



Bloodlist 14

THE ONES WHO STAY

Written by

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EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - DAY

The sun sets on Old Halsley Wood.

Rotting leaves on the forest floor partly obscure a crudely carved wooden token, the shape of a circle with rough tentacle-like lines jutting out from its center.

An adult hand scoops up the token and another dusts it off.

The hands belong to CAMERON HART (28), a drifter in desperate need of sleep, a shave, and clean clothes.

Cameron stands with a satchel over his shoulder. He tucks the token away in his satchel and produces the strapless remnants of a wristwatch to check the time.

All that surrounds him: trees and a WHISPER of wind.

A sudden RUSTLING of leaves and Cameron turns to see a dirty YOUNG GIRL in rags a ways off through the trees.

She stands with her back to Cameron, unaware of his presence.

He moves toward her slow.

Careful and quiet.

At the sound of a distant WAIL, the girl scurries off.

Cameron gives chase and she notices.

He soon gains ground on her but the girl scrambles over a fallen tree and disappears.

Cameron leaps over the same tree but trips and falls on the other side with a THUD.

He looks up.

No girl.

Before him only the fresh, bloody remnants of an animal-- maybe a deer. Stripped of meat.

Its leg bones form a diamond on the ground. The rest of its bones arranged to create a pedestal for the skull atop.

INT. NICKY'S CAR - DAY

NICKY PAXTON (28), married too young and stifled by monotonous small-town living, sits in her idling car and stares at the clock on the radio. It reads "8:54".

She puts her hair up in a ponytail and drapes a smock over her ratty Decatur High School tee. She glances out the window at Short Stop Convenience Store and then back to her clock.

EXT. DOWNTOWN DECATUR - CONTINUOUS

Downtown Village of Decatur stretches on for two whole blocks. The village's sole stoplight hangs over the intersection in the middle of town.

Missing persons flyers adorn every lamppost.

At one end of Main Street stands Short Stop Convenience Store and a pharmacy next door with Nicky's car idling out front.

Behind the building loom massive grain silos.

At the other end of Main Street stands Town Hall and beyond that: country roads.

Two police cruisers sit in front of the Town Hall.

Five other vehicles occupy the dozens of available parking spots between the cruisers and Nicky.

EXT. SHORT STOP CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Nicky climbs out of the car and approaches Short Stop.

DAWN (mid-50s), the chatty sort you'd rather not have talking at you before 9AM, exits the pharmacy and spots Nicky.

DAWN
Shouldn't you be at work already?

Nicky forces a smile as she flips through her keys.

NICKY
What about you?

DAWN
Just got off. Another night of
drunks and crickets at the station.

NICKY
Fun.

DAWN
I'll be in for my scratch-offs
later. You all open on the holiday?

Nicky unlocks the door.

NICKY
You know how Mike is.

DAWN
You hear the post office was closed
on Martin Luther King Day? The post
office... I guess I just don't know
what counts as a holiday anymore.

Nicky shrugs and Dawn wanders off.

PHIL THE PHARMACIST, a genial man in a predictable white lab
coat, leans out of the pharmacy and gives Nicky a wave. He
carries out a chair and seats himself next to the door.

Nicky returns his wave.

INT. SHORT STOP CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

A mop stirs beer and green glass shards around on the floor.
Nicky stands at the side of this mess near the beer cooler
with the mop in hand and a "WET FLOOR" sign nearby.

SHERIFF TOM TRENT (late-50s), well-fed with a universally
trustworthy face, enters. The bell over the entrance DINGS.

Trent passes by a bulletin board just inside the door
plastered with nothing but missing persons flyers.

Then he rounds a shelf and eyes the mess at Nicky's feet.

SHERIFF TRENT
Ed Sheatley do that?

NICKY
Told him to walk his happy ass down
to Village Market, he wants to
crash around like a Frankenstein.

Nicky leans her mop on a rack and motions for him to follow.

NICKY
I got your Skoal put back for you.

SHERIFF TRENT
Actually, Nicky, I'm here as an
elected official first.

Nicky stops en route to the counter and turns to him slow...

SHERIFF TRENT
I'm following up on a complaint I
received just now from Ed Sheatley.

Nicky scoffs and strolls behind the counter.

SHERIFF TRENT

You know you can't be cursing at people like Ed Sheatley. We got a city ordinance all about cursing in front of folks just like Ed Sheatley.

NICKY

Scared the hell out of me with that "official business" crap, Tom.

SHERIFF TRENT

A city ordinance is a city ordinance, now. And you know darn well that it's my job to make sure--

Nicky slams a tin of Skoal on the counter.

NICKY

Come and pay for your dip, old man.

Trent sidles up to the counter and produces some cash.

SHERIFF TRENT

Girl, you're too good to me.

NICKY

Somebody's got to take care of you.

Trent passes a ten to Nicky and she makes his change.

SHERIFF TRENT

I been telling that mother of yours she ought to be the one to do it.

He reaches for his Skoal but Nicky snatches it away.

NICKY

Don't be banging my mom now, Tom.

SHERIFF TRENT

You know what? I'm going to tell her you said that.

NICKY

Good. Maybe she'll think twice before letting you stay over again.

SHERIFF TRENT

"Again"?

NICKY
(sliding him the Skoal)
You can't keep a secret in Decatur.

Trent chuckles and heads toward the door.

The bulletin board catches his eye though and he turns back.

SHERIFF TRENT
By the by... I wanted to let you
know nothing new's come in since we
did up the age progression.

NICKY
(returning to her mop)
Thanks anyway.

SHERIFF TRENT
It's really just a waiting game at
this point. We'll find her.

NICKY
Ain't nobody holding their breath.
Don't got to keep on pretending.

SHERIFF TRENT
Pretending what now?

NICKY
Like she's ever coming back.

Trent taps the Skoal on his leg and saunters out. DING.

EXT. SHORT STOP CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Nicky leans against the front face of the shop.

Next to her stands KRYSTAL (30), unemployed and virtually
friendless, yet somehow never without a story to tell.
Krystal smokes a Parliament Menthol Light.

KRYSTAL
So I get it home. Fucking "check
engine" light comes on. They had
the god damn thing three weeks
waiting on a part from your dickbag
husband! You believe that shit?

Nicky doesn't reply and Krystal stares at her for a moment.

KRYSTAL
You all right?

NICKY

Sheriff Tom was in giving me the
kid-glove treatment again is all. A
girl's got to get on with her life.

Krystal swats Nicky a tad too hard with the back of her hand.

KRYSTAL

What you doing tonight?

NICKY

Hoping Luke will take me to the new
Walmart. Hear it's nice as hell.

KRYSTAL

Like shit. You and me are getting
Bill to drive us down to The 40 and
we're going to get fucked up.

NICKY

It ain't "going out" if you stay in
Decatur, Krys.

Krystal rubs her cigarette out on the wall.

KRYSTAL

When you get home, you go right
upstairs and put on your skank
shoes. We're going to The 40.

NICKY

Krystal... I got enough problems
without Luke thinking--

KRYSTAL

I'm not arguing this.

NICKY

We'll see, okay? We'll see.

Nicky heads back into the shop.

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Cameron enters, his sketchbook in-hand and satchel over his
shoulder. He approaches a POSTAL CLERK.

CAMERON

You got a spot for, like, missing
persons posters and things?

The clerk points toward the opposite wall.

Cameron turns and moves toward a bulletin board like the one at Short Stop. His eyes dart around from one flyer to flyer.

POSTAL CLERK
(squinting at Cameron)
You know I recognize you, fella.
Better hope certain folks don't
find out you come back.

Cameron removes a missing persons flyer from the board.

The missing child: JORDAN PAXTON (9). The flyer depicts Jordan, age 5 at the time of her disappearance, beside an artist's rendering of what she might look like now.

But Cameron fixates on the name of the mother: Nicky Paxton.

CAMERON
Oh, Nick...

POSTAL CLERK
You can't take that.

Cameron snatches a few more flyers and hurries out the door.

EXT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - DAY

A faded, two-story country home with a cinder block steps up to the door.

A long-unused swing set rusts in the yard.

A recently killed deer hangs from a tree.

Nicky's car rolls into the gravel drive and parks next to a pickup truck.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

LUKE PAXTON (29), former JV football star-turned-auto parts specialist, sits on one end of a couch with his Xbox controller in hand and gaming headset on.

Luke's feet rest atop a coffee table next to a dirty plate, an open pop, and an array of trash.

Some kind of *Call of Duty* on the 40-inch TV in front of him.

The TV sits atop a microwave stand. On the middle shelf, a cable box and an Xbox. On the bottom shelf, a smattering of low-brow DVDs and an empty Tupperware.

LUKE
(into the headset)
Get fucked. Get straight fucked!

Nicky enters the front door, which leads right into the living room. Luke's attention remains fixed to the game.

Nicky removes her smock and hangs it in the open coat closet.

Then she begins straightening up Luke's mess on the coffee table, piles the dirty plate high with his trash.

NICKY
That an eight-pointer out there?

Luke responds with a dismissive grunt.

Nicky picks up Luke's pop. He leans forward, snatches it from her, slams it back down, and returns to his game.

LUKE
(into the headset)
They're pushing B up top.
(hammers buttons)
They're pushing B, god damn it. B!
What the fuck?!

Luke drops his controller on the couch and stands.

LUKE
(into the headset)
No, it wasn't a GG. It was a shit
G. You play like a little bitch.
(eyes widen as he listens)
Fuck you, kid.

Luke rips his headset off and slings it onto the couch. Then he storms out of the room with his pop in hand.

Nicky, motionless with hands full of trash, watches him go.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Luke stands in the kitchen and finishes off his pop. He drops the can into a bag full of cans hanging on a cabinet door.

Nicky enters from the adjacent dining room with Luke's mess. She dumps the trash and stacks the plate in the sink.

LUKE
Got some kind of epoxy on my pants.
You take a look at that? And work
on the dishes.

NICKY
Yeah, sure.

LUKE
I'm taking off here soon.

Luke heads back through the dining room.

INT./EXT. CAMERON'S CAR - DAY

Cameron's car rolls up onto the shoulder of the road outside Luke and Nicky's house.

Bags filled with clothes and necessities fill the back seat.

On the passenger seat lay the post office's flyers and a sketchbook, open to sketches of the girl he had been chasing.

He looks from Jordan's missing person's flyer to the house and twirls the wooden token he found in his fingers.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Luke puts a foot on the coffee table to lace up his boot as Nicky watches.

NICKY
Game tonight?

Luke glances at her and turns his attention back to his boot.

NICKY
Maybe I'll check out that Walmart with Krystal then, get out of the house for a bit.

LUKE
You think so, huh?

NICKY
If that's all right...

LUKE
(standing)
You got shit to do here, Nicky.

NICKY
Luke, I just--

As he speaks, Luke creeps toward Nicky, who backs away.

LUKE

You just thought you'd hit up the Walmart with Krystal? Just the Walmart? Like I'm fucking stupid.

NICKY

(her back on the wall now)
Krystal wanted to go to The 40 but yeah, I told her I didn't.

LUKE

Krystal wants to wave her pussy around The 40, that's Bill's problem. And I don't got Bill's problems, do I?

NICKY

No, you're right.

Luke leans in and kisses her on the lips.

LUKE

Love you, babe.

Luke heads out but Nicky stays fixed to the wall.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

Nicky sits at the table with Luke's dirty work pants laid out in front of her. She scrapes at a dried patch of epoxy on the crotch with a nail file until the nail file breaks.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Nicky holds the wall phone receiver to her ear and glares at the sink full of dishes.

NICKY

(into the phone)
Guess who's getting her skank shoes on right now?

EXT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The last dregs of sunlight wash over the yard as an enormous pickup truck whips into the driveway. It pulls up behind Nicky's car with the horn blaring.

Nicky rushes out the door in a pair of tight jeans, a sequined top, far too much makeup, and her "skank shoes."

Krystal climbs out of the passenger side in her own bar attire and skank shoes.

KRYSTAL
Damn, girl, you looking hot.

Nicky spins with arms raised to show off.

KRYSTAL
What'd you tell Luke?

NICKY
What's there to tell?

Krystal laughs and climbs back into the truck.

INT. BILL'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

BILL (mid-30s), a meth addict-thin hillbilly harlequin, sits behind the wheel. He eyes Luke's buck hung from the tree.

BILL
That dick must be the only one in
town to shoot anything all season.

Krystal slides into the middle of the truck's bench seat.

KRYSTAL
What'd you say now?

BILL
I said come on, ladies. I been
waiting to get fucked up all day.

KRYSTAL
Hold your horses, boy.

BILL
"Boy," nothing.

Nicky crams in next to Krystal and wrestles the door shut.

BILL
Ready to get your drunk on?

NICKY
Waiting on you now, Bill.

BILL
Well, hell!

Bill pops the truck in reverse and tears off.

INT. THE 40 - NIGHT

Locals pound cheap booze and light beer in the half-full bar. Smoke and a mix of dated country and dance music fill the air. Everyone yells to be heard over the jukebox.

Nicky and Krystal sit laughing at a table covered in empty beer bottles and spent shot glasses.

Something like Crystal Waters' "100% Pure Love" comes on the jukebox and Nicky HOWLS.

She clambers up on the table and Krystal follows. They dance drunkenly. Beer bottles and shot glasses crash to the ground.

Bill and other men gather round to cheer. Some random shouts:

RANDOM

Kiss!

Nicky laughs. Krystal kisses her full on the mouth and the room erupts in whooping and hollering.

The DOORMAN appears and waves Nicky and Krystal down.

DOORMAN

Come on, you two. That's enough.

BILL

Like shit. Them is my women.

Bill hits the doorman in the head with a beer bottle, but it bounces off without breaking. Bill scowls.

DOORMAN

Mother fucker.

The doorman punches Bill in the face and Bill collapses.

EXT. THE 40 - NIGHT

The doorman stands out on Main Street, illuminated by streetlamps and the Budweiser sign above The 40.

A bloody-nosed Bill gives him the finger a few feet away.

Krystal and Nicky exit the bar arm-in-arm.

DOORMAN

Go on home, Bill.

Bill cackles and claps as he follows the women to his truck. His claps echo down the otherwise abandoned Main Street.

EXT. ROAD HAWK TRAVEL CENTER - NIGHT

The Road Hawk truck stop overlooks I-94, a hilltop beacon for truckers and drunk locals in the middle of the night.

An eighteen-wheeler pulls into the lot and passes Bill's truck, parked along the front of the building.

INT. ROAD HAWK TRAVEL CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Nicky and Krystal sit opposite each other in a booth in the back of the truck stop, between cash register and the bathrooms. Each woman nurses a tall styrofoam cup of coffee.

A handful of TRUCKERS populate the remaining booths.

Bill plops down on the bench next to Krystal with a spread of greasy truck stop food. A shred of wadded-up, bloody napkin dangles from his nostril.

BILL
How you ladies feeling?

Nicky groans.

KRYSTAL
Like I'm going to vom.

Bill chuckles. He unwraps a burger and takes a bite.

Without warning, Krystal pukes into her half-full cup of coffee, fills it to the brim. Nicky dry heaves at the sight.

BILL
Oh, Jesus.

Krystal heaves again, but chipmunks the vomit in her cheeks. She turns to Bill, wide-eyed.

Bill throws his burger aside and leads her toward the bathrooms. She carries her cup with her.

BILL
Choke it back now. Choke it back.

Truckers look on as the two disappear into a bathroom.

Nicky puts her head in her hands and groans.

SOMEONE sits down across from her, but she doesn't look up.

NICKY
I really got to get home, you guys.
Luke's going to fucking kill me.

CAMERON (O.S.)
Hi, Nick.

Nicky's head pops up.

Cameron sits there with his satchel over his shoulder.

NICKY
Cameron?

CAMERON
You all right?

NICKY
I drank all the drinks.

CAMERON
All of them?

NICKY
A few got away maybe. But they
won't be so lucky next time. You
should have been there.
(reaches over, pokes him)
You disappeared on me... Why?

As Cameron half-shrugs, she slaps him in the arm.

NICKY
Missed the hell out of you, jerkus.

Cameron flashes a quick smile and then turns deadly serious.

CAMERON
I need to talk to you about a
Jordan Paxton. She's your daughter?

Nicky leans as far away from Cameron as the booth allows.

NICKY
Jordan?

CAMERON
I think she's in Old Halsley Wood.

NICKY
Alive?

He takes the wooden token and sketchbook from his satchel. He passes the token to Nicky. She picks it up and looks at it.

CAMERON
Looks familiar, right?

Nicky shakes her head and Cameron flips through his sketches.

CAMERON
Do you remember the stories about
the Underfly?

NICKY
Every kid in Decatur jokes about
the Underfly.

CAMERON
It's no joke.

Cameron turns his sketchbook around to Nicky. The drawing depicts the girl he chased through the woods running away.

CAMERON
Well?

Nicky shoves the book away.

CAMERON
Nick--

Bill and Krystal approach from the bathrooms.

NICKY
The fuck are you on about?

Bill spots Cameron and hurries forward with fists clenched.

BILL
What's this shit?

Cameron grabs his sketchbook and slides out of the booth.

NICKY
He's talking crazy about Jordan.

Bill drags Cameron toward the exit.

EXT. ROAD HAWK TRAVEL CENTER - NIGHT

Bill slings Cameron into the parking lot by his shirt.

Cameron almost falls but rights himself against his own car.

Nicky and Krystal hurry out after them.

BILL
You think you're some kind of
fucking Shakespeare, kid?

Cameron holds his hands up defensively.

CAMERON
I didn't do anything.

Bill jams two fingers into Cameron's forehead.

BILL
You like telling stories so much,
maybe you want to walk away from
here with a story about how I put
my dick in your cheek.

KRYSTAL
Like hell. He is my man!

NICKY
Let him go, Bill. He's sick.

BILL
(nods toward the road)
You get, queerbo.

Krystal puts her arm around Nicky, who glares at Cameron.

Cameron climbs in his car and speeds off.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nicky stumbles in. She leans all her weight against the front door and it slams shut behind her. She giggles.

Luke, on the couch, turns off the TV when she enters.

LUKE
Look at this.

NICKY
(waggles her face at him)
I'm looking.

Luke stands and marches toward her.

LUKE
What kind of time you call this?

He grabs Nicky by the arm, but she shakes him off.

Nicky points a finger at Luke's face.

NICKY
Don't touch me.

LUKE
You tell me what happened now. I
don't want to hear it first from
someone at the shop.

NICKY
You don't get to touch me...
(exaggerated)
Luke!

LUKE
The fuck's gotten into you?

Nicky brushes past him and stumbles upstairs.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Nicky approaches a closed door marked: "JORDAN'S ROOM."

LUKE (O.S.)
(hollers from downstairs)
I don't want you hanging around
that fat bitch Krystal anymore. You
hear me?

She reaches up above the door frame, produces a key, and
unlocks the door with a push to open it.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - JORDAN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nicky turns the light on and looks around at Jordan's things.

Dusty toys exactly where Jordan last played with them. Nicky
touches a couple of these and wipes away dust.

She plops down on the bed and picks up a stuffed giraffe.

A framed photo on the wall depicts Nicky and Luke with
Jordan, who prominently wears a GIRAFFE NECKLACE.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - JORDAN'S ROOM - DAY

Nicky awakens in Jordan's bed, stuffed giraffe clutched to
her chest.

Luke stands in the doorway in a polo shirt and black jeans.

LUKE
Your mother's here.

Luke taps the door frame a couple times and moseys off.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

Luke sits at the table with a cup of coffee.

Nicky enters, running her fingers through her hair.

JEAN (O.S.)
There she is.

Nicky turns to the adjacent kitchen to see her mother JEAN (50), a woman whose holier-than-thou disposition has long been permanently etched into her face.

Jean fries an egg on the stove and smiles at Nicky.

JEAN
We were getting worried you might
miss church altogether.

Nicky sits at the table and leans toward Luke.

NICKY
(whispering)
Did you call her?

LUKE
I need to grab a couple parts from
the shop on the way. Jean, you mind
giving this wife of mine a ride?

JEAN (O.S.)
Absolutely. You go on.

Luke moves to Nicky and kisses her on the head. She winces and clutches at her skull.

LUKE
(as he exits)
See you in a bit.

Jean approaches with the pan and slides the egg onto a plate already home to toast and ham. She hands the plate to Nicky.

JEAN
Eat. I'll get you some aspirins.

Jean scuttles back to the kitchen and returns with coffees and aspirin. She takes a seat near Nicky and sips her coffee.

NICKY
Hey, Ma? How did you know when it
was over between you and Dad?

JEAN
He left.

Nicky washes down a small handful of aspirin with coffee.

NICKY
Luke called you, didn't he?

JEAN
That Krystal's nasty, Nicole.

NICKY
I don't need a lecture.

JEAN
Well I'm a mom and lecturing's what
we do, so just listen. Luke's a
decent man and he loves you.

Nicky scoffs.

JEAN
He just grieves in his own way.

NICKY
What if there ain't anything to
grieve? Jordan could still be
alive, couldn't she?

JEAN
I hope so too, baby, but don't let
it spoil what you got right here.

Nicky breaks her egg's yolk and it oozes over everything.

INT./EXT. JEAN'S CAR - DAY

Jean drives. Nicky leans against the passenger side window.

They pass an old barn. On the side of the barn: a faded
painting of the same symbol as that on Cameron's token.

NICKY
(bolts upright)
How long has that been there?

JEAN
What's that?

Nicky taps the window as they pass the barn.

JEAN
Oh, that old barn's been there long
as I can remember.

NICKY
Not the barn. The deal on the side.

JEAN
Guess I didn't see it then. Sorry.

Nicky stares back at the barn in the passenger side mirror.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Parishioners file into church from a half-empty parking lot.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Parishioners mill about. Dawn, Phil the pharmacist, and ED SHEATLEY, whose Coke bottle spectacles embolden his already crazy eyes, stand out among them.

Some in the crowd were even at The 40 the night before.

Parishioners shake hands and smile. One man laughs loudly. His wife stands beside him and does not laugh.

The men from The 40 stare as Jean and Nicky pass.

Sheriff Trent approaches Jean and Nicky with a smile.

SHERIFF TRENT
(to Nicky)
How you feeling this morning?

JEAN
It's not funny, Tom.

SHERIFF TRENT
Hey now, Jean. Don't pretend like
you never tore up The 40 before.

JEAN
(swatting at him)
You're terrible, Tom Trent.

Trent chuckles. Jean marches off in a huff.

NICKY
You hear anything about Jordan yet?

SHERIFF TRENT
Didn't we talk yesterday?

NICKY
I just thought maybe something came
in last night. I don't know.

Luke works his way over to Nicky and puts his arm around her.

SHERIFF TRENT
Any particular reason you ask?

NICKY
Just a feeling. Probably nothing.

SHERIFF TRENT
(to Luke)
Darnedest thing: women's intuition.

LUKE
(nodding)
I don't get it.

Trent laughs. He extends his hand to Luke and they shake.

INT. CHURCH - LATER

PASTOR JOSHUA (mid-60s), a haggard figure more fanatical than inspirational, speaks from the pulpit.

PASTOR JOSHUA
"But where do I find this love and
happiness He has planned for me?"
you ask. All you have to do is
look. Look around you. Right now.

Nicky sits in a pew near the front between Luke and Jean.
Trent sits on the other side of Jean.

Nicky stares at the shapes in the stained-glass windows.

PASTOR JOSHUA
There's happiness to be found in
each other, in the community we've
built. And there's joy in the
little things too, in the things
that fill the gaps between us,
whether it's the holy book between
you and your neighbor right now or
the bounty between us at the dinner
table. All this He provides.

Luke takes Nicky's hand. She glares at his oil-stained paw.

PASTOR JOSHUA

Yet these gifts He does not bestow
on the wealthy or privileged alone.
He cares for the cast-out too
because they need Him most of all.
They find in Him the love the rest
of the world cruelly denied them,
when they've been abandoned by--

Sheriff Trent coughs loud into his fist, then mouths "sorry"
to those around him.

PASTOR JOSHUA

Please join me in prayer. In
particular, I'd like us all to pray
for Wendy Redmond's boy, Neil, who
went missing earlier this week.

Nicky turns around. WENDY REDMOND (mid-40s) sobs and nods a
few pews back on the opposite side of the aisle.

INT. CHURCH - LATER

Parishioners chat and file out post-service. Nicky slinks
away from her family and approaches Wendy Redmond.

NICKY

How you holding up?
(off Wendy's shrug)
If you need anything, don't
hesitate, okay?

Wendy takes one of Nicky's hands in hers.

NICKY

It's just that... I know how hard
it is. When Jordan disappeared...

WENDY

Thank you. Everyone's been so kind.

NICKY

Just don't lose hope. That's the
hardest part.

A group of WOMEN appear around Wendy, all big hair, eye
shadow, and comforting hands.

WOMAN 1

Tom will find your Neil, Wendy. You
stay strong now.

WOMAN 2

When I lost my Marcus, I didn't know what to do with myself.

WOMAN 3

Oh, and my poor Selina...

WOMAN 4

Never found my Casey...

WOMAN 5

My Lindsay...

WOMAN 6

My Sammy...

WOMAN 1

My Zeke...

Nicky backs away from them, trembling hands over her mouth.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Sheriff Trent climbs into his cruiser and starts the vehicle.

Nicky rushes out into the parking lot and toward the cruiser.

NICKY

Tom, wait!

Trent takes no notice and pulls out of the parking lot.

Luke strolls up to her.

LUKE

Ready to hit the road?

He leads Nicky to his truck, and they part ways at the rear of the vehicle. He moves up the driver's side and she stops by the bed of the truck.

NICKY

It can't be normal for a town to be missing this many kids, can it?

Luke stops and ponders.

LUKE

They're always talking on the news about people going missing. Lot of creeps out there, babe. Psychos.

(pats the truck)

Come on. Let's get moving.

Luke hops in and Nicky watches him.

ED (O.S.)
You all ought to be grateful for
what you got.

Nicky spins to find Ed Sheatley uncomfortably close to her.

ED
Not everyone lucky as you, Nicky
Paxton. You just can't see it
because you don't want to see it.

Phil the pharmacist approaches and leads Ed away.

PHIL
Ed Sheatley, you mind your own.

Phil waves back at Nicky with a smile.

Nicky wanders up to her door, gears turning behind her eyes.

She doesn't see Phil on the church lawn, gesturing wild and
angry at Ed Sheatley.

Pastor Joshua approaches them.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - DAY

Luke sits on his end of the couch and plays video games with
his headset on.

LUKE
(into the headset)
That's right. Eat shit, kid.

Nicky stares out the window from the other end of the couch.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

Nicky puts a load of laundry in the wash. She pulls the too-
tight jeans she wore to the bar out of the hamper. The wooden
token Cameron gave her falls out of the pocket.

INT. SHORT STOP CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Nicky stands near the register. Taps the wooden token on the
counter and stares at a map of Decatur on the wall.

Krystal stands on the customer side of the counter.

NICKY
I'm missing something, Krys.

KRYSTAL
We need to find you a man.

NICKY
Last thing I need is another man.

Krystal tosses a wadded-up bill onto the counter. Nicky straightens it out and hands Krystal a pint of Seagram's 7.

KRYSTAL
(cracking open the bottle)
You only say that because you never had a man go down on you before. Last night, Bill had his tongue so deep inside me you'd think it was detachable. I saw Jesus!

Nicky's face contorts. Too much information.

Krystal takes a swig of Seagram's.

NICKY
You know what happened to Cameron after the other night?

KRYSTAL
If he's got any sense, he's a hundred miles down I-94 right now. Bill told Ian his queerbo cousin's back in town and they're looking to whoop his ass if they don't get too drunk tonight.

Nicky takes the map off the wall, lays it out on the counter.

NICKY
Think they'll find him?

KRYSTAL
Ain't nowhere to hide in Decatur.

Nicky smirks and lays the token on the area of the map marked "Old Halsley Wood."

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - DAY

Clouds swirl over treetops swaying in the wind.

INT./EXT. NICKY'S CAR - DAY

A wire fence runs the length of Old Halsley Wood.

Every ten or so yards a "No Trespassing" sign on a tree.

Nicky's car approaches a break in the fence where a dirt trail leads into Old Halsley Wood. Beside the trail lies a rusted gate, fallen off broken hinges.

Just outside the trail stands a post with two weathered signs on it.

The top sign: "OLD HALSLEY WOOD".

But the bottom, sloppily hand-painted sign warns: "STAY OUT!"

Nicky peers at the sign, then the woods. At length, she rolls her vehicle onto the trail.

As the car bounces along the overgrown trail, Nicky spots Cameron's car up ahead.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - TRAIL - DAY

Nicky stands near the cars. No one in sight. She calls out:

NICKY
Cameron?

Wind HOWLS through the trees in response.

INT./EXT. CAMERON'S CAR - DAY

Nicky eyeballs the bags in Cameron's car.

She opens the back door and unzips the nearest bag. Nothing.

An open duffel bag deeper inside draws her attention.

Nicky climbs on hands and knees into the back.

Keys jangle in the ignition.

Nicky finds only camping paraphernalia in the duffel bag: a sleeping bag, rope, tarpaulin, and a hatchet.

Nicky takes the hatchet. Then she reaches up front and takes Cameron's keys.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - TRAIL - DAY

Nicky stands at the edge of the tree line with the hatchet.

NICKY
Ready or not...

Deep breath, then she steps off the trail and into the trees.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - DAY

Nicky moves through the trees with the hatchet readied at her side. Her eyes dart back and forth. *Where the fuck is he?*

The further she goes, the thicker the foliage.

Trees close in.

Vines and limbs snag her clothes.

Tree roots break through the forest floor, claw at her feet.

The forest RUMBLES and Nicky stops.

DOOM. Everything trembles: the ground. The trees. Nicky's entire body.

She spins and finds no sign of the disturbance's source.

Suddenly, Cameron appears in front of her. Nicky raises the hatchet defensively and he stumbles back into a tree.

NICKY
Jesus shit, Cameron!

Nicky paces in a circle and shakes off the fright.

CAMERON
Is that my hatchet?
(off her nod)
And you were looking for me?
(off her shrug)
Surprised you came.

Cameron takes the watch remnants from his satchel. Checks it.

NICKY
Where's my daughter, Cameron?

CAMERON
Don't know yet.

NICKY
You don't have her?

CAMERON
No. I told you. The Underfly does.

NICKY
That's kid shit, Cam. I'm not dumb.
I stopped believing in the Underfly
when I was like eight.

CAMERON
Yeah, me too.

Cameron moves off through the trees.

Nicky hesitates for a bit, then follows.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - LATER

Cameron leads Nicky through the woods. They step over logs
and roots as they go, fight off branches and brambles.

NICKY
So... why did you come back?

CAMERON
Things fall apart. Why'd you stay?

NICKY
My life's here, I guess.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - DAY

Bill's ill-kept prefab home, surrounded by trucks, a couple
go-karts, and a yard that needed mowing months ago. Jerry
Jeff Walker's "Up Against the Wall Redneck Mother" plays loud
enough from within to be clearly heard outside.

Luke hammers his fist on the front door.

The music cuts out and the door opens.

From the dim interior, Bill appears with a smile and no shirt
on, his body all ribs, welts, and bruises.

BILL
Well, shit.

LUKE
Where is she, Bill?

BILL
(calling inside)
Hey, darling! Luke's here.

KRYSTAL (O.S.)
Like... Luke-Luke?

Krystal appears behind Bill in only a real big T-shirt.

KRYSTAL
(to Luke)
Thought you didn't come around here
anymore.

BILL
Says he's looking for Nicky.
(to Luke)
But you going to get and keep on
looking, fella.

KRYSTAL
Ain't seen her since yesterday.

LUKE
I'm going to look for myself, if
you don't mind.

Luke moves to push past them, but Bill puts an arm right in his way and grins.

BILL
Funny thing is, I do mind.

LUKE
I know she's in there.

BILL
Mother fucker, you couldn't be more
wrong if your asshole was on
backward.

Luke shoves Bill then puffs himself up all intimidating-like.

BILL
(rubs his wrist; smiles)
You want to get it on, we do it
right fucking now. But getting your
ass beat ain't going to change the
fact you can't control your woman.

Bill stifles a burp and stares at Luke until Luke walks away.

BILL
That's right! Get the fuck on now.

KRYSTAL
(to Bill)
You sexy as shit when you go all
mean-ass, you know that?

She slaps his ass.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - DAY

Nicky and Cameron stop at the top of a hill. The ground
before them slopes down into a clearing.

Nicky's hand floats up to cover her gaping mouth.

NICKY
Oh my god. What is this place?

The pair overlooks "the boneyard," a parting of trees
littered with mammalian remains in various states of decay,
bones all virtually stripped clean of meat.

EXT. THE BONEYARD - CONTINUOUS

Cameron and Nicky clamber down into the boneyard. They move
together for a piece in silence, and then:

NICKY
Have you shown this to anybody?
(off his head shake)
We need to show somebody.

CAMERON
Show them what? A bunch of bones.
Garbage. Just a couple rusted out
trucks and a wood stove shy of
being any old country dump.

Nicky treads careful over animal bones, rotted dolls,
clothing fragments, rusted-out trinkets, and the occasional
hand-carved token or figurine.

NICKY
She was here.

CAMERON
You found something?

NICKY
No. It's like... just a feeling?
(staring at the bones)
I can't tell if any of these are
people bones. Can you?

CAMERON
Not here. But Old Halsley's huge.
Might be other places like it.

NICKY
Why are they like this...? So many.

CAMERON
Everything's got to feed.

Nicky comes across a fresh carcass. The bulk of some animal,
but no head. Tiny bits of meat still cling to bone.

NICKY
This one's recent.

Cameron rushes over to her and snatches it away. Inspects it.

CAMERON
Some kind of dog maybe. Or a
something. It was here.

NICKY
The Underfly?

CAMERON
We only have until sunset.

NICKY
I have a lantern in my trunk.

CAMERON
Nope. No, that's when it feeds.

Nicky surveys the boneyard in its shocking vastness.
Wind shakes the tree limbs overhead.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - DAY

Nicky catches up to Cameron. He scans the ground as he goes.

CAMERON
Look for a hole. Like a tunnel.

NICKY
It lives underground then.

CAMERON
It sleeps.

NICKY

And you know this? You know it
lives underground?
(off Cameron's nod)
How do you know that but not where?

CAMERON

It moves house. Like anything else.

Nicky stops and points the hatchet at him as she speaks.

NICKY

You keep saying this crazy shit
like it's all normal to you-- hunky-
dory. Like you been out here so
long you forgot how to people.

CAMERON

(turning to Nicky)
You want to know what happened--?

He spots something on a tree behind Nicky. Pushes her aside.

Some kind of viscous fluid there. Sap-like, but not sap.

He examines the next tree over. Same thing.

CAMERON

It was here.

Cameron takes off, eyes on the trees to follow the sap trail.

NICKY

See? That's exactly what I'm...

Nicky leans in close to the fluid.

She touches it and HISS. It sizzles on her skin. She wipes it
away on her jeans in a hurry.

NICKY

What the fuck?

CAMERON (O.S.)

(hollering back)
We got thirty minutes of light.

Nicky looks at her burnt finger and then follows him.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - CLEARING - DAY

Nicky and Cameron arrive at a small clearing. In the middle, a tree snapped in two just a few feet up from its base, either lightning-struck or Underfly-bent.

Nicky recoils at the sight of it because...

On top of the stump sits a freshly cleaved coyote head atop a few other half-rotted animal heads. Branches stick up out of the ground like arms for this makeshift coyote-tree hybrid.

All around the sides of this weird totem: the symbol of the Underfly and other childish drawings in dried blood.

NICKY

This is fucked.

Cameron crouches by the stump and eyes the blood drawings.

CAMERON

This is how its children play.

Nicky reaches out a shaky hand with the hatchet in it and pokes the heads. A dozen dirty-yellow "house centipedes" tear out from under the rotten heads and scurry down the stump.

Nicky throws her hands up in the air and hurries away.

NICKY

(walking toward the trees)

Ew. Fuck. Just... give me a sec.

Cameron takes out his sketchbook to sketch the totem.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - LATER

Daylight fades fast. The wind HOWLS and trees shake.

Nicky, by herself, plops down with her head slumped. Spent.

She lifts her face and spots in front of her there: a hole on a soft slope. Maybe big enough for kids to climb into.

She moves to the hole and peers in...

Can't see far. Some sort of tunnel. Unclear how deep.

NICKY

Cameron! I found a hole-thing.

Nicky stares into the tunnel. Not enough room to stand or even crouch, so she eases herself in on hands and knees.

INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Nicky crawls in. Opens her eyes wide to soak in the dark.

The ground RUMBLES and soil from the top of the tunnel falls on her back.

She moves a few feet in, then stops.

Something moves toward her in the blackness, and she blinks to adjust her eyes.

NICKY

Jordan? Baby?

Then she sees it, the something in the darkness: CENTIPEDES!

Hundreds of centipedes pouring over each other toward her. Surging waves of bristling legs by the thousands.

Nicky SHOUTS and scurries back, but not fast enough.

In an instant, they swarm her.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - CONTINUOUS

Cameron approaches the hole, slow and cautious.

CAMERON

Nick? Sunset. We got to--

Suddenly, centipedes pour out of the hole in an undulating mass. He steps back.

Soon Nicky too rolls out and the tunnel collapses behind her.

Nicky tumbles down the soft slope, much of her lower half obscured by obscene masses of legs. She swats at the creatures as they reach her face and scurry into her mouth.

Nicky gags, yelps, heaves.

Cameron yanks her up. Drags her away and centipedes tumble off her by the dozens. He sweeps the things off her methodically like he's done it before.

Nicky coughs and hacks and spits out chunks of centipedes, some still very much alive.

Cameron moves to inspect the collapsed tunnel as Nicky wipes centipede parts off her clothes.

NICKY
Fuck! What was that?

CAMERON
Don't know. Seen it before though.

NICKY
Some kind of prank?

CAMERON
Something like that.

Cameron takes out his watch then heads back toward the cars.

CAMERON
We got to go.

Nicky looks up at the darkening sky.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - TRAIL - DAY

Nicky and Cameron emerge from the tree line and onto the trail near their cars. They hurry toward the vehicles.

NICKY
We can't do this alone.

CAMERON
No one's going to believe us.

NICKY
They will when they see.

CAMERON
Not in Decatur.

Nicky opens her car door and lets it hang open between them. She produces Cameron's keys and slaps them into his chest.

NICKY
Here. Keeping the hatchet though.

Cameron takes the keys and eyes them.

NICKY
Wasn't sure I could trust you.

CAMERON
And now?

NICKY
Now I know what's out there.

CAMERON
And we'll find it, Nick.

NICKY
We'll find Jordan.

She tosses the hatchet onto the passenger side floorboard.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nicky peeks in the front door and creeps in. The house quiet.
The lights dimmed. No sign of Luke.

She crosses the room to the stairs at a tiptoe.

LUKE (O.S.)
Where the fuck were you?

Nicky jumps and looks up to see Luke sat on the stairs.

NICKY
Scared the shit out of me.

Luke descends the stairs. Deliberate, threatening.

LUKE
Where were you?

NICKY
Work. Becky had a thing.

LUKE
Oh yeah?

NICKY
Then I went out... with Krystal.

Luke gets so close to Nicky his breath moves her hair.

LUKE
I went by Bill's looking for you.
Saw Krystal too. So try again, huh?

NICKY
Spying on me now?

Luke takes her face in his trembling hands.

LUKE
Stop fucking lying to me, woman.

NICKY

Fine. Okay... I was out looking for Jordan. Not that you give a shit.

Nicky pushes him away. Luke pauses, squints in confusion.

LUKE

Somebody see her?

NICKY

No. Just... wandered around. One of those intuition things, I guess.

LUKE

You're just out wandering around then, making me worry? Thought you was out doing I don't know what.

Luke embraces her. She does not return the hug.

NICKY

Yeah. Just making you worry, Luke.

LUKE

Ain't nothing you can do the police can't, you know.

NICKY

(pulling away from Luke)
I'm her mom.

LUKE

Can't keep obsessing over shit we can't change. It don't make sense.

NICKY

But if there's even a tiny chance--

LUKE

It's been five years, babe. We got to face facts here.

NICKY

Oh, fuck off.

Nicky turns to walk away but Luke grabs her by the arm.

LUKE

What'd you say?

Nicky yanks against Luke's hand and he lets go with a SHOVE.

Nicky topples over onto the stairs.

Lands hard.

Nicky slowly pulls herself up and rubs at her back.

NICKY

You want me to sit around watching
you play games and putting out when
you say, "put out." But fuck that.

Nicky storms upstairs and Luke scrambles to say something.
His face scrunches up. And at last, he hollers after her:

LUKE

I'm so sorry, babe. I just... I
don't want to lose you. You know
that, right? Babe?

Nothing but silence from the upstairs. Luke punches the wall.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Morning. Nicky stands at the wall phone in her work clothes.

NICKY

(into the receiver)
Not even a few hours, Mike. No, I'm
sick. Shit's coming out both ends.

Nicky leans out to look toward the living room. No one there.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Luke stands at the top of the stairs and eavesdrops.

NICKY (O.S.)

Becky can stop spinning for a few
hours, can't she?

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Nicky holds the phone away from her ear for a moment.

NICKY

(into the receiver)
Yeah, well I'm about to blow
chunks, so you figure it out. And
don't fucking call me next time
Becky's too strung out to work!

Nicky slams the phone onto the hook.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nicky enters the living room and Luke descends the stairs.

LUKE
Off to work?

NICKY
Yep. See you tonight.

