

EXT. RIDGE - PRE-DAWN

A MAN of about forty and a BOY of eight are asleep, camped on a tarp under a rock ledge, the blackened chasm of a burnt valley spread out below. They are both emaciated and exhausted, their faces and hands coated in grime and soot from the burned, blackened landscape around them. Their hair is greasy and straggly and the MAN has a scraggly beard. Dirty black rain falls with a CLATTER on the tarp, which is bright blue, the only color in sight. The MAN is woken by something, he instinctively reaches out to touch the BOY, his hand rests on his chest and rises and falls with each of the sleeping BOY's breaths.

There is a low RUMBLE, the ground starts to TREMBLE and the BOY wakes.

BOY.

Papa? (NO REPLY.) Papa?

MAN.

Shh. It's okay.

BOY.

What is it, Papa?

They listen as it grows NEARER and LOUDER, everything SHAKING, tree roots GROANING and SPLITTING, until it passes between them with a ROAR like a subway train right beneath them. The BOY is now clinging to the MAN and crying, his head buried against his chest in fear.

MAN.

Shh. It's all right. It's all right.
It's gone

BOY.

What was it, Papa?

MAN.

It was an earthquake.

OPENING CREDITS:

EXT. CORN FIELD - DAY

The intense BUZZING of summer insects and the SONG of songbirds. A birds eye view of a bucolic mid west farming landscape, corn field, blue skies, sunshine, a FARMER PLOUGHING a nearby field with a TRACTOR, grain silos and a hay stack.

The camera descends on a lake surrounded by the stumps of shorn birch trees, two MEN are sawing a tree down with chain saws. The camera glides across the lake and catches up with a MAN smoking a cob pipe in a little BOAT with an outboard, a BIRCH STUMP jerking along behind him on a rope creating a swell in the water. It travels up a nearby dirt road to a clapboard house with an apple orchard, FRUIT PICKERS picking APPLES and putting them in pails.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

FLASHBACK - A warm night, the same MAN - a few years younger, short haired, without the beard - is asleep with his pregnant WIFE, no sheets on the bed. The MAN is restless and wakes. A distant RUMBLING, indistinct - the MAN swings his feet off of the bed and goes to the window, anxious.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

The MAN is in his shorts, sweating, putting a plug in the bath and turning on the taps as far as they will go. His WIFE appears in the doorway in a nightdress and leans against the door frame watching, blearily, cradling her pregnant belly.

WIFE.

Why are you taking a bath?

MAN.

I'm not.

His WIFE takes off her nightdress and goes to the bath.

WIFE.

You'll sleep better.

He looks at her, surprised she's misunderstood.

MAN.

I'm not. Put your clothes back on.

She sees he's looking out the window now - there's a dull rose-colored glow of distant fire through the glass.

WIFE.

What is it? What is happening?

END OF FLASHBACK:

TITLE: THE ROAD.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

In the burnt, barren landscape, through swirls of soft ash and smoggy air the MAN appears dressed as if homeless, a filthy old PARKA with the hood up, a knapsack on his back, pushing a rusted shopping CART with a bicycle mirror clamped to the handle and the BLUE tarp now covering it's load. The little BOY, similarly dressed with a KNAPSACK on his back, shuffles through the ash at his side.

There is a flicker of lightning over head, then more, but no thunder.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Abandoned pumps, broken asphalt, the earthquake has caused a large FISSURE to open up on the forecourt, a crack in the concrete a foot wide. The MAN and the BOY stand in the road studying the forecourt.

MAN.

I think we should check it out. Shall we take a look?

INT. SERVICE BAY - DAY

The BOY waits at the door as the MAN goes through a standing tool box, examining and discarding various sockets and ratches, no good tools. The BOY studies the metal desk, cash register, shelves of parts filmed with dust, a phone.

The MAN drags the steel trash drum over and tips it out and paws through the empty quarts of oil. He stands each one upside down, draining the dregs into a pan. He watches a moment as the BOY picks up the telephone and listens to nothingness.

The MAN finds a quart bottle with a lid and decants the oil collected in the pan into the bottle, screwing the lid on tight when he's finished.

MAN.
Oil for the lamp.

BOY.
Now you can read me a story, can't you
papa?

MAN.
Sure I can.

EXT. RIDGE/ CAMPSITE - EVENING

The sky is filled with a lattice work of silent lightning, no thunder, constantly flickering. They are camped high up on the ridge of a mountainside, a line of dead trees behind. There is a camp fire with wet clothes hanging to dry on sticks beside it. The MAN is erecting the blue tarp over string tied between two sticks stuck in the ground. The BOY is sitting lighting a lantern between the sticks so the tarp is erected over him and he finds himself inside the makeshift tent, his shadow stark against the illuminated blue tarp. He gets out a BOOK and looks at the pictures in the lamplight.

EXT. RIDGE/CAMPSITE - MORNING

The MAN awakens bathed in firey light as if the sun has come out. There is pale gray snow all around him with a quivering orange glow. He gets up to investigate, looks to the line of trees up the ridge where a FOREST FIRE is burning, CRACKLING in the distance. He stands staring at the fire, the warmth and light moving him, enlivening him and not frightening him at all. The BOY has got up and appears at his side, yawning. He looks at the sky at a single gray SNOWFLAKE drifting down.

BOY.
It's snowing!

MAN.
It's like it used to be when the sun
came out.

