nice! When this dude sees a two-  
hundred pound dog running at him,  
he's gonna be outta here so fast.

ANNIE

What if Charlie bites him?

RAMONA

A lawsuit is the last thing we need right now, so for everyone's sake, I hope Charlie stays preoccupied with whatever animal he's chasing.

BEN

Well, I hope he rips this dude's head off.

RAMONA

That's enough.

BEN

And the sooner the better too. We don't want to give him any chance to break in...

RAMONA

Ben.

BEN

...tie us up...

RAMONA

Ben!

A beat.

BEN

(can't help it)  
...and eat us.

RAMONA

(snapping)  
STOP IT!

She nudges him forcefully. Ben recoils.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

I have everything under control!  
We're in here, he's out there,  
we're fine!

Ramona takes a DEEP BREATH, calming down again.

BEN

(timid)  
Okay, geez. I'm just concerned,  
that's all.

They all continue to watch *The Man In The Yard*, as if expecting him to do something at any moment. He doesn't.

ANNIE

I wish Dad were here.

BEN

Me too.

A beat.

Ramona looks at her two kids and comes to a decision.

RAMONA

I'm gonna go talk to him.

She hobbles to the couch, plops down and starts putting A BOOT on her left foot. (She keeps her right leg in its cast.)

BEN

Uh, what?

RAMONA

I'm gonna go outside and I'm gonna talk to him and you'll both see that there's nothing to be afraid of. And then we'll all eat some ice cream. Deal?

Ben sticks a finger in his ear and shakes it around wildly, as if to unclog it.

BEN

Mom, when's the last time you scheduled me an ear appointment? Because it sounded like you just said you were gonna do the dumbest thing ever.

Ramona ignores him and continues tying her boot.

BEN (CONT'D)

Well, at least take a bat with you!

RAMONA

I am not walking out there with a weapon, Ben. Giving an old man a heart attack is not on my to-do list today, all right?

Her boot now tied, Ramona uses her crutch to stand herself up. She hobbles into the foyer. Everyone follows.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Ramona heads for the front door.

BEN

I vote against this plan.

Ben raises his hand, "voting." He then grabs Annie's hand and raises it too.

BEN (CONT'D)

Annie too.

RAMONA

Too bad. I'm in charge.

Ramona unlocks the front door and opens it. But Ben pushes it closed.

BEN

Y'know, technically, I'm the man of the house now.

RAMONA

You're thirteen.

BEN

Exactly! In some countries, I could be king!

RAMONA

Oh yeah? What countries?

Ben thinks. He has no idea.

BEN

Game of Thrones!

RAMONA

Stay here with Annie.

Ramona pushes his hand away and exits, closing the door behind her. Ben looks down at his scared sister.

BEN

Don't worry, I bet he's just a Jehovah's Witness or something.

ANNIE

What's a Jehovah's Witness?

BEN

They're people who show up at your house and the only way to get them to leave is to join their religion.  
 (then, considering/joking)  
 Actually, I hope he's a murderer.

He smiles at Annie, trying to lighten the mood, but she remains somber. He gets down to her level.

BEN (CONT'D)

(comforting)  
 Hey, I'm not gonna let anything bad happen. Okay?

He grabs Penguin and holds him up.

BEN (CONT'D)

I'll look after you, and you look after Penguin, deal?

She hugs Penguin, then finally smiles back. Ben makes a silly face, sticking out his tongue and crossing his eyes. Annie does the same. It's cute.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - SAME TIME

Ramona takes a few steps onto the front porch. From out here, her view of The Man In The Yard hasn't changed much. He's still sitting there, frozen. She walks -- with the use of her crutch -- to the end of the porch.

RAMONA

(calling out)  
 Hello? Sir?

Nothing.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Sir? Can I help you?

Still nothing. She begins carefully down the porch stairs, one hand on the railing, the other holding the crutch under her armpit. *First step... second step... third step...*

She walks into the grass and slowly begins across the yard. *Crutch... step... crutch... step...*

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Ben and Annie watch nervously out the window as their mother crutches away from the house.

BEN  
 (ANNOYED SIGH) Man, I should be  
 playing XBox right now.

EXT. FRONT YARD - SAME TIME

Ramona slowly approaches The Man. *Crutch... step...  
 crutch... step...*

As she begins to get a better view of this stranger, she can finally make out his face under the dark brim. He is awake. And he's--

smiling.

*Crutch... step... crutch... step...*

With each step, his face becomes more and more visible under his hat. A jolly grin shows off long, white teeth.

About thirty feet from his chair, Ramona stops. She wipes her brow and readjusts her crutch. Her heart is pounding.

RAMONA  
 Hello?

A beat. The Man remains frozen, almost as if "on pause."

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 ...Sir?

The Man simply stares at her, still grinning.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 Are you okay? Sir? Can I--

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 Good morning, ma dear!

The Man speaks with a loud raspy, unsettling Southern drawl, like a disgraced Televangelist with a smoking habit.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 Pardon my unannounced arrival. I'm sure spottin' me out here so early must have frightened you and your family.

RAMONA  
 Um. (CHUCKLE) A little actually.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

Well, I do apologize. That was not my intention.

A beat.

RAMONA

Can I help you?

THE MAN IN THE YARD

I'm so glad you asked. Do you mind if I come in?

Ramona thinks, quickly running scenarios through her mind.

RAMONA

Um, I... I don't know about that.  
(BEAT) Who are you?

THE MAN IN THE YARD

Y'know, where I'm from --  
Cartersville, Georgia that is --  
the true measure of a household  
lies within how they treat a  
stranger at their door.

RAMONA

Well, around here we don't just let anyone into our homes.

The Man looks Ramona up and down.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

What's your name?

RAMONA

(hesitant)  
It's... Ramona. (BEAT) What's yours?

THE MAN IN THE YARD

(savoring)  
Ra-moaaan-ahhhh... Of course it is.

The Man's unrelenting smile grows bigger than ever. Ramona bites her lip, nervous.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

What a wonderful name. Though, I was taught in school that it's proper to address a woman by her surname. So which do you prefer, shall I call you "Ramona" or shall I call you "Missus--"?

RAMONA

Just Ramona.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

Very well. (BEAT) I meant no offense. Ramona it is. I only asked because I noticed that beautiful ring on your finger.

Ramona looks down at her wedding ring. She touches it with her thumb, remembering that she had it on.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

Where is your husband this morning, Ramona?

RAMONA

Hunting. He went out hunting.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

Ah, hunting! Such a rewarding recreation. I engage in it myself from time to time. And what is your husband out hunting this morning, Ramona?

RAMONA

Deer.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

Deer?

RAMONA

Yes.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

Huh. Well isn't that peculiar. Deer hunting season in this county doesn't begin until October. Or am I mistaken?

*Shit.* She wrinkles her eyebrows, exaggerating her thinking.

RAMONA

Right. It was uh, turkey.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

(CONDESCENDING CHUCKLE) Ramona, that also doesn't start until October.

*Shit. Shit. Shit.*

RAMONA  
Squirrel. Fox squirrel.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Ah, fox squirrel. I see. So, he went out to hunt a few fox squirrels and left his feeble wife alone with two young children to care for? And in her current condition? Tsk, tsk, tsk. Now, what kind of a man does that? Clearly one whose momma didn't raise him right.

A beat as Ramona stares deep into the Man's beady, unblinking eyes.

RAMONA  
What the hell do you want?

For the first time, his grin vanishes. A scowl of disappointment spreads from his forehead to his skinny lips.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Now that ain't any kind of way to talk to a guest.

RAMONA  
You're not my guest.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
(aggravated)  
And you're a terrible liar. You're not married. Well, you were, clearly, but you're not anymore. Are you?

Like it never left, The Man's grin returns.

RAMONA  
When he finds you here--

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Passed recently did he? Shame. If you don't mind my asking, how did he die?

RAMONA  
If you're not off my property in sixty seconds, I'm calling the police.

Ramona turns around to head back, but--

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 Did it have anything to do with  
 that damaged pickup truck behind  
 your garage?

She turns back around to face him, grief-stricken. He smiles wide, as if he somehow already knows the whole story.

RAMONA  
 He... he had an accident.

The Man and Ramona stare deep into one another's eyes for a long beat. He tilts his white head, intrigued by her answer.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 Did he, now?

She SWALLOWS, then nods ever so slightly.

The Man shakes his head, as if disappointed at Ramona.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 How unfortunate.

Ramona stares at The Man, frozen with fear and hatred.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 At least you survived the crash.  
 Save for those injuries to your leg  
 and arm, you're just right as rain,  
 huh?

Ramona doesn't say anything. The Man pities her.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 But now... when you hobble up and  
 down the stairs of that enormous  
 three-story house every morning --  
 like a pathetic cripple -- you  
 curse the person that put you in  
 that ugly condition, don't you?

Tears well in Ramona's eyes.

RAMONA  
 (tortured)  
 Yes. Yes, I do.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 That's what I thought.

A tense beat. The Man then looks down at Ramona's casts.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

"Annie."

Realizing that her children's names are all over her casts, she panics and tries to cover them up, but it's impossible.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

Aw, young Annie had quite a field day signing your casts, didn't she? Adorable. And "Ben." Named after his father maybe?

RAMONA

You keep my children's names out of your goddamn mouth.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

Ben appears to have only signed the one time. And so small? Perhaps he wasn't too keen on signing at all, was he?

Ramona glances down at "BEN" on her cast.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

Tell me, have things changed between the two of you? Since the accident, I mean. Young boys tend to be so close with their fathers. (BEAT) Ever get the feeling that he wishes you had died in that accident instead?

(shrugging playfully)

(CHUCKLES) Kids.

RAMONA

Get out of my fucking yard.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

Oh, Ramona... I'm so sorry to tell you this but... I'm really gonna ruin your day.

Ramona looks around, as if searching for something.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

(feigned concern)

What is it? Whatcha lookin' for?

("eureka")

Oh, I know! You're wondering where Charlie the dog has run off to.

Her eyes widen, shocked. *Oh my God.*

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 Surely he should be running up here  
 aaaaaaannny moment to chase me from  
 your property. Well...

From behind his back, The Man reveals a thin piece of fabric; parts of it, dark red. He tosses it in front of him and Ramona hears a recognizable JINGLE as it hits the ground.

Even at this distance, she notices a shiny silver tag, where the name "CHARLIE" is now covered in blood.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 And right about now you're  
 wondering whether or not you can  
 drive a stick shift with your leg  
 in that cast. Maybe. (BEAT) But  
 let me just save you the trouble  
 before you drag Ben and little  
 Annie out of the house...

The Man leans forward as if to tell her a secret.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 Your Jeep ain't gonna start.

He winks.

RAMONA  
 ...W-w-why are you here?

The Man's grin grows larger than ever, becoming an unnatural expression that no human face should be able to form.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 I was invited.

RAMONA  
 By... by who?

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 Well... by you, Ramona.

Ramona stares at him, not understanding.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 Every evening, after you kiss your  
 children goodnight, you lie  
 restless in that big empty bed, all  
 alone... and beg for me.

On Ramona's confused face, we...

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - THE NIGHT BEFORE

Ramona, unable to sleep, eyes glazed over, sits up in her bed. She looks down at her clenched fist and opens it, revealing the silver key we saw earlier...

BACK TO SCENE:

THE MAN IN THE YARD

(sinister)

You need me, don't you?

(then, giddy)

Welp, here I am! Ready when you are!

RAMONA

I... I... I don't understand.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

(direct)

Okay, I'll make you a deal, Ramona.

He folds his long hands, as if coming to the end of a business meeting.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

If you let me in -- right now -- no harm will come to you Ben and little Annie today. If not, well...

(shrugs)

...no promises.

Horror-struck, Ramona can only stare at this bizarre stranger, confused and terrified.

A long beat.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

Well? Whatta'ya say? Won't you let me come in?

Ramona turns and quickly hobbles toward the house. She hurries across the yard, BREATHING HEAVILY.

*Crutch-step-crutch-step...* Even at her fastest, she's rather slow.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

*First step, second step, third step.* She shuffles toward the front door. She grabs the doorknob -- but stops.

Before she goes inside, she TAKES A DEEP, CALMING BREATH.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

The door opens and Ramona re-enters. Ben and Annie are standing there.

BEN  
Well? How'd it go? Who is he?

Face-to-face with her two children, Ramona masks her concern. For a long awkward beat, everyone is silent.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Mom? ...What'd he say?

Ramona opens her mouth to speak... but can't.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Tell me you at least asked him  
where he got that dope hat.

She eyes her son and young daughter...

BEN (CONT'D)  
...Mom?

...and puts on a brave face.

RAMONA  
Everything's fine. No need to  
worry. Perfectly harmless. He's  
just... confused. Alzheimer's,  
Dementia, definitely something.

She hobbles into the living room...

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...and looks out the window. The Man is still sitting there, motionless, same as before.

BEN  
Did he say anything?

RAMONA  
He did.

BEN  
("go on")  
...What was it?

RAMONA

He uh... he thought I was his nurse.

A beat. Ramona avoids eye contact with them.

*Are they going to buy it?*

ANNIE

His nurse?

RAMONA

Yeah. So, he probably wandered over here from John the Twenty-Third. At least, that's my best guess.

Another beat.

BEN

John the Twenty-Third? You mean, the old folks' home by the high school?

RAMONA

It's a uh... an assisted living center, yeah.

Ben thinks, wrinkling his brow, not buying it.

BEN

Isn't that place like... half an hour away?

RAMONA

As soon as the power comes back on, I'll call them and let them know he's here.

Ramona peeks outside -- The Man still hasn't moved. Then, masking her worry, she gives her children their marching orders as confidently as she can:

RAMONA (CONT'D)

So -- we're all just gonna stay inside today. The front door is locked, the back door is locked. And under no circumstances are we going to open them. Okay?

Ramona flashes Annie a reassuring smile.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Ice cream?

Annie nods. Ramona takes her by the hand.

BEN  
Mom, wait.

Ramona ushers Annie into the kitchen, then stays behind per Ben's request. Ben and Ramona are now alone.

BEN (CONT'D)  
(quietly)  
What's going on? You can tell me.

A beat as she stares at her son.

RAMONA  
There's nothing to tell.

She exits into the kitchen.

Ben looks down and notices that Ramona's boot and cast have left dirt stains on the nice carpet.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Annie sits at the table. Ramona grabs some bowls, spoons, and two pints of ice cream.

RAMONA  
Vanilla?

ANNIE  
Yes.

RAMONA  
Yes what?

ANNIE  
Yes please.

Ramona scoops the ice cream into two bowls and WHISTLES A HAPPY TUNE, as if nothing is wrong whatsoever.

RAMONA  
One for Annie. Two for mom.  
(calling out)  
Ben? Ice cream?  
(then)  
Ooo! Wonder if we have any  
chocolate syrup.

She opens the fridge and sees some.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

We do!

Ben enters, arms crossed, skeptical.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

(to Ben)

Want some?

A beat.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Ben?

BEN

Okay, let me make sure I got it straight: this hundred year-old lookin' dude escaped from his nursing home... walked like, thirty miles... found a wooden chair along the way... and just plopped down in our yard?

RAMONA

(dodging the subject)

Uh, I dunno, I guess. Vanilla or mint chocolate chip?

BEN

What's his name?

Ramona is trying desperately to ignore Ben.

RAMONA

(to Annie)

Chocolate syrup?

ANNIE

Yes please.

BEN

His name, Mom. Did he tell you his name?

Ramona gives Annie her ice cream.

RAMONA

(ANNOYED SIGH) No, he didn't tell me his--

BEN

Then how are you gonna check with the nursing home to see if he lives there?!

RAMONA

Ben, I--

BEN

So you're just gonna call them up and say, "Hi, have you lost any of your old people recently? 'Cause I got one in my yard. No, I don't know his name, but hey, can you come pick him up anyway?"

Ramona opens her mouth to say something... but has nothing.

BEN (CONT'D)

"Oh, and I'm sure he's pretty ripe from his journey, so bring a few extra pairs of Depends!"

RAMONA

Christ, Ben. Look, he...

(searching)

...he told me he lives at John the Twenty-Third. Should I believe him or not?

BEN

(perplexed)

Wait, wait, wait. He told you he lives there?

RAMONA

Yes!

BEN

But like... ten seconds ago you said you thought that's where he came from!

RAMONA

(growing frustrated)

No, I didn't. I said--

BEN

Yes you did!

RAMONA

Ben, I said--

BEN

Mom, you said it was your best guess!

RAMONA

DROP IT!

A beat. Ramona stares at him angrily.

Ben doesn't let up:

BEN

I think you should get Dad's gun.

Annie GASPS.

Ramona grabs a bowl from the counter and *SMASHES* it on the floor. It shatters, sending sharp pieces all over the kitchen. Ben and Annie recoil.

RAMONA

Go to your room.

BEN

(incredulous)

What?

RAMONA

Go. To. Your. Room.

A tense beat. Ben and Ramona stare one another down.

BEN

(SCOFF) No.

He exits into the living room as Annie starts to CRY.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Ben turns an arm chair around to face the window. He slumps down in it, "on guard." He stares at The Man In The Yard, who still hasn't moved at all.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Ramona SIGHS and rubs her eyes. She then grabs a broom from a closet and begins to sweep up the tiny pieces of bowl.

Annie CRIES HARDER.

RAMONA

Stop crying.

She doesn't.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Annie, if you don't stop crying,  
I'm gonna take away your ice cream.

At that, Annie stops crying on a dime and takes a big bite. Ramona continues to sweep.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Ben watches out the window, pissed. He then glances up at the photo above the fireplace, looking longingly at his father.

After a beat, he looks back outside.

On The Man, sitting perfectly still in his chair, we...

DISSOLVE TO:

LATER IN THE AFTERNOON

The sun is now high in the sky and The Man hasn't moved an inch.

Ben is still "on guard," but he's now slouching in his chair, rather tired.

Ben YAWNS.

Behind him, Ramona and Annie are playing CHUTES AND LADDERS. Ramona is trying desperately to make today as normal as ever. Annie rolls the dice and gets a "FOUR."

ANNIE

Four.

She moves her piece four spaces and lands on a ladder.

RAMONA

(playful)

Ooo, you got a ladder!

Annie moves her piece up the ladder. She's winning by a lot.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Dang, you're good at this game.  
What's your strategy?

ANNIE

(shrugging)

I dunno, I just... roll the dice.

Ramona LAUGHS.

RAMONA  
 "Roll the dice." I should try  
 that. Okay, Mom's turn.

She rolls.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 Three.

Ramona moves her piece three spaces. No ladder, no chute.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 (teasing)  
 Hey, I rolled the dice like you  
 said. How come I didn't get a  
 ladder?

ANNIE  
 (shrugs)  
 Stuff happens.

Ramona LAUGHS again.

RAMONA  
 "Stuff happens." That's true! All  
 right, Ben, you're up.

A beat. Across the room, Ben continues to stare out the  
 window.

ANNIE  
 Ben, your turn.

Another beat. He ignores them completely.

RAMONA  
 Oh-kay, looks like I'll roll for  
 your brother... again.

She rolls.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 Three.

She moves Ben's piece three spaces. It lands on a chute.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 Uh-oh. Sorry, buddy.

ANNIE  
 Ben, you got a chute.

BEN  
 I'm devastated.

Annie gets up and heads toward the kitchen.

RAMONA  
Where you goin'?

ANNIE  
I want some water.

Annie exits.

A beat.

BEN  
Mom, I just had a pretty good idea.

He turns around in his chair to face her.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Why don't we drive over to the  
Marcus'?

Ramona bites her lip.

BEN (CONT'D)  
That way, we can use their cell  
phone to call the old folks' home  
and get this old geezer off our  
yard even faster. Bada-bing, bada-  
boom, I'm a genius.

Ramona holds up her casts.

RAMONA  
I can't drive stick like this. You  
know that.

BEN  
Yeah...  
(has all the answers)  
...but I can.

He smiles, proud of himself.

A beat. Ramona starts to shake her head no.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Come on, Dad's let me drive the  
Jeep up and down the driveway a  
bunch of times!  
(begging)  
It's ten minutes away and all on  
country roads!

RAMONA

No.

BEN

(aggravated)

Mom! Why not?!

RAMONA

Because one, you're not old enough...

Ben lets out a LOUD, OVER THE TOP GROAN.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

...and two, there's something wrong with the Jeep. I don't know what it is, but I gotta take it in.

A beat. Ben is completely bewildered.

BEN

Really? With the Jeep?

RAMONA

Yeah, it's not starting, I don't know.

BEN

Since when? Dad replaced the starter in March and there's no way the battery is--

RAMONA

I said no!

Ben GROANS and turns back around, pissed. He slumps in his chair like the teenager that he is.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

We're staying right where we are. Inside. End of discussion. Everything's fine. Stop trying to "save the day."

A beat.

BEN

(under his breath)

You're a bitch.

She heard him.

RAMONA

What did you say?

Another beat.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

(stern)

Ben. What did you--

BEN

I said you're--

AHHHHHH!! It's Annie SCREAMING from the kitchen.

Ben and Ramona jump up immediately, run towards the kitchen...

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

...and look O.S. at Annie. On their horrified faces we...

SMASH CUT TO:

CLOSE ON Annie's bare foot, sitting on the table. A SHARP, TINY PIECE OF BOWL sticks out of her heel. It's bleeding. Ramona inspects it. Ben too.

RAMONA

It's just a little cut, baby.

ANNIE

(through tears)

It's a piece of the bowl!

Ramona feels terrible.

RAMONA

I have some tweezers upstairs.  
Let's go clean it out and we can  
put a band-aid on it. Kay?

Annie nods. She grabs Ramona's hand and they start to leave.

BEN

(snide)

Way to go, Mom.

She ignores him and exits with Annie.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

As they walk through the living room to reach the stairs, Ramona briefly peeks out the window.

The Man still hasn't moved.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Now all alone, Ben glances toward the back door, where, on a small hook, are a set of CAR KEYS.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - SAME TIME

Ramona and Annie both hobble up the *CREAKING* stairs.

ANNIE

I got a little blood on the stairs.

RAMONA

That's okay. It's just blood.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

A beat as Ben listens to them go.

Once he's sure they're on the second floor, he quietly unlocks the back door and grabs the car keys.

BEN

(to himself, skeptical)

Something wrong with the Jeep, huh?

He goes to leave, but then gets an idea. He turns around, tip-toes to the BASEMENT DOOR, opens it, reaches down the stairwell... and grabs A BAT.

Bat in hand, he exits silently out the back door.

EXT. HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ben shuts the door, then creeps through the backyard toward the driveway. He carries the bat at his side, holding it near the middle, like he's seen in action movies.

He steps over a COILED UP GARDEN HOSE as he comes to the corner of the house. Eyes on the Jeep, he stops. It's about fifty feet away, parked by the garage. But in order to get there, he'll have to walk in plain sight of The Man In The Yard.

A beat. He takes a DEEP BREATH... then goes for it.

He rounds the corner and walks briskly toward the garage. To calm his nerves, he talks under his breath, all the while keeping his eyes glued on The Man, a hundred or so feet away.

BEN

(sotto)

Hey there, ya old bastard. How's  
it goin'? Don't mind me, just  
walkin' to my Jeep.

He holds his bat in the air, showing it to The Man.

BEN (CONT'D)

(sotto)

Yep, got a bat here. And I know  
how to use it too. That's right, I  
hit two dingers over the fence last  
season. (BEAT) Sure, technically,  
one was a foul ball, but it still  
went over the fence, fuck you.

Ben reaches the Jeep. Without ever taking his eyes off The Man, he takes out the keys, unlocks the door, and...

INT. JEEP - CONTINUOUS

...gets in. He puts the key in the ignition and turns it.

Nothing.

He then remembers -- he has to push in the clutch -- and does so with his left foot. He turns the key again.

Still nothing.

BEN

Hmm.

He tries again and again and again, all while keeping an eye on The Man.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Ramona puts a band-aid on Annie's foot.

RAMONA

There we go. Feel better?

Annie nods.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Good. Maybe it's best we put some  
shoes on, huh?

ANNIE

Yeah.

Ramona grabs Annie's hand.

RAMONA  
Baby, I didn't mean for you to step  
on that. I'm sorry.

ANNIE  
It's okay. It was an accident.

RAMONA  
(smiles)  
Right. "Stuff happens."

ANNIE  
Like when Daddy crashed.

Ramona's smile slowly fades.

A beat.

RAMONA  
Right.

INT. JEEP - SAME TIME

Ben's still trying to start it. No luck.

BEN  
(frustrated)  
Come on. Come on, you piece of  
shit. (GROAN)

He finally stops. He SIGHS, then pulls a lever near the steering wheel, popping the hood. He gets out...

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

...and walks to the front of the Jeep. For the first time since he's walked outside, he turns his back to The Man in order to open the hood and inspect the engine.

He peers inside -- the battery's missing.

BEN  
What the...?

He turns back around and--

The Man's chair is empty.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Oh, shit.

He raises his bat in the air. His eyes dart around the property: the fields... the driveway... the backyard...

BEN (CONT'D)  
Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit, oh shit,  
oh shit.

...the garage... the empty chair... back to the fields...  
back to the empty chair...

BEN (CONT'D)  
Shoot. Shoot. Shit shit shit.

Bat high and ready, BREATHING HARD, Ben walks cautiously and very slowly back towards the house. Suddenly--

*CRACKLE!*

Ben GASPS and quickly turns toward the noise. It's the blue tarp over top of the crashed pickup truck being *RUSTLED BY A GUST OF WIND*. That's all.

His eyes always moving, Ben turns the corner into the backyard. He quickens his pace and, not looking where he's going, trips on the garden hose--

and slams into the ground -- *THUD!* -- dropping the bat. It rolls away in the grass.

BEN (CONT'D)  
(PAINED GRUNT) Shit!

He gets up, and--

bumps right into Ramona.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Ahh!  
(then)  
(RELIEVED SIGH) Jesus, Mom.

Furious, she grabs him by the shirt and pulls him inside.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Ramona and Ben enter. She's pissed. She *SLAMS* the door behind her and locks it.

RAMONA  
What the hell do you think you're doing?! I told you to stay in the house!

Ben's not having any of it.

BEN

Yeah? You know what else you told me?! That everything was fine! Guess what -- it isn't!

Ben turns to Annie.

BEN (CONT'D)

Somebody ripped out the battery from the Jeep so we can't drive anywhere!

(to Ramona)

Yeah! I just went and looked! Gee, I wonder who that could have been!

Ben, fuming, storms to the living room...

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...and points out the window.

BEN

Him!

The Man is now back in his chair, same as before. Ben storms back into the kitchen...

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

...and gets right in Ramona's face.

BEN

But you already knew that, didn't you?

Ramona doesn't say anything. Her expression is an odd mixture of guilt and anger.

BEN (CONT'D)

(knowingly)

And where has Charlie been all day, Mom? Huh?

Annie eyes her mother skeptically.

ANNIE

...Mom?

RAMONA  
 (small)  
 He's outside.

BEN  
 (pointed)  
 Hmm. He's sure been outside for a  
 long time, hasn't he?

RAMONA  
 (RE: Annie, quietly)  
 Ben, please.

Ben shakes his head, storms past her and unlocks the back door.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 What are you doing?

He opens it...

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 HEY!

...and pokes his head out.

BEN  
 (calling out)  
 Charlie?!

RAMONA  
 BEN!

BEN  
 Char--lie?! Come here, boy!  
 (WHISTLE)

Ramona tries to shut the door, but Ben uses his foot to keep it open.

RAMONA  
 Shut the door!

BEN  
 What? I'm just trying to get  
 Charlie back inside!  
 (calling out)  
 Here, boy! Want a treat?!

RAMONA  
 Close it!

BEN  
 (calling out)  
 Char--lie!

Using all her strength, Ramona finally shoves Ben away from the door and *SLAMS* it closed.

BEN (CONT'D)  
 (insinuating/pointed)  
 Why don't you care about where  
 Charlie is, Mom?

RAMONA  
 Keep. The door. Locked.

BEN  
 He could be hurt! Maybe I should  
 go look for him.

RAMONA  
 EVERYONE'S STAYING INSIDE!!

Ramona locks the door.

A tense beat. Ben stares daggers at his mother.

BEN  
 He's dead, isn't he?

Annie GASPS.

Ramona says nothing.

Ben shakes his head, disappointed.

BEN (CONT'D)  
 You've been telling us, over and  
 over, that you have everything  
 under control. But you don't, do  
 you, Mom?  
 (to Annie)  
 All day long, she's done nothing  
 but lie to us.  
 (to Ramona)  
 Right?

A tense beat.

BEN (CONT'D)  
 Admit it!

She can't.

RAMONA  
I'm... trying to protect you.

BEN  
(sarcastic)  
Well, you're doing a really good  
job.

Ben crosses his arms.

BEN (CONT'D)  
I don't know why we should listen  
to you anyway. You're on crazy  
person pills.

*Ouch.*

Ramona *SLAPS* Ben hard across the face.

He rubs his cheek and stares at her, shocked.

BEN (CONT'D)  
I should have done this a long time  
ago.

He storms out of the kitchen, a man on a mission.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - SECONDS LATER

Ben *STOMPS* quickly up the stairs.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Hearing her son head up to the second floor, Ramona realizes exactly what he's doing. *Oh no.*

RAMONA  
(panicked)  
Ben! BEN! STOP!

She hurries after him.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Ben storms down the long hallway, enters Ramona's room...

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

...and begins throwing open her dresser drawers, searching for something. He digs around frantically, tossing clothes, jewelry, and other possessions onto the floor.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Ramona crutches through the living room with urgency.

RAMONA  
BEN! DON'T YOU DARE!

She turns the corner and...

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

...hobbles up the stairs in desperate haste.

RAMONA  
GET OUT OF THERE!

*First step second step...*

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Meanwhile, as things escalate inside the house... out the window... The Man sits in the yard, as calm as can be.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - SAME TIME

*Fourth step fifth step sixth st--*

Ramona's crutch slips and she *BANGS* her bad knee hard against the wooden stair. She *GRUNTS*, hurt.

Her crutch *TUMBLES* down the stairs and *CRASHES* into the front door. It lies on the foyer floor.

Ramona grabs her knee, grimacing in pain.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Ramona's things are scattered about the room. Ben searches the last dresser drawer. *Nothing yet*. Frustrated, he turns and spots her bedside table. He yanks its drawer open and starts digging.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - SAME TIME

Ramona's hurt, but continues up the stairs without her crutch.

RAMONA

Ben!

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Ben pulls his hand from the bedside table drawer. He holds the silver key. *He's found it.*

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Ramona, BREATHING HARD, reaches the second floor. She hops down the hallway toward her bedroom.

RAMONA

Ben, please!

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Downstairs, Annie walks to the front window, grabs the sill, and looks out at The Man In The Yard.

The Man raises his long arm and waves at her playfully.

She backs away from the window, scared.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Ramona hurries toward her bedroom. She's almost there--

her door swings open and Ben steps into the hallway. Ramona's worst fear has come true -- her son is holding THE REMINGTON 700 HUNTING RIFLE; one hand firmly on the barrel, the other on the trigger.

At the sight of the gun, she GASPS.

RAMONA

No!

Ben tries to walk by her, but Ramona grabs the gun with both hands. They "play tug-of-war" with the weapon.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Put that back!

BEN  
Give me it!

Ben shoves the gun forward, thereby pushing his mother backward down the hallway.

RAMONA  
Put it back!

BEN  
Let go!

She doesn't, she holds it tight, but continues to step backwards against her will.

BEN (CONT'D)  
I said let go!

Ben pushes her closer and closer to the top of the stairs.

BEN (CONT'D)  
(furious)  
MOM!

Because of her leg cast, Ben is winning. Ramona's foot is just inches from the stairs. She realizes this.

RAMONA  
Wait, stop!

But he keeps pushing. They glare at one another; resentment in Ben's eyes, fear in Ramona's.

BEN  
LET GO!

She squeezes even tighter. So he pushes more... and more... until her boot heel hangs over the ledge of the stairs.

RAMONA  
(scared)  
Ben... Ben, no...

He's won. He could shove her down the stairwell...

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Please...

...but he doesn't. He yanks the gun around, swinging Ramona away from the ledge.

Instead of pushing her down the stairs, he redirects her further into the hallway. And with one hard shove, Ben tosses his mother into the bathroom...

INT. BATHROOM/INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...she loses her grip on the rifle, and is sent flying backward, falling down. She *BANGS* her head on the bathtub.

She lies on the floor, hurt and in a daze, *MOANING*. The plaster cast on her arm, now cracked from the fall.

Ben clearly feels terrible, but presses onward.

BEN  
I'm sorry, Mom, but... if you're  
not gonna protect this family, then  
I will.

As his mother writhes in pain, he closes the bathroom door. He hurries into his bedroom.

He returns quickly with a LONG EXTENSION CORD.

Inside, Ramona rubs her head. It's bleeding a bit. She gets up very slowly.

RAMONA  
(*MOANING*) Ben... put it back...

Ben takes the extension cord and wraps it tight -- in a figure eight formation -- around the bathroom doorknob and the doorknob of the bedroom next to it, effectively "locking" his mother inside.

Ramona finally stands herself up and tries the door. She turns the knob and pulls on the handle -- but it won't open.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Ben?

She tries pulling again. Still won't open.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Ben! Open the door.

She pounds her fist -- *BANG-BANG-BANG!*

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Open it!

Ben watches as the extension cord holds tight amidst his mother's attempts to escape.

BEN  
(to himself)  
Sorry, Mom.

He picks up the rifle and heads down the stairs.

RAMONA (O.S.)  
(muffled)  
Open the door!

*BANG-BANG-BANG!*

RAMONA (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
(muffled)  
Open the goddamn door!

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Ben walks down the stairs and approaches the front door. (We hear Ramona POUNDING throughout.)

He takes out a BOX OF AMMUNITION from his pocket. He removes a BULLET from the box, opens the chamber of the rifle and sees --

It's already loaded.

He eyes the bullet already inside, bewildered: *Why is this loaded? Who loaded it?*

ANNIE (O.S.)  
Ben?

Ben looks up to see his sister, clutching her penguin, scared.

BEN  
Don't worry. Dad showed me how to use it.

He puts the bullet back into the box, closes the chamber of the rifle, and, after a bit of effort, *COCKS* it.

BEN (CONT'D)  
It's just like Call of Duty.  
(under his breath)  
Theoretically.

He makes a goofy face at her again... but she doesn't make one back. Ben unlocks the front door, then exits.

Hearing the sound of her mother's MUFFLED YELLS, Annie looks up the stairs.

EXT. FRONT PORCH/YARD - CONTINUOUS

Ben *SLAMS* the front door and walks toward the edge of the porch. He eyes The Man In The Yard, still in his usual spot.

BEN

All right, asshole! Listen up!  
The United States government says I  
have the right to blast any  
intruder that trespasses on my  
property! Penal Code four, article  
a-hundred and six, section... uh,  
seventy. (BEAT) So I'm gonna give  
you ten seconds to get outta here  
before I blow your head off!

He raises the rifle to his shoulder.

BEN (CONT'D)

'Merica, bitch!!

Ben adjusts the gun, remembering as best he can the form his father taught him.

BEN (CONT'D)

One!

Nothing.

BEN (CONT'D)

Two!

The Man doesn't move at all.

BEN (CONT'D)

Three!

Ben looks through the scope, aiming right at his head.

BEN (CONT'D)

Four!

Still nothing.

BEN (CONT'D)

Five!

The Man moves. He places his hands firmly on the arm rests and pushes himself upward, slowly standing from the chair.

BEN (CONT'D)

Six!

When he's finally upright, The Man is well over six feet tall. Taken aback by his towering height, Ben is shook.

BEN (CONT'D)

Seven!

Keeping his head down and his face covered by his hat, The Man takes a large step forward towards the porch. Then another. Then another. Then another and another...

BEN (CONT'D)

(alarmed, flustered)

Ei-eight!

With each wide step, The Man somehow seems to grow taller and taller. Ben blinks erratically: *"Am I imagining things?"*

BEN (CONT'D)

NINE!

The Man is now twenty feet from the porch and shows no signs of stopping.

BEN (CONT'D)

I said "nine," you piece of shit!  
Don't make me pull this trigger!

About ten feet away, The Man stops on a dime and lifts his head, revealing his large beady eyes and unsettling smile.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

(pleasant)

You must be Ben!

Despite standing on the ground below the porch, The Man's head is somehow even with Ben's. Ben stares in disbelief at The Man's abnormal height and lanky limbs. *Was he always this freakishly tall?*

BEN

I will shoot you!

The Man playfully raises his hands up in a surrender.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

(chuckling)

I believe ya, son, I believe ya! I don't doubt your responsibility to protect your home. In fact, I respect it. After all, it's your job now, ain't it? You're the man of the house!

BEN  
Damn straight.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Daaaamn straight! Now that's the  
right attitude! Just 'cause you  
got a job to do, that don't mean it  
can't be fun. Right?

He winks at Ben.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
Though, I do wonder -- and don't  
take this personally -- whether you  
actually have it in ya to shoot a  
defenseless old man.

BEN  
I'll do it! Watch me!

The Man looks Ben up and down, observing his stance.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Feet shoulder width apart... left  
leg slightly forward... butt of the  
weapon up against your right  
shoulder. That's good form there,  
Ben.

(big smile)  
I take it you've gone huntin'!

BEN  
You sure smile a lot for a guy  
who's about to have his head blown  
off.

The Man CHUCKLES.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
It appears hospitality never made  
its way to this part of the  
country. (BEAT) You been huntin' or  
not?

BEN  
Yeah, once.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Your daddy take ya?

Another beat.

BEN  
Yup.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Isn't that nice. Mind if I ask  
what ya'll were huntin' for?

BEN  
Rabbits.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
And did you kill any rabbits on  
your hunt, Ben?

A long beat.

The Man finally gives Ben a look: "...Well?"

BEN  
No.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
No? Why not?

BEN  
(embarrassed)  
Didn't... didn't get a good shot.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Didn't get a good shot. Your daddy  
kill any?

BEN  
Yeah.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Ah, so your daddy killed a rabbit;  
his son did not. How many did your  
daddy kill?

BEN  
Um. Nine or ten.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Nine or ten?! Goodness gracious,  
that's one hell of a haul! So your  
daddy shot nine or ten rabbits on  
your hunt and you didn't shoot any?  
Not one? Not a single one?

Ben doesn't answer. The Man pounces on this.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
Did ya maybe... get cold feet?

Silence from Ben. The Man's grin grows wider.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 Had one riiiiight in your sights...  
 but you just couldn't pull the  
 trigger, could ya? (BEAT) Do ya  
 think you disappointed your daddy  
 that day, Ben?

BEN  
 No. No, he said it was okay, we'd  
 go again. He said next time--

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 But there never was a next time...  
 was there, Ben?

A long beat.

BEN  
 No.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 Shucks.

The Man begins to casually stroll around perpendicular to the porch, his hands behind his back. No matter where he goes, Ben keeps the rifle aimed right at him.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 I always loved huntin'. Still do!  
 Back home, in Temple, Texas, I used  
 to hunt wild geese. You see, what  
 you do when you're huntin' wild  
 geese is you get yourself a little  
 whistle. And when you blow it --  
 after much practice, of course --  
 it makes the sound of a goose. You  
 get them geese to come to you!

Ben doesn't move.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 Hell, using that whistle, you can  
 get those stupid creatures to do  
 just about anything you want. Got  
 pretty good at it myself. I swear,  
 hand to God, with your eyes closed,  
 you'd have thought I was an actual  
 goose! After awhile, I didn't even  
need the whistle! Just used the  
 mouth the good Lord gave me.  
 Imagine that.

The Man's grin slowly fades. He stares deep into Ben's eyes.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 But gettin' an animal to come to  
 you... that ain't the real way to  
 hunt.

(sinister)  
 See, what I like to do... is keep  
 the wind at my back... let my prey  
 get a whiff of me. Let 'em know  
 I'm comin'. Puts the fear in 'em.

The Man begins to slowly walk toward Ben, his beady eyes open abnormally wide.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 Mmmmmmmmm... fear. Mother nature's  
 last line of defense. The instinct  
 of every living creature.

Ben can only stare, practically hypnotized.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 When it fears for its life... a  
 beast of flesh and blood will do  
 the craaaaziest things.

He can't look away from The Man's sunken eyeballs.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 Trickin' an animal to come to you  
 is one thing, but takin' your  
 time... trackin' it... seein' where  
 it sleeps... watchin' it panic...  
 toyin' with it... and then, when  
 you got it trapped--

The Man *SNAPS* his fingers. The loud sound makes Ben jump a bit.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 Mm-mm-mm... That's huntin'.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

*BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG!* Ramona continues to POUND on the door.

RAMONA  
 Annie?! Annie, are you there?!  
 Open the door!

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

On the other side of the door, Annie silently watches as the extension cord holds taut despite Ramona's best efforts.

RAMONA (O.S.)  
Hello?! Annie?! LET ME OUT!

*BANG-BANG-BANG!*

On Annie, unsure what to do...

EXT. FRONT PORCH/YARD - SAME TIME

The Man's face is now only a few feet from the end of the rifle. He stares right down the barrel at Ben, unafraid.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Wanna learn how to hunt like that?  
I could teach ya, Ben. I could  
show you how to finally kill the  
rabbit. (BEAT) All you gotta do...  
is let me come in.  
(enormous beam)  
Whatta'ya say?

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

*BANG-BANG-BANG!* Annie continues to stare at the bathroom door.

RAMONA (O.S.)  
Annie! ANNIE!

EXT. FRONT PORCH/YARD - SAME TIME

The Man awaits a response. Ben, rifle still firmly in his hands, stares blankly at the stranger's gaze.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
...Well?

BEN  
No.

The Man's smile fades. He bares his teeth, and GROWLS QUIETLY.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Why not, Ben?

BEN  
Because you killed my dog.

He readies the rifle.

BEN (CONT'D)  
And now I'm gonna kill you.

The Man is taken aback.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
(insulted)  
I did what?

BEN  
You killed Charlie!

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Lord, I don't know who would put  
such an awful idea into your head.

The Man raises his index finger and thumb to his lips. He blows a QUICK PIERCING WHISTLE.

*BARK! BARK!*

Ben turns toward the noise and sees -- walking out of the ryegrass, is Charlie the dog. Around his neck, his collar hangs as clean as it was before.

BEN  
(shocked)  
...Charlie?  
(then, calling out)  
Come here, boy! Charlie!

The dog doesn't move. His tail doesn't even wag. He stays obediently in the yard.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Charlie!!

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Your mother lied to you. She's  
trying to turn you against me. Are  
you gonna let her?

INT. BATHROOM/UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Ramona tugs hard on the doorknob to no avail. Out of both breath and options, she stops, defeated.

ANNIE

Mom?

RAMONA

(elated)

Annie!! Annie, I need your help!  
Can you open the door?

A beat. Ramona realizes why she's not helping.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

(remorseful)

Baby, I'm sorry I lied to you. I  
just...

Annie stares at the door.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

I didn't want you to worry. So I  
made up something else.

Ramona remembers something Annie said earlier.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

I changed the scary parts.

A beat.

Annie looks down at Penguin, then begins untying the  
extension cord knot.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

(relieved)

Yes, baby! Hurry, hurry!

EXT. FRONT PORCH/YARD - SAME TIME

The dog stands oddly still in the yard.

BEN

Come here, boy!

Ben then notices the tan spot underneath Charlie's left eye.  
*Wait... his left eye?*

BEN (CONT'D)

(suspicious)

...Charlie?

THE MAN IN THE YARD

You wanna know what else your  
mother lied about?

(MORE)

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 (BEAT) The night of the accident --  
 y'know, when you lost your daddy?

Ben lowers the rifle, giving The Man his full attention.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 She told you he was driving, didn't  
 she?

Ben nods.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 (shaking his head)  
 Nope.  
 (whisper)  
She was. Your mother crashed that  
 truck. She killed your daddy.

After a beat, Ben storms back into the house.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 (snide)  
 My condolences, by the way.

The Man's devilish smile returns.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

A deranged Ben enters, *SLAMS* the door closed, and locks it.  
 He glares up the stairs with disgust.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY/BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Annie almost has the figure-eight knot untied.

On the other side of the door, Ramona pulls on the knob, it  
 can now open a few inches -- she's almost free.

RAMONA  
 Almost there, baby!

Ramona reaches her hand around and undoes the rest of the  
 knot herself. She pulls again... the door opens and--

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 Yes!

the barrel of the rifle is shoved right in her face.

She GASPS.

Ben, a crazed look in his eye, aims the rifle at Ramona.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
What... what are you doing?

BEN  
(upset)  
Is it true?!

RAMONA  
Is what true?

BEN  
You told me Dad crashed the truck.

*Oh no.* Ramona SWALLOWS, caught.

BEN (CONT'D)  
You said the roads were wet and he  
lost control of the wheel.

Ramona retreats backward as Ben walks toward her.

BEN (CONT'D)  
But you were lying, weren't you?

On Ramona's guilty face...

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Downstairs, the living room is empty.

Outside, we hear the call of a WILD GOOSE in the distance:

*SQUAWK!*

*...SQUAWK! SQUAWK!*

A beat. Then the distant sound of an unfamiliar, yet calming  
voice...

MAN'S CALMING VOICE (O.S.)  
(faint)  
Annie... Annniiiiieee...

A beat.

MAN'S CALMING VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Annie, are you there?

Another beat. Annie's head slowly pops up from behind the  
couch. She looks toward the window, confused.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Ramona eyes the rifle nervously.

BEN

What happened that night, Mom?  
 What happened the night Dad died?  
 Can't you be honest with me? For  
once?

Ramona bites her lip.

BEN (CONT'D)

(angry)  
 Tell me the truth!  
 (then, pleading)  
 Please.

A long beat.

Ramona collects herself, takes a BREATH, EXHALES... and finally admits to her son what she's avoided telling him for weeks.

RAMONA

We left dinner that night and...  
 we'd both been drinking. But since  
 I'd only had two glasses of wine...  
 (struggling)  
 ...I drove home. And when we  
 turned onto Lake, the wheel just...  
 got away from me, I dunno, and...

A tear rolls down her cheek.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

...we slid off the road... and the  
 truck flipped.

On Ben's angry face...

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

MAN'S CALMING VOICE (O.S.)

Annnnniiiiieee...

Annie creeps toward the window. She peers outside.

She sees the source of the voice. In the distance is A HANDSOME, FAMILIAR LOOKING, BEARDED MAN. He looks identical to the hunter from the framed photograph above the fireplace, except his dark hair is parted on the opposite side.

ANNIE

...Daddy?

Seeing Annie, his face lights up. He waves.

DAD

Hey, baby girl!

Annie, a blank stare on her face, waves back. Even though the window is closed and he's far away, Annie can hear her dad's welcoming voice as clear as day.

DAD (CONT'D)

Aw, I've missed you.

ANNIE

(smiling)

Missed you too.

On her dad's warm smile...

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

The rifle's still in Ramona's face.

RAMONA

When I woke up in the hospital, the police told me we'd hit a patch of black ice and that my blood alcohol level was well under the limit, so... it wasn't technically my fault, but...

She hangs her head, ashamed.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

...it was. I know it was.

Tears well in Ben's eyes.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

I survived. He didn't. And I can't stop asking... why?

They're both crying.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Dad's dead. And every night, I lie awake, wishing that...

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - THE NIGHT BEFORE

We pick up where the last flashback ended. Ramona stares at the silver key in her hand. Coming to a decision, she walks toward her closet. She opens it and shoves aside her hanging clothes, revealing A THIN, BLACK GUN SAFE. She uses the key to unlock it.

Inside is the Remington rifle.

A MOMENT LATER, Ramona sits back on her bed and stares down at the long rifle laying across her lap.

BACK TO SCENE:

She now stares at that same weapon, currently pointed right in her face.

RAMONA  
...wishing that I had died instead.

A beat.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
I lied because... well... I already hate myself. I didn't want you to hate me too.

Ben lowers the rifle and hugs his mother tight.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Annie is completely transfixed by the image of her father.

DAD  
Hey, guess what!

ANNIE  
What?

DAD  
I got you something. A gift.

ANNIE  
What is it?

DAD  
Well, I can't tell you, that'd ruin the surprise. (BEAT) You want it?

A beat. She considers.

DAD (CONT'D)  
 ...Well? Do ya?

Annie nods. "Dad" smiles wide.

DAD (CONT'D)  
 Then you're gonna have to unlock  
 the door.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Ramona and Ben stop hugging. It's back to business:

RAMONA  
 He's trying to turn us against each  
 other. We can't let him, okay? I  
 need you on my side.

Ben nods, then remembers:

BEN  
 Mom, I saw Charlie. Only... it  
 didn't feel like him.  
 (putting it together, but  
 confused)  
 I think he was... backwards.  
 Like... like, in a mirror.

On Ramona's concerned look...

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

DAD  
 Open the front door for me, will  
 ya, Annie? Pleeeeease?

Annie nods, excited, and walks into the foyer...

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

...she reaches for the door lock -- stepping up on her tippy  
 toes -- and turns the bolt, unlocking it.

DAD (O.S.)  
 (muffled)  
 Let me in, Annie...

She then twists open the door knob and--

a gust of wind *BLOWS* the front door wide open. It *SLAMS*  
 against the wall.

The wind *WHIIIIIPS* through the foyer, blowing Annie's hair wildly in all directions, finally snapping her out of it.

Standing on the edge of the porch, just a few feet away, is The Man In The Yard; his long slender body completely still; his head down; his face covered by his hat.

Annie SCREAMS.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Ramona and Ben hear the scream and run out.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - SAME TIME

Annie runs up the stairs...

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...right into Ramona's arms.

ANNIE

He's coming! He's coming!!

The three of them take off down the hallway...

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - SAME TIME

The Man walks into their house, ducking his head down to pass under the doorway. Once inside, he stands up straight -- the top of his hat only inches from the ceiling.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

(pleasantly)

Anybody home?

On his wide, victorious grin...

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Ramona, Ben, and Annie -- as quietly as they can -- enter a room and close the door.

INT. OFFICE - SECONDS LATER

They're in a small room with a desk, some books, etc.

RAMONA  
 (whisper)  
 We're gonna be okay. But only if  
 we stick together.

Ramona sits in a chair and quickly begins taking off her leg cast. She points to a pair of mens' boots in the corner of the room.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 (whisper)  
 Grab me dad's boot.

Ben grabs THE LARGE RIGHT BOOT and hands it to her. She shoves her cast aside and puts the boot on, tying the laces tight.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 (whisper, RE: rifle)  
 Where are the rest of the bullets?

Ben remembers, and SIGHS. Pissed at himself, he shakes his head no: *"I don't have them."* Ramona bites her lip.

BEN  
 (whisper)  
 What do we do?

Now wearing one of her boots and one of her husband's -- and no longer restricted by her leg cast -- Ramona stands up, recharged and determined, but still clearly terrified. She ties her hair back in a tight ponytail.

On her nervous face, thinking fast...

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The dark, towering figure enters, again ducking his head down to pass under the archway. He slowly walks around and, using his thin, pointy fingers, touches anything he can: the couch... the coffee table... the game of Chutes and Ladders... and the framed photos on the mantel.

CLOSE ON his fingers as they pass over school portraits... the family on vacation... Ramona and her husband's wedding...

The Man's finger stays on the happy newlyweds. He stares -- almost sympathetically -- at the bride and groom. He then notices a FUNERAL PRAYER CARD, leaning against the frame. It's for the groom's recent service.

## THE MAN IN THE YARD

The more we do to you, the less you  
seem to believe we are doing it.

With his finger, he taps the face on the prayer card.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

The office door opens. Ramona peeks out.

RAMONA

(whisper, to Ben)

Go.

Ben tip-toes towards the bathroom and grabs the extension cord (from earlier) still lying on the floor. As he does, Ramona looks down the opposite end of the hallway...

...at the ATTIC ENTRANCE on the ceiling.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Giant black boots step slowly on the linoleum. Massive pale hands slide gently across the fridge... the counter... and the cabinets.

He sees Annie's tulip on the windowsill. With one finger, he gently touches its petals.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Underneath the attic door, Ramona reaches up and grabs THE HANGING PULL CORD. She pulls on it and begins to lower the ladder.

A few inches down, the door *CREAKS*. Everyone freezes.

A long beat. Silence. She starts to pull again. Once it's low enough, Ben unfolds the ladder to the floor. Ramona forces Annie to climb up.

RAMONA

(whisper)

Go, baby.

INT. DINING ROOM - SAME TIME

The Man enters. He stands at the head of the table. He closes his eyes... takes a DEEP BREATH... and squeezes the back of the chair.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Ben ties the extension cord around the fourth rung of the attic ladder, just above the hinge of the bottom section.

Above him, Ramona climbs into the attic.

INT. ATTIC - CONTINUOUS

STORAGE BOXES and VARIOUS JUNK fill the dark room. Two small windows are the only sources of light. Ben begins to climb up next.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - SAME TIME

Having done a full circle of the first floor, The Man, taking his sweet old time, begins up the stairs, each step *CREAKING LOUDLY*.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
(calling out)  
My, you have such a lovely home!

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

Ben and Ramona stand above the entrance and pull on the extension cord, thereby raising the ladder back up, and folding it in the process. It *CREAKS* slightly.

They hear *FOOTSTEPS* coming up the stairs.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

As The Man reaches the second floor, the attic door down the hall behind him closes just in the nick of time.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Ramona? Ben? Little Annie? Come  
out, come out, wherever you are.

He looks around, then enters the closest bedroom. Down the hall, out of his sight, the attic pull cord dangles back and forth.

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

Ben and Ramona use the extension cord to "lock" the attic closed, similar to how Ben locked the bathroom.

He loops it through the ladder and passes it off to Ramona. She loops it around a wooden beam and passes it back to him.

He ties it into a knot.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

The Man looms in Ben's doorway. He then extends his arms and begins to feel the surfaces of Ben's messy bed... his dresser... his TV... his trophies...

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

Their "lock" now secure, Ramona, Annie, and Ben huddle together in a corner of the room, breathing quietly, not moving a muscle.

They can hear the *LOUD FOOTSTEPS* of the colossal monster below them.

Ben spots A BOX by his head and gets an idea. They whisper.

BEN

Mom.

He points to the box. It reads "FIREWORKS."

BEN (CONT'D)

Let's send a signal.

Ramona debates.

BEN (CONT'D)

Like a flare gun. The Marcuses might be able to see it from their house.

She shakes her head.

RAMONA

It's still light out, they'd never be able to.

Ben SIGHS, annoyed.

INT. ANNIE'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Long white fingers slither across the roof of a doll house... a book shelf... a plastic tea set...

Enjoying this, A QUIET, RUMBLING MOAN escapes his throat:

THE MAN IN THE YARD

Mmmmmmmmm...

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

They listen to The Man's MOANING below.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.)

Mmmmmmmmm... Ahhh...

Ramona holds Annie close.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

ANGLE ON Ramona's bed. The DARK SILHOUETTE OF A LARGE MAN grows over it.

The very tips of The Man's fingers slide across her sheets, from the foot of the bed... all the way to her pillows.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

MMMMMMmmmmmmmm...

He closes his eyes, takes a DEEP BREATH... and SLOWLY EXHALES...

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

(calling out)

Ramona? You know why I'm here,  
don't you? You know why. Yooooou  
know whyyyyyy.

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

Huddled in the darkness, they can only listen.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.)

You wanted me to come! You beg for  
me! BEG FOR ME!

Ramona wrinkles her brow, still unsure what he means.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Children! Chilllllllllll-dren...  
Your mother knew what I would do  
when I got here, but she invited me  
anywayyyyyy.

Out of the corner of his eye, Ben glances at his mother, his expression a mixture of confusion, apprehension, and terror.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 Blood is on herrrrrr hands! SHEEEEE  
 DID THIS! She doesn't care what  
 happens to youuuuu! SHE WANTS YOU  
 BOTH DEAD!

Ramona shakes her head "no."

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 (monstrous)  
 SHE! HATES! YOU! EVERY TIME SHE  
 LOOKS AT YOU, SHE SEES NOTHING BUT  
 THE FILTH THAT SLITHERED OUT OF  
 HER!

She continues to shake her head no, over and over, trying to reassure her children.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 You were right, Ben. From the very  
 beginning, you were right...  
 weren't ya? If only she had  
 listened to you.

A beat. Ben takes a DEEP BREATH.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 Give her to me, Ben. Givvvvve  
 herrrrrr to meeeee. (BEAT) I'll make  
 ya a deal: hand her over, and you  
 and Annie... will be safe.

Ramona can't help but eye her son anxiously.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 Now's your chance. Be the man of  
 the house. Protect your sister.  
 Protect poor, little Annie and give  
 up the bitch who killed your  
 daddy...

Ben sits up... listening... thinking.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 ...before she gets you killed too.

A long, tense beat as Ben debates.

Ramona bites her lip. *He wouldn't.... would he?*

Finally, he turns to Ramona with an idea.

BEN  
 (whisper)  
 Let's start a fire.

He points again to the box of fireworks. Relieved, Ramona nods, almost cracking a smile.

RAMONA  
 (whisper)  
 Now that's a signal.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The towering dark figure exits Ramona's room. Thin, lanky legs walk down the hall.

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

Ben has all the fireworks out of the box and spread out on the floor. There are a few rockets, a box of sparklers, one roman candle, and a bunch of big cherry bombs. He begins twisting two fuses together.

Behind him, Ramona and Annie silently dig through nearby boxes. Ramona finds a ROLL OF DUCT TAPE. Annie continues searching for something.

RAMONA  
 (whisper)  
 Anything?

Annie shakes her head no. Ramona points to a box that reads "CAMPING."

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 (whisper)  
 Try that one.

Annie does. Ramona then starts quietly crumbling up OLD NEWSPAPER...

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

The Man creeps slowly down the hall, like a parent playing a friendly game of hide-and-seek with their kids.

He playfully peers into the bathroom...

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 Ramona? ...Ben?

..then into the office.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
Little Annie?

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

Ben continues to twist fuses together, creating one enormous fuse, connecting all the different fireworks. Ramona puts her crumbled newspaper balls into the box of fireworks.

Annie finds something in the camping box.

ANNIE  
(whisper)  
Mom.

She tip-toes over to Ramona. Ramona grabs it and holds it in the light. It's A UTILITY LIGHTER.

RAMONA  
(whisper, relieved)  
Yessss.

She kisses Annie on the forehead.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Still walking down the hallway, The Man approaches the attic entrance on the ceiling.

Right underneath it, he stops.

He slowly tilts his head upward and notices it. He grins a grin so wide it can barely fit on his white, gaunt face.

He wraps his fingers around the pull cord...

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

Ben flicks the lighter, lights the fuses, and places the lit fireworks back into the box (now filled with newspaper). Ramona seals it closed with a strip of duct tape as we hear the *CRACKLING* of the firework fuses inside.

Box in hand, Ben walks to the attic window, opens it, and...

EXT. HOUSE / INT. ATTIC - CONTINUOUS

...looks down at the ground -- eyeing nervously the three-story drop -- then looks out at the field of tall grass. He carefully leans out the window to get the best angle.

RAMONA  
(can't help it)  
Careful.

Ben prepares himself and, with one arm, ...heaves the box.

It flies through the air... over the backyard... and lands with a *HARD THUMP* in the ryegrass.

A beat.

Ben, Ramona, and Annie all stand at the window and wait with bated breath. *Will it work?*

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
(sotto)  
Come on, come on, come on.

Annie hears something behind her. *Thud... thud... thud...* She turns toward the noise and sees that it's the attic door, opening a few inches over and over.

Someone is trying to open it.

ANNIE  
(whisper)  
Uh, Mom...

But Ramona is preoccupied watching the box out in the field. Finally... *BOOM. CRACK. SNAP.*

BEN  
Come on, come on.

The muffled explosions continue. The box bounces with each one until -- *BOOM!* -- it explodes completely, sending sparks, shredded cardboard and lit newspaper flying. The pieces of ignited newspaper float through the air; landing delicately in the tall grass.

After a beat, a patch of the field ignites. A SMALL FIRE has started. Ben pumps his fist in celebration. A RELIEVED SIGH from Ramona.

RAMONA  
Thank you, God--

*THUD!* Ramona turns and realizes that The Man is pulling hard on the attic door.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.)  
 HelllooOOOoooo...

She grabs Annie and holds her close. Another hard pull on the door. Then another. Everyone eyes the extension cord lock. *Please hold. Please hold.*

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 (playful)  
 Are you up there?

EXT. BACKYARD - SAME TIME

Meanwhile, the fire blazes in the ryegrass.

A CLOUD OF BLACK SMOKE begins to rise into the sky. Their distress signal has been sent.

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

The Man continues to pull on the attic door. *THUD...*  
*THUD...*

But because of the extension cord, he can only open it a few inches. Annie looks at her mom, scared.

RAMONA  
 (mouthing silently)  
 Don't. Move.

The Man pulls again -- *THUD* -- and this time, his right hand squeezes through the small opening. The hand feels around blindly, but everyone is safely out of its limited reach.

Ramona looks at her children and puts her finger to her mouth: "*Quiet.*"

The Man begins to squeeze his entire arm in. Ramona, Ben, and Annie then watch in horror as the skinny arm keeps coming...

...and coming...

...and coming...

It grows longer and longer. Ramona's jaw drops. *What the fuck?*

The Man's arm is now ten feet long.

Panic sets in. With a wider range of motion, the hand continues to feel around. Ramona and the kids back up as far as they can, Ben on one side, the girls on the other. But the long arm just keeps coming...

...and coming...

...and coming...

...anndd coommiinnngg...

His arm is now fifteen feet long.

The unnaturally long arm reaches around blindly, clawing at boxes and knocking things over, feeling for its prey.

More of the arm keeps coming -- twenty feet long now -- as it heads toward Ramona and Annie. Ramona pulls her daughter behind a kayak that leans vertically against the wall.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.)

I know you're uuup heeerrreeeee.

The Man's bony fingers feel the kayak in front of them. His long, pointy fingernails *SCRAAAPE* the plastic just inches from Ramona's head... but the hand continues onward.

Like the leg of a giant spider, the thin arm rotates slowly around the room, touching suitcases... old paint cans... a crib... a pair of skis... an upside down bike. It casually spins the bike tire: *CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK...* *click... click..... click.*

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Ra-moooooooooaaaaannnnn-ahhhhh...

It touches an OLD JEWELRY BOX. The hand opens it up and a small ballerina inside twirls around to A BEAUTIFUL LULLABY.

To the calming music, the arm swings towards Ben. He backs far into the corner as the hand feels around near his feet. To avoid getting caught, he grabs hold of a wooden beam above him and pulls both legs into the air. The hand passes under him, just missing his feet.

As the arm continues onward, Ben puts his legs back down on the floor. *That was close.*

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Where arrrrreee youuuuuu...?

Feeling around, the arm is approaching the rifle, leaning against the wall. *Fuck.* Too scared to move, Ramona and Ben can only watch as its spider-like fingers dance toward the

weapon, inch... by... inch...

*shit shit shit shit shit shit*

...but it glides right over top of it, leaving the gun untouched. Ramona and Ben sigh silently in relief.

The arm continues onward, *KNOCKING OVER* a ski pole, which causes a stack of magazines to *TOPPLE OVER* -- sending a cloud of dust hurtling right toward Annie. Dust in her face, Annie tilts her head back to sneeze... but Ramona places her hand overtop Annie's mouth at the very last second, stopping her.

Relieved, Annie sighs and leans on a golf bag beside her. The golf bag falls over and hits the ground -- *THUD*.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)

AHA!

The arm immediately swings toward the sound and grabs the first thing that it touches -- Annie's shoe.

The hand wraps around her foot and begins pulling her. But Ramona grabs onto Annie's hands...

RAMONA

NO! Let... go!

...just as the arm begins retracting back down into the hallway below. It's pulling Annie slowly as it goes and, holding onto her daughter, Ramona is being pulled too.

ANNIE

AHHH!! MOMMYYYYYY!!

RAMONA

(strained)

BEN! BEN, HELP!

Ben grabs one of the golf clubs, and WHACKS the arm with it. Nothing. He WHACKS again and again. Still nothing. The hand is pulling his mother and sister closer and closer to the attic entrance and there's nothing he can do.

ANNIE

AHHHHH!!!

Ben then notices the white hand holding onto Annie's shoe -- and quickly rips the shoe off his sister's foot.

That does it. Annie is free.

Still holding onto the tiny shoe, the arm retracts completely into the hallway below, leaving Annie behind. Ramona grabs her and hugs her tight.

RAMONA  
Baby, are you okay?!

Meanwhile, Ben grabs the handle of a GIANT WOODEN CHEST, drags it across the floor, and sets it over top of the attic entrance. He then grabs anything he can and puts it on top to make it heavier -- boxes, books, anything.

Thanks to Ben, the small crack in the entrance is now blocked off. All panting and out of breath, the three of them retreat back into a corner, safe for now.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

CLOSE ON the fireplace. Entering from screen right, The Man's hand grabs THE LONG, SHARP FIREPLACE POKER...

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.)  
(giddy laugh)  
Hee-hee-hee-heeeee.

...and immediately slinks away with it.

INT. ATTIC - MOMENTS LATER

They're all huddled together in the corner, same as before. Ben peers out the window, eyeing their distress signal, rising into the sky, just as they planned.

A quiet beat. Then...

*CRAAACKKKK!*

In the center of the room, the fireplace poker is shoved up through the floor. Everyone watches as it descends back into the hallway below. A few feet away -- *CRACK!* -- it's shoved up through again ...then descends.

RAMONA  
(sotto)  
Oh, shit.

Everyone stands and panics as the sharp fireplace poker begins stabbing through the floor at random...

*CRACK!*

*CRACK!*

*CRACK!*

*CRACK!*

...like a deadly game of Whack-A-Mole. Wherever The Man stabs, they immediately runs as far as they can from it.

*CRACK!*

*CRACK!*

*CRACK!*

With every violent thrust, a two-inch wide hole is left behind, each allowing a ray of sunlight from the hallway to flood upward into the dark attic.

*CRACK!*

*CRACK!*

*CRACK!*

*CRACK!* This time, the poker stabs Penguin, piercing right through the stomach of Annie's poor stuffed animal.

ANNIE

(GASP) Penguin!

Smelling blood, the poker descends. Ramona picks up Annie just as...

*CRACK-CRACK-CRACK-CRACK-CRACK-CRACK*

*CRACK-CRACK-CRACK-CRACK-CRACK-CRACK!*

...the poker stabs rapidly like a jackhammer right where she was standing.

Running away with Annie, Ramona trips and falls -- *THUMP!*

A second later, the poker stabs -- *CRACK!* -- right next to Ramona's face. Annie still in her arms, she rolls across the floor, just barely missing -- *CRACK!* -- another stab -- *CRACK!* -- then another.

BEN

HEY! OVER HERE!

From the other side of the room, Ben *STOMPS* his foot to draw The Man's attention. The poker descends as Ben takes a step backward and readies himself.

*CRACK!*

The poker rises right where he stomped and Ben grabs it with both hands.

BEN (CONT'D)

Gotcha, bitch!

Through the floor, Ben and The Man "tug-of-war" with the poker. With one aggressive yank from below, Ben's left hand is sliced by the sharp hook at the poker's tip. He *SCREAMS* as blood drips from his hand, but he continues to hold onto the poker, grimacing in pain.

RAMONA

Ben!

Ramona hops up, runs over, and grabs the poker too. With his mother helping, Ben readjusts his hands for a better grip. The two of them pull as hard as they possibly can.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
(strained)  
Pull! PULL!

Ramona and Ben, GROANING LOUDLY, wrestle with the sharp poker, avoiding its sharp points as best they can. But The Man is stronger than the two of them. He pulls hard, forcing both to their knees. They're losing this fight.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Puuullllll!

BEN  
I'm... pulling...

Annie, watching from the other side of the room, spots a large cherry bomb lying on the floor. She grabs it, then lights the fuse with the lighter.

Ramona and Ben are about to lose... but then Annie runs up with the lit cherry bomb...

ANNIE  
This is for Penguin!

...and shoves it through the hole, down into the hallway.

*KA-BOOM!*

A brief flash of light illuminates through the many new holes in the floor. Ramona and Ben pull the fireplace poker up into the attic, victorious. *They did it!*

Ramona wraps her arms around Annie, and Ben wraps his arms around the both of them. Ramona kisses Annie's forehead repeatedly as everyone catches their breath.

A beat as they hear nothing from the hallway below.

ANNIE (CONT'D)  
(RE: the silence)  
Did I... did I kill him?

RAMONA  
I... I don't know, baby. I--

A DEEP CHUCKLE begins to roll from below.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.)  
 Kill me? Kill me?! (WILD LAUGHTER)  
 Try as haaaard as you might, little  
 Annie... you'll never even hurt me!  
 Give up! Giiiiive upppppp! Mmmmmm-  
 aaaahhhhhh...

As he MOANS, a LONG, THIN, SLIMY OBJECT sticks up through one  
 of the new holes in the floor and begins to wiggle around  
 like a worm.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 BlaghhaAaAaAahhh...

They all stare in disgust, realizing it's The Man's long  
 tongue. It shakes wildly.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 (tongue noises)  
 Lulllulllllullllullllluul...

Ramona can't take it anymore.

RAMONA  
 LEAVE US ALONE!

She grabs the fireplace poker, runs toward the tongue, and  
 swings downward at it -- CLANG! -- but it retracts away just  
 in time.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 GO BACK TO THE HELL YOU CAME FROM!

Crazed, she readies the poker once more, ready for anything.

*Beep-beep-beeeeep...*

Everyone freezes.

In the distance they hear... *Beep-beep... Beep-beep!*

It's a car horn, approaching the house.

*Beeeep-BEEP-BEEP-BEEP!!!* It's getting closer. They all  
 listen as tires *SPEED* down the gravel driveway... an engine  
 turns off... a car door *SLAMS*...

OLD MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)  
 (distant)  
 Ramona?! Hello?!

Ramona SIGHS, relieved. The fire worked.

RAMONA  
(elated)  
Fred.

EXT. HOUSE - SAME TIME

An overweight man, FRED MARCUS (early 60s) runs into the backyard, following the smoke.

FRED  
(panicked)  
Ramona? I was driving down 19 and  
I saw smoke!

He finally sees the extent of the fire in the field...

FRED (CONT'D)  
Jesus!

...and sprints toward the garage.

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Fred runs in, BREATHING HARD, and searches frantically.  
Finally, he spots it in the back -- a FIRE EXTINGUISHER.

EXT. HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Lugging the heavy object, he runs through the backyard and into the field of tall grass. Sweating and COUGHING, he begins to *SPRAY* the fire.

It's working.

After he gets one section nearly out, Fred turns around and focuses on another. He *SPRAYS* the extinguisher again... but it's running low. He sprays every last bit, but the fire isn't out.

BREATHING HARD, and COUGHING EVEN HARDER, he drops the extinguisher and quickly unbuttons his shirt. Now in his "wife beater," he swings his button-down shirt at the fire. We spot a TATTOO on his upper arm.

His attempts to put out the fire are working. The red-faced old man, GRUNTING and COUGHING as he does, continues to swing his shirt at the fire.

He STOMPS out the last bits.

Fred looks around -- he has put the fire out.

FRED  
(exhausted)  
Christ.

WHEEZING, he sits down in the grass. Red-faced and drenched in sweat, he pulls out his handkerchief and wipes his face and neck.

For a beat, he catches his breath.

RAMONA (O.S.)  
Fred!

Fred turns and looks around for Ramona. He doesn't see her.

FRED  
Ramona?

RAMONA (O.S.)  
Up here!

He looks up and sees Ramona poking her head out the attic window, waving frantically. He stands and walks toward her.

FRED  
Are you okay?!

RAMONA  
Fred, there's a man! He's trying  
to kill us! Help!

FRED  
Oh my God.

RAMONA  
He's inside!

Fred sees Ben's bat (from earlier) and grabs it. He runs toward the back door -- it's locked -- he immediately runs around to the front of the house.

RAMONA (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Hurry, Fred! And be careful!

INT. FRONT PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Fred runs up and cautiously walks onto the porch. He notices that the front door is wide open.

He enters, bat held high...

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

...and looks around. There's no one in sight.

On the ground, Fred spots Ramona's crutch and the box of ammo. He tightens his grip on the bat, ready to swing, and looks around the house...

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

Huddled together, Ramona and the kids are silent and still. Ben grabs the rifle and holds it, ready.

INT. DINING ROOM - SAME TIME

Fred enters the dining room from the foyer. There's nobody in here.

He even checks under the table. Nothing.

He continues onward, walking slowly into...

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

...the kitchen.

Nothing.

He spots the basement door, opens it, and goes down.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

It's dark. Bat out in front of him, he walks down the basement stairs. He looks around.

Nothing. Just a basement. Washer, dryer, water heater, etc.

He retreats back up the stairs.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

He exits the basement and heads into...

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...the living room.

Nobody. Nothing.

Having done a full circle, he re-enters...

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

...the foyer and begins up the stairs, slowly and cautiously.

Despite his efforts to be quiet, the stairs *CREAK* as he climbs them.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Fred reaches the second story. He sees dozens of holes in the ceiling.

FRED  
(concerned)  
Ramona?!

RAMONA (O.S.)  
Be careful, Fred! He's somewhere  
in the house!

Fred remains calm.

FRED  
You guys just hang tight, okay?

Fred goes to check the rooms on the second floor.

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

Ramona, Ben, and Annie all wait silently and anxiously.

Ramona holds Annie close.

RAMONA  
(whisper)  
We're all gonna make it. We're all  
gonna make it. Say it.

ANNIE  
We're all gonna make it.

Ramona nods.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Fred enters Ramona's room. Nobody in here. It's just messy. He eyes the closet door. It's open a tiny crack.

Bat ready, he cautiously approaches it. Using the bat, he slowly nudges it open--

Nothing.

Nothing but the empty gun safe, its door open; the silver key hanging from its lock.

INT. ATTIC - A FEW MINUTES LATER

They all continue to wait.

FRED (O.S.)  
Coast is clear.

Ramona peers through one of the holes. She sees Fred, standing in the hallway.

FRED (CONT'D)  
Checked everywhere. Whoever he was, he's gone now.

A COLLECTIVE SIGH OF RELIEF from Ramona, Ben, and Annie.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The attic ladder has been lowered and Ramona and Annie have already descended. Ben, clutching the rifle, his left hand bloody, starts down the ladder with Fred's help.

FRED  
Okay, I gotcha, Ben.  
(RE: rifle)  
Want me to take that?

BEN  
Nah, I got it.

Ramona, still keeping a watchful eye on the surrounding bedrooms, looks down at her arm cast; it's plaster now falling apart. With some effort, she tears it off completely and it drops to the floor, in pieces.

Ben finishes descending the ladder.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Thanks, Mr. Marcus.

RAMONA  
Yes. Thank God for you, Fred.

FRED

Nah. I'm just thankful I got that  
fire out. Thing would have burned  
all day.

Ramona puts an arm around Fred (as a crutch) and they all  
walk toward the stairwell.

RAMONA

(to Ben)

Hey. Great idea. Y'know, with the  
fire. Proud of you.

She smiles. He blushes.

BEN

Yeah, I know I'm a genius, but how  
about we hold the applause until  
we're actually outta here?

They begin down the stairs, Ben and Annie in front, Fred and  
Ramona behind them. Ben keeps the rifle ready, just in case.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

As they walk...

FRED

Where can I take you? Our place?  
Police? Hospital?

BEN

How about Dave & Buster's?

RAMONA

I don't care. Anywhere.

Ben and Annie reach the first floor and exit. Ramona and  
Fred follow close behind, out onto...

EXT. FRONT PORCH/YARD - CONTINUOUS

...the porch. The sun is starting to set.

RAMONA

I really owe you one, Fred.

FRED

Oh, cut that out. (BEAT) You  
actually owe me like, fifty.

Ramona LAUGHS. *That feels good.* Her arm still on Fred's shoulder, they begin down the porch stairs into the yard.

Ramona spots the tattoo on Fred's arm. It's a black and white image of the U.S. MARINES EMBLEM, depicting an Eagle, wings out, standing on top of a globe; visible on the globe are North and South America. And behind the globe, a large anchor.

A beat.

Walking slowly through the yard, Ramona looks at the tattoo once more. *Something about it seems... odd.*

She eyes the western hemisphere on the globe... and realizes that the east coasts are where the west coasts should be... and the west coasts are where the east coasts should be.

The tattoo is backwards. Like it's in a mirror.

*Oh my God.*

Still arm-in-arm with Fred, she keeps her cool and continues walking toward the driveway as if nothing's wrong.

RAMONA

(calm)

Hey Ben. Can I see that?

Ben turns around. She points to the gun.

BEN

Yeah, sure.

Ben hands her the rifle then continues walking.

RAMONA

Oh, and before we leave, can you do me a favor?

BEN

Um, sure. What's up?

Out ahead, Annie reaches the driveway and looks around.

ANNIE

Mr. Marcus... where's your car?

There isn't one.

RAMONA

(to Ben, still calm)

Can you grab Annie and take her into the field?

Ben turns around, perplexed.

BEN

...Huh?

RAMONA

Grab your sister and run into the field. And don't stop.

Ramona and Ben stare at one another. He doesn't understand.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Now.

She nods, insisting.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Right now.

A beat. She stares into her son's eyes: "*Trust me.*"

Ben takes off running as Ramona swings the butt of the rifle at Fred. She hits him -- *CRACK!* -- right in the temple.

Fred GRUNTS in pain and falls to the ground.

FRED

What are you--?!

With both hands, Ramona slams the rifle down into his stomach. Another GRUNT. Fred writhes in pain.

FRED (CONT'D)

Stop! Stop!

Ben grabs Annie, runs into the backyard, and heads straight into the field, disappearing into the tall ryegrass.

FRED (CONT'D)

Ramona... wait...

Standing over Fred, Ramona *COCKS* the rifle, puts her finger on the trigger, and aims it right at his face.

FRED (CONT'D)

No... no please...

(pleading)

Please, Ramona...

She can't do it.

She loosens her grip on the trigger and stares at the gun... then down at Fred. Only, he's no longer Fred. He now has a wide, sinister grin and sunken, beady eyes. He LAUGHS.

"Fred" KICKS Ramona in the stomach, sending her flying across the yard and dropping the rifle.

Ramona lands hard and rolls painfully to a stop. Then, WINCING, she sits up. She looks toward Fred, but "Fred" is gone -- The Man stands there now, good as new.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Got ya good, didn't I?

On The Man, LAUGHING MANIACALLY...

EXT. FIELD OF RYEGRASS - SAME TIME

Ben runs through the tall grass with Annie over his shoulder.

ANNIE  
What about Mom?!

Ben doesn't stop running. He doesn't look back.

EXT. YARD - SAME TIME

The Man walks towards Ramona, LAUGHING. She frantically looks for the rifle -- and spots it about fifteen feet away.

Unable to stand up, she army-crawls toward it as The Man's WILD CACKLE echoes across the yard.

EXT. FIELD OF RYEGRASS - SAME TIME

Ben continues to run like hell. Annie watches as the house disappears in the distance.

ANNIE  
What about Mom?! WHAT ABOUT MOM?!

Annie begins punching Ben in the back.

ANNIE (CONT'D)  
(angry)  
BEN! WHAT ABOUT MOM?!

Ben doesn't stop...

EXT. YARD - SAME TIME

The sun has nearly set. The yard grows dark. Ramona crawls as The Man continues toward her; his long, pointy face now frozen in rictus.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 (toying with her)  
 That's right! Get that gun! I  
 want you to! GET IT!

Her bloody elbows dig into the grass and pull the rest of her  
 limp body across the lawn.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 Crawl, Ramona! CRAWL!

The Man deliberately stays about five feet behind her, his  
 bony arms outstretched, his fingers wide and crooked...

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 (crazed)  
 Get it! GET IT!!

With each step, he raises his gangly legs high into the air,  
 then down with a tremendous *STOMP*, in an unnatural, almost  
 cartoonish, galumph...

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 (insane)  
 I WANT YOU TO! I WANT YOU TO!!

Drool drips from his black mouth... his snake-like tongue  
 flops around wildly around long, sharp teeth...

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 (howling)  
 AA000!!!! AAAA000000000000!!!

Ramona finally reaches the rifle. She grabs it, flips  
 herself over, sits up, and aims it at The Man.

RAMONA  
 DON'T MOVE!

The Man stops, but his deranged, confident smile remains.

A long beat.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 My dear, sweet Ramona. We both  
 know you won't fire that gun.  
 (matter of fact)  
 You can't.

The Man's expression slowly begins to change. No longer one  
 of cruelty... but of duty and responsibility.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 And that's why I'm here. To help  
 you.

Ramona lets out a QUIET GASP. She finally understands.

On her shocked face, we...

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - THE NIGHT BEFORE

We pick up where the last flashback ended. Ramona sits, staring at the weapon. She takes A DEEP BREATH, loads it, then COCKS it. She tilts her head back, places the gun vertically between her legs, puts one finger on the trigger, and rests her chin over the muzzle.

She closes her eyes and begins to squeeze the trigger...

A long beat.

...but her finger relaxes. The gun drops to the floor and she begins to WEEP. She puts her hands together and prays.

RAMONA  
 (sobbing)  
 Please... help me. I can't...  
 please... I can't do it... please,  
 help me...

She falls to the ground, hands clenched, praying hard. On her tightly intertwined fingers...

BACK TO SCENE:

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 You rest your finger on the trigger  
 of that rifle every night. And  
 every night, you hope you have the  
 strength to pull it. (BEAT) But you  
 don't.

He slowly walks toward her.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
I do.

Tears well in Ramona's eyes.

RAMONA  
 (softly)  
 No...

The Man squats down next to her. She keeps the gun aimed at him, but she's clearly giving up.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 (weak, pleading)  
 No, please... please...

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 Tell me, Ramona. What is it you  
 pray for?

A tear rolls down her cheek.

RAMONA  
 (ashamed)  
 Death.

The Man nods knowingly.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 That's right.

He places his hands on the gun, taking control of it.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 So don't be surprised when he shows  
 up at your door.

INT. FIELD OF RYEGRASS - SAME TIME

They're still running.

ANNIE  
 Ben! Ben! PUT ME DOWN!!!

She grabs a chunk of his hair and pulls hard. Ben YELPS in pain and finally sets her on the ground, where she immediately starts hitting and kicking her brother.

BEN  
 Stop! Annie, stop!

She doesn't. So Ben kneels down and grabs her hands to stop the relentless onslaught.

BEN (CONT'D)  
 Mom said to run! Okay? That's  
 what she told me to do!

ANNIE  
 We can't leave her! We can't! We  
 can't...

Annie WEEPS. Ben tries to convince her...

BEN  
She told me to run!

...and convince himself.

BEN (CONT'D)  
She told me to.

Annie shakes her head.

ANNIE  
(through tears)  
We can't leave her behind.

On Ben's face, unsure...

EXT. YARD - SAME TIME

The Man grabs Ramona's head, holds it steady, and shoves the rifle under her chin.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
This is what you want, Ramona.

He grabs her hand and places it on the trigger...

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
No more pain. No more guilt.

...then slides his bony index finger into the trigger guard along with hers.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
No more nightmares.

RAMONA  
Wait. Won't you... won't you  
please... spare my children?

The Man slowly shakes his head.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
You know I can't. For every soul  
that is forced to live, I am forced  
to visit.  
(sly smirk)  
One day or another.

Ramona accepts this. She accepts everything. She's given up. The Man has won. She shuts her eyes, ready to die. The Man's evil grin returns, enjoying every moment.

He slowly begins to squeeze, helping Ramona pull the trigger.

ANNIE (O.S.)  
(faint)  
Mom?

At the sound of Annie's distant voice, Ramona's eyes open.

BEN (O.S.)  
(faint)  
MOM?!

With one hand, she pushes the rifle forward just as their fingers squeeze the trigger -- *BANG!* -- blowing The Man's head off his shoulders.

His headless body remains still for a beat... then goes limp and falls backward onto the ground like a rag doll.

Ramona watches as his black hat flies through the air... landing softly in the yard a few feet away.

RAMONA  
Not today, fucker.

EXT. YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Ben and Annie run out of the field of tall grass and sprint toward the front yard. They turn the corner of the house and see a smiling Ramona hobbling toward them, trying to use the rifle as a crutch.

Seeing their mother alive, their faces light up.

BEN  
Mom!

ANNIE  
Mommy!

Ben reaches Ramona first, takes the rifle, and helps her stand. Annie runs up next and hugs her tight.

RAMONA  
I thought I told you to run and not stop?

BEN  
You expect the man of the house to take orders from you? (SCOFF)

Ramona CHUCKLES.

Annie and Ben spot The Man's hat sitting in the grass.

ANNIE  
 You killed him?  
 (confused)  
 But he said...

She stares up at her mom, her brow furrowed.

RAMONA  
 The world's full of monsters,  
 Annie. Some big and scary, and  
 others... just in your head.

Annie takes this to heart.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 But no matter what, don't believe  
 anything they say. You're stronger  
 than they are, I promise.

She smiles. Annie smiles right back.

BEN  
 Mom... why did he come here?

Ramona takes a moment to collect her thoughts. Then:

RAMONA  
 Because I needed a reminder of why  
 I have to keep going.

In an EXTREME WIDE, we watch the three of them, holding one another close, as they trek toward the front porch. The blackness of night blankets the yard.

BEN  
 So... now can I get my own cell  
 phone?

RAMONA  
 Eh... maybe.

BEN  
Maybe?! Are you kidding me?

He GROANS and Ramona LAUGHS. Suddenly, a few lights in the house flicker and then turn on all at once. *Power's back.*

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

CLOSE ON Ramona, sound asleep. As we PULL OUT, we reveal Annie, on her mother's right shoulder. And as we PULL OUT even further, we see Ben on her left.

WE SETTLE on a wide of the bed, where all three sleep together soundly.

After a beat, the DARK SILHOUETTE OF A LARGE MAN grows over them... then vanishes.

For now.

FADE OUT.

THE END