He watches her leave, teeth gritting and chest heaving.

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY

Sheriff Trent exits Town Hall. Nicky trails behind him.

SHERIFF TRENT
You're not giving me much to go on.

NICKY
But the shit I saw out there...

Trent stops and turns to her.

SHERIFF TRENT
You saw what? Animal bones, a couple of heads, and centipedes. The heads thing is unusual, I'll give you that. But it's probably just some good old boys having fun.

NICKY
And the stuff on the trees?

SHERIFF TRENT
So somebody smeared gunk on some trees. I just don't see how that and you crawling into an animal burrow adds up to a promising lead.

NICKY
What about the rumbling then?

SHERIFF TRENT
Earthquake down in Ohio last year knocked my mother's commemorative plates off the mantle.

NICKY
Was there an earthquake yesterday?

SHERIFF TRENT

Even if there was, what would that have to do with Jordan?

NICKY

Tom. She's out there. Now.

SHERIFF TRENT

I'm a public servant. I can't waste Decatur's time and taxes scouring the woods without good cause. We searched the woods for your girl already and went back in there two year ago when old Melvin Sheatley left town without telling nobody.

(hand on Nicky's shoulder)

So look at all the stuff you just told me and tell me how that adds up to Jordan living in the woods.

NICKY

She's out there, Tom.

SHERIFF TRENT

If she is, someone will see her, and she'll needs you around when she gets back. So pull it together.

Trent strides to his cruiser and leaves Nicky standing there.

INT./EXT. LUKE'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Luke sits in his truck a half block away from Nicky and Sheriff Trent... just watching.

INT./EXT. LUKE'S TRUCK - DAY

Luke follows Nicky at a distance alongside Old Halsley Wood. Out the window, "No Trespassing" signs, one after another.

Nicky's brake lights shine up ahead and Luke slows.

Her car turns into the woods.

LUKE

What are you doing out here, girl?

Luke creeps his truck up to the trail and watches Nicky's car bounce down the trail in the distance.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - DAY

Cameron sits on a log and scribbles the symbol of the Underfly onto a sketchbook page covered in archaic symbols.

Nicky jogs up and he slams his sketchbook shut.

NICKY

We got twelve hours until sunset?

CAMERON

If that.

Nicky waves him on.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - TRAIL - CONTINUOUS

Luke sneaks up to the tree line. He spots Nicky with Cameron through the trees but can't quite make out the man's face.

He moves closer still until he can make out... Cameron Hart.

LUKE

You mother fucker.

Luke presses a fist hard into a tree and then slinks away.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - LATER

Clouds roll in overhead. The trees shake.

Nicky and Cameron tromp through the woods in silence. They scan the woods from side-to-side. No signs of monsters or children.

The foliage closes in around them. Rows of brambles guide them deeper into the woods.

NICKY

Must have covered ten miles by now.
Is that even possible?

Cameron stops and looks around.

CAMERON

We're getting close and it knows.

NICKY

Or we're lost. This is pointless.

CAMERON

Well, not like we can get it to
come to us. Not if we want to live.

Nicky stops and again those gears turn behind her eyes.

NICKY

You wait here. I have an idea.

She sprints back the way they came.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - DAY

Krystal comes out to meet Nicky on the porch. Nicky waves at
the trucks around Bill's place.

NICKY

Any of these run?

KRYSTAL

Got mine back from the shop.

NICKY

Go get your keys and the Polaroid.

KRYSTAL

I'm too high to drive though.

Nicky pushes Krystal back inside.

EXT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - DAY

Nicky backs Krystal's truck up to the tree where Luke's deer
hangs. Nicky and Krystal climb out.

They stare up at the deer. Huge. It looms taller than either
of them and its front hooves hang even below the truck bed.

KRYSTAL

We stealing Luke's deer?

Nicky nods. Krystal laughs.

Nicky opens the tailgate, and they climb into the truck bed.

KRYSTAL

This'll be fucking rich. Only son
of a bitch in town nab a deer this
season is Luke, you know that?

Nicky examines the rope that holds the deer aloft.

KRYSTAL

Ope. I got something to cut that.

Krystal roots through the junk in the back of her truck.

NICKY

How can it be that not one other deer was got this season?

KRYSTAL

The fuck should I know? I can cook and eat a deer. About it though.

Krystal shifts a bit of chain link fence and produces a pair of wire cutters.

KRYSTAL

Told you.

Nicky reaches down and pulls the deer's legs up into the bed. Krystal takes the legs from Nicky and pulls.

KRYSTAL

You a big mother fucker. Goddamn.

Nicky pulls its head up too by the antlers. She almost falls out of the truck, but Krystal grabs the back of her shirt.

KRYSTAL

How we going to do this?

NICKY

You want to, like, pull on it and I'll cut the rope?

KRYSTAL

So the big girl got to be the one hugging the corpse, huh?

NICKY

No, I was thinking--

KRYSTAL

I'm just fucking around. Cut this big bastard down already!

Krystal takes the deer in a bear hug, locks her fingers together on the other side of it.

Nicky attacks the rope with the wire cutters.

KRYSTAL

Hurry up. This thing smells like a dead fucking deer, you know that?

NICKY

Almost there.

Suddenly, SNAP. The remaining strands of rope give way. The cutters topple from Nicky's hands and fall sharp-side down between her feet.

Krystal stumbles backward under the weight of the deer. The remnants of chain link trip her and she goes down hard. The deer on top of her.

The friends lock eyes, Krystal pinned under the deer. For a moment, nothing. Then they laugh.

KRYSTAL

Get this off of me before its
asshole touches my face!

Nicky pulls on the deer but she laughs too hard to be useful.

INT./EXT. KRYSTAL'S TRUCK - DAY

The truck speeds down the old county road that runs alongside Old Halsley with Luke's deer in the truck bed.

Nicky drives. Krystal smokes a joint in the passenger seat.

KRYSTAL

Wish I could be there to see the
look on his face. I hope he gets
all red-eyed like he does, like
he's going to cry but trying to
look angry. You know the face.

Krystal mocks trying not to cry.

NICKY

That's the one.

KRYSTAL

Where we dropping it?

Krystal extends the joint to Nicky, who waves it away.

NICKY

The woods. Once we hit the trail.

Nicky nods toward the trees that fly by the truck window.

KRYSTAL

Yeah right. You must be high too.
Nobody goes to Old Halsley.

No response from Nicky. Krystal blinks and soaks this in.

KRYSTAL

Uh-uh. Let's just drop this bitch
in the lake and go watch Oprah.

NICKY

It's got to be the woods.

KRYSTAL

Nope. I'm not going there. Fuck
that. Place is spooky, all fenced-
up and shit. Just look at it.

Nicky slows to a stop in front of an abandoned, overgrown
house on the edge of Old Halsley Wood.

NICKY

You don't have to go. You can walk
from here if you want, but I've got
to get this thing out there.

KRYSTAL

I'm not...

Krystal opens her door, pauses, then turns back to Nicky.

KRYSTAL

This is my truck though.

NICKY

Sorry, Krys.

Krystal shuts the door and takes a big hit.

KRYSTAL

I'm not happy about this. You know
what, no. I'm fucking pissed at you
right now is what I am.

NICKY

I know you are.

KRYSTAL

Just tell me what's going on.

NICKY

(re: the abandoned house)
For starters, who lives there?

KRYSTAL

(shrugs)
Look at the fucking place.

NICKY
 (truck picking up speed)
 Name one person who lives along Old
 Halsley Wood.

KRYSTAL
 How the fuck should I know?

The truck pulls up to the trail into Old Halsley Wood.
 Krystal points at the "STAY OUT!" sign. No reply from Nicky.

KRYSTAL
 You know I've never been in them
 woods? Not even when Randy Jr.
 swore he'd go down on me if I put
 one foot in. He'd have done it too.

The truck rolls a dozen yards down the trail into the tree
 line and Nicky shuts it down.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - CONTINUOUS

Nicky hops out and jogs to the rear. Krystal follows.

NICKY
 We'll hang the deer up over here
 and set up across the road.

KRYSTAL
 The fuck for?

Nicky opens the tailgate and gathers a length of rope.

NICKY
 Remember in second grade, Sally
 Peterson said the Underfly was
 going to drag you off into the
 woods? Then you told her to shut up
 and pulled her hair?

KRYSTAL
 Yeah, and she's still a cunt. But
 what's that got to do with...

Krystal looks deep into the woods at the seemingly never-
 ending expanse of trees. The woods stand silent around them
 except for WIND and the RUSTLE of leaves.

KRYSTAL
 We're about to do something real
 fucking stupid, aren't we?

Nicky tosses Krystal the rope.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - TRAIL - DAY

The deer now hangs from a tree. Nicky and Krystal drip sweat as they survey their handiwork.

NICKY

Should be able to see it from the
road just fine tonight so long as
the clouds pass.

Nicky wanders over to the truck and blares the horn.

KRYSTAL

What the serious fuck, Nicky?

NICKY

There's something in the woods.

KRYSTAL

Yeah. A couple sweaty-ass bitches
about to get rained on.

Nicky looks up at the growing cloud coverage.

Suddenly, Cameron appears up the trail and he and Krystal lock eyes. Krystal storms over to Nicky's side, ranting:

KRYSTAL

This where you been when Luke's out
scouring the town for your dumb
ass? Shacking up in the woods with
this fucking fruit loop?

NICKY

He's cool, Krys.

KRYSTAL

He's a creeper.

Cameron approaches with his hands in his hair.

NICKY

(re: the deer)
We're going fishing, Cam.

CAMERON

Looking to get yourself killed,
more like it.

NICKY

We need proof people will believe.

KRYSTAL

Proof of what?

CAMERON
Don't worry about it.

KRYSTAL
Don't talk to me.

NICKY
The Underfly.

KRYSTAL
Fuck off with that stupid shit.

NICKY
And this is why we need proof.

CAMERON
Fine. Okay. What's your plan then?

Nicky puts her hands on both their shoulders.

EXT. OLD COUNTY ROAD - DAY

Krystal's truck and Cameron's car sit on the shoulder of the road opposite the trail entrance. The sky now mostly grey.

Luke's deer sways just inside the tree line.

Nicky and Cameron approach Krystal's truck as Nicky fiddles with the Polaroid camera.

Krystal sits just in the open door of the truck and glares out at Cameron.

CAMERON
We're too close.

NICKY
Thought it stayed in the woods.

Cameron shrugs.

NICKY
If it didn't, the whole town would be toast by now, right?

KRYSTAL
Y'all are talking some crazy, you know that?

NICKY
If I can just get a picture of it, we'll be that much closer to finding her, Krys.

KRYSTAL
Hold up. This about Jordan?

Krystal jumps out of the truck.

NICKY
If these clouds don't clear, we
won't be able to see a damn thing.

CAMERON
It could still blow over.

Suddenly, SIRENS in the distance.

The trio turn to see two police cruisers speeding toward them with Luke's truck behind.

NICKY
(giving Cameron a shove)
Go. Now.

Cameron sprints to his car and hops in. He starts it up but too late.

The cruisers block him in.

Sheriff Trent along with DEPUTY EADIE and DEPUTY BARRY climb out of the cruisers. They draw their weapons on Cameron.

In the car, Cameron raises his hands.

NICKY
The fuck, Tom?

SHERIFF TRENT
Cameron Hart, step out of the
vehicle real slow-like. Understand?

Luke's truck pulls up and stops a piece behind the cruisers. He gets out and speed-walks over toward the action.

NICKY
(to Luke)
You followed me?

Cameron steps out of the car.

SHERIFF TRENT
Deputy Barry?

Barry sidles up to Cameron and produces a pair of handcuffs. He bends Cameron's arms back and cuffs his wrists behind him.

CAMERON
You're arresting me for what?

SHERIFF TRENT
We just want to ask you a few questions about the disappearance of Jordan Paxton is all. Plus, we don't appreciate you running none.

NICKY
He didn't do anything.

SHERIFF TRENT
Nicky, please.

Trent eyes the contents of Cameron's car and holsters his gun. Then he opens the driver's side door and pops the trunk.

Cameron struggles against Barry.

CAMERON
Sheriff...

Trent moves to the rear and eyeballs the trunk's contents.

SHERIFF TRENT
You in mighty deep, boy.

Nicky runs to Trent's side.

Beneath Cameron's erratic sketches of symbols and dismembered animals, the trunk brimmed with weathered kids' items: toys, clothes, shoes, and, most notably, JORDAN'S GIRAFFE NECKLACE.

Nicky reaches for the necklace, but Trent grabs hold of her.

SHERIFF TRENT
Nicky, don't. It's evidence.

NICKY
But that's Jordan's giraffe.

KRYSTAL
I fucking knew it.

Luke and Krystal hurry to the back of Cameron's car.

NICKY
(to Cameron)
How'd you get Jordan's necklace?

CAMERON
I found it.

NICKY

You didn't tell me about all this.

Sheriff Trent hands Nicky to Luke.

LUKE

He brainwashed my wife, Tom.

NICKY

Shut the fuck up, Luke!

SHERIFF TRENT

Barry, why don't you introduce our man here to Miranda and toss him in the back of the cruiser?

Deputy Barry leads Cameron to the cruiser and sets him in the back seat. Trent follows.

LUKE

Got the son of a bitch now, babe.

Nicky shakes Luke off and runs toward Cameron, but Trent intercepts before she can reach the cruiser.

NICKY

(hollering past Trent)

Where did you find her necklace?

SHERIFF TRENT

Whatever he knows, I'm going to know. I swear.

NICKY

He said she's alive, Tom.

SHERIFF TRENT

I wish to hell you'd told me he was involved. Boy never was right.

Sheriff Trent shakes his head and joins his deputies.

KRYSTAL

I always told you that he was a fucking freak.

Nicky wanders over to Luke's truck in silence. Luke hurries after. He tries to take her hand, but she shies away.

LUKE

I'm just glad we got here before anything happened to you.

NICKY
Don't talk to me.

Nicky climbs into the truck.

SHERIFF TRENT
Deputy Eadie, you get the area
roped off. Then I suppose we'll
give the woods a going-over.

DEPUTY EADIE
Sure thing, Chief.

SHERIFF TRENT
(re: the deer)
And Barry, go ahead and cut that
thing down, would you?

DEPUTY BARRY
That an eight-pointer?

Trent looks back at Cameron in the cruiser, but Cameron just
stares off into Old Halsley Wood.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nicky sits on the floor of Jordan's room, her back against
the door and arms around her knees.

KNOCK KNOCK.

LUKE (O.S.)
Babe? Do you want to talk?

Nicky stares at the photo of Jordan in her giraffe necklace.

LUKE (O.S.)
Babe?

NICKY
Leave me the fuck alone!

LUKE (O.S.)
I'll be downstairs.

Nicky leans forward and takes the corner of the comforter in
her fingers. She yanks it off the bed and Jordan's dolls all
come with it.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Nicky sits slumped in the pews amidst the rest of the flock, flanked again by Luke and Jean. A thousand-yard stare.

Pastor Joshua preaches from the pulpit.

PASTOR JOSHUA

...the path to Him is rarely clear.
At times, His methods may confuse
us and His reasons elude us. But no
matter the hardships that befall
you, know that He watches and that
He loves in a way man can never
understand. Take comfort in that.

Nicky snaps out of her funk and scans the people around her. Familiar faces beam up at the pulpit.

The back half of the church sits empty.

NICKY

Where's Tom?

JEAN

(whispers)

Probably dealing with the Hart boy.

NICKY

(re: the half-empty pews)

Where is everybody?

Jean shushes her.

PASTOR JOSHUA

Now I'd like to take a moment, on
behalf of the entire congregation,
to extend our immense gratitude to
our own Nicole Paxton.

Nicky recoils. Jean takes her hand. Luke rubs her back.

PASTOR JOSHUA

Nicole, as I'm sure some of you
know by now, aided Sheriff Trent
and his deputies in arresting the
man believed responsible for so
many recent kidnappings, a man who
has more than once brought immense
pain to the people of Decatur.

NICKY

(to Jean)

I didn't do anything to help.

JEAN
 (rubbing Nicky's knee)
 You did what you had to do, baby.

PASTOR JOSHUA
 (hand out toward Nicky)
 Our community can at last sleep
 soundly knowing you've helped bring
 justice for our lost children.

Parishioners nod and whisper in agreement. Some hold their hands up in praise.

INT. HARD TIMES DINER - DAY

A family restaurant unchanged since the 1980's. The dining space boasts more seats than would ever be necessary to accommodate the dining-out population of Decatur.

Wait staff who know the patrons by name serve the post-church service crowd. Club sandwiches, burgers, breakfast all day.

Nicky sulks in a booth, trapped against the wall with Luke at the end of the bench. Across from them, Jean, who smiles and waves at some other parishioners.

A few parishioners pause as they pass to silently acknowledge Nicky. One woman clasps her hands, holds them out to Nicky in thanks, and moves off into the restaurant.

NICKY
 What did he mean, "justice"?

JEAN
 I thought Pastor Joshua gave a very
 sweet speech. You should be proud.

Luke rubs Nicky's back. She squirms.

LUKE
 I sure am.

JEAN
 These folks needed closure.

NICKY
 The kids are still missing.

JEAN
 That Hart boy was always sick, you
 know. The things he used to say
 about his father...

LUKE
Some kind of homo.

NICKY
Jordan is still missing.

JEAN
All we can do now is pray.

NICKY
That's all?

JEAN
Remember what the pastor said about
the mystery of His ways--

NICKY
So just "shut up and move on" then?

Nicky scoots toward the edge of the seat like she wants out,
but Luke prevents her from scooting clear out of the booth.

LUKE
This is the first real chance we've
had of finding her in years, babe.

NICKY
Get out of my way, Luke.

LUKE
The best thing for you to do is--

Nicky shoves Luke off the seat and slides out of the booth.

Everyone turns their attention toward the Paxtons. Gossipy
whispers fill the diner.

Nicky glares at the other patrons and they fall silent.

NICKY
Mind your own fucking waffles.

JEAN
Nicole!

Luke moves toward Nicky with his arms out to embrace her. She
jabs him hard in the chest with her fingers.

NICKY
You follow me, I swear to God...

Nicky hurries out. A family on their way in part as she goes.

EXT. HARD TIMES DINER - CONTINUOUS

Nicky rushes out the front door. She turns toward Town Hall and finds herself face-to-face with Wendy Redmond.

Wendy wraps her arms around Nicky and squeezes her tight.

WENDY

I can't thank you enough for what
you done, Nicky.

NICKY

Our kids are still out there.

WENDY

(smiles, tearing up)
We'll make him pay for what he did
to the children.

Nicky opens her mouth to speak, but nothing comes out.

INT. TOWN HALL - DAY

Nicky spots Deputy Barry at a desk, some paperwork in front of him. She strides over and leans on his desk.

NICKY

Where's Tom?

DEPUTY BARRY

Not here.

NICKY

Where?

Barry glances around the room.

NICKY

What's happening with Cameron?

Barry tries to hide the report on the desk with his forearms.

NICKY

I can't read your goddamn chicken
scratch, Barry. Just tell me what
you found.

DEPUTY BARRY

We're investigating.

Nicky grunts in exasperation and storms out.

EXT. JEAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nicky rings the doorbell.

Sheriff Trent's police cruiser sits in the driveway.

The door opens and Jean, in her nightgown, peeks out.

NICKY

Let me talk to him.

JEAN

Who do you, uh...?

NICKY

His cruiser's in the drive, Ma.

It's like 9 o'clock. Don't bother.

Jean pulls her nightgown tight and disappears inside.

Moments later, she reappears with Trent, in a partial state of undress himself-- boxers and police-issue button-down.

SHERIFF TRENT

If this is about the investigation,
I want you to know you turning up
here don't sit right with me.

JEAN

This is inappropriate.

NICKY

Everyone in Decatur's celebrating
like our troubles are over, but my
baby ain't back home yet and I want
to know what you found, Tom.

SHERIFF TRENT

Jean, you mind getting me a drink?

Jean goes inside and Trent joins Nicky outside on the porch.

SHERIFF TRENT

We're doing everything we can.

NICKY

Lot of juicy clues in my mom's bed?

SHERIFF TRENT

Hey, that ain't fair. This is the
first down time I had since we
brought in the Hart boy. Had me,
Barry, and Eadie working around the
clock.

NICKY

You search the woods?

SHERIFF TRENT

Tell you what I saw out there too
and it weren't Jordan. Just a bunch
of bones and a couple of heads all
piled up exactly like you told me.

Jean joins them on the porch with a beer and a diet soda. She
hands the beer to Trent and extends the soda to Nicky.

SHERIFF TRENT

Appreciate it.

NICKY

(to Jean)

You leave me the hell alone.

Jean scoffs and sips the soda herself.

NICKY

Cameron didn't do that stuff.

SHERIFF TRENT

You understand the position you put
me in, you protecting him? Whole
town thinks you're a hero, but you
were harboring that boy. Imagine if
that got out.

NICKY

I've known him since we were kids.

SHERIFF TRENT

Boy's been playing some kind of
brain games on you, girl.

NICKY

He's not that way.

He leads her down off the porch with one hand on her back and
the other clutching his beer as he speaks.

SHERIFF TRENT

You know why you always hear on the
news about serial killers making
such good neighbors? Because a
killer like that don't want you to
know they spend their free time
chewing on folks' face meat.

JEAN

That boy got himself run out of
town doing and saying awful things.

SHERIFF TRENT

Not enough evidence to bring
charges against him back then
though, to be fair.

JEAN

Still got himself run out of town.

Nicky snatches the beer out of Sheriff Trent's hand and
pitches it at the front door of Jean's house.

CRASH.

Sheriff Trent shakes his head at the beer mess. *A damn shame.*

NICKY

(to Jean)

Do you really not care about this?

JEAN

Everybody grieves in their own way.

NICKY

(to Sheriff Trent)

What if it wasn't Cameron? What if
it's something else?

SHERIFF TRENT

Some-thing?

Nicky scans the ground, spots a sizable rock, and snatches it
up. Then she looks around frantic and rushes to her car.

Nicky leans over the hood and uses the rock to scratch a
massive symbol of the Underfly into the hood.

JEAN

Oh lord, Nicky.

NICKY

You seen this before?

Sheriff Trent and Jean just stare at her.

NICKY

That's its symbol. It lives in Old
Halsley Wood, and it's been taking
the kids for who knows how long.

SHERIFF TRENT

Have you seen it?

NICKY

There was this hole--

SHERIFF TRENT

I didn't ask about holes. I asked
if you seen it with your own eyes?

NICKY

No, but if you find the right hole--

JEAN

Are you even listening to yourself?

SHERIFF TRENT

So you've never seen it, fine. All
right. What's your proof?

NICKY

This symbol is all over. And the
stuff in the woods--

SHERIFF TRENT

Already been over that.

Nicky gesticulates with the rock in her hand.

NICKY

Even when I was little, kids talked
about it, but I thought it was make-
believe. Only it's not. It's out
there. When you came for Cameron, I
was this close to drawing that
fucking thing out and getting my
girl back. I could feel it.

SHERIFF TRENT

We talking about the Underfly? That
what he said happened to Jordan?

After a moment, Nicky responds with a timid nod.

SHERIFF TRENT

So I'm supposed to believe some
bogeyman's out there and you
haven't seen it or got any proof?

JEAN

Look at your poor car.

Nicky drops the rock.

Sheriff Trent takes her by her shoulders.

SHERIFF TRENT

Ask yourself: is it more likely there's a monster got your daughter out there for five years, or that some sicko filled your head with a bunch of nonsense you just wanted to believe? The same sicko with Jordan's necklace and a whole mess of kid stuff in his trunk too.

JEAN

It's scary not knowing what happened to her, baby. We get that.

Trent leads Nicky to the driver's side of her car.

SHERIFF TRENT

Now I'd love to beat the truth out that boy myself back at the station to ease your burden. But if you don't want the man who took your girl walking, it takes time.

NICKY

And what am I supposed to do?

SHERIFF TRENT

I don't know. Maybe tomorrow you get up, go to work, and try not to swear at the customers. Then spend some time with your husband. Go to church Sunday. Live your life.

(opens her door for her)

And let the law do what she do.

NICKY

Back to being the grieving mother.

SHERIFF TRENT

We all have parts to play.

Trent gives Nicky a patronizing pat on the back.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nicky stands in the flickering light of the television, her gaze fixated on the coffee table.

There, Luke's rifle case lies open, the weapon inside.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - NIGHT

Streetlamps and the Budweiser sign outside The 40 illuminate Main Street, abandoned at this late hour except by Nicky.

She approaches Town Hall with the rifle over her shoulder and her car with the symbol on its hood behind her.

EXT. TOWN HALL - CONTINUOUS

Nicky knocks on the door. She holds the rifle off to the side so it's not visible through the glass.

Dawn appears on the other side of the glass.

Nicky smiles big, innocent.

DAWN
(shouts through the glass)
What you doing here so late?

NICKY
Becky said you left one of your
scratch-offs behind again. Thought
I'd drop it off. Could be a winner!

Nicky produces a scratch-off lottery ticket from her pocket. Dawn lights up at the sight and unlocks the door.

DAWN
Aren't you just a saint?

Nicky pushes her way in.

INT. TOWN HALL - CONTINUOUS

Dawn spots Nicky's rifle and takes a step back.

DAWN
What are you doing with that?

NICKY
Something really fucking stupid.

DAWN
Eadie, hu--!

Nicky lunges and slaps the lottery ticket over Dawn's mouth.

NICKY
None of that now. Where's Eadie?
(off Dawn's head shake)
I'm not looking to shoot you, Dawn.

DAWN
(muffled by the ticket)
You're not?

NICKY
Not yet anyway. Haven't really
thought that far ahead... Sorry.

Nicky slips the lottery ticket into Dawn's pocket.

NICKY
Now where is he?

DAWN
If I'm being perfectly honest...

Nicky nods and points the rifle at Dawn's chin.

DAWN
He'll be off doing a #2 right about
now. The coffee makes him spastic.

NICKY
Then we don't have long, do we?

Nicky shoves Dawn toward a door marked: HOLDING AREA.

INT. TOWN HALL - HOLDING AREA - NIGHT

The holding area is a lifeless, grey-walled space occupied by three holding cells, a desk, and a filing cabinet.

Dawn enters followed by Nicky.

DAWN
Folks will be mad as hell, they
find out you done what you done.

Cameron lies on a thin cot in the nearest cell. He sits up.
His face, clearly battered. Split lip, black eye.

Nicky motions toward his cell.

NICKY
(to Dawn)
You unlock this?

Dawn nods and shuffles toward the desk. Nicky follows.

Dawn opens a drawer wherein lie the keys and handcuffs. Dawn takes the keys and Nicky swipes a pair of cuffs.

CAMERON

You know what you're doing, Nick?

Nicky ushers Dawn toward the cell and passes Cameron the cuffs through the bars.

NICKY

Put these on.

CAMERON

That necessary?

NICKY

(points the rifle at him)

Put them on, Cameron.

Cameron, balks but then cuffs his wrists together anyway. Doesn't take his eyes off Nicky.

NICKY

All right, Dawn. I need you to let him out and then lock yourself in.

DAWN

(unlocking the door)

Yeah, I figured.

DEPUTY EADIE (O.S.)

Dawn, what the hell's--?

Nicky spins and there's Deputy Eadie. Startled, she fires with the barrel inches from the side of Eadie's head. BOOM!

He shrieks. Crumples, hands clutched to the side of his face.

DAWN

Don't kill him!

NICKY

Oh Jesus.

Dawn sees her chance to take the rifle and hops toward Nicky.

But Cameron rushes Dawn. He shoves her against the wall and puts the chains of his cuffs to her throat. Pushes hard.

DEPUTY EADIE

You blew my fucking ear out!

Blood pours down the side of Eadie's face.

NICKY

I'm sorry.

Nicky lifts the rifle overhead and clubs Eadie in the skull.

He goes limp.

Nicky turns to see Dawn now purple. Murder in Cameron's eyes.

Suddenly, Cameron has a rifle barrel in his face.

Nicky just shakes her head at him.

Cameron lets Dawn slump to the floor and she breathes again.

INT./EXT. NICKY'S CAR - NIGHT

Nicky speeds down back roads, rifle in the back seat.

Cameron leans up onto the dashboard, scrutinizes the symbol scratched into Nicky's hood.

CAMERON

That back there was crazy, Nick.

NICKY

You're one to talk.

A police cruiser-- lights flashing, siren blaring-- barrels toward them from the opposite direction. Nicky tenses.

NICKY

Eadie must have woke up.

The cruiser passes. Nicky watches in the rearview mirror and Cameron cranes his neck around. The vehicle stays its course.

CAMERON

They never questioned me. The whole time I was there, not one question. Just kept telling me to confess I took the kids. Over and over.

NICKY

Did you?

Cameron shoots her a dirty look.

She slows the car at the Old Halsley Wood trail. Yellow police tape spans the entrance.

CAMERON
(squirming, panicked)
What the fuck, Nick?

Nicky drives through the police tape and onto the trail.

CAMERON
The sun's not out yet.

NICKY
I know.

Nicky shuts off the car but leaves the high beams on, illuminating the swath of woodland around them.

CAMERON
We need to go. Like fucking now go.

NICKY
We need to talk.

Nicky grabs the rifle from the back seat.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - NIGHT

Nicky leads Cameron, her prisoner now, off the trail.

NICKY
Take me to her.

CAMERON
I can't.

NICKY
Then tell me where she is.

CAMERON
I told you. Please.

NICKY
I trusted you.

CAMERON
It took me too, Nick. I didn't say,
but that's how I know. I was 17.

NICKY
What happened to my baby?

CAMERON
But I got away. Or it didn't want
me... Too old? Maybe. Or... impure.
(MORE)

CAMERON (CONT'D)
I remember thinking maybe it could
smell my father on me.

She stops him with the barrel of the rifle at the edge of the
light provided by Nicky's car.

NICKY
What did you do to her?

CAMERON
Christ, Nicky. You know me.

NICKY
The whole town knows what you are,
Cameron Hart. We all do.

The wind picks up and ROARS through the trees. Branches whip
back and forth. The din of RUSTLING leaves.

CAMERON
Oh, you do, do you? "Cameron the
liar, the queer, child molester"?
How dare you? How fucking dare you!

CRACK. WHOOM. The sound of a falling tree echoes through the
wood and draws Nicky's attention.

Her gaze averted, Cameron sprints toward the road, but she
fires a potshot. BOOM. A chunk of nearby tree explodes.

Cameron topples, covers his head.

NICKY
Up!

CAMERON
(rising to his knees)
I told these hicks the truth and
you were the only one who listened.

A hellish WAIL overwhelms the forest.

But her eyes aflame, fixed on Cameron, Nicky doesn't care.

CAMERON
Oh god.

The WAIL gives way to a low GRUMBLE that grows ever nearer.

NICKY
Just tell me what you did to her.

CAMERON
It's too late.

NICKY

I won't shoot you, Cameron. I won't even. I just need to hear it.

Cameron peers into the darkness of the forest beyond the light. The GRUMBLE almost on top of them.

A stillness washes over Cameron and he sinks to the ground. He wavers and the life drains from his face.

CAMERON

You want me to tell you? You want to hear? Oh... I've got something to tell you, Nicky Paxton who knows what I am... Are you listening?

(with a smirk)

You're never going to get your daughter back. And you're going to die in this place.

Nicky lets out a furious CRY and points the rifle at Cameron.

CAMERON

Do it. Please?

From the darkness beyond the headlights slithers a TENDRIL-- a tentacle or vine, somehow both plant and insect.

Fast, the tendril snakes up and around Cameron's torso.

NICKY

Cameron...?

Nicky and Cameron lock eyes, then WHOOM, the tendril yanks him into the darkness. And with a SCREAM, he's gone.

From the darkness, his SCREAM gives way to a gurgling SQUEAL. Bones CRACKING. A horrible, wet RIPPING and a SPLATTER.

Then all this stops and the GRUMBLE mellow.

Nicky stands alone, frozen in place.

Something soars out of the darkness at her. Slings blood across her clothes and face. She winces.

Nicky wipes blood out of her eyes.

At her feet, Cameron's severed arms, cuffed at the wrists.

Her mouth trembles.

A sudden, ear-piercing WAIL from the trees and Nicky runs for it. Wind tugs at her hair and clothes. The woods RUMBLE.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - TRAIL - CONTINUOUS

Nicky scrambles into her car, tosses the rifle in the back. A tree CRACKS nearby and topples down in front of the car.

INT./EXT. NICKY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Nicky starts the car. Turns her body as near she can to all the way around and floors it in reverse.

As she faces the rear of the car, the bouncing headlights give a glimpse of the UNDERFLY'S CHILDREN amidst foliage.

The car whips out onto the road beyond the woods.

Suddenly, the lights of an oncoming vehicle rush toward her. Its horn blares and headlights swerve.

Nicky's car bounces over the road and crashes to a stop in the ditch opposite the woods.

Up on the road, red and blue flashing lights erupt from the top of the cruiser that almost T-boned her car.

EXT. OLD COUNTY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Nicky tumbles out of her car and clambers out of the ditch.

The cruiser's door opens and Sheriff Trent steps out. His lip bulges with chewing tobacco and he marches up to Nicky.

SHERIFF TRENT

You got a metric shitload of explaining to do! I find myself one prisoner short, and Eadie's like to never hear again if the concussion you gave him don't kill him first.

Nicky stumbles over to Trent and he catches her. Looks her up and down, blood soaking her clothes and face.

SHERIFF TRENT

You didn't kill that boy, did you?

Nicky hurries to the passenger side of the cruiser.

SHERIFF TRENT

That the Hart boy's blood or yours?

NICKY

It was right on my ass, Tom!

The Underfly's WAIL erupts from Old Halsley. Trent whips around toward the trees.

SHERIFF TRENT

God damn.

Trent jumps in the cruiser.

INT./EXT. SHERIFF TRENT'S CRUISER - NIGHT

Trent's cruiser speeds down the road.

Nicky watches Old Halsley rush by out the passenger side.

NICKY

It killed him, Tom. Just tore him apart like he weren't a thing.

SHERIFF TRENT

You see it, the thing that did it?

Nicky trembles, eyes fixed on the woods, oblivious to him.

Trent slaps the dash and Nicky jumps, startled.

SHERIFF TRENT

Snap to, girl. Hear? What happened?

NICKY

I saw it. But not the whole of it.

SHERIFF TRENT

How do you know it's a something and not a someone?

NICKY

It was a tentacle or a vine maybe. Just reached out of the woods and snatched him up like he didn't weigh a thing. And he kept screaming and screaming. The sound of it... and his arms...

Nicky peels the bloody clothes away from her torso.

NICKY

It butchered him.

SHERIFF TRENT

I need you to tell me, what was it?

NICKY

The Underfly.

Trent snatches the police radio handset from the center column. Holds the button down to speak into it.

SHERIFF TRENT
Dawn, you there?

Dawn's voice comes over the radio, hoarse but recognizable.

DAWN (V.O.)
Yeah, Tom. You find her?

SHERIFF TRENT
I need you to call a town meeting.

DAWN (V.O.)
It ain't even six yet.

SHERIFF TRENT
Yeah, I got two eyes and a clock,
Dawn. Call it in and let Joshua
know me and Nicky are on our way.

DAWN (V.O.)
You got it, Sheriff.

Trent replaces the handset.

NICKY
A town meeting?

SHERIFF TRENT
We got to let folks know.

Trent grabs a half-full cup of chewing tobacco spit from the cup holder and spits into it.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

The church looms tall over the empty parking lot, aglow in the morning sunlight. Trent's cruiser whips into the lot.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Nicky and Trent enter the church, otherwise empty except for Pastor Joshua, who rushes down the aisle toward them.

PASTOR JOSHUA
Dawn called it in. I do so hope
we've coffee enough for everyone.

At the sight of Nicky, Joshua stumbles and almost falls.

SHERIFF TRENT
Blood's not hers.

PASTOR JOSHUA
Oh... I see.

Joshua puts a hand on Nicky's shoulder.

PASTOR JOSHUA
We'll get you something to change
into from the clothing drive.

Joshua leads Nicky away from Trent.

INT. CHURCH - BATHROOM - DAY

Blood spots the bathroom sink. The running water washes some of it away.

Bloody rags fill the waste basket.

Nicky dries herself off with paper towels, but blood still cakes her hair and lingers on her ears. Specks on her face.

She slips into a clean shirt, then stares at the bloody mess before her.

INT. LUKE AND NICKY'S HOUSE - DAY

The empty rifle case lays open on the table.

Luke paces, bags under his eyes from lack of sleep.

The phone RINGS in the other room.

INT. CHURCH - DINING HALL - DAY

Long tables fill the small dining hall. On a counter by the door sits coffee enough for everyone. Pre-packaged pastries.

Deputy Barry and Ed Sheatley fix themselves coffee.

Nicky sits alone, shell-shocked.

Jean bursts in with Trent close behind. She rushes over to Nicky and wraps her arms around her.

ED
What's this about, Tom?

SHERIFF TRENT

We'll get started soon, Ed. Just
you go on out with the others.

Ed glares at Nicky until Deputy Barry leads him away.

INT./EXT. LUKE'S TRUCK - DAY

Luke drives alongside Old Halsley Wood. The front end of
Nicky's car sticks up out of the ditch. Headlights still on.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

Luke slides down into the ditch.

He approaches the car and grimaces at the symbol of the
Underfly carved into the hood.

Through a window, he spots the rifle in the back seat. He
opens the door and the vehicle DINGS, keys in the ignition.

LUKE

(examining the rifle)
What you been shooting at?

The surrounding woodland answers back with a WHISTLE of wind.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Jean and Trent lead Nicky into the congregation hall.

Near the pulpit, some 35 community members mill about or sit
in pews. Pastor Joshua stands at the front of the group.

In addition to Barry and Ed, those attending include Wendy,
Dawn, Phil the pharmacist, and even Bill, among others.

Dawn adjusts the scarf that partly conceals her bruised neck.

Pastor Joshua waves Jean, Trent, and Nicky over. The three of
them approach and Trent points to the entrance.

SHERIFF TRENT

Barry.

Barry trots down the aisle to the door and locks up.

Nicky watches in confusion as Trent rubs her shoulder.

SHERIFF TRENT

Just in case.

Everyone sits save for Nicky, Trent, Jean, and Joshua.

Joshua hurries up to the pulpit.

Trent guides Nicky to the floor space between pew and pulpit.

SHERIFF TRENT

Looks like most everyone's here.

NICKY

I thought this was a town meeting.

SHERIFF TRENT

Go on, tell everyone what you saw
and about the sound of it. Don't
leave anything out either.

With her back to the pulpit, Nicky does not see Pastor Joshua drape a pulpit scarf over the lectern.

On the pulpit scarf: THE SYMBOL OF THE UNDERFLY.

INT. BILL'S HOUSE - DAY

BANGING at the front door. Beams of light stream in through cracks between the blankets hung up as makeshift curtains.

KRYSTAL (O.S.)

Bill! You going to get that?

Krystal enters, in a giant tee and sporting serious bedhead.

KRYSTAL

Bill?

Krystal opens the front door to find Luke there.

KRYSTAL

Man, fuck off. She's not here.

LUKE

I think she's in trouble.

KRYSTAL

You planning on wife-beating her or
something? Because I'm bigger than
you and I'll fuck your shit up.

LUKE

Something's wrong. No joke.

KRYSTAL

Let me go put my contacts in.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Those at the meeting listen to Nicky's story, enraptured.

NICKY

...that's when it reached out and took him. Tore him apart. I know it sounds crazy like I'm making it up.

PHIL

That's something, that is.

NICKY

It's all true. I didn't do that to Cameron. I couldn't.

SHERIFF TRENT

We believe you.

NICKY

(turning to Trent)
About... everything though? I tried to talk to you about this thing before, but you--

SHERIFF TRENT

I know and I'm sorry. But that's why we're holding this meeting.

Ed Sheatley raises his hand.

ED

Tell us about its vines. How'd it move? And it have a color to it?

NICKY

It was like some kind of... wait...

JEAN

Leave her be. She's still shook up.

NICKY

(to Jean, pointing at Ed)
I just said it reached out and took him. I didn't say about the vine.

DAWN

Not like you haven't heard about its tendrils a hundred times before, Ed Sheatley.

Trent steps into the aisle in front of Nicky, surrounded by those in the pews.

SHERIFF TRENT

Nicky Paxton, it is now my duty as an elected representative of this community to inform you that you are not alone in this discovery.

Nicky reels at this and scans the unfazed-to-ecstatic faces of those before her, appalled.

NICKY

You knew it was out there and treated me like I was nuts? Why? And Cameron... What it did to him. And you made me think he took her.

JEAN

We can explain.

Jean tries to hold Nicky, but she shakes her mother off.

NICKY

(to Jean)

No, no, no. You too? You didn't.

Trent holds his arms out.

SHERIFF TRENT

It's just us in this room, Nicky. And a few more who didn't make it.

ED

You be grateful. Not everyone lucky enough to find their way to Him.

NICKY

My friend got ripped apart by that fucking thing.

PASTOR JOSHUA (O.S.)

Cameron Hart was not one of us.

Nicky turns and at last spies the Underfly-themed pulpit scarf. She YELPS and her hands shoot up to her mouth.

SHERIFF TRENT

We all find out in our own way. But the roads we take to Him have to be our own. He has to show Himself to you, welcome you to the fold Himself. Elsewise I'd have told you myself. But that's also why we had to do something about the Hart boy.

All eyes on Nicky. She meets their gaze with red eyes.

NICKY

You were going to kill him.

SHERIFF TRENT

Jesus, no. Somehow or other he come to know about the Underfly, but he didn't keep quiet. Wanted to show you and that's just not how things is done. Had to charge him with the disappearances or risk everything we've built up here.

NICKY

He was a sacrifice.

SHERIFF TRENT

Legally-speaking. Just didn't count on you finishing him off permanent.

Nicky lets out a SHARP CRY.

PASTOR JOSHUA

Some sacrifices have to be made for the good of the community.

JEAN

And you're part of the community now, baby!

Nicky stumbles away from the congregation and puts the pews between them. She never takes her eyes off the lot.

DAWN

More and more find their way to Him all the time.

NICKY

The fuck are you talking about?

PASTOR JOSHUA

(holds his hands aloft)

The Sacred Order of the Underfly!

SHERIFF TRENT

Oh, hush. Ain't nobody but you calling us that, Joshua.

Nicky trembles, pointing to Trent and Jean interchangeably.

NICKY

Cameron. Was he right about Jordan?

Trent approaches with hands held out, palms toward the floor. A pacification tactic.

SHERIFF TRENT

Can't rightly say, honestly. We don't intervene in its affairs.

JEAN

Its ways aren't our own. Nothing else like it anywhere. It's a god!

SHERIFF TRENT

If Jordan's with Him, she's safe. I promise you that.

PASTOR JOSHUA

She's a child of the Underfly.

NICKY

(to Wendy)

And your boy too...?

(off Wendy's nod)

I'm... I'm going to go. Okay? I want to go now and... find Jordan.

Nicky backs away further. Her hands clutch at the pews.

JEAN

You'll see the light, I promise. It was hard for me to accept too.

NICKY

That thing took your granddaughter!

JEAN

Like Pastor Joshua says: His methods may confuse us but He loves in a way we could never understand.

NICKY

What does it want with the kids?

SHERIFF TRENT

Ain't like we can just go and ask it. Far as we know, it's only ever just looked after them. And maybe that seems bad to you now, but the Underfly ain't meaning no harm.

NICKY

What the fuck are you saying? It tore Cameron to little fucking bitty bits, Tom. And what if somebody wanders into the woods at night? You think they're safe?

DAWN
We put up a fence.

BILL
A whole mess of "No Trespassing"
signs too.

PASTOR JOSHUA
The Underfly is love, Nicole.

Trent winds around the pews toward Nicky.

She slinks toward the door, keeping her distance from Trent.

DAWN
"These gifts He does not bestow on
the wealthy or privileged alone."

Amen. PASTOR JOSHUA ED
The Underfly is life.

Nicky scurries into an empty pew to further distance herself.

NICKY
You're all fucking crazy.

Trent motions for the others to stop what they're doing.

SHERIFF TRENT

You all just shut the hell up and act like normal folk for a minute. Scaring the poor girl to death.

(to Nicky)

Here's the way of it, okay: the Underfly's a thing what lives in the woods. Maybe always has. Looking after young ones seems to keep it happy-- or at least staying in Old Halsley-- so we leave it be.

Suddenly, Nicky snatches a few hymnals from the back of a pew and hurls them at Trent and the others.

She breaks for the door, but Deputy Barry blocks her way.

Trent motions to a few of the menfolk. They surround her but keep their distance.

SHERIFF TRENT
It's terrible important we see eye-
to-eye here.

JEAN

The Underfly chose Jordan, Nicky.
Try and see what an honor that is.

NICKY

I'm getting my girl back and you
psychos aren't going to stop me.

PASTOR JOSHUA

We won't tolerate the intolerant.

Cheers of agreement from the congregation.

SHERIFF TRENT

Shut your god damn mouth, Joshua!

Gasps and murmurs.

Trent steps close to Nicky, lowers his voice.

SHERIFF TRENT

If you can't be reasonable, I have
to detain you. But it's my duty and
I'm real sorry about that.

NICKY

What will you charge me with?

SHERIFF TRENT

You're not reading me. If you walk
away from this, you're just another
face on a flyer beside your little
girl's. We can't use you to keep
folks away from the Underfly like
we aimed to do with the Hart boy.

NICKY

So that's the justice y'all preach.

SHERIFF TRENT

I uphold a higher law.

Trent gives a circular wave and addresses the congregation.

SHERIFF TRENT

Take it easy. No need to be cruel.

Bill, Ed, Phil, and the other men close in on Nicky.

A sudden BOOM BOOM BOOM on the door and everyone freezes.

SHERIFF TRENT

Barry. On me.

He and Barry creep to the door, unholstering their pistols.

SHERIFF TRENT
(hollering)
Who's out there?

No reply and Trent nods.

Barry opens the door, slow and easy.

Before they can see who's outside--

BOOM! Trent falls with a brand new, bloody hole in his leg.

SHERIFF TRENT
Son of a bitch!

Outside stands Luke with smoking rifle in hand. He slams into the door, and it knocks Barry aside.

Luke takes aim and SHOOTs BARRY in the shoulder. Barry collapses with a HOWL and his gun CLATTERS to the floor.

Trent writhes in agony and Luke grabs his pistol from him.

Luke waves the gun at the others who keep their distance.

DEPUTY BARRY
That shitbag shot me, Tom!

SHERIFF TRENT
Quiet, Barry.

LUKE
Don't nobody get uppity. I'm just
here for my old lady.

Nicky slips through the ranks of the congregation to Luke's side. They watch her with disgust.

SHERIFF TRENT
You screwed yourself here, boy.
Where you going to go now, huh?

LUKE
Remember I only shot you in the
leg, Tom. I didn't want to neither.

SHERIFF TRENT
Then why the hell did you?

LUKE
Just remember I didn't kill nobody!

Krystal hurries in and grabs hold of Nicky.

NICKY

Let's get out of this nuthouse.

BILL

(to Krystal)

You here with him? What line's this son of a bitch been feeding you?

KRYSTAL

We heard y'all creepy fucks talking from out there, Bill.

BILL

Shit, Krys.

Krystal gives Bill the finger as Nicky pulls her outside.

PASTOR JOSHUA

Lucas. The righteous know when to--

LUKE

Don't talk church at me.

NICKY (O.S.)

Luke! Let's go.

LUKE

And don't open this door before we're down the road either.

Luke maneuvers himself outside and closes the door.

EXT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Luke joins Nicky and Krystal at the top of the steps. His truck sits with its bed facing the steps for easy escape.

Luke rams his rifle through the door handles as a barricade.

Nicky puts her ear to the door.

NICKY

They're talking about rushing us.

LUKE

Get back, babe.

Nicky steps away from the door.

Luke raises Trent's pistol and puts a couple rounds through the door. SCREAMS from within.

BILL (O.S.)
Jesus. God damn.

SHERIFF TRENT (O.S.)
I said stay back! Someone check if
she breathing.

Luke peeks in through one of the holes in the door.

LUKE
I'm sorry, hear? But I told you--

SHERIFF TRENT (O.S.)
You best run, boy.

Nicky takes off for the truck. Krystal follows.

Luke hollers on his way down the steps:

LUKE
Krystal, here. You shoot better
than you drive?

KRYSTAL
Can't shoot for shit.

LUKE
(holds up his keys)
You drive then. Nicky and I'll
handle anyone who follows.

Krystal nods and moves toward Luke at the rear of the truck.

INT. LUKE'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Nicky scoots into the middle of the bench seat and glances
back just as Luke hands Krystal the keys.

Then Nicky turns forward, facing away from them.

Suddenly, Luke PUTS THE GUN TO KRYSTAL'S HEAD and BOOM!

Nicky screams and ducks.

The shot sprays chunks of Krystal all over the back window
and her lifeless body collapses into the truck bed.

She scrambles into the driver's seat but, of course, no keys.

The door swings wide and Luke's there. He PISTOL WHIPS her.

Everything goes black.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - DAY

Nicky's head lay in the dirt, dry blood pooled below the break in her face from Luke's attack. Her eyes flicker open.

She tries to sit but winces and drags a hand up to her face.

NICKY
What the hell...?

Nicky rolls onto her back and looks up at treetops and a cloudless, dusk sky overhead.

LUKE (O.S.)
Right off the bat, I want to say
I'm sorry. You know I wouldn't have
hit you if I didn't have to, right?

Nicky groans.

LUKE (O.S.)
But they were ready to crucify you.

Nicky pulls herself up into a sitting position.

Luke squats before her. Behind him, KRYSTAL'S CORPSE hangs from a tree, a massive hole where her face used to be.

Nicky SHOUTS angry and incoherent, at the sight.

LUKE
(looking back at Krystal)
Got the idea from you, actually.
When you took my deer.

NICKY
Why?

LUKE
Well... I want you to see the
Underfly. To know it like I do.

NICKY
So we're in...

LUKE
Yup! Sun's setting. Then it'll
come.

NICKY
You knew about all this.

Luke stands and moves in to touch her face, but she shies away from him.

LUKE

Can't tell you how bad I wanted to tell you. After Jordan, I just had to sit there watching you and me fall apart. But... the congregation has its ways.

NICKY

You knew that thing had our baby?

LUKE

Not the whole time, no. Knew you'd be bitter as shit about it when you found out though. And I knew what the congregation would do to you.

Nicky stands and stumbles past Luke to Krystal. She sobs.

LUKE

When I heard they had you, I knew you wouldn't join them. Can't get you to do the fucking dishes, and they're going to get you up and worshipping the Underfly? Hell.

NICKY

You didn't have to kill her.

LUKE

I needed something to keep it busy long enough for you to see. And it couldn't be anyone from the congregation. They're particular about that. Otherwise, you bet your ass it'd be Bill hanging up there.

Without warning, Nicky picks up a rock and heaves it at Luke.

He spins and it bounces off his back. Then he turns back with Trent's pistol drawn on her.

LUKE

The Underfly's better than us, and when you see that, we won't have to hide from each other anymore. We can just be Luke and Nicky again, like in high school. You'll see.

Luke smiles at her with the gun trained on her even still; Nicky fumes, bleeding from her face.

EXT. OLD COUNTY ROAD - NIGHT

Night blankets Decatur and Old Halsley Wood. The only daylight remaining: a sliver of orange on the horizon.

A police cruiser pulls up to the trail.

Jean gets out of the driver's seat and Trent almost falls out of the passenger's with a crutch, his wounded leg bandaged.

Another cruiser pulls up behind them, followed by a half dozen other vehicles.

Trent hobbles up to the trail entrance with Jean at his side.

His deputies and the rest of the congregation file out of the other vehicles and gather round.

SHERIFF TRENT

Too late to go in after them.

BILL

What do we do then?

SHERIFF TRENT

Wait until they come running or we hear Him take care of them for us.

Jean clasps her hands as if in prayer.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - NIGHT

Moonlight cuts through the treetops.

Luke squeezes Nicky to his chest, pistol almost pressed to her head. He watches the woods beyond Krystal's body.

Nicky glares at the pistol out of the corner of her eye.

LUKE

They always talk about Him but most of them only seen Him the once. Too afraid to peek again. But not me.

NICKY

Let's go home, Luke.

The WAIL of the Underfly disrupts the peace of the woods.

Suddenly, shapes and shadows among the trees spring to life and a TENDRIL snatches Krystal's body up into the treetops.

LUKE
(gasps)
Look at it, Nicky. Just look.

In the moonlight there, Nicky sees it: THE UNDERFLY at last.

An impossibly tall horror at once plant, insect, and cephalopod with an uncannily humanoid gait.

It pulls Krystal apart with ease and Nicky looks away.

LUKE
No! You need to see this.

Luke pockets the pistol, grabs Nicky by the hair, and forces her to look. She tries to wriggle free but he's strong.

The Underfly's WAIL gives way to its GRUMBLING.

LUKE
Ever seen anything so beautiful?

The UNDERFLY'S CHILDREN appear, emaciated and draped in rags.

LUKE
Look how it cares for them.

The children set upon Krystal's shredded corpse like animals.

LUKE
He is love! Don't you see that now?

Luke smiles at his wife, her eyes fixed on the Underfly.

The Underfly shifts direction and ambles through the children toward Luke and Nicky.

With Luke's arms around her, she has nowhere to go though.

LUKE
Do you see?

Nicky claws Luke in the eyes and he stumbles off, SCREAMING.

Nicky spies a large hollow in a tree trunk some yards away, sprints to it, and jams her body inside.

Luke just stands there, rubbing at his eyes.

LUKE
Nicky!

Luke opens his eyes to find the Underfly towering over him.

It WAILS.

Luke pisses his pants and SHRIEKS.

Its tendrils wrap up Luke's legs, yank him up into the air and rip him in half, groin to shoulder-- a human wishbone.

EXT. OLD COUNTY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The congregation stand at the entrance to the woods. The WAIL of the Underfly washing over them.

SHERIFF TRENT

Would you listen to that, Jeanie?

JEAN

Beautiful.

Trent takes Jean's hand in his.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - CONTINUOUS

More children pour out of the foliage to feed on Luke. Some run their hands along the Underfly's leg stalks as they go.

The Underfly GRUNTS and plods out of sight.

Then, JORDAN EMERGES.

Nicky gasps but covers her mouth.

Jordan clutches a two-year-old girl to her chest and a four-year-old hangs from her back.

Nicky watches as the children devour Luke and Krystal.

Jordan helps young ones wrench meat from her father's bones.

The kids gorge themselves.

Once full, they laugh and dance and play with the remains, making dolls from hair and bone or smashing bones together.

All the while, the Underfly's tendrils writhe through the children's play space.

It caresses them and embraces them.

This is the Underfly's love.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - LATER

Sunrise nears.

The Underfly's children lounge around the bloody swath of woods littered with Luke and Krystal's remains.

Some nibble on the remains.

Others play lackadaisically.

Jordan and a few others pick nits out of each other's hair.

Nicky shivers in her tree trunk, her gaze focused on Jordan.

Suddenly, a YAWP from the Underfly.

The children perk up.

Without instruction, the kids gather any human remains they can carry. The young ones who came with Jordan rejoin her.

Then they all wander off in the same direction.

Nicky crawls out of the tree, surveys the grisly scene, and watches the children vanish into the trees.

Nicky hesitates over a pile of human meat, then crouches and sticks her hand in.

She produces a bloody CHUNK OF OFFAL and nearly vomits.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - DAY

Fully morning now and Nicky trails the children, careful to keep her distance. She uses blood from the human meat she carries to mark her way on the trees.

The children approach a large hole, like a doorway, cut into the side of a hill, beset on all sides by an arc of brambles.

The entrance to THE UNDERFLY'S LAIR.

Nicky watches the children file into the hole and waits.

EXT. THE UNDERFLY'S LAIR - DAY

Nicky approaches the bramble archway and peers inside, this hole larger than the centipede trap. A tunnel large enough to crouch in.

INT. THE UNDERFLY'S LAIR - CONTINUOUS

Nicky creeps inside and blinks to adjust her eyes.

The sloping corridor before her soon becomes branching paths. She looks down each path. Nothing but darkness.

NICKY

Damn it.

Nicky hurries back out into the daylight.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - DAY

Nicky follows her blood markings back through the wood at a sprint. Blood and dirt up to her elbows.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - TRAIL - DAY

Nicky runs past Luke's truck and toward the old county road.

EXT. OLD COUNTY ROAD - DAY

The congregation has gone. Nicky emerges from the trail, beelines for her car in the ditch.

EXT. ROADSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Nicky opens the trunk and retrieves the hand-crank lantern from her emergency car kit. Then she searches out the hatchet under the passenger seat.

INT. THE UNDERFLY'S LAIR - DAY

Nicky re-enters with her lantern aglow and the hatchet. She gives the lantern a few more cranks for safety.

The walls of the tunnel resemble no natural formation. They instead appear carved into the Earth in accordance with some sort of otherworldly architectural philosophy.

Nicky traces a finger along the wall. She finds it slick with the same sap-like fluid as before that sizzles on her skin.

She wipes it on her pants and moves on.

When she arrives at the branching paths, she chooses the one with the greatest slope beyond.

INT. THE UNDERFLY'S LAIR - CORRIDORS - DAY

Nicky winds her way down the corridors.

She stops at a fork. Holds the lantern out in each direction, gives it a few cranks. No discernible difference between the paths, so she hurries down one at random.

Fork after fork, again and again. She makes split-second decisions, each corridor identical to the last.

Suddenly, the ground opens up beneath her and SHE FALLS.

INT. THE UNDERFLY'S LAIR - CAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Nicky plummets into a cavern and lands on her back with a wet CRUNCH. It knocks the wind out of her, she drops the hatchet.

Nicky heaves for air.

The hole she fell from looms visible in the dying lantern light fifteen feet overhead.

Finally, the air returns to her lungs and Nicky's face contorts. Something she smells. She dry heaves and covers her nose and mouth with her forearm.

She bolts upright and cranks the lantern. She swings it around to find the source of the smell and discovers...

A massive mound of tiny human corpses beneath her.

Nicky HOLLERS and tumbles down the side of the mound.

She scrambles to the cavern wall and surveys the corpses. There's a logic to their stacking, a ceremonial symmetry.

She weeps at the sight. Her entire body retches.

The corpses at the bottom are rag and bone, long ago rotted away. The few at the top, mere months gone maybe.

Many appear nearly torn in half from the groin up.

No telling if the injury served as cause of death or was sustained post-mortem.

Nicky finds the hatchet and skirts along the outside of the mound until she finds a crawl space leading out of the cavern.

INT. THE UNDERFLY'S LAIR - CORRIDORS - DAY

Nicky drags herself out of the crawl space into a corridor.

Dolls and tokens surround the crawl space entrance to the burial cavern, like some sort of memorial.

Nicky pulls herself to her feet and hurries away.

Frantic glances down the corridors behind her as she goes.

INT. THE UNDERFLY'S LAIR - OUTER SANCTUM - DAY

Nicky rounds a bend and is beset on either side by a series of rudimentary totems and etchings in the wall.

Here, the walls themselves emit a constant, unnatural light.

Countless centipedes scurry underfoot and overhead.

The totems depict the Underfly and its children along with childish symbols of love. Bones-- animal and human-- lay in piles at the foot of each totem.

An opening at the end of the hall of totems leads into a dome-like room beyond: the Underfly's inner sanctum.

INT. THE UNDERFLY'S LAIR - INNER SANCTUM - DAY

The walls emit the same unnatural light as the hall before, only here the walls surge with that viscous fluid. The substance flows from floor to ceiling.

Nicky enters this largest of chambers and finds the children asleep in bunches along the outer edges.

In the center, Luke and Krystal's remains piled in a vessel.

Opposite the entrance looms a hellish, ornate archway. And beyond that, the Underfly's tendrils writhe in a void.

Nicky slips in among the children, scanning faces for Jordan.

Every face in the first bunch recognizable from a missing persons flyer. But none of them Jordan.

On to the next bunch and Nicky's lantern light disturbs one of the kids, but they do not wake.

Nicky steps back a pace. Again though, no Jordan.

She moves quick to the next group. Face after face, no sign of Jordan.

Nicky stifles a cry. She pauses, chokes it down, continues.

Only, she turns around and freezes immediately.

Not another bunch of children here.

Instead, she stands mere yards from the hellish archway... and the Underfly itself.

She stands petrified in the face of the Underfly's immensity, its hypnotic undulation.

Visions of another realm entirely peek through its writhing tendrils, as if Nicky and the Underfly stand on opposite sides of a rift between worlds.

She wavers and almost collapses, but her arms go limp and the hatchet gouges into her leg.

The pain shakes her from her stupor, and she averts her eyes.

Doesn't look back. *Mustn't look back.*

She tiptoes to the other side of the chamber. A bunch of younger children there. Four- and five-year-olds.

Amidst the younger ones lies one much older: Jordan.

Nicky steps into the group, careful not to tread on them.

A pair of kids rest their heads on Jordan herself. Nicky puts the hatchet in her waistband, shifts the kids off Jordan slow and gentle, and pries Jordan from the bunch.

Nicky hoists her up face-to-face. Jordan's eyes blink open.

NICKY
(whispering)
Hi, baby girl.

Jordan sort of smiles. Something like recognition in it.

Then, a little one awakens. And at the sight of Nicky, the child lets out a feral HOWL to alert the others.

The Underfly too STIRS. Its tendrils spill out of the void and wrap around the archway exterior, mirroring the shape of the symbol Nicky's seen all around Decatur.

Nicky rushes out with Jordan in her arms and the children give chase.

INT. THE UNDERFLY'S LAIR - CORRIDORS - CONTINUOUS

Nicky sprints through the corridors. The children WHOOP and HOWL behind her in their pursuit.

The lantern flickers. No cranking it now that she has Jordan.

Nicky strains to see through Jordan's gnarled hair. They reach a fork in the path. No difference between the options.

NICKY
Which way, baby?

Jordan offers no help, so Nicky makes a choice at random, and then another at the next fork and another.

The Underfly WAILS and the tunnel WALLS BEGIN TO CLOSE IN.

Nicky rounds a corner. A handful of children scurry toward her like animals, and she turns back.

At the previous fork she makes another choice.

Suddenly, a child pops up in front of them. It SHRIEKS and Nicky, startled, instinctively swings the hatchet.

The child flops aside lifeless to the floor.

NICKY
Oh my God!

Jordan BAWLS and struggles against Nicky. Reaches out toward her de facto sibling, still and bloody on the ground.

NICKY
Baby, I'm sorry. I didn't--

The walls shift inward with a RUMBLE.

Nicky looks at the branching pathways ahead and one closes up entirely. The others contract.

Then the lantern flickers rapid and blinks out.

Utter darkness.

Just the sounds of Jordan, and Nicky trying to comfort her with a constant "shh."

Then, the walls around them light up, incandescent like in the Underfly's sanctum.

Nicky drops the lantern and sees the Underfly, or parts of it anyway, surge toward them. Its children lead the charge.

Jordan reaches for the other children. WHIMPERS.

NICKY
Mommy's got you.

Nicky clutches the thrashing Jordan to her chest and turns away from their pursuers.

Jordan claws at her, but Nicky pushes on into the blackness of the corridors ahead, effectively blind until suddenly...

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - CONTINUOUS

Nicky bursts out into the daylight with Jordan in her arms.

Jordan claws at Nicky's eyes and HOWLS.

NICKY
No, baby, no. I'm so, so sorry.
Mommy was just scared. I got you.

Jordan tears a handful of hair from Nicky's scalp and Nicky loses hold of the girl.

Jordan topples to the ground and scurries back into the lair.

Nicky hurries back to the entrance in time to see the Underfly embrace Jordan.

Then the lair's entrance contracts and vanishes with a SIGH.

Nicky screams.

She raises the hatchet high overhead and hacks at the ground where the tunnel had been.

Swings again and again and again to no avail.

She drops the hatchet and digs and digs with her hands until her fingers bleed.

No matter how deep she goes though, no tunnel.

No Jordan.

No Underfly.

No hope.

Nicky slumps over onto her side: alone, dirty, bloody, beaten, and WAILS in despair.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - LATER

Nicky shuffles through the forest, eyes glazed over.

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY

A house sits at the edge of the woods, the entire back wall that faces the trees long ago torn away by the Underfly.

Nicky approaches the hole that is the back of the house.

Long-rotted human remains lie scattered around inside.

The walls painted in long-dried blood.

Nicky pulls herself up into the hole and tumbles onto the floor of what was once a family room.

She sits on the couch beside a partial corpse in a dress and lets the wind WHISPER her to sleep.

FADE TO:

EXT. SHORT STOP CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

SUPER: SIX MONTHS LATER

Decatur. Just as it was before.

Phil sits in his usual spot outside the pharmacy.

A police cruiser pulls up in front of Short Stop. Phil waves.

Sheriff Trent climbs out of the cruiser. He waves back to Phil and limps on into the shop. DING.

INT. SHORT STOP CONVENIENCE STORE - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Trent limps in. He passes the bulletin board up front, still awash with missing persons flyers.

Many new flyers join those from six months ago. Flyers for the likes of Luke, Krystal, and Cameron hang alongside old, yellowed flyers of the Underfly's children.

The flyer for Jordan still hangs there too.

Trent pulls something from his pocket. He leans on the counter and taps whatever's in his hand against the register.

A RUSTLING comes from behind a door marked "EMPLOYEES ONLY."

Nicky emerges from the back and waggles her finger at him.

NICKY

You aiming to rot a hole straight
through that jaw of yours, coming
here twice a week to buy dip.

SHERIFF TRENT

(chuckling)

Naw. I want to show you something
and get your honest opinion. Picked
this up for your mother.

He slides the velvet ring box to her and she opens it.

Nicky looks from Trent to the ring inside and back to Trent.

NICKY

You're kidding.

Trent shakes his head.

Nicky rushes around the counter and hugs him.

NICKY

Decatur's most eligible bachelor,
settling down at last.

SHERIFF TRENT

Hold your horses. She ain't said
"yes" yet.

NICKY

When you asking her?

SHERIFF TRENT

Tonight. Over dinner.

Nicky returns the ring box and Trent pockets it.

NICKY

I'll be over afterward then to help
her start planning. 8? 9 maybe?

SHERIFF TRENT

Don't you think that's a bit...
premature?

NICKY

Seriously? Mom will have the date
picked out before dinner's through
and she'll be pricing venues and
florists while you do the dishes.

SHERIFF TRENT

You ought to come over then, yeah.

NICKY

You know I'm not going to call you
"Dad" though, right?

He tousles her hair like she's a child and she swats at him.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Service is either over or yet to begin. Parishioners mingle.

Amid the crowd stands Sheriff Tom Trent with his arm around Jean's shoulder. Beside them: Nicky.

Dawn and a couple other women admire Jean's ring, then Dawn reaches up and pinches Trent's cheek.

Nicky smiles and laughs.

Ed Sheatley of all people emerges from the crowd and wraps his arms around Nicky in an awkward sort of hug.

INT. ~~LUKE AND~~ NICKY'S HOUSE - DAY

Nicky crosses the living room, now free of Luke's stuff. The microwave cart's been upgraded to an actual TV stand.

Flowery throw pillows decorate the couch and a basic "Live Laugh Love" sign hangs on the wall.

Nicky tosses her work smock on the couch and heads into the

KITCHEN

Where she sets a red picnic basket decorated in strawberries out on the counter.

Then she opens the fridge.

Nicky leans inside and latches her arms onto something big and heavy. GRUNTS as she attempts to pull it out.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - DAY

A rope draped over a tree branch. The branch worn as if it's had rope pulled over the top of it many, many time before.

The rope SCRAPES across the branch inch-by-inch until a massive slab of beef dangles from it just off the ground.

At the other end of the rope, Nicky pulls and hoists up the meat like Luke's deer and Krystal before it.

EXT. OLD COUNTY ROAD - NIGHT

Sun sets on the road that runs alongside Old Halsley Wood.

Nicky's car sits on the opposite shoulder. The symbol of the Underfly's been buffed out of the hood, but she never bothered to have it repainted.

Nicky retrieves the picnic basket from the car, then climbs onto the hood and sits cross-legged there.

She lifts the cover of the basket and produces a sandwich. Just picks at it as the sky grows dark. No real bites.

Suddenly, the woods tremble with the WAIL of the Underfly.

EXT. OLD HALSLEY WOOD - CONTINUOUS

The beef hangs just visible through the trees on the other side of the fence and "NO TRESPASSING" signs.

The Underfly's children emerge from the brush and tear into the meat.

Its tendrils wind into the space and meander up into the trees. It frames the children sweetly in its nightmarish appendages, a Lovecraftian family portrait.

Then Jordan emerges from the pack with a handful of meat and a much smaller child at her side.

Jordan takes a few steps toward the fence, looks out at her mother beyond and jams the meat into her chomping, feral maw.

EXT. OLD COUNTY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Nicky takes a delicate, civilized bite of her sandwich in kind and smiles at her baby girl, so happy she could cry.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END