The BOY catches the snowflake in his hand, surprised.

EXT. ROAD/PLAIN - DAY

They travel along the road through drifting wood smoke, smoke
pouring off the ground like mist and thin black trees burning
like candles on the snowy ridge.

They reach a spot where fire has crossed the road melting the
tarmac. Their feet stick in the molten tarmac, it sucks at their
shoes and they stop. Just ahead they see a set of foot prints in
the tar and study them.

BOY.
Who is it?

MAN.
I don't know.

The MAN looks through a pair of BINOCULARS and sees: A stooped
figure up ahead, a DYING MAN dragging one leg slightly, limping
along. He stops and stands uncertainly, then continues. The BOY
sees him too.

BOY.
What should we do Papa?

MAN.
We're all right. Let's just follow and
watch.

BOY.
Take a look.

MAN.
Yeah. Take a look.

EXT. ROAD/HILL - LATE AFTERNOON

The DYING MAN is getting slower and slower as they climb a slope, following, until he finally stops and simply sits in the road. The BOY hangs onto the MAN's coat anxiously as they approach.

POV BOY - the DYING MAN is burnt, his clothing scorched and skin black with soot. One eye is burnt shut and his hair is a nitty wig of ash. His shoes are bound with wire and coated with road tar. As they pass by the DYING MAN looks down, averting his eyes. The BOY keeps looking, unable to take his eyes off him.

BOY.

Papa, what's wrong with that man?

MAN.

He's been struck by lightning.

BOY.

Can't we help him? Papa?

MAN.

No. We can't help him.

They keep walking away and the BOY tugs at the MAN's coat.

BOY.

Papa?

MAN.

Stop it.

BOY.

Can't we help him, Papa?

MAN.

No. We can't. There's nothing to be done for him.

EXT. BRIDGE - EVENING

They are camped under the bridge, ash and slurry drift by on the river, a dull sulphur light from the fires glows against the sky. The MAN is erecting the tarp, the BOY is staring at the lightning, his back to him.

MAN.

There's nothing we could have done.
(NO REPLY.) He's going to die. We
can't share what we have or we'll die
too.

BOY.

I know.

MAN.

So when are you going to talk to me
again?

BOY.

I'm talking now.

MAN.

Are you sure?

BOY.

Yes.

EXT. BARN - DAY

They come to a barn beside the road. Nailed to the barn door is a boar hide with a ratty tail. They look at each other.

MAN.

Let's take a look.

The man picks up the revolver and they go inside cautiously.

INT. BARN - DAY

Three pairs of FEET wearing different shoes - a man's shoes, a woman's shoes, and a CHILD's sneakers - hang above three carefully placed chairs. The MAN and the BOY barely react.

BOY.
There could be something here. There
could be corn or something.

MAN.
No, they ran out of food.

BOY.
Maybe we could find some hayseeds in
the hayloft?

The BOY eyes the empty hayloft, goes over to the swinging
CORPSES, studying them.

MAN.
It's not what you think. They
committed suicide.

BOY.
What does that mean?

MAN.
You know what that means.

The MAN GOES outside while the BOY thinks about it a moment.

EXT. FARM YARD - DAY

The BOY comes out and finds the MAN sitting on the wheel of a
dusty, faded, soot-coated red tractor.

MAN.
Come here, sit down a minute.

He takes the BOY onto his lap and takes out his revolver, opens
the magazine and shows him. There are two bullets left.

MAN.
You see that? Two left. One for you
and one for me.

He helps cock the pistol and curls the BOY's thin index finger
around the trigger.

MAN.
You put it in your mouth and point it
up. Like this. Just like I showed you.

He puts the barrel of the pistol in his own mouth until the BOY
nods, wide eyed. He takes the pistol out of his mouth.

MAN.
You got it?

BOY.
I think.

MAN.
Is it okay?

BOY.
Okay.

MAN.
Okay. Let's go.

The BOY hops off his lap and stands about uncertainly as the MAN
gets up, looks around, sets off.

INT. CLAPBOARD HOUSE - DAY

FLASHBACK - the WOMAN is sitting by the window, staring out at
the garden which is barren, the sky gray but tinged with the
same fireglow seen earlier, a film of gray ash covers dead lawn
and shrubs. She is heavily pregnant. The MAN sets down chipped
old plates and spoons, spoons beans from a pot and sits to eat.

As the WOMAN starts to eat she winces and freezes with a look of
horror, spoon halfway to her mouth. She looks down and sees:

POV WIFE - water and blood running down her legs.

WIFE.
Oh no. Oh no.

MAN.
It's okay, I'll help you. Just like we
said.

WIFE.
No no no...

MAN.
I'll light a fire. I'll heat water. We
can do it.

As he goes out she MOANS in despair.

INT. KITCHEN/CLAPBOARD HOUSE - DAY

The MAN rushes in and opens a drawer in the sideboard. Instead of cutlery it contains a pair of kitchen shears, a bottle of antiseptic, worn but clean towels and a pair of worn out yellow rubber dish gloves, all laid out in readiness.

The WOMAN appears at the door, blood running down a leg.

WIFE.
We don't have to.

MAN.
Well, I think we probably do.

WIFE.
What kind of life is this?

MAN.
It's life. It's the only thing left.

He takes his WIFE back into the other room.

INT. CLAPBOARD HOUSE - DAY

TERRIBLE SCREAMING. The WIFE lies on the kitchen table SCREAMