

THE DIONAEA HOUSE

by Eric Heisserer

Warner Bros. Pictures
Heyday Films

<http://www.dionaea-house.com>

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Approximately 2,000 people are reported missing each day. Most of these cases are resolved as runaways, or solved by the FBI.

The most mysterious cases -- virtually unsolvable -- are when people disappear from their own homes.

In 2003, 8,421 people were last seen at their home address, their cars parked in the garage. No sign of foul play.

They simply vanished.

FADE IN:

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DUSK

An empty and lifeless street. Fall leaves tap-dance across driveways. FOR SALE signs line the block in front yards like rows of gravestones.

ONE HOUSE is missing a Realtor's sign. A generic, one-story structure with attached garage. Discolored roof shingles. Peeling paint on the garage door.

Above and behind this house, phone poles and lines mark the far edge of the back yard easement.

All along the telephone lines: a crowd of BLACKBIRDS gather tightly. But only behind this house. The rest of the phone lines are bare.

MARK CONDRY (late 20s) faces the house, a young everyman in what feels like a surreal place.

Mark walks up the driveway, stepping over a pile of NEWSPAPERS left on the concrete. No one's been home.

FRONT PORCH

Mark rings the doorbell, but hears no sound. He calls out:

MARK
Hello?

Wings FLUTTER from the tree in the front yard, and blackbirds take flight, scattering like buckshot.

Mark knocks on the door. Still no response.

Hesitant, he reaches up along the door frame, and finds a HOUSE KEY on the narrow ledge.

He stares at the key a beat, reluctant.

INT. HOUSE

Mark enters and stands at the foyer, hesitant. Again:

MARK
Hello? Anyone here?

Nothing. Then: a muted VOICE from somewhere inside. Too faint and garbled to understand.

LIVING ROOM

Mark ventures across the room, toward the hallway that bisects the house.

His shoes make prints on the carpet as he goes, but...

The carpet fibers RIPPLE back to their original position, like hairs on a beast's skin.

HALLWAY

Mark peers down this dimly-lit corridor.

Doors line the hall, into bedrooms and closets. Most are open, spilling light in patches along the floor and walls.

Above Mark, an ATTIC DOOR marks the fringe of a fluid stain.

Mark's attention is distracted by a GURGLING sound from somewhere down the hall.

MARK (CONT'D)
Drew? Are you here?

SPARE BEDROOM

Mark checks in this sparsely-furnished room. Everything looks tidy -- bed neatly made, books stacked evenly -- but dust has settled like a powdery sheet.

He steps into this room a few feet. The clock radio by the bed is on, tuned to STATIC.

Mark ventures over, and clicks off the radio.

In response, the house SIGHS and CRACKS -- did the heating just kick on? It's as if the structure just awoke.

Mark backs off, and returns to the hall.

HALLWAY

He approaches the final bedroom. He calls out:

MARK (CONT'D)
It's me, Mark.

Behind him, the attic trap door BEGINS TO OPEN.

Mark stops at the door to the master bedroom and looks in.

INSIDE, a YOUNG MAN sits slumped on the bed, drooped like a rag doll.

His skin is taut in places, as if it were being pulled by wires. His arms and the back of his neck are stretched to points, where the skin is dark like a tumor.

Mark pauses in the threshold, frozen in fear.

The Young Man's neck TWITCHES, and his head lifts up. His stare is vacant and cadaverous.

The Man's arm raises, pointing. His mouth opens and a GUTTURAL SOUND issues from it.

Mark looks back down the hall --

The attic trap-door stands agape now.

A darkness spills out, hiding the end of the hall in shadow.

Mark starts to scream --

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

-- And wakes up in bed, sucking in breath.

His fiancée JENNIFER (20s, attractive and athletic) rolls over to him, blinking awake. She puts an arm gently around Mark's chest.

JENNIFER
Shh, shh. Another one?

Mark looks nervously at Jennifer for a moment, then calms down as he gets his bearings.

MARK
Yeah.

JENNIFER
What was it this time?

MARK
I don't, I don't know. It didn't make any sense.

Jennifer props herself up on one elbow and brushes back Mark's hair from his face.

JENNIFER
You wanna talk about it?

Mark looks up at her and lets out a breath.

MARK

Eh, you were right earlier. It's just stress.

JENNIFER

I can handle more of the wedding junk, if that's it...

She says this, but her body language says she doesn't want to do it alone. Mark reads it.

MARK

No, that's not it. As dumb as it sounds, I like doing stuff like meeting caterers and Deeja's...

Jennifer grins and lays back down. The two talk to each other by talking at the ceiling.

JENNIFER

Well, who wouldn't?

MARK

I know somebody who couldn't stand the last minister.

JENNIFER

He had caterpillars for eyebrows!

Mark gets up and goes to the bathroom.

MARK

I'm gonna get something to knock me out.

Jennifer bites her lip, then says:

JENNIFER

Hey, maybe you could see that guy at the VA. I bet he'd get you something for the nightmares.

Mark stops at the door to the bathroom and leans against the frame.

MARK

Dr. Collier?

Jennifer sits up and nods.

MARK (CONT'D)

It's not that bad. Is it?

JENNIFER

It's getting worse. Do we know what it is? Maybe just a session would--

MARK
(suddenly)
I'll see him.

He enters the bathroom and shuts the door. The suddenness of Mark's response makes Jennifer frown, worried.

EXT. V.A. BUILDING - DAY

U.S. and state flags whip and crackle in the wind above this dreary, weathered building in the dilapidated part of town.

INT. DR. COLLIER'S OFFICE

A pen LIGHT shines in Mark's eye.

DR. COLLIER faces Mark, leaning over to be at eye level while he checks Mark's dilation.

DR. COLLIER
The mysterious Mark Condry.

The office itself is more like a regular manager's space. Desk, chairs, coffee table. Collier looks like he's pushing 60, and wears a department-store business suit.

MARK
What?

DR. COLLIER
You've made four appointments with me in the past six months, and flaked out every time. I thought this would make five.

MARK
Work has been really busy for me. They got me on small business loans.

DR. COLLIER
Uh-huh. So what are these nightmares about? Are they recurring?

Mark leans back in his chair. Lets out a long breath.

MARK
Andrew.

Collier reaches for a clipboard, donning his glasses.

DR. COLLIER
Tell me about him.

MARK
Three of us were from Houston: Me, Travis, and Andrew. Travis was the prankster of the group.

Collier writes and nods as Mark talks.

MARK (CONT'D)

Andrew, he was the guy who agreed with whatever we wanted to do. Our mascot, our adopted little brother.

DR. COLLIER

You met during the occupation?

MARK

Yeah, but this happened after.

(beat)

When we got back home, we stayed close. Got together every weekend for Game Night. It was a ritual.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

TRAVIS, Mark, and ANDREW sit at a card table, bent over a boardgame; Risk. They're laughing at a joke we just missed.

Andrew resembles the young MAN from Mark's nightmare.

ANDREW

I got one now, I got one. How many Freudians does it take to screw in a light bulb?

MARK

Freudians? I give up.

ANDREW

Two. One to screw in the bulb, and one to hold the penis.

(whoops)

Ladder! I meant ladder!

Everyone LAUGHS and Andrew beams.

TRAVIS

Your turn, Andrew. Roll your dice and move your mice. Hey, before Mark abandons us all for his girl--

MARK

C'mon, I'm not abandoning you!

TRAVIS

--Let's try the new Madden. Oh, sure you are.

ANDREW

Oh, I uh, I can't make it next week.

TRAVIS

The hell you say. Dude, the clock is ticking. Mark's leaving in--

MARK
Less than a month.

ANDREW
My step-dad wants me to house sit at
this place he bought last month at
auction.

MARK
Just you alone in the place?

ANDREW
It's mostly empty. No one lives
there yet. He bought it as a
renovation project or something.

TRAVIS
Why's he want you to stay there then?

ANDREW
It's been vandalized couple times.
He's out of town all next week so he
can't stay there himself.

TRAVIS
Domestic overwatch duty. Always a
soldier.

MARK
Aren't we all?

Travis grins, but the seriousness of that question creeps
in. Mark fiddles with his Risk cards, suddenly awkward.

TRAVIS
I'll pick you up in two weeks, buddy.
We'll do the big send-off night for
PFC Con-man here then.

CLOSING on Andrew, wincing a little, as he puts his hand
against his ear -- like he hears a harsh noise.

BACK TO SCENE

MARK
We didn't hear from Andrew the whole
time. Then, two Saturdays later,
Travis picked him up like usual.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Andrew sits on the couch, staring straight ahead. His
expression is completely vacant. He keeps repeating letters:

ANDREW
L-A-R-oh, L-A-R-oh, L-A-R...

Mark sits down next to him, shaking his head.

MARK
Dude, are you wasted? On my final
game night?

Andrew turns his head and then digs into his pocket, producing
a folded piece of magazine paper.

ANDREW
Tell me what it is.

Mark takes the crinkled page and unfolds it.

INSERT: A photo of an RV, listed for sale, clipped from a
catalog.

MARK
What, you mean...
(glancing at Travis)
An RV?

Andrew stares at Mark.

MARK (CONT'D)
You know. A recreation vehicle?

ANDREW
(smiling now)
Re-creation vehicle.

Andrew starts jabbering to himself, mispronouncing the name:

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Re-creation vehicle. RV...

Travis makes for the kitchen.

TRAVIS
I need a beer.

MARK
I'll go with.

INT. KITCHEN (FLASHBACK)

The two converge at the fridge.

MARK
What the hell is up with him?

TRAVIS
I don't know. He was silent for a
while, but halfway here he just
started babbling random shit.

It pains Mark to ask this next question:

MARK
(close, sotto)
Is he losing it?

TRAVIS
I dunno, man. Maybe he's just being
all moody about breaking up the band.

MARK
If that's it, he's being a prick.

Travis doesn't argue the point.

TRAVIS
C'mon, let's see if he calms down.

BACK TO SCENE

Collier talks as he writes on his pad.

DR. COLLIER
Do you remember any more about
Andrew's behavior?

MARK
He wouldn't sit down and play. Like
he wasn't interested in us at all.
I finally gave up and drove Andrew
back to his place.

DR. COLLIER
And this was your last big night
together before you moved.

MARK
Yeah.

DR. COLLIER
Did you talk to him on the way back?

INT. MARK'S CAR - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Mark drives. Andrew sits shotgun. Mark glances over.

Andrew seems to be quietly mumbling to himself; his lips
moving soundlessly. Then, looking around:

ANDREW
This is not the house.

Mark stops the car at the curb.

MARK
Well then tell me where you live.
Seriously, what's up? Two weeks ago
you were fine. Did something happen
at your step-dad's place?

Slowly Andrew turns his head and stares at Mark.

ANDREW
The door is open.

BACK TO SCENE

Collier makes a small GRUNT of interest at this.

MARK
That's it.

DR. COLLIER
And that haunts you?

MARK
I just don't know what happened to him. Maybe he just couldn't stand to see me go. I don't know.

DR. COLLIER
But you haven't seen him since then.

MARK
No.

DR. COLLIER
Mark, I'm going to prescribe you something to help you sleep.

Mark starts to get up.

DR. COLLIER (CONT'D)
But, this doesn't address the problem. And I'm not sure you're experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder. Let's have you come in next week.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A bar and grill style eatery. Crowded. Moving toward the booths in the back.

DR. COLLIER (V.O.)
Meanwhile, you need to get out of the house. Be social.

In a corner booth, Mark and Jennifer sit among FRIENDS, all laughing and talking around a table littered with drinks, chips, and salsa.

DR. COLLIER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Don't get caught up in old memories. Make new ones.

Their friend LEE (hyper yet happy), raises his beer bottle.

LEE
To Mark and Jenny. May they have
many years of happiness, because if
they can't make it work, we're all
fucked.

GLENN
(toasting)
Hear, hear!

LAUGHTER all around as bottles CLINK in the middle.

Mark squeezes Jenny next to him and smiles conspiratorially.

She grins back. Across the table, DANA (mousy) chimes in.

DANA
At least Mark picked a romantic way
to pop the question. Let me tell
you how Glenn proposed to me.

GLENN
Is it husband humiliation hour
already?

JENNIFER
Hush, I wanna hear this!

DANA
We were in the Office Depot...

Somewhere at a neighboring table, a young girl WAILS, throwing
a tantrum.

The table conversation fades out as Mark looks around for
the Girl.

The WAIL changes to a high-pitched RINGING, drowning out
other sounds.

Mark flinches, crooking his head.

The RINGING continues, but Mark's suddenly distracted.

MARK'S POV

A decent view of this part of the restaurant: The bar, other
booths, DINERS, two TVs broadcasting a football game, and
right in the middle: An open doorway with a neon sign above
it marked "RESTROOMS."

Yet... There is something wrong. Pressing in:

Beyond the threshold to the "RESTROOMS" is a bedroom, with
the corner of a bed visible, and a floor lamp with a long-
sleeve shirt hung crookedly on its shade.

It's as if the restaurant ends, and a house begins.

Over a booth by the doorway: An attic TRAP DOOR. Its door string-pulley descends slowly, like a dangling snake.

JENNY notices Mark staring off. She follows his gaze--

It's a normal restaurant. No bedroom, no attic door.

LAUGHTER from the friends at the table.

Mark snaps to, and joins in the laughter, offering his best casual look of interest.

Jenny meets his glance and smiles at him. Gives him just the slightest nod.

He returns with another, almost imperceptible nod back.

JENNIFER

The real question is, did he buy the ring there too!

DROPPING UNDER THE TABLE, Mark's hands dig into his knees, knuckles white.

Jenny's hand ventures over to Mark's arm and rests atop it.

INT. MARK'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jenny and Mark enter, tossing off their shoes, stowing things like purse and keys on the nearest table.

JENNIFER

Oof, I am going straight to bed.

MARK

Oh the way you talk.

JENNIFER

(fake innocence)
Whatever do you mean?

Jenny pauses and pushes one strap of her dress over her shoulder, teasing.

Mark moves in and kisses her.

Then the phone RINGS. They are reluctant to break the kiss. On the second RING, Mark makes a frustrated noise and moves for the kitchen phone.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Meet me.

She heads for the bedroom as Mark nods, answering:

MARK

Hello?

Nothing but atmospheric background noise. Then: Click.
Disconnected.

Mark looks down at the phone, checking the caller ID.

MARK (CONT'D)
(sotto)
Two-oh-eight?

He puts the phone back on its cradle.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Very early in the morning now. Mark wakes up and looks around nervously. His hair is pasted from sweat.

Jennifer is fast asleep next to him. Mark checks the clock:
4:21 AM.

Mark takes a deep breath. The phone RINGS. Mark gets out of bed and grabs the cordless from the nightstand.

JENNIFER
Mmmph.

MARK
I got it. Probably another wrong
number.

Jennifer takes Mark's pillow and puts it over her head.

Mark answers the phone as he moves out of the bedroom. (NOTE:
no intercut in this call. Remain with Mark.)

MARK (CONT'D)
Hello?

MAN'S VOICE
Hello, who may I ask is speaking?

Mark shuts the bedroom door behind him and continues down the hall.

MARK
Mark. What number did you dial?

MAN'S VOICE
My name is Detective Rojas, I'm with
homicide in Boise, Idaho.

MARK
Idaho?

DETECTIVE'S VOICE
Yes. You know someone in Boise?

MARK
No. I don't, uh, no.

Background NOISES on the other end of the line: SIRENS, the chaos of other VOICES. Someone who sounds like a REPORTER.

DETECTIVE'S VOICE
You got a call earlier from here.

INT. MARK'S LIVING ROOM

Mark sits in a chair, away from the bedroom.

MARK
I don't know how to put this, but I really think you have the wrong number, detective.

DETECTIVE'S VOICE
Mark, is it?

MARK
Yes.

DETECTIVE'S VOICE
Mark, I'm staring at a pay phone in the parking lot of a diner off I-84 where, four hours ago, a call was placed to your number. The call lasted about five seconds.

Mark sits up.

MARK
Wait, wait... I got a hang-up call. Is that what this is about?

DETECTIVE'S VOICE
Where do you live?

MARK
I'm in Dallas.

DETECTIVE'S VOICE
You say it was a hang-up call?

MARK
Yes. Wrong number.

DETECTIVE'S VOICE
So you spoke with someone?

Mark rubs his forehead, getting frustrated.

MARK
No, they didn't say anything.

DETECTIVE'S VOICE

Sorry if I woke you, just following a lead. An officer will call you again later to follow up. Do you remember my name?

MARK

Detective Rojas.

DETECTIVE'S VOICE

Good. Contact me if you get any more hang-up calls from a number you don't recognize.

Click. Mark sits and stares into the dark. What the hell?

INT. LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Focused on the TV screen, tuned to an all-news station like CNN that covers stories across the States. An ANCHORWOMAN rattles through the next headline as tickers scroll by at the bottom of the screen.

ANCHORWOMAN

Next up: A violent crime shocked the capital city of Idaho when a man entered a diner and began shooting at patrons.

MARK sits in the same chair in the living room where he took the call late at night. He hasn't moved. He just watches the TV. The story goes on:

ANCHORWOMAN (CONT'D)

As of yet, the police have no information on the identity of the man entered who the restaurant, fatally wounded two customers, and then fled on foot.

ON SCREEN, an eyewitness interview. The WITNESS is a round-faced woman wearing a waitress uniform.

WITNESS

It just happened so fast, the guy came in and went right past the register, turned to the first table in the smoking section and started shooting.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

He didn't make any demands or take any money?

WITNESS

Nah, nah, he just walked up, shouted something crazy, like, 'The door is open' he said, and then shot at a couple people before running off.

MARK sits bolt upright.

ON SCREEN, portrait-style photos of a MAN AND WOMAN.

ANCHORWOMAN (V.O.)

The victims, John and Lucy Madson, were seated near the door...

Jenny enters and leans against the wall, still wearing her sleep shirt.

JENNIFER

Hey. What's up?

Mark turns off the TV and stares up at Jenny. Trembling.

Off Jenny's look of growing concern...

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Mark begins to stuff clothes into an overnight bag.

Jennifer sits on the bed, watchful. Worried.

JENNIFER

But... How do you know it's Andrew?

Mark expels an impatient sigh.

MARK

I need to make sure it's not him.

JENNIFER

Maybe, maybe Travis could check on him, so you don't have to drive down.

MARK

Travis doesn't work that way. He'll just wait an hour and call me back, say Andrew is fine. No, I need to go down there.

JENNIFER

What would make him flip out like that and go on a shooting spree?

MARK

He wouldn't!
(convincing himself)
None of us would.

This worries Jennifer more. She doesn't know what to say at first. She falls back on:

JENNIFER
And your appointment with Dr. Collier?
I'm worried about you.

MARK
I'll be fine. It's just... I made a
promise. Call it a guy thing. I
can't have Drew thinking I abandoned
him. It's important.

JENNIFER
(hurt)
But... Aren't we important?

He stops and sits down next to her.

MARK
Hey, hey... We're getting married.
You're the most important.
(beat)
I do this, I go down and find Andrew,
I won't need to see Collier anymore.

She blows out a breath, then finally nods.

JENNIFER
Make me a promise, then. Promise to
put it all behind you when you get
back. Okay?

MARK
Okay.

They hug, but it's a tense one.

JENNIFER
(whispered)
Call me.

Mark squeezes her, then catches his reflection in the mirror.

For just a fraction of a second, he sees ANDREW standing in
the open closet, staring out at him --

Mark whips his head around. But no one's there.

Off his worried look...

BLACK.

HOUSTON, TEXAS

INT. TRAVIS'S APARTMENT - DAY

Travis is asleep on his couch, eyes flitting under his lids.
A shadow passes over his face.

ANDREW (O.S.)
No man left behind.

He sits up suddenly, sucking in breath.

The apartment is quiet. No Andrew.

On the coffee table: a prescription pill bottle.

Travis picks it up, shakes it. Empty.

TRAVIS
(sotto)
God damnit.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

Basic hive living. Identical buildings crammed together
around communal swimming pools.

The sky overhead is a bleak grey bubbled with stormclouds.

Mark's SEDAN pulls up into the parking lot.

INT. SEDAN

From behind the wheel, Mark looks up at one unit. Hesitant.

TRAVIS exits, carrying a bag of garbage.

EXT. PARKING AREA

Travis walks the trash to a dumpster, hefts it over the top.

He turns around to find Mark standing five paces behind him.

Travis spasms in surprise.

TRAVIS
Jesus! Mark, you scared me.

MARK
Hey.

TRAVIS
Man, I thought you moved to Dallas.

MARK
Yeah, I got a promotion.

Travis looks around for signs of anyone else.

TRAVIS
Yeah, cool. What're you doing back?

MARK
Just here for a few days.

TRAVIS
Yeah?

They study each other like opponents.

MARK
Take a guess.

TRAVIS
Man, if this is about those PS2 games,
I didn't take them.

MARK
It's about Andrew.

Travis shifts his weight. His eyes dart left and right,
calculating.

TRAVIS
...Yeah?

MARK
Yeah.

INT. TRAVIS'S APARTMENT - DAY

TRAVIS
Fuckin' Idaho?

Travis and Mark sit across from each other in Travis's
smallish living room. Two cans of soda sit on the glass
coffee table between them.

MARK
I don't know. Maybe it's not him.
(off Travis's look)
It's not him.

TRAVIS
Drew couldn't ever pull the trigger,
you know that.

MARK
He still at Video Giant?

TRAVIS
Psshhhh. Hell if I know.

Travis sits back.

MARK
When was the last time you talked to
him?

TRAVIS
I don't remember.

MARK
Travis.

TRAVIS
What? I don't.

Travis drinks his soda, trying to avoid Mark's B.S. detector.

MARK
You used to pick Drew up every week,
drove him home.

TRAVIS
Little shoebox apartment, yeah.

MARK
Take me there. Let's just drop by,
check on him.

Beat.

TRAVIS
Man, that was like a year ago. I
don't know if I can remember where
he lives.

MARK
I need you on this. C'mon.

Mark waits him out. He leans forward and watches Travis
intently.

Travis squirms a little under Mark's stare.

TRAVIS
I don't know.

Mark holds out his arm, hand formed in a fist.

A TATTOO of an EAGLE is inked on the back of his hand.

Travis surrenders. He puts his own fist against Mark's.
Travis has an identical TATTOO on his hand.

TRAVIS (CONT'D)
Damnit. I'll drive you there, but
I'm not going in.

Mark stands up.

INT. TRAVIS'S TRUCK - DAY

The two old friends are silent for a beat in the car.

Rain begins to wage its war on the city. Travis turns on his wipers.

TRAVIS
How'd you find out?

MARK
Cops called me.

TRAVIS
How'd they know your number?

MARK
Got a hang-up call earlier. Pay
phone near the crime scene.

TRAVIS
...Oh.

Beat. The wipers swoop across the windshield.

TRAVIS (CONT'D)
What area code is Boise?

MARK
208, why?

Travis makes a brief throaty noise. Mark frowns.

TRAVIS
I been getting calls, too. But it
was some little girl, different area
code. Thought it was a wrong number,
you know, but she knew my name. She
knew who I was. I asked her how, I
mean what the fuck, you know?

MARK
And?

TRAVIS
She said I was on the list.

MARK
What list?

Closing in, tight on Travis's face.

TRAVIS
...Andrew's.

Right then, Mark's cell phone RINGS in his lap. Both Mark and Travis jump a little. Mark answers, fumbling:

MARK

Hello?

JENNIFER (V.O.)

You in Houston yet?

MARK

(deep breath)

Made it here earlier this morning,
45 was a breeze.

JENNIFER (V.O.)

Good. Things going okay?

Mark glances at Travis, who is now focused on driving.

MARK

I'm with Travis. Call you later.

JENNIFER (V.O.)

Okay. Love you, bye.

He hangs up. Neither of them speak right away.

MARK

I want that number.

TRAVIS

The little girl's?

MARK

Maybe she's related.

TRAVIS

Here. It's in my cell.

(handing cell phone)

You know, we didn't keep in touch.

MARK

You and Andrew?

TRAVIS

Any of us. He got freaky, you moved
up to Dallas with your woman, and I
was left holdin' down the fort.

MARK

I e-mailed you couple times.

TRAVIS

Yeah.

EXT. BRAESWOOD APARTMENTS - DAY

The rain pours down outside this stucco-style complex.
Travis's pickup stops near a dilapidated unit of four
apartments.

INT. TRAVIS'S TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

Mark hurries out of the manager's office with a piece of paper in his hand. He gets back inside Travis's truck, and greets Travis with a wide smile.

TRAVIS
What? He still live here?

MARK
No, but I got something better.
Kurt Malone. He was the step-dad.

TRAVIS
How did you find that out?

MARK
He paid Drew's rent now and then.
Landlord gave me his number and
address.

TRAVIS
So...

MARK
So we're getting closer.

Travis starts the engine. Mark dials a number on his cell.

TRAVIS
This is crazy.

MARK
Damn.

TRAVIS
What?

MARK
No longer in service.

Mark stares at the address, pondering.

MARK (CONT'D)
Richmond... That's where Drew went
to house-sit for him.

TRAVIS
So?

MARK
So maybe he's there.

TRAVIS
Come on, Mark, he was there for like
a week. He doesn't live there.

MARK

How do you know? You've been hanging out with him a lot lately?

TRAVIS

Oh, like this is suddenly my fault? Mr. Bail for Dallas?

MARK

Hey! It's on both of us. No man left behind.

Travis shakes his head.

TRAVIS

Shit.

(then)

You know, he's gonna laugh his ass off at us when we find him.

MARK

Yeah.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DUSK

Thunder GROWLS as the sun sets, choked behind clouds.

Travis's truck cruises slowly down the street of a middle-class neighborhood. The homes have different designs, from different builders.

Most of them have FOR SALE signs in the yard.

The truck WHINES to a stop.

INT. TRAVIS'S TRUCK

Mark and Travis stare out across the street.

TRAVIS

That one?

Mark's eyes widen. It takes him a moment to answer.

MARK

Yeah.

ACROSS THE STREET, a generic-style house. Unkempt lawn. Cracked driveway. But it's familiar.

It's the same house from Mark's nightmare.

A tree in the front lawn is populated with BLACKBIRDS. Wings flutter restlessly amid the branches.

Travis puts the truck in park.

TRAVIS
Let's go ring the bell.

They get out.

EXT. HOUSE - DUSK

Travis leads. Mark hangs back. Eyes the tree.

Travis reaches the front porch and rings the bell.

The blackbirds CAW and SCATTER from the tree. The branches seem to explode like black buckshot.

Mark is quite uneasy now. He holds up his camera-phone and takes a snapshot of the front of the house. He notices:

MARK
For sale sign. Maybe no one's home.

TRAVIS
Malone was a realtor, right? Maybe
Drew is staying here until it's sold.

MARK
I guess we'll come back tomorrow.

TRAVIS
And do what?

Mark doesn't have an answer. He shrugs.

TRAVIS (CONT'D)
Forget that. I'm not dragging this
out any longer than I have to. We're
here now.

MARK
But nobody's home.

Travis is through with beating around the bush.

TRAVIS
If Andrew lives here, we'll know
soon as we look inside.

MARK
So we come back during the day.

TRAVIS
(scoping out house)
No. Too easy to be seen then.

Travis walks to the side gate and opens it.

Mark follows him, agitated.

MARK
We're not breaking in.

Travis puts his hands on his hips.

TRAVIS
Fine. You stay out front and do
overwatch.

MARK
Travis...

But Travis is already planting a phone earpiece in his ear,
and plugging the hands-free mic cord into his cell.

TRAVIS
Get on the phone. You know the code
word if someone shows.

Mark unspools a hands-free cord and earpiece for his own
phone. He plugs it in just as his phone RINGS.

MARK
Hello.

Travis gives him the thumbs-up.

EXT. BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Travis rounds the corner, scanning for any witnesses or
neighbors outside.

The homes on the other side of the fence are quiet and dark.

TRAVIS
Lawn hasn't been mowed. I think the
home is vacant.

MARK (V.O.)
All clear out front. Is there a
back door?

There is. A sliding door. Travis tugs on it. The door
slides open an inch.

TRAVIS
It's unlocked.

Just inside, tall mini-blinds dangling from the ceiling block
his view of the interior.

Travis parts them with his hands and steps inside.

EXT. FRONT YARD

Mark leans against the truck, hands in his pockets.

MARK
What's inside?

TRAVIS (V.O.)
Not much. Hard to see in the dark.

MARK
Turn on a light. The power should still work even if it's for sale.

TRAVIS (V.O.)
I turn on a light and neighbors will know there's a break-in.

OLD MAN (O.S.)
Can I help you?

Mark turns around to see an OLD MAN standing on his driveway; the house across the street from the one Travis is in.

TRAVIS (V.O.)
Who was that?

MARK
Hi. I'm just looking at houses.

OLD MAN
At this hour?

MARK
They say it's wise to visit at night, see how the neighborhood is.

The Old Man rubs his chin, eyes never averting from Mark.

OLD MAN
Not much of one, I'm afraid. When the sugar mill business collapsed, this place became a ghost town.

Travis continues to speak to Mark over the phone earpiece.

TRAVIS (V.O.)
Okay, whoever it is, keep him distracted. I'm checking out the bedrooms.

MARK
(pointing)
Do you know anything about the place across the street?

The Old Man shakes his head.

OLD MAN
It's bad luck.

He bends down and pulls a weed from his yard.

MARK
What do you mean?

OLD MAN
Been on the market longer than any
other home on this street.

TRAVIS (V.O.)
Warm in here...

Mark catches this and pauses, distracted. Since he can't
talk to Travis yet, he asks the Old Man:

MARK
Did you know the owners?

Old Man chuckles.

OLD MAN
Which ones?

TRAVIS (V.O.)
(heavy breathing)
Out of... Breath... What's this?

MARK
Did you know Kurt Malone?

OLD MAN
Was that the real estate guy?

MARK
Yes.

OLD MAN
Eh. Seen him once or twice. His
kid came by a lot, too.

TRAVIS (V.O.)
Are you-- you inside now? Is that
you Mark?

MARK
(worried)
Not me.

OLD MAN
What?

MARK
A kid? Medium build, blond hair?
Sort of scraggly? [Change to fit]

Old Man shrugs and pulls another weed.

OLD MAN
Sounds right. The only ones I really
remember were the Madsons.

Mark frowns. Just as he was starting to retreat to the truck, this brings him back.

MARK

Madson?

OLD MAN

John and Lucy, yup.

Off Mark's shock --

QUICK POP - PHOTOS OF JOHN AND LUCY MADSON

From before. The two victims Andrew shot in Boise.

BACK TO SCENE

Mark's jaw drops.

MARK

They lived here?

OLD MAN

Maybe a month. Then they high-tailed it outta here like a flood was comin'. Left furniture n' crap behind.

MARK

That house over there?

OLD MAN

Ayup. Put all their money in an RV and just drove off. Craziest thing.

Mark begins to back away, back toward Travis's truck.

MARK

Thank you.

Old Man nods, heading back into his home.

TRAVIS (V.O.)

Mark, there's a door here, there's a door in the-- [static]

MARK

Travis?

The signal WHINES and sounds -- like someone thrashing underwater -- crackle in the earpiece and --

Then the signal goes dead.

MARK (CONT'D)

Travis! I lost signal.

Mark redials. Busy.

MARK (CONT'D)

Damnit!

Redials again. RINGS over and over.

Mark hustles up to the front porch, and tries opening the front door.

It appears to be locked.

Mark moves around to the side gate.

EXT. BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Mark rounds the corner, fixated on the house. He holds a flashlight in his hands.

The porch is empty, save for some wrought-iron lawn chairs. The back door is closed.

Mark goes up, tries the door - it's locked.

He jiggles the knob and tries again. No dice.

MARK

Travis! It's me!

The dangling mini blinds sway like tails. Mark tries to look inside. Can't see.

Fists clenched, blood pressure rising, Mark stares at the sliding door a beat.

He then moves OUT OF FRAME... Given up?

He reappears holding a metal lawn chair, which he SWINGS against the sliding door. With a REVERBERATING BONG, the chair bounces off the glass.

Mark looks at the door, surprised. What the hell?

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Two RICHMOND DEPUTIES enter the foyer, followed by Mark. One Deputy flicks on the lights.

DEPUTY 1

How long ago did your friend enter the premises now?

MARK

Half an hour, maybe.

DEPUTY 2

You realize that's considered breaking and entering, trespassing--

MARK
But he's thinking of buying the house,
and, uh, the door--

Mark stops himself, as the door obviously opens fine now.

That RINGING NOISE starts to build up in Mark's ear again.

Deputies move through, to:

INT. KITCHEN

Fridge and microwave are furnished. Nothing else here. No signs of struggle. No Travis.

Mark continues to follow. Tense. The interior matches his nightmare.

DEPUTY 1
What was his name again?

MARK
Travis.

Mark tries reaching Travis on the cell phone again. No luck.

INT. FAMILY ROOM

Deputy 2 enters and turns on the light.

The room is empty, save for a FRAMED PHOTO on the wall; an old black-and-white portrait of a PALE-FACED MAN smiling. The same one from earlier.

Deputy 2 looks around carefully.

INT. HALLWAY

The main hall that connects the rooms to the house.

Deputy 1 and Mark peer into bedrooms as they traverse the hall.

Mark looks into one bedroom to see a LONG-SLEEVE SHIRT hanging crookedly from the shade of a floor lamp. Just like his vision in the restaurant.

MARK
(sotto)
Jesus...

He looks back, and up.

There is no trap door in the hall here.

BLACK.

TOPEKA, KANSAS

EXT. HOUSE - EVENING

The same house as the Houston one. Identical. Only... This one is in a different neighborhood. Completely different street layout.

BLACKBIRDS gather in the withered tree on the front lawn.

MRS. ELLISON (V.O.)
You must be Danielle.

INT. FOYER

MRS. ELLISON (40s) -- an overstressed mother shuts the door after letting in DANIELLE STEPHENS -- 16, cute but rebellious with a color streak through her hair.

DANIELLE
Wow, so you all just moved in?

Looking into the DINING ROOM, where U-Haul boxes are stacked against the wall.

MRS. ELLISON
Actually, it's just been crazy the past couple weeks.
(checks her watch)
So ten dollars an hour is good with you?

DANIELLE
Sure.

MRS. ELLISON
Okay. Great. Well let me introduce you to Linney.

She leads Danielle back to:

INT. FAMILY ROOM

Couch, TV, card table with a PC on it, and more boxes.

MRS. ELLISON
Linney? Sweetheart?
(to Dani)
She's usually watching TV.

DANIELLE
How old is she?

MRS. ELLISON
Eight, and already she is her own woman, believe me.

Mrs. Ellison checks her watch again. Dani notes the PC on the table as they pass through.

DANIELLE
Is she allowed on the PC?

MRS. ELLISON
What? Oh -- no, that's something
else, don't touch that.

DANIELLE
Okay.

MRS. ELLISON
I need to get back to the office.
(calling)
Linney?

INT. LINNEY'S BEDROOM

Danielle and Mrs. Ellison arrive at the doorway.

MRS. ELLISON
Linney, hey. This is Danielle.

LINNEY sits on the floor in a dress, playing with a doll house. She seems the complete opposite of her mother -- calm to the point of lethargic.

LINNEY
Hello.

Danielle puts on a smile and sits down on the bed.

DANIELLE
Hi Linney.

MRS. ELLISON
Danielle is going to stay with you
tonight while Mommy finishes some
things at work, okay?

LINNEY
(shrugs)
Okay.

MRS. ELLISON
Come give Mommy a hug and kiss.

Linney gets up and goes to her mother.

Danielle notices the doll house, specifically...

The wallpaper has been ripped away on the house's second floor. In its place, someone has marked the walls crudely with a red marker.

Mrs. Ellison kisses and hugs her daughter. Then, to Dani:

MRS. ELLISON (CONT'D)
No soda after seven.

Danielle snaps out of her stare and smiles up at Mrs. Ellison.

DANIELLE
Got it.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Danielle sits Indian-style at the coffee table, painting her fingernails. Linney watches cartoons on TV.

The house phone RINGS. Linney gets up.

LINNEY
I'll get it!

Danielle blows on her wet nails, then calls after her:

DANIELLE
Maybe we should let the machine pick
up?

INT. MASTER BEDROOM

Linney hurries in and mashes the speakerphone button on the nightstand phone. It's the easiest to reach for her.

LINNEY
(to the room)
Hello? Hello?

MARK'S VOICE
Hello, my name is Mark. I'm calling
for someone who may know Andrew.

Linney climbs up on the bed and rolls onto her back.

LINNEY
Andrew. Andrew Hughes?

INT. MARK'S CAR - SAME

Mark drives on a freeway at dusk. Earpiece in his ear. Talking as he drives.

MARK
That's right! Do you know him?

INTERCUT

Linney brushes hair out of her face.

LINNEY

Nope.

MARK

How did you know his last name?

LINNEY

It's in the book. Hang on.

Linney hurries out of the room. From the family room, Danielle calls out:

DANIELLE (O.S.)

Linney? Who is it?

From the speaker:

MARK'S VOICE

Hello?

Linney returns, holding a SMALL POCKET NOTEBOOK - the kind used to jot quick notes, or as an address book.

She sits down on the floor by the nightstand and flips open the book.

Its PAGES look stained by a greenish fluid. On the open page: A short list of NAMES and NUMBERS.

LINNEY

Mark?

MARK'S VOICE

Yes, hello?

LINNEY

Mark Condry?

In the car, Mark becomes even more agitated.

MARK

Yes, that's me. Is Andrew there?

LINNEY

Nope.

MARK

How do you know my name?

LINNEY

It's written down.

Danielle enters, shaking her hand to dry her nails faster.

DANIELLE

Who is it?

Linney shrugs. Mark's voice carries into the room:

MARK'S VOICE

Written where? Whose house is this?
Are your parents home?

The 'red alert question' for babysitters. Danielle picks up the phone, annoyed.

DANIELLE

Excuse me, who is this?

(beat)

Well there's no one here with the
name Hughes. These people just moved
in. I think you have the wrong number.

(beat)

I'm hanging up now. Don't call again.

She hangs up and smiles down at Linney, to reassure her.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Wrong number.

Linney stares up at her, clutching the notebook.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

"One Tree Hill" on the TV. Danielle reclines on the couch,
engrossed in the show.

DANIELLE

Oh, come ON Haley, don't be such a
ditz!

Linney sits on the floor in front of her, quietly playing
with crayons.

The house CRACKS and SIGHS around them, the way old homes do
when the vent kicks on. Danielle pauses.

Linney gets up and goes to the hall. She disappears around
the corner.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Linney?

(back to TV)

Wait, what did Nathan just say?

(rewinds TiVO)

It better not be "I love you."

Linney returns to the room carrying something SMALL and METAL
in her hands.

She makes a beeline for an open box on the floor in the corner
of the room.

Bending over, Linney drops the object in the box.

Dani catches sight of the girl in the corner of her eye.

Linney then looks at her hands and wipes them on her dress...
Which SMEAR WITH BLOOD.

Danielle sits bolt upright.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
(pausing TV)
Omigod Linney are you okay?

She drops the remote and rushes to Linney's side.

Linney stands still, suddenly looking guilty.

LINNEY
I'm okay.

DANIELLE
What happened? What'd you do?

LINNEY
Nothing.

DANIELLE
Let me see your hands.

She shows them to Dani, palms up. They're mostly clean.
Only a little blood still in the lines of her hands.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
Did you cut yourself?

Linney shakes her head no.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
What was that?

And now Danielle looks into the BOX.

INSIDE: various random personal items.
A hair dryer. A hardback novel. An empty plastic bottle.
An iPod. A pair of glasses. A porcelain horse knick-knack.

And lastly, a cell phone, pasted with blood.

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

She starts to reach in and grab it, then decides to use a
napkin from the coffee table to pick it up.

LINNEY
It was in the spot.

DANIELLE
What spot?

LINNEY
In the hall.

DANIELLE
No, I mean, but where did these things
come from?

Linney shrugs.

LINNEY
I find them in the hall. It's like
playing a game.

Danielle stares at Linney. Is this for real?

DANIELLE
Show me.

INT. HALLWAY

Linney steps up to a spot on the carpet, stained long ago
from a spill.

Parts of the carpet around this stain are freshly wet.

LINNEY
Here.

Danielle bends down and inspects the spot.

DANIELLE
Right here? This is where you found
the phone.

LINNEY
Uh-huh. I put it with the other
things.

Danielle sniffs the spot and recoils. She stands upright
and looks around.

DANIELLE
(calling)
Hello? Is someone here?

Looks up --

And notices the lines of an ATTIC TRAP DOOR above her in the
hall. The STRING to pull it down dangles just above her head.

Off Danielle's look of quiet disbelief...

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Danielle rummages through the drawers until she finds a
FLASHLIGHT among the spatulas.

Grabs it. Linney stands nearby.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Danielle sets a wooden chair on the floor, then tries the flashlight. It works.

Linney stands at the end of the hall, watching.

LINNEY
What are you doing?

DANIELLE
Just going to check something out.

She looks up again at the ceiling --

The creases that marked the trap door are GONE. The whole ceiling is continuous. NO sign of a door.

Danielle frowns. Cocks her head.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
Wait. I.
(to Linney)
Wasn't there a door up here? Did
you see...?

Linney shrugs.

Danielle stares at the ceiling.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
How do you get to the attic?

LINNEY
You mean the red room?

DANIELLE
(right at Linney)
The what?

Linney looks like she just got in trouble. She turns and walks back into the family room, answering:

LINNEY
I don't know. Someone lives up there,
leaves things in the hall. Sometimes
I leave things there too. Sometimes
they disappear.

Danielle follows.

INT. FAMILY ROOM

She catches up to Linney on her way to the kitchen.

DANIELLE
Hey, wait. Linney.
(kneeling down)
Have you been up there? Is that why
you call it the red room?

Linney shakes her head.

LINNEY
I don't go in dark places.

Danielle lets out a breath.

DANIELLE
Okay. But. Let's say I wanted to
take this --
(the flashlight)
-- and look around, make sure no
one's in the red room, like maybe
hurt or something. How would I get
there?

Linney shrugs again. A common defense mechanism for her.

Danielle gives up.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
Too weird.

She opens up her cell phone and starts to dial a number.

LINNEY
I'm hungry.

Dani closes her phone and takes Linney's hand.

DANIELLE
Okay, let's get you some dinner.

LINNEY
Can I have spaghetti?

DANIELLE
Sure.

They walk past the PC screen...

ON SCREEN, a diagnostic program records SPIKES of data.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The microwave HUMS as pasta heats up inside.

Linney sits at the breakfast table, gripping her silverware.

Danielle sets out plates with one hand while cradling her
cell phone to her ear.

DANIELLE

Jon, I'm totally serious. There was blood on it.

(beat)

She doesn't know. Will you come over?

(beat)

Then ask to borrow your brother's car. Please? I'm just down the block from my house. It's 815 Sage.

(beat)

God, thank you, Jon. Thank you so much.

She shuts the phone.

LINNEY

Mommy doesn't like strangers over.

DANIELLE

It'll be fine, Linney. He's a good friend, and he won't stay long. I just want to make sure everything is okay here.

The power DIMS -- all the lights drop to about half their wattage. Then power restores again.

Danielle stops and looks around. Waiting.

LINNEY

It does that sometimes.

The microwave BEEPS. Dani pulls out the spaghetti and takes the bowl to the table.

We now notice hanging on the wall behind the table: the FRAMED PHOTO of the PALE-FACED MAN. The same one from Houston.

DANIELLE

Does your mommy know about this stuff?

LINNEY

I guess so. She didn't really listen until Bumble went away.

DANIELLE

(stirring spaghetti)
Who's Bumble?

LINNEY

She was my cat.

DANIELLE

Bumble ran away?

Linney shrugs.

Danielle is getting more shaky by the minute. She starts to pour the hot pasta on Linney's plate.

Nearby, a phone CHIRPS loudly.

Danielle drops the pasta bowl in surprise. It BREAKS on the table, spattering the two of them with tomato sauce.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Oh-- oh no. I'm sorry.

Another CHIRP ringtone.

Danielle takes a paper towel and wipes Linney's face, looking back toward the FAMILY ROOM over her shoulder.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Is that your phone?

LINNEY

Nope.

Linney picks at the pasta that made it onto her plate.

INT. FAMILY ROOM

Danielle finds the source of the ringing.

It's the cell phone in the box.

Dani grabs the phone and stares at it. Unsure.

It stops ringing.

DANIELLE

(to herself)

Star 69. Or check the call log.

But she doesn't. She puts the phone back in the box.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Dani sits with Linney, watching her eat.

DANIELLE

We need to get you cleaned up. Put you in the tub. Look at that, I got tomato sauce in your hair.

LINNEY

I take showers in the morning. Mommy washes my hair then.

DANIELLE

Well, we can't put you to bed like this. Just a quick bath.

LINNEY

I don't know.

Danielle picks up the pieces of the broken bowl, and starts to clean the small mess on the table.

DANIELLE

I'll make it fun. Like a little pool party. How about that.

LINNEY

Okay.

DANIELLE

You get ready and I'll go start the bath water. C'mon.

INT. GUEST BATHROOM - NIGHT

Hot water pours from the tub faucet.

Danielle puts her hand in the water to test the temperature.

She scoots the shower curtain out of the way and rolls up her sleeves.

LINNEY (O.S.)

I'm ready.

Dani turns and sees Linney in a one-piece swim suit.

Danielle grins.

DANIELLE

Well look at you! Pool party time.

Linney grins back and approaches the tub.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Let's get you in there.

Linney straddles the basin and dips a foot into the water.

LINNEY

Tsssst!

DANIELLE

Too hot?

Dani adjusts the temperature. Pushes some water around. The color of the water is slightly off. Unfiltered. A tint of green to it.

Linney puts both feet in the tub and slowly settles down.

Dani shuts off the water and starts to wash Linney's face.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
So what does your Mom do?

LINNEY
She's a programmer for a big insulting
firm.

DANIELLE
(grins)
You mean consulting?

LINNEY
Yeah. Though I don't think we'll be
staying in this house much longer.

DANIELLE
So there's been some problems here?

Linney shrugs.

LINNEY
We hear people on the roof at night.
Mom says it's just squirrels.

Dani looks up at the ceiling.

Somewhere o.c. a DOORBELL RINGS.

DANIELLE
Hang on. Be right back.

Linney takes an uncertain breath.

LINNEY
Okayyyy...

After Danielle leaves, Linney stares at the faucet.

ANGLE ON LINNEY

Behind her, in the hall outside the bathroom -- the ATTIC
DOOR STRING suddenly drops into view, dangling from the
ceiling offscreen.

Slowly, it raises up again, as if being reeled up.

THE TUB FAUCET emits a strange scraping sound as the SAME
STRING now unspools from it.

Linney washes her face with the rag, unaware.

The string is now fully unspooled, dangling from the faucet.
The plastic knob on the end of the string bobs and floats
limply on the surface of the water.

Then... It spasms.

INT. FOYER

Danielle answers the door.

Outside, JON (16) stands sheepishly in the porch light. Looking over his shoulder at the street.

DANIELLE
Jon, thank god. I think I've gone
crazy.

She leads him into the house. Jon shuts the door behind him.

JON
Hey, is there any beer in the fridge?

DANIELLE
Don't even.

INT. FAMILY ROOM

Dani points at the box in the corner.

DANIELLE
Take a look.

Jon bends over the box, rummages around in it.

JON
So?

From the bathroom down the hall, Linney SCREAMS. It's a high-pitched, life-or-death WAIL.

Danielle gasps, and burst into a run down the hall.

INT. BATHROOM

Thrashing of water in the tub.

Danielle skids to a stop at the bath to find Linney flailing like mad.

The string has wrapped itself around her leg and is pulling her toward the faucet.

Linney's ankle is being gouged on the lip of the faucet.

Danielle freaks and starts to pull Linney out of the tub --

The string cuts into Linney's leg --

Linney WAILS --

LINNEY
Getitoffgetitoff!

Danielle starts to work at it with one hand while holding Linney aloft out of the tub --

The string is slippery with soapy water --

Danielle SHOUTS --

DANIELLE
JON HELP!

No sign of Jon --

Finally, the slippery string YANKS away, like a spaghetti noodle being sucked off a plate --

Danielle and Linney tumble backwards and land on the linoleum floor.

Both of them are out of breath. Both are in tears.

The drain GROWLS as the bath water empties out of the tub.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
Jon!

No answer. But then -- the house CRACKLES and SIGHS again, like some central heating system has kicked on. It makes the house sound... organic.

Dani holds her breath and listens. Hyper-alert now.

Linney cries softly in her arms. Both of them still on the bathroom floor.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
Shh, shh...

A deep, resonating THROATY SOUND booms throughout the house.

Both girls stay quiet now. Short breaths.

The vent in the bathroom pipes in warm air.

Danielle breathes in... And then puts her hand over her nose, flinching. It's obvious the smell is overpowering.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
(sotto)
Oh god...

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Danielle emerges from the bathroom, cradling Linney.

She's shaken and terrified. She looks down the hall.

AT ONE END, where she saw the attic trap door before, the door has returned.

Now, it hangs open. A set of wooden steps reach the floor.

The darkness at the threshold of the attic doorway is impenetrable.

LINNEY
(scared)
The door is open.

Danielle breathes faster now. She retreats from the trap door and carries Linney into the room at the other end.

INT. FAMILY ROOM

She makes for the sliding glass door at the other end of the room. (This is the same door in the Houston house Travis used to get inside.)

She calls once more:

DANIELLE
Jon! WHERE ARE YOU?

The sliding door is stuck. It won't open for Dani.

She tugs harder.

Linney helps. Still doesn't work.

Danielle grabs a small chair (the one she used before in the hall), and BASHES it across the screen door.

The glass DOES NOT BREAK.

LINNEY
Don't do that!

Danielle grabs Linney and backs into a far corner, eyes searching the room everywhere.

LINNEY (CONT'D)
Please... Just wait until it's not hungry anymore...

On the verge of having a complete nervous breakdown, Danielle instead gets panic-angry.

DANIELLE
We are getting out of here, NOW.
The front door.

LINNEY

No!

DANIELLE

Come on.

LINNEY

(pleading)

The red room is that way.

But Dani is committed.

DANIELLE

Stay here.

Linney obeys, crawling under an end table, mumbling:

LINNEY

I don't want to play anymore.

Danielle looks around for some kind of makeshift weapon. She finds a small STATUETTE on a bookcase and hefts it like a lead pipe.

Shaking, sweaty, she moves into the hall.

INT. HALLWAY

The way to the front of the house is past the attic trap door. No other way.

The door is in the same position as before. The inside of the stairs and door have a red hue to them, like the tongue of a great beast.

Danielle approaches slowly. Statuette raised.

Getting closer now. Watery sounds above, as if the attic were flooded.

Danielle is nearly under the trap door now. She looks up into the darkness beyond --

And it seems like the threshold into the attic is a LIQUID SURFACE, black and unnatural.

A HUMAN BODY tumbles down the steps --

Dani BACKS UP and raises her makeshift weapon.

It's Jon. His body lies in a heap on the floor.

DANIELLE

JON JESUS CHRIST!

His skin is black and taut at his elbows.

His arms spasm --

The house GROANS --

Jon stands up as if lifted by invisible strings, his
silhouette rising before us -- shrouding Danielle --

Danielle SCREAMS --

BLACK.

BOISE, IDAHO

INT. COMMERCIAL AIRPLANE - DAY

Mark wakes up in an airline seat. A uniformed FLIGHT ATTENDANT smiles at him.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
We've arrived. Is this your final destination?

Mark rubs his eyes and grabs his carry-on bag.

MARK
God I hope not.

He gets up to leave the plane.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Mark plunks his bag down on the bed as he talks to Jenny on his cell phone with the hands-free earbud.

MARK
Hey Jenny.

JENNIFER (V.O.)
Mark? Where are you?

MARK
Uhhh, La Quinta. Did Travis call?

JENNIFER (V.O.)
No, but your office did. They wanted to know if you were still out sick.

Mark gingerly takes off his shirt while keeping the earbud and mic in place, so he can still hear/talk to Jen.

MARK
Tell them yes. I had to fly out to Idaho. This thing with Andrew, it's not over yet.

He rummages in his overnight bag for a clean shirt.

JENNIFER (V.O.)
Wait-- what isn't over yet? What makes you go from Houston to Idaho? What happened with Travis?

MARK
Travis disappeared. I don't know what happened. That's why I'm here.

Mark goes to the nightstand with his laptop and stows it in the top drawer.

JENNIFER (V.O.)
 You have to know something, right?
 To fly all the way to Idaho? Is, is
 this about something that happened
 in the war?

Closing on Mark now, face taut with worry.

MARK
 This is something else.

JENNIFER (V.O.)
 Mark, come home. This is starting
 to freak me out.

MARK
 Yeah.
 (hangs up, then)
 Welcome to my world.

Mark opens the bottom drawer of the nightstand and finds a set of phonebooks. Takes out the White Pages.

INSERT: The 'H' page. Pointer finger sliding down to the name HUGHES. No sign of an ANDREW listed.

MARK (CONT'D)
 (sotto)
 No Andrew. Would've been too easy.

He bites his thumbnail, wondering if he's screwed.

Then, another idea.

INSERT: The 'M' page. Scrolling down past the MADISON entries to come to rest on a single MADSON name.

EXT. WOODLAND HOME - DAY

A pleasant two-story house on four acres of land.

Mark drives his rental car up the long driveway, stopping behind: an RV. With Texas plates.

INSERT: LICENSE PLATE

It reads - LAR 0826 (the letters and one number Andrew was repeating in the flashback)

Mark stares at this a beat, registering.

ALLAN MADSON (50s) steps out from his front porch. He moves as if affected by arthritis or similar disease.

Mark rolls down his window as Allan approaches.

ALLAN
Hello there.

MARK
Allan Madson?

ALLAN
That's me, yes.

MARK
Any relation to a John or Lucy Madson?

INT. RV - MOMENTS LATER

The two men enter and sit down at the little L-shaped bench around a small table built into the RV.

ALLAN
John is-- was. Was my brother. He and Lucy were visiting for a week or so while they resupplied.

MARK
They lived in Houston before this, right?

ALLAN
Yeah. They didn't stay for more than a few months.

MARK
What made them leave town?

ALLAN
There were problems with the house they bought there.

MARK
What kind of problems?

ALLAN
Structural issues, strange noises... And it got worse. I think they just hit a melting point and chucked it all for a life on the road.

Allan looks around at the RV as testament.

MARK
They left town, just like that?

ALLAN
(nodding)
Heard from him once or twice, on the road...
(then, lower)
Maybe they were being hunted.

MARK
Hunted? Like for a crime?

ALLAN
No no, it's more like they just felt
so paranoid about being stalked.
(then)
I don't know. My wife thinks I'm
trying to rationalize it, have it
make sense, when it's just a random
shooting by some drugged-up nutjob.

This gets under Mark's skin. If it's Andrew...

MARK
Would you mind if I looked around?

ALLAN
Not at all. Police came by few days
ago, but they didn't find anything.
Not that they looked all that hard.

Mark walks back to the rear bedroom of the RV.

INT. RV - REAR ANGLE - CONTINUOUS

Back here, a TV sits on a shelf with a small stereo and tiny
DV tapes, next to a little camcorder.

Mark notes the labels. "LEAK - CEILING" "NOISES - FURNACE"
"CARPET PRINTS" and one with just three letters: "OKC."

MARK
What are these?

ALLAN
Lucy liked to send video greetings
online. Some of these document the
house problems, though, for the
insurance company.
(then)
What does their Houston house have
to deal with this shooting?

MARK
I don't know.
(re: DV tapes)
Can I borrow these?

Allan ponders Mark a beat. Then, shrugging:

ALLAN
Knock yourself out.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - DUSK

Jennifer steps out of the bedroom in a bathrobe, a towel wrapped around her head. She looks toward the living room expectantly.

Beat. Then: BZZZZZZZZZZ.

Jennifer hurries into the living room and approaches an intercom panel against one wall. Holding down a button:

JENNIFER
Yes, hello?

Click.

MAN'S VOICE
...Is Mark home?

JENNIFER
He's not uh... I'm sorry, who is this?

Another beat. Jennifer's brow crinkles.

MAN'S VOICE
This is Travis.

JENNIFER
Travis, oh my god! Mark's not here, I thought you'd know.

MAN'S VOICE
...Where is he?

JENNIFER
He's in Boise, hey, look, let me buzz you in, we'll talk.

She holds down a button on the intercom for a second. She then looks down at her bathrobe.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
(sotto)
Ack.

Jennifer makes a dash back to the bedroom.

EXT. MARK'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

The front door opens and Jennifer peeks out onto the second floor landing. She's now wearing sweats.

JENNIFER
Travis?

No sign of him. Jennifer hurries down to the building door.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING

Jennifer steps out and scans the area.

Travis is nowhere to be found.

INT. HOUSTON HOUSE - VIDEO FOOTAGE

Camcorder style. Set on a tripod or shelf in the master bedroom. LUCY MADSON hurries away from the camera to her husband JOHN, who's sitting on a bed that's been newly assembled, without sheets.

All around, boxes have been opened and partially unpacked. A floor lamp barely lights up the room, leaving the open door to the hall dark.

John smiles as Lucy puts her arm around him, waving at the camera.

LUCY MADSON

Hi! So we made it, got all moved in yesterday, now it's just a matter of unpacking and finding where everything goes.

JOHN MADSON

The heat is crazy here. Humid.

LUCY MADSON

Well, it's not Oklahoma, but it's our home, just the two of us now.

At the doorway behind the Madsons, a FIGURE moves slightly into view: the line of an arm, leg, and half a face. Barely visible at the door frame. Watching.

JOHN MADSON

Hey, Allan, I'm two blocks from the golf course. You gotta visit.

The FIGURE moves back out of view.

LUCY MADSON

Can't wait to start painting this--

WHAM-- a sound from somewhere behind them.

BLUE SCREEN with white lettering in one corner that reads "STOP." Backing away from the TV...

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Mark sits on the edge of his bed, with the pile of DV tapes at his side. The camcorder is plugged into the TV, being used as the cassette player.

Mark ejects the first tape and puts in another.

INT. HOUSTON HOUSE - VIDEO FOOTAGE

Lucy in the hallway now. She holds the camera so that she's partially in frame.

Whispering:

LUCY MADSON
Just some weird noises, and I thought
I heard... voices. Something.

From the camcorder mic, a low RUMBLING.

LUCY MADSON (CONT'D)
(hushed tone)
There it is!

Pointing the camera at a space in the hallway. Furniture footprints in the carpet.

LUCY MADSON (CONT'D)
I had a side table here... Right
here. Had a porcelain horse on it I
got in Europe... Now it's gone.

Her tone is decidedly worried. The blue screen again: "STOP."

INT. HOTEL ROOM

Mark puts in another tape. This one with the label OKC.

INT. SEDAN - DAY - VIDEO FOOTAGE

The same hand-held cam. Lucy as director again. The camera zooms in on a PICKUP TRUCK ahead of the sedan.

LUCY MADSON (O.S.)
John, don't get so close! He'll see
us!

JOHN MADSON (O.S.)
We're not in the RV, we're in a
rental.

Camera shifts to reveal John in driver's seat. Furrowed brow.

JOHN MADSON (CONT'D)
Are you taping? Does it show the
date?

LUCY MADSON (O.S.)
I don't see it.

JOHN MADSON

Okay, it's January 12th, we're in Oklahoma City. Four months on the road now. A man's been following us--

LUCY MADSON (O.S.)

Ever since the freeway!

JOHN MADSON

This morning. We saw him on I-35, and as we left the dealership--

The camera drifts back to the pickup truck. It turns right onto a residential street.

LUCY MADSON (O.S.)

We had to leave the RV at a dealer because the electrical isn't working and when we drove off the lot--

JOHN MADSON

He was there. We don't know who he is. But I think he's been tailing us since the state border--

LUCY MADSON (O.S.)

He's turning, John.

JOHN MADSON

I see him, I see him. I just don't-- I mean, does he live here? He's got Texas plates...

The pickup pulls into a driveway. The Driver gets out and moves for the front door...

LUCY MADSON (O.S.)

He's stopped! He's there!

JOHN MADSON (O.S.)

I see him--

The Driver looks out at the street for a moment -- IT'S ANDREW. Hair askew.

Camera focusing on the HOUSE where Andrew has pulled up...

LUCY MADSON (O.S.)

Oh my god John!

It's the same house. Identical to the Houston and Topeka houses. In Oklahoma City.

John slows. Andrew moves toward the house and enters.

LUCY MADSON (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Keep going, keep going!

John revs the engine and they speed away from the house.

Camera focuses on John now.

LUCY MADSON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I don't understand, that was, that
was--

JOHN MADSON
(then)
We're leaving town. Right now.

STATIC.

INT. HOTEL ROOM

Mark stares at the static. Struggling to make sense of it.

The RINGING NOISE in his ear returns. Mark holds a palm to his right ear, wincing. He moves for the bathroom.

What he doesn't hear or see: His cell phone on the nightstand, lit up as a call comes in, CHIRPING, while he's in:

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mark checks the drawer by the sink for aspirin.

The HIGH-PITCHED EAR NOISE continues, but this time we start to hear a VOICE garbled in that tone; unintelligible English.

Mark looks up at his image in the mirror. He's alone.

His jacket hangs on the bathroom door's hook. He goes to it and reaches in a pocket, where he finds

A SMALL PILL BOTTLE -- ibuprofen. He dryswallows two pills.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stepping out, the NOISE dissipates. Mark shuts off the VCR.

ON-SCREEN: A COP SHOW. A detective shows his badge.

Mark snaps his fingers, remembering.

MARK
Rojas.

He leaves, his PHONE still on the nightstand, its voicemail light blinking.

INT. DALLAS APARTMENT - THAT MOMENT

Jenny peeks out a window, biting her nails. Mark's voice from the kitchen counter behind her:

MARK (V.O.)
--but leave a message and I'll call
back.

BEEP. Jenny turns and leans into the speakerphone:

JENNIFER
Mark, what the hell. Travis just
came by here, looking for you, I
guess. He's here. I'm here. The
only one who isn't here is you.
(beat)
Look. The longer you don't tell me
what you're doing, the more my mind
runs wild.

She hits a button and ends the call. Big exhale. Then, she
speed-dials another number.

INT. BOISE POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

To establish. Mark stands at a front desk, signing in. A
CLERK points him in the right direction.

INT. FILE BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Mark descends a set of stairs to this underground room full
of cold case files, closed files, and legal documents. He
now wears a VISITOR badge on his shirt.

MARK
Detective Rojas?

At the end of a narrow row, Rojas stands with a filebox open,
his hands sifting through the papers.

NOTE: Attentive viewers will notice he's wearing the long-
sleeve shirt Mark saw in his vision and at the Houston house.

MARK (CONT'D)
Detective Rojas?

Rojas pulls a file, turns, and sees Mark. Smiles broadly.

ROJAS
Yes. Can I help you?

MARK
I'm Mark Condry.

ROJAS
Yes. Hello.

MARK
You called me a week ago.

He doesn't look like he remembers. But still smiling.

MARK (CONT'D)

My number was called from a pay phone.
You thought it might be related to a
shooting.

Rojas nods.

ROJAS

Right. Yes.
(goes back to files)
How can I help you, Mark Condry.

MARK

I think I have some important
information. After we talked, I
remembered a friend of mine, Andrew--

ROJAS

Andrew Hughes?

This jolts Mark.

MARK

You know him?

Rojas puts another file into a filebox at his side.

ROJAS

Someone saw his sketch on the news
and called in.

MARK

Where is he now?

ROJAS

He could be anywhere. He's not at
his house.

MARK

...He was living here? How long?

ROJAS

I was about to go over and give it
another look.

Mark flips open his phone and scrolls to the PHOTO he took.
It's of the HOUSTON HOUSE. He shows it to Rojas.

MARK

Did the house looks like this?

Rojas looks at the photo. Then at Mark.

ROJAS

Yes.

MARK

I have a tape you should see. The Madsons and Andrew, they stayed in the same house in Houston. At different times. And in Oklahoma there's another house, and I swear--

ROJAS

We'll talk on the way.

He hands Mark the filebox. Mark hefts it with both arms. It's heavy.

INT. CROWN VICTORIA - DAY

Rojas drives, Mark sits in the passenger seat with the box in his lap. Lots of files inside.

Mark peers at the one on top.

In the folder: a PHOTO and criminal information about LOREEN MATHERS, late 60s.

MARK

Loreen Mathers? How is this related to the case?

ROJAS

I did a search for previous owners of the house where Andrew stayed, hoping to find a relative or someone who knew him. Her record came up.

MARK

(reading)

She killed a man in Salt Lake City?

ROJAS

Crazy woman.

MARK

(reading again)

Served time. Got out on appeal.

ROJAS

She claimed self defense. That he attacked her.

MARK

How does that make her crazy?

ROJAS

She also claimed the man was a servant of the house.

MARK

Is this whole box about her?

ROJAS
No. Those are other files relating
to crimes at the address over the
past twenty years.

Mark stares down at the crammed box. Whoa.

MARK
This is big.

EXT. BOISE SUBURBAN STREET - DUSK

The SAME HOUSE from the other locations is here. Different
street, different surrounding homes, but this house is the
same.

Even the paint job is the same.

The detective's Crown Victoria pulls up to the curb. Mark
and Rojas step out.

MARK
This is it. This is the same one.

ROJAS
Let's go.

MARK
How many people have gone missing in
this area?

ROJAS
You ask odd questions. If you have
something to tell me, just tell me.

They approach the front door. Mark is reluctant.

MARK
I saw the Houston house. With a
friend. Travis. He, uh, he--

ROJAS
Is that how you know Andrew? As a
friend?

MARK
Yes. And the Madsons, there's a
tape I need you to see.

ROJAS
A tape.

MARK
This is bigger than Boise. These
houses, who built them?

Rojas faces Mark on the porch.

ROJAS
Which ones?

MARK
This one. There are others just
like it.

ROJAS
Huh. Let's go inside and look around.

MARK
Do you have a key?

ROJAS
The door is open.

Rojas enters. Mark stands outside, staring at the open front door. Those four words chill him to the bone.

INT. BOISE HOUSE

Empty of furniture. It looks larger inside without tables or couches.

A sleeping bag lies half-opened on the floor of the formal living room.

Rojas moves toward the hall.

Mark follows tentatively.

MARK
Do you know how long Andrew stayed
here?

ROJAS
(over shoulder)
No.

INT. HALLWAY

Rojas continues to move down the hall, toward the master bedroom. The TOP OF HIS HEAD has a bald spot, blackened.

ROJAS
(mumbling)
No, no, no, stop this stop this.

MARK
What was that?

Twitch. Rojas looks back, smiling broadly. Too broadly.

ROJAS
Look for anything out of the ordinary.

MARK
That describes my whole week. So,
has anyone talked to Loreen Mathers?

Mark passes by a bedroom doorway. Peering in:
THE CARPET has been covered in a plastic sheeting.
Mark pauses, and enters.

On the far wall, that familiar PORTRAIT of the Pale-Faced
Man hangs crookedly. His eyes seem to follow you.

ROJAS (O.S.)
Loreen Mathers is crazy.

INT. BEDROOM

Mark looks around the room.

In one corner, a FILEBOX sits, mostly burned, among ashes of
other paperwork.

Plugged into an outlet: An industrial SHREDDER.

MARK
(sotto)
Maybe no one else has investigated
her story.

Mark leans over and checks out the filebox. Rummaging.

A TAPE CASSETTE has survived the incineration, poking out
from the bottom of the box.

He pulls it free, pockets it, and then sees the box label...

"BOISE P.D. RECORDS ROOM"

He sucks in his breath. As Mark turns around --

Rojas is there in the doorway --

The Detective raises his HANDGUN at Mark's head --

Mark opens his mouth, tumbling back --

BLAM!

Blood spouts from the top of Mark's head --

Mark falls over backwards.

BLACKNESS.

Then: the sound of the SHREDDER. Slowly, the world fades
back in.

MARK'S POV. Everything is sideways.

From this angle, he can see Detective Rojas in the room, standing over the second filebox from his car.

Feeding the Mathers file into the shredder.

Mark's head is bleeding badly. Already the plastic sheeting around his head is dark with blood, and his hair has become matted in it.

The bullet wound bore a shallow trench across his scalp, without ever hitting skull. It still bleeds like a river.

The house CRACKS and GROANS; an old ship at sea.

Rojas turns toward Mark now, grabs him by the leg and starts to drag him into the hallway.

MARK (CONT'D)
(slurred)
No, let go...

Rojas begins to cry.

MARK (CONT'D)
Stop...

Mark's body slides along the plastic. His hair leaves a wide streak of blood like a wet mop.

ROJAS
Stop of course stop...

MARK
Detective!

INT. HALLWAY

Dragging Mark into darkness. The hall light FLICKERS a yellowish light that casts the hall in a sickly hue.

Mark struggles to sit up. His head bangs the door frame as Rojas pulls him all the way into the hall.

And one end, the ATTIC TRAP DOOR cracks open and drops like a lower jaw.

A heavy underwater SOUND gurgles above. The threshold into the attic is hidden by a watery skin.

ROJAS
I'm just watching, all I can do is
watch--

MARK
LET ME GO!

The light FLICKERS again --

Only this time we see the SHADOW OF STRINGS connected to Rojas -- his arms, his torso, the back of his head -- all tautly leading up into the open attic door.

Mark gapes in shock --

ROJAS

The quick brown fox jumps over the
lazy dog! THE QUICK BROWN FOX--

Rojas steps on the ladder leading up to the attic --

Overhead an UNEARTHLY GROWL --

Mark makes one last attempt to get up --

He reaches for Rojas and his hand finds the HANDGUN at the detective's hip --

Rojas turns back, grabbing for the gun --

Too late! Mark aims and FIRES into Rojas.

BLAM-BLAM-BLAM-BLAM!

The detective lets go of Mark's leg and stumbles, then FALLS atop Mark.

They stare face-to-face, as Rojas coughs:

ROJAS (CONT'D)

Help me.

The Detective's body is YANKED up, into the attic --

The oily, permeable surface of the threshold SPLASHES as the detective's body disappears behind it, and the trap door SLAMS SHUT.

Mark steps back and FIRES into the ceiling, to no avail.

All around, the house CRACKS and MOANS like a wounded animal.

Then: The trap door opens slightly --

And a PALE HUMANOID ARM reaches out, smacking against the ceiling. Someone is emerging from the attic, upside down.

Mark gets the fuck up and runs through the nearest door.

INT. BATHROOM

Mark slams the door behind him. Goes to the small window over the tub, facing the front lawn.

Tugs at the window sill, YANKING it open.

Behind him, someone BASHES at the bathroom door.

Mark starts to squeeze through the window.

THE DOOR shudders against its hinges once, twice, then burst open to reveal a YOUNG MAN forcing his way in.

This is JON -- Dani's boyfriend from Topeka. No shirt. Strange splotches discolor his flesh, and he's bald. He's also slightly wet. And the whites of his eyes are now red.

THE WINDOW is still open, but no sign of Mark.

Rushing forward --

Mark has actually LAID DOWN in the tub basin, and now FIRES at Jon, CLIPPING his shoulder, causing the teen to spin backwards.

Mark gets up and pushes through the window.

EXT. HOUSE

The mad dash for the detective's car --

It's locked, and Mark doesn't have the keys.

MARK

Shit!

But there's another car in the driveway. With Texas plates.

Mark rushes there, peers inside.

ON THE DASH, a set of car keys.

The house's front door CRACKS open, and Jon launches outside. No sign of blood from the gunshot wound on his collar bone.

Jon goes for Mark like the T-1000.

Mark braces and FIRES the weapon again.

The round connects with Jon's leg, causing the Teen to drop to the lawn like he'd been tripped.

Mark FIRES four more times at Jon, one or two hitting his target in the back, the arm. While FIRING--

MARK (CONT'D)

Fucking stay down!

The slide locks back on the handgun: empty.

Mark jumps in the car and starts the engine.

JON STARTS TO GET UP AGAIN.

Mark peels out and performs a reverse bootleg on the street.

Jon watches. Steps forward, about to pursue. Then the skin on his elbow STRETCHES as if a fishing line were tugging him back to the house.

Jon begins to return inside.

BLACK.

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

INT. PUBLIC RESTROOM - DAY

A BANDAGE now wraps Mark's head; white gauze, discolored red in a brief line across his scalp.

He examines it in the mirror. The wound is still tender.

Mark looks like a basket case. Bloodshot eyes, three-day stubble, small cuts and bruises on his hands.

He pops his aspirin bottle and chugs the final four pills. Then he gently props a baseball cap over his head bandage, sucking breath through his teeth as he does so.

Finally, he SMILES at his reflection. No one's buying it.

INT. COFFEE HOUSE - DAY

Mark sits in a booth at this Internet cafe.

His laptop computer sits open before him. Mark sips a coffee and scopes the mostly empty cafe.

ON SCREEN: an online image database search engine. The ad at the top of the page: "MISSING PERSONS - U.S."

Mark enters parameters for the search -- "house." And "single story" and "missing."

Hits the search button.

A series of photos begin to stack up, along with articles and police reports.

The first two house photos don't look anything like the ones Mark has been in.

The third one is a match. He looks at the address of the attached Missing Persons report:

MARK
(sotto)
San Diego.

Fourth one -- another match. This case is from...

MARK (CONT'D)
(sotto)
Phoenix.

Fifth one, no, but six, a match. Different street, different state. This Missing Persons case is from CINCINNATI.

The seventh one is not a match. Mark glances down at the "Results" number: "2,188 images found meeting criteria."

He takes a shaky breath. His cell phone RINGS.

MARK (CONT'D)
 (into phone)
 This is Mark... Loreen Mathers, yes.
 You're her lawyer?
 (grabbing notepad)
 Yes, I know that, but she got out
 five years ago and...
 (beat, frustrated)
 Well she had to have gone somewhere.
 What's her last known address?

Mark frowns as the lawyer talks on the other end.

MARK (CONT'D)
 This whole time? Which shelter?

INT. STAR OF HOPE MISSION - DOWNTOWN - DAY

MARK stands in a feed line of BUMS and other HOMELESS, some trailing their grocery carts.

He steps up to the soup kitchen VOLUNTEERS as they fill bowls of chicken noodle. It's obvious he's not here to have lunch.

MARK
 I'm looking for a woman named Loreen.
 Does she come here?

Volunteer shrugs. Another one wipes her hands and steps up.

VOLUNTEER
 The seafood lady?

MARK
 (the who what?)
 Maybe.

VOLUNTEER
 Try the overpass, few blocks from
 here.
 (points)
 That way.

EXT. OVERPASS - DAY

The interstate overhead offers a wide roof, shading a wheel-less station wagon and the occasional stray grocery cart.

A large arroyo passes under the freeway, streaming with murky water. The ledge of the arroyo is overgrown with weeds.

Sounds of freeway traffic drone like a mechanical tide.

LOREEN MATHERS (60s) stands at an overturned barrel draped in newspaper. She's dressed in several layers of dirty clothes, has a shock of white hair, and a damp scarf tossed over her shoulder.

She begins to gut a fish on the newsprint, with a fat knife.

MARK

Loreen? Loreen Mathers?

Having sliced the fish, tail-to-mouth, she pulls out the knife and faces Mark.

LOREEN

Who's asking?

MARK

My name is Mark. I need to ask you some questions.

LOREEN

Huh.

MARK

About the house. In Idaho.

Loreen shuffles over to a card table topped with garbage bags of blankets and various junk.

LOREEN

Not mine anymore, got auctioned off or something.

She casually digs into a garbage bag.

Mark steps forward, clumsy with his approach to the subject.

MARK

Whatever happened to you, it's still happening. Maybe, maybe you know--

Loreen pulls a REVOLVER from the bag and points it at Mark.

LOREEN

Turn around.

Mark stops in his tracks, surprised.

MARK

(sotto)
Not again.

LOREEN

Turn around, this minute.

Mark tenderly holds up his arms and turns around.

MARK

Please, just listen to me. I'm not a threat.

Loreen approaches cautiously, checking the street behind him to see if Mark has backup.

LOREEN
I'll be the judge of that.

She gets close and grabs the back of his collar, then yanks his head back, taking off the cap. She's looking for black spots, and Mark is clean.

MARK
I've seen it.

LOREEN
Seen what.

MARK
(faces her)
The attic.

Loreen stares at Mark a beat. Pensive.

She lowers her gun and slowly shakes her head, resigned.

LOREEN
You're on your own.

MARK
Please! Please... The cop who took me there, it looked like he had wires pulling him along...

LOREEN
(sotto)
Flesh puppets.

MARK
What?

Loreen waves a hand, dismissive, as she puts away the revolver and goes back to her fish on the barrel.

LOREEN
Here's what you do. You make a list. All your friends and family, neighbors, co-workers. You get a call from one of them, maybe see one on the street one day -- run. Do not meet them, do not talk to them. Cross them off your list. They're as good as dead.

Mark won't accept this answer. He steps closer to her.

MARK
You used to be a high school science teacher. You've had six years to investigate this. I think you're homeless because you choose to be. Even your lawyer couldn't tell me which shelter you frequent.

Ignoring him, Loreen splays open the fish, to remove its bones.

MARK (CONT'D)
Work with me! Whatever is in that house, it's after me now. Tell me what it is.

LOREEN
What for?

Mark absently touches his hand to his bandaged head.

MARK
So I can stop it.

Loreen pulls the fish open wider.

INSIDE the fish's stomach, an EARTHWORM wriggles; still alive after all this time.

LOREEN
That's just the problem, isn't it.
There are so god damned many of them.
Like weeds.

MARK
What are they?

Beat. Loreen seems to consider Mark, then YANKS out part of the fish's skeleton and dumps it in an open paper bag.

LOREEN
Don't know, but I'd read up on quantum theory. Entangled photons.

Mark flips out a little notepad and pencil.

MARK
Entangled what?

LOREEN
David Bohm, B-O-H-M. Experimented with particles that look the same, but when you change the polarity of one, all the others change.

Mark abandons the note-taking idea.

THWACK! Loreen cuts off the head of the fish.

MARK
Who built them? I tried looking for public records, deeds or titles...

Loreen turns her attention to Mark again, intimidating. Gesturing with her knife hand as she talks.

LOREEN

It's a cancer. It does two things -- it spreads, and it hides. It spends its time up there beyond the veil trying to figure out new ways to get the rest of us.

MARK

Andrew, my friend... And, this cop... They're being used by the house--

Loreen goes back to preparing her dinner.

LOREEN

It's not a house. It's some other thing in there. Now it's after you. And it won't ever stop.

MARK

You made it. You survived.

LOREEN

I'm just hiding.

Loreen moves over to another barrel crackling with fire, and places the fish on a makeshift grill. It SIZZLES loudly.

MARK

How do I kill it?!?

Loreen gestures for him to come closer as she pulls back the tarp on her grocery cart.

THE CART is the housing for a bizarre cluster of discarded items (a portable radio, a maglite, two weed-cutters, etc.), taped and tied together.

LOREEN

I'm building a device to alter brain waves. It will cancel the alien signal, you see?

Mark steps back, covering his nose from the smell of Loreen's dinner, feeling desperate and confused.

LOREEN (CONT'D)

(sneering)

It's not finished!

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DALLAS - DAY

Jennifer walks along the sidewalk, two blocks from her apartment complex. She carries a bag of Chinese takeout on one arm.

A truck slows to a crawl as it pulls alongside her. The passenger window rolls down.

Jennifer looks over. Does a double-take.

Travis is in the driver seat.

TRAVIS
Jennifer?

JENNIFER
Travis? Is that you?

TRAVIS
Yeah. Hey.

He smiles at her. One corner of his mouth twitches. Stops the truck by the curb.

Jennifer steps close and leans in.

JENNIFER
You're still in town? I was wondering what happened the other day, I buzzed you in but you--

TRAVIS
Don't worry about that. Don't worry about it. Had to leave, little emergency.

JENNIFER
Oh? Everything okay?

TRAVIS
It's fine. Let me give you a lift.

Jennifer looks back up the street. Bites her bottom lip.

Travis reaches over and opens the passenger door.

JENNIFER
Okay, but it's not that far.

INT. TRAVIS'S TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

Jennifer peers behind her, at the small bench seat in the cab. It's crammed with clothes.

JENNIFER
You know, Mark isn't back yet.

TRAVIS
Yes. He's on the move. I need to find him. Ollie Ollie.

JENNIFER
He should be back soon. Take a right here.

TRAVIS
Hang on. I want to show you
something.

Jennifer looks at Travis more carefully now. The radar is
on, she's pondering.

JENNIFER
Ooookay...

TRAVIS
It's just a few blocks over. Don't
worry about it.

JENNIFER
So, are you gonna tell me what
happened?

TRAVIS
What did Mark tell you?

JENNIFER
How about I hear your side of it?

TRAVIS
So he did tell you something.

JENNIFER
Look, I know you probably still hate
me for taking Mark away from you,
but it was his decision. I didn't
force him to go.

TRAVIS
It's fine.

JENNIFER
I'm serious.

TRAVIS
Don't worry about it.

JENNIFER
I am worried, I should be worried,
about this whole thing, just like
you seem to be, otherwise why would
you be up from Houston, hanging
around, waiting for Mark to get back.
(breath)
We're on the same side, Travis.
Please. Tell me what you two are
involved in.

Travis pulls up along the curb next to a HOUSE on a run-down
side street.

It's the same house as the others.

TRAVIS
Come in and I'll show you.

Jennifer looks past him, at the house.

JENNIFER
What is this?

TRAVIS
(getting out)
Where I'm staying. Come on.

Jennifer gets out of the car.

EXT. SIDE STREET

Travis saunters up the driveway to the front door. He looks back at Jennifer, who remains by the car, still holding her Chinese takeout bag.

He gestures for her. She approaches, puzzled.

JENNIFER
How did you afford a place like this?

TRAVIS
Don't worry about it.

She stops at the little walk to the front door. Alarms have gone off in her head now.

Her free hand holds her CELL PHONE. One finger moves over the ringer volume button.

Her cell phone makes a CHIRPING SOUND.

JENNIFER
Oh damn, hang on, let me get this.
I only have two bars, need to stay
outside for a sec.

She flips open the phone as he enters the house without a key.

TRAVIS
No problem. Come in when you're
done.

INT. HOUSE

Travis steps in, takes off his jacket, and scratches the top of his head absently.

TRAVIS
(sotto)
Ollie Ollie Oxen-free.

He bends down and picks up a FIRE AXE, calmly. Relaxed.
Returns to the front window and peers out.

OUTSIDE, Jennifer is nowhere to be seen. Gone.

Travis frowns.

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - NIGHT

Down in the stacks, with no windows or natural light.

BOOKS lie open on a long table. Reference material.

Finally arriving at MARK, slouched in a chair. He rubs his eyes. A yellow legal NOTEPAD is crammed full of penciled notes, sometimes venturing into the margins.

Slowly, the RINGING TONE fades in.

Mark can sense it approaching. Feels his pockets for pills.

Instead, he pulls out a TAPE CASSETTE. The one he took from the Boise house.

INSERT: LABEL ON CASSETTE

"SESSION: Oct. 20, 1983 / Topeka"

Mark stares at it in his hand a beat.

TIMECUT - ONE MINUTE LATER

The tape is SLAPPED into a public library cassette player on the table next to Mark's laptop. Mark presses 'PLAY'.

THE WHEELS spin the tape.

Mark listens as a VOICE mumbles on low volume.

He spins the volume wheel. The voice has a gravelly, chain-smoking aspect. Over the hiss of background noise:

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)
--Three, side one. Continuing with
Miles Lewis. Noted astro-physicist
and now leader to a new cult it seems.
You were saying, about these
transmissions...

A smooth, almost lyrical voice begins.

MILES LEWIS (V.O.)
Yes, well, you know as well as I
that the brain is built as a
communication device.

As the tape plays, Mark leans over to the laptop and types a quick Google search.

The tape continues playing:

MILES LEWIS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Thirty years ago we thought of it as
 a separate organ, but now we're
 finding neuropeptides in every corner
 of our body. We're wired to receive
 information, via nerves, or dreams,
 or external sources.

Mark is focused on the tape. His laptop MONITOR displays a result of his search:

A photo of LEWIS -- He's the PALE-FACED MAN FROM THE PORTRAIT.
 With that same sickening smile and the eyes that follow you.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)
 External sources?

MILES LEWIS (V.O.)
 Well, neurologically speaking, is
 what I'm saying. That's how I knew,
 when I heard the voice in my head,
 it was a being from another dimension.

Mark does a double-take at the recorder. What???

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)
 And it told you to build the house?

Closing in on the spinning wheels of the tape...

MILES LEWIS (V.O.)
 The sanctum, yes. As a way to this
 world. To live among us.

Mark stares the photo of Lewis.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)
 That's all it takes? Just, build a
 house?

MILES LEWIS (V.O.)
 There is more involved in the process.
 You neeeeeeeeeee--

The RINGING in Mark's ear escalates as the tape gets GARBLED
 as if damaged.

THE IMAGE OF LEWIS ON MARK'S LAPTOP turns his head slightly,
 to stare at Mark, and in an unearthly voice--

IMAGE OF LEWIS
 NINE PINTS OF BLOOD.

Terrified, Mark KNOCKS OVER the laptop and stands back.

The VOICES and high-pitched tone stop completely. Beat.

Then: his cell phone RINGS.

He grabs the phone and pauses. Gets his breath back when he sees the ID. Hits SEND and puts it to his ear.

INT. MARK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jennifer paces back and forth in the kitchen, holding the cordless phone to her ear.

JENNIFER
Mark, what's the deal? Where the hell have you been?

INTERCUT

Mark starts pacing as well, keeping an eye on his laptop.

MARK
Everywhere. I've been all over.

JENNIFER
Your voice sounds different. Why aren't you back home?

He plows his fingers through his hair.

MARK
Soon, soon. I don't know where else to go now.

JENNIFER
Did you get my message? Why didn't you call back?

MARK
Message?

JENNIFER
Travis came by here, he was looking for you.

MARK
(oh shit)
Travis came by? When?

JENNIFER
He wouldn't even come up. Said he was trying to reach you. And like five minutes ago he drove me around the block on Westbrook, something just didn't feel right about it...

MARK
Drove you? Drove you where?

JENNIFER
He's renting a house nearby.

Mark rolls his chair over to his laptop and opens his email program.

MARK
Jenny, I'm going to send you a photo of a house and I want you to tell me if it's the same one.

JENNIFER
What? What does this have to do with Travis?

MARK
It's important. And listen: Do NOT talk to Travis. Do you hear me?

JENNIFER
Explain why first! You just don't shut someone out like this. Especially not your fiancée.

Mark takes a breath, wondering where to start.

MARK
Okay. Okay. Maybe you can help.

JENNIFER
Please.

MARK
Right, I've been wracking my brain trying to figure this out. Let me describe some things, like traits of an organism, and you tell me if it sounds familiar.

Jennifer stares at the empty room: What the hell?

JENNIFER
...Ohh-kay?

MARK
It blends in with its environment. It lures its prey into its, uh, its mouth. There are lots of these mouths, and they are all connected--

JENNIFER
You mean like a Venus flytrap?

It's like the lightbulb goes on over Mark's head.

MARK
 A flytrap! Yes!
 (shuffling through
 books)
 So it's like a plant! ...And to
 kill a plant...

JENNIFER
 Just kill the root? Mark--

She sits down at her PC and checks her email.

Mark's photo of the Houston house begins to download.

MARK
 Bingo! Okay, Jenny, listen. I'm
 coming home. Go stay with your mother
 for now. The apartment isn't safe.

Mark mashes 'END' on his phone and picks up his notepad.
 Suddenly seized by a thought, he stops:

MARK (CONT'D)
 (sotto)
 Where is the root?

INT. AIRPORT TICKETING COUNTER - NIGHT

The place is as good as dead here at this hour. Airport
 staff is kept to a skeleton crew. A disinterested TICKETING
 AGENT woman glances at Mark with a look that says "Oh great,
 he's picking my airline."

MARK
 I need a one-way ticket to Dallas,
 earliest available flight.

TICKETING AGENT
 The computers are down. It'll take
 a few minutes before I can check.

Mark nods at the agent and backs away, rubbing his temples.

MARK
 (sotto)
 Travis, Travis...

He stares down at his phone. Scrolls through numbers. Finds
 one labeled "TRAVIS."

Bingo. 'SEND.'

Mark holds the phone to his ear, listening to the RING.

One. Two RINGS. Three. Then: a voice answers the phone.
 A woman's voice.

MRS. ELLISON (V.O.)
Hello?

It catches Mark by surprise.

MRS. ELLISON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Who is this?

MARK
I'm sorry, I think I have the wrong
number--

MRS. ELLISON (V.O.)
No, you tell me who this is.

INT. ELLISON HOUSE - THAT MOMENT

Mrs. Ellison stands in her living room, the cardboard box of
random things at her feet.

The woman looks worn out and distraught. Her face is wet
from recent tears.

MRS. ELLISON
Is this about my baby girl? Do you
have my Linney?

Her face is pressed close to the phone.

INTERCUT

Mark stops his pacing. Something starts to click in his
mind.

MARK
Hold on. My name is Mark. I was
trying to reach Travis, is this not
his cell phone?

MRS. ELLISON
Tell me what his cell phone is doing
in a box inside my house!

And at that moment, Mark knows.

MARK
Ma'am, where are you right now?

MRS. ELLISON
My house, I just told you! Who is
Travis?

MARK
Where do you live? The address.

MRS. ELLISON
Do you have my girl? Are you bringing
back Linney?

Mark bites his lip. Beat.

MARK
I have some information that will
help you find her.

Mrs. Ellison tenses up. She begins to cry again.

MRS. ELLISON
Please don't hurt her...

MARK
Your address. I need your address,
please.

MRS. ELLISON
815 Sage Drive.

MARK
What city?

She's trying to catch her breath, the crying has turned to
heaves.

MARK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
WHAT CITY?!?

MRS. ELLISON
God damnit! Topeka! Where was she
taken?!?

INSERT: THE CASSETTE

Close on its label as Mark slides it from his jacket pocket:
"Topeka." The location of the Lewis house.

Mark whirls around to face a VIDEO MONITOR showing departing
flights.

MARK
I'm on my way.

BLACK.

TOPEKA, KANSAS

INT. BAGGAGE CLAIM AREA - NIGHT

Two lonely bags of luggage ride a carousel in this nearly-deserted part of the airport.

Mark shuffles his way across the quiet floor toward the door marked "Ground Transportation." This is the fourth city he's flown through in as many days.

He approaches the doors...

And a WOMAN stands up from her seat on a bench nearby.

She catches Mark's eye. He does a double-take.

MARK
(shocked)
...Jenny?

Jennifer gets in his face.

JENNIFER
Is this what you call home?

MARK
What? What are you doing here?

JENNIFER
You said you were coming home!

Mark backs away from her, distrustful.

MARK
How did you know I was here?

JENNIFER
(pissed)
The Visa people called, said your card was getting a lot of activity, lots of plane tickets. Like Topeka!

MARK
Jen, Jesus, this is not the time--

JENNIFER
Why not! You meeting someone else?
Is that it?

MARK
No, no, no, Jen it's not that, I can't believe you'd even think that--

JENNIFER
Then tell me what to believe. Take me to wherever you're going, that obviously isn't home.
(MORE)

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
Because you aren't yourself, Mark.
This isn't you at all.

MARK
It's me, Jenny. It's really me.

He breaks down and hugs her, bringing her in close.

MARK (CONT'D)
I'm so glad you came.

This isn't what Jennifer expected. She's late to hug back.

EXT. VAL-U MART - NIGHT

A Wal-Mart clone -- huge parking lot, huge catch-all store.

A rental car pulls up to a spot near the door.

INT. RENTAL CAR

Jenny peers out at the store.

JENNIFER
You flew to Kansas to go shopping?

MARK
I just need to get a few things.
Stay in the car if you want.

JENNIFER
Mark, hang on, slow down. When's
the last time you slept?

Mark looks her way. That kind of question says "He's crazy."

He gets out of the car.

INT. VAL-U MART - MOMENTS LATER

Mark pushes a cart down an aisle full of cleaning supplies.
He hefts two of the two-gallon jugs -- industrial cleaner.

Jennifer follows, biting her nails.

MARK
See if you can find some cold soda.

JENNIFER
What exactly is this all for?

MARK
I'll lay it out for you in the car.
Now let's hurry.

Jennifer doesn't know what to say. Instead, she walks off.

INT. VAL-U MART REGISTER STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Jennifer waits for Mark at the one active register at this hour, holding two bottles of cola.

Mark wheels his cart up and hauls the cleaning jugs on the conveyor.

Jen adds her sodas. Mark adds a cigarette lighter. Then: a baseball bat. Road flares.

Last through: A double-barreled SHOTGUN and a box of shells.

Jennifer sees it and pales.

The CLERK rings it up.

MARK
(to Clerk)
Do you know where Sage Road is?

In response the Clerk pulls a CITY MAP from a pocket of travel maps on sale at the counter.

He plunks it down on Mark's pile of gear.

INT. RENTAL CAR - NIGHT

Mark drives. Jenny sits in the passenger seat, watching Mark closely.

She has her cell phone out, tucked by her leg.

INSERT: PHONE LED SCREEN

The numbers 9-1-1 glow against the green. Jenny's finger rests on the SEND key. Waiting.

JENNIFER
Tell me where we're going.

MARK
Did you get the photo?

JENNIFER
Yes. So you took a picture of the house Travis showed me.

MARK
No. That's the house in Houston where Andrew stayed. The people he shot lived there, too. Earlier.

JENNIFER
...What? What do you mean?

Mark reaches into a book bag and pulls a black-and-white printout of an online image. Another of the houses.

MARK

Here is where he stayed in Boise
just before the shooting.

She looks at the image with growing concern.

He hands her a stack of printouts.

MARK (CONT'D)

There are others. I think they're
all connected. Somehow.

She sifts through the different angles on what looks like the same house -- only each one is on a different street.

JENNIFER

Did you Photoshop these? How'd you--

MARK

Listen to me! These things have
more in common than elevation. People
who move in to something that looks
like that--

(taps finger on photo)
--either disappear, flee for their
lives, or go crazy and kill. And do
you know who they kill?

JENNIFER

Mark--

MARK

The ones who got away!

Jennifer stares back down at the printouts.

JENNIFER

There has to be an explanation.

MARK

I think you figured it out.

JENNIFER

Me?

MARK

The flytrap spits up things it can't
eat, or doesn't want. Right?

JENNIFER

You're losing me...

MARK

(making eye contact)
What if we're the insects?

Mark can tell she's terrified of him, but can't walk away at this point. It hurts to see her looking at him this way. He focuses on driving.

JENNIFER

Okay. How about we just go home.

MARK

I'll make you a deal. If we get to this house and it doesn't look like the others, I'll drive us right to the airport, we fly home, and I'll check myself in for PTSD.

Jennifer's voice trembles.

JENNIFER

Mark...

MARK

But. If it's the same house, I have to kill this thing.

JENNIFER

(glances at back seat)

Wait, what are you planning to do?

But Mark doesn't respond. He GUNS the engine instead.

EXT. SAGE ROAD - NIGHT

Mark's car pulls to the curb. The houses on this street are all dark and seemingly empty.

INT. RENTAL CAR

Mark looks across the street. In the dim light of the car's dashboard he looks like a member of the undead.

Jen follows his gaze, her expression of worry stretching into wide-eyed surprise.

Whipping around, to see what they're staring at:

It's the TOPEKA HOUSE. Just like all the others he's seen.

The lights are on inside, but it seems unnaturally still.

Mark steps out of the car and pops the trunk with his remote.

Jennifer gets out on the passenger side, already a wreck.

JENNIFER

Mark. Wait.

He pulls out the two jugs of cleaner he purchased at the corner store and sets them on the ground.

Each is marked with the bright label: HIGHLY FLAMMABLE.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Please...

MARK

I've told you what's going on, and it hasn't helped. I don't blame you.

Mark "suits up" as they have this last talk. Putting shells in his jacket pockets...

JENNIFER

Baby, let's just go home, get some sleep--

Mark slings the shotgun over his shoulder.

MARK

(ignoring her)

This is what I'm going to do. I'm going to make sure no one is inside. Then I'm going to burn this thing to the ground, and hope to hell that it does the trick. Kill the root, the buds will die.

He tears the road flares from their packaging.

MARK (CONT'D)

If you have to, call the police and report me. Or drive off.

JENNIFER

Mark! ...What if you're wrong?

MARK

I love you, Jenny.

He moves for the house, carrying the cleaner. Road flares tucked in his jeans.

INT. TOPEKA HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

A knock on the front door in the entry.

The door opens slightly. Mark peers inside.

MARK

Hello? Anyone here?

No response.

MARK (CONT'D)

Hello?!?

Silence. Mark stands in the threshold a beat, listening intently. Then, he steps back out onto the porch.

A second later, he enters with one of the large jugs.

EXT. HOUSE

Jennifer paces out on the street, hand over her mouth. Looking around for signs of anyone -- someone she can go to for help.

The street is empty.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Mark yanks off the cap and begins pouring cleaner along the baseboard of an interior wall. As he does so:

MARK
Ma'am? Are you home?

He pours the length of the wall, then peers around the corner down the hallway that runs the length of the house.

INT. HALLWAY

Empty. No sign of an attic trap door in the ceiling. Dark.

A light from the master bedroom at the other end spills into the hallway, flickering.

Mark continues pouring, moving in a half-crouch down the hallway.

He watches the ceiling intently.

INT. BEDROOM

Mark enters this guest bedroom. It's Linney's room. He splashes more cleaner on the carpet here, backing up into Linney's DOLL HOUSE.

Mark notices the top floor of the doll house, colored all red and black with markers.

He empties the last of the cleaner here, tossing the empty jug to the corner.

INT. FRONT ENTRY - MOMENTS LATER

Mark returns to the front door and glances outside for Jennifer.

OUTSIDE, the rental car is gone.

Jennifer has left. Mark pauses a beat, remorseful.
He then hefts the second jug and returns to the interior.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mark hurries toward the back part of the house. The family room.

INT. FAMILY ROOM

Peering inside. Watching his back.

The house still seems empty.

Mark bends over to remove the lid to the easy-pour spout, and inadvertently knocks over a floor lamp. CRASH.

He jumps, tense. As he begins to spill cleaner here, a NOISE reverberates throughout the house. As if the house were waking up. CRACKING of wood, a SIGH through the vents.

Mark crouches low, sets the jug down. Loads his shotgun. Then, a thought occurs to him. He pulls out his cell phone.

ON THE CALL DISPLAY, the name 'TRAVIS.'

Mark hits 'SEND.'

From somewhere very close, a cell phone RINGS.

Mark peers around into the hallway --

And Mrs. Ellison is RIGHT THERE -- covered in blood -- mouth agape -- ATTIC DOOR open behind her --

Mark REELS back --

Mrs. Ellison LURCHES FORWARD --

Mark TRIPS, struggling more to aim the gun than find footing --

The Ellison puppet descends atop him --

Mark struggles to keep her hands away from his throat --

Blood and bile drip onto his clothes --

Mrs. Ellison's bony hands finally wrap around Mark's neck, choking him --

MRS. ELLISON
I CAN'T FEEL MY ARMS.

Her face is one of pure terror --

Mark reaches for anything he can find --

And he finds his LIGHTER, which he flicks on --

As his face starts to turn a bright red --

He CHUCKS the lighter at the wet spot on the carpet where he started to spill cleaner.

It FLARES UP in a line of flame.

Ellison ROARS like a bear and her body retreats from Mark as if she were pulled away.

Mark rolls over and starts to get up --

Ellison smothers the flame with her body --

Mark levels the shotgun -- BLAM!

And TWO MORE PEOPLE enter the room!

Mark loads another round, horrified --

They RUSH him (one of them is DANIELLE) --

Mark BLASTS the JUMPSUIT-WEARING MAN --

Dani is now on him, KNOCKING him over the short coffee table --

Behind her, THREE MORE flesh puppets enter, two immediately start stomping out the fire in the corner --

Mark tries to push Danielle off him --

Her skin is blackened and bulbous in places, and she's missing most of her hair.

Mark KICKS her and shoves free -- CRACKS the shotgun over her head, down she goes --

He WHIPS AROUND, loading another round into the chamber --

And faces ANDREW.

Mark sucks in his breath.

MARK

Andrew?

TWO MORE PUPPETS (Jon and a MIDDLE-AGED MAN in a white button-down dress shirt) flank Mark --

Andrew PUSHES the shotgun barrel away from him as Mark BLASTS again, missing --

They wrench the gun free from him --

Andrew grabs Mark's feet --

And suddenly he's DRAGGED toward the hallway.

Mark scrambles to reach a ROAD FLARE in his jeans --

The other two PUPPET-MEN struggle against him --

Mark finds a flare and IGNITES IT, then JABS IT at Middle-Aged Man's shirt --

Middle-Aged Man backs off, pawing at his shirt --

Mark twists and JAMS the lit flare into the "easy pour spout" of the big jug of cleaning fluid -- now it's a variation of a Molotov cocktail --

And then Jon CLOCKS Mark with an elbow to the nose.

INT. HALLWAY

Andrew continues to drag Mark by one arm and one leg toward the open attic door.

Mark KICKS and FLAILS, his nose bloody --

One kick jostles Andrew's HANDGUN, it drops to the floor --

Mark's fingers find it -- aims it at ANDREW --

Jon PUSHES PAST, carrying the cleaner jug with the flare, headed for the front door --

Mark changes targets and SHOOTS Jon in the back --

Jon goes down, dropping the makeshift bomb --

Mark points the handgun at Andrew again --

MARK

Let me go!

Andrew shakes his head, face black from some skin disease.

ANDREW

It'll be okay, we're almost there--

MARK

LET GO!

They're at the ladder to the attic now. Climbing.

ANDREW

I tried to call, just needed help--
You're my best friend--

MARK

(in tears now)
Andrew STOP!

But he doesn't. Mark can't wait any longer. He must shoot his old friend.

TWO GUNSHOTS reverberate as Mark blasts into Andrew's chest.

Andrew drops Mark instantly, stumbling up. Reaching into the black water line that hides the attic above.

One last stare of disbelief at Mark and then --

Andrew is YANKED back into the void.

Mark gets up and goes for the flare-jug grenade --

The OTHER PEOPLE from the Family Room pour out --

Mark FIRES at the Middle-Aged Man wielding the shotgun --

MARK (CONT'D)
GODDAMNIT!

It stalls them enough for Mark to grab the cleaner -- he turns around --

To come face-to-face with MILES LEWIS. The original owner.

Lewis is totally HAIRLESS and wears only a dirty pair of trousers. The top of his head is black and bubbly. Mouth stuck in a permanent smile.

INT. BATHROOM

Mark is THROWN across the room, bashing across and into the tub at the far end --

And Lewis is suddenly RIGHT THERE -- grabbing Mark by the throat, holding him under the faucet with one hand --

The other hand setting the jug with the burning flare on the linoleum nearby --

Mark coughs, and struggles but the grip is too tight --

Lewis starts the faucet, water pouring down on Mark's face --

With the wet hand, Lewis wraps around the flare, EXTINGUISHING IT before it ignites the fluid inside. Fizzle.

Mark CHOKES, still fighting --

Lewis JUST KEEPS SMILING without a word, holding Mark down --

And then a BASEBALL BAT swings hard into Lewis's head. WHAM!

Lewis falls over sideways and JENNY STANDS OVER HIM with the baseball bat, breathing heavy.

JENNIFER

Mark?

Mark gets up, sucking in air, yet still pushing Jennifer for the door.

MARK

Go.

He picks up the jug with one hand as they move back to:

INT. HALLWAY

Mark pulls out his last road flare and IGNITES it. To Jenny:

MARK

Run for the door!

She does so.

Mark LIGHTS the trail of cleaner fluid along the hallway, then jams the new flare into the spout of the jug.

He steps onto the attic ladder, and HURLS the jug through the threshold into the space beyond.

Jennifer looks back in time to shout warning:

JENNIFER

MARK!

But too late -- Lewis BARRELS into Mark, right at his waist, LAUNCHING both of them up through the watery void.

INT. VOID

An underwater nightmare seen for only a second.

In that brief moment:

The light from the house shines up through the trap door, which marks the only light source in this otherwise black, dimensionless space.

Mark's silhouette is seen REACHING as hard as he can for the top step -- for light -- for reality --

Lewis's silhouette still has hold of Mark --

Something GIANT is there too, an ARM perhaps, outlined in shadow by the BUBBLING FLARE-JUG far up --

WHAM! The trap door shuts like a snapping jaw.

BLACK.

INT. HOUSE

The attic trap door SEALS UP until it's no longer part of the ceiling.

JENNIFER
NO! GIVE HIM BACK!

Behind her, LINNEY grabs Jen's leg and MIDDLE-AGED MAN grapples her by the elbows.

Linney wields a BUTTER KNIFE and starts to saw at Jennifer's knee with her little hand. Jen SCREAMS.

WHUFF. The house SHUDDERS. An explosion somewhere.

Instantly, Linney and the Man collapse like rag dolls.

EXT. HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Jennifer emerges from the front door, hobbles to the lawn, and looks back to see the roof ABLAZE.

She's crying and shaking like a leaf.

JENNIFER
MARK!

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mark's body SMASHES through the ceiling, onto the carpet.

Flames trail a second later, catching fire to the ceiling.

Mark COUGHS and sucks in breath.

From somewhere above and far away, a great HOWLING echoes down into the hallway.

The fire along the ceiling begins to spread.

Mark finds his strength and forces his legs to move.

INT. KITCHEN

On his way out of the house, Mark passes by the GAS STOVE.

Thinking quickly, he cranks the dials on the stove top.

It HISSES awake.

Mark keeps moving.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Mark stumbles out of the front door to this house as its roof belches smoke. Flames LICK up from underneath a dozen shingles. The gutters are on fire.

Outside, in the yard, the ground is COVERED IN SNOW.

Mark's breath plumes out before him in clouds of mist. It's damn cold.

Mark looks around him --

The house sits on a few acres of land, all by itself. No other homes around it.

The top of the house erupts in flames now. An EXPLOSION from the general direction of the kitchen.

Mark collapses on the snowy lawn, staring at the fire. He's drenched in stomach fluid, his shirt torn to pieces, his arms bleeding from lashes.

And yet he defiantly shouts at the structure:

MARK
I KILLED YOU!

He's exhausted now. He begins to take in his surroundings.

There are no cars in the long gravel driveway. The house seems unoccupied.

The look on his face: Where the fuck am I?

BLACK.

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

TV FOOTAGE PLAYS

...On a boxy television set. It's a news broadcast.

NEWS ANCHOR

...in what authorities are calling
the most unusual and organized act
of arson yet.

NEWS FOOTAGE FROM HELICOPTER

Early morning hours. The roof of a predatory house is ablaze.
The caption at the bottom of the screen: "TOPEKA, KANSAS."

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

So far, homes in as many as eighteen
U.S. cities have burned to the ground,
the cause or suspects presently
unknown. The only tie at the moment
is that the homes were possibly built
by the same developer. It appears
they are all the same floor plan.

INTERVIEW FOOTAGE - POLICE

A harried OFFICER stands on the street. Charred remains of
the house behind him.

OFFICER ON SCENE

We got the call from someone down
the block, by the time fire trucks
got here the fire had spread through
the whole house.

REPORTER ON SCENE (O.S.)

Do you know if anyone was inside?

OFFICER ON SCENE

Firefighters have recovered five
bodies so far.

REGISTER CLERK (O.S.)

Do you know what started the fire?

OFFICER ON SCENE

No ma'am.

BACK TO NEWS ANCHOR

NEWS ANCHOR

The FBI will be looking for a common
link among all the home owners to
see if this was a possible act of
terror. We'll keep you updated as
the story unfolds.

Pulling away to reveal:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Mark lies back on a small white bed. The television is perched from the ceiling in the far corner.

He's cleaned up a bit, but his head wound still looks bad. It doesn't look like it matters to him now. There's a sense of relief in his face.

Jennifer rushes in, wearing her clothes from Topeka. It's obvious she's been out in the cold.

JENNIFER

There you are!

Mark sits up, and the two hug for a long beat. No words are needed. Finally:

MARK

So. Indiana.

JENNIFER

(grins)

Indiana, holy shit.

MARK

Yeah. Did I name the right hospital?
You got here all right?

JENNIFER

Yes yes. Are you okay? I mean, was
it, how did it feel--

MARK

The doctor says all my parts are
where they should be. But I wouldn't
recommend doing that again.

Jennifer glances around. No one else is here.

JENNIFER

(quietly)

It burned down. I stayed to watch.
I don't know what it was for sure...
I'm not sure of anything right now.

MARK

Welcome to the club.

(smiling)

You could have just left a note.

JENNIFER

What?

MARK

Anybody else would have just assumed the worst, bailed, and I'd come home to a note on the fridge.

(grins again)

But you. You get on a plane, track me down, and face me like it's high noon in Dodge.

(then)

Thank you.

Jennifer grins as well, holding back a tide of emotion.

JENNIFER

I'm stubborn. And I believe in us.

Mark beams at her. They kiss. Then he asks her:

MARK

Hey. You know how we were talking about buying a home this summer, get in on the good mortgage rates?

JENNIFER

Yeah.

MARK

Would you be devastated if I wanted to stay in an apartment?

JENNIFER

Way ahead of you.

On the TV in the hospital room, breaking news.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - MORNING

The apartment where Mark and Jen live.

A phone RINGING. Then:

MARK'S VOICE

Hey, you've reached Mark and Jen's place. Leave a message.

Flying over the apartment complex to another street --

Taking a left --

TRAVIS'S VOICE

Ollie Ollie Oxen-free.

BEEP.

A row of HOMES, and at one corner --

TRAVIS sits at the curb, staring in the direction of the apartment. Propping his arms up on a fire axe.

Bloodshot eyes.

Behind him --

A predatory house. Like the others. Untouched.

HARD CUT TO BLACK.

THE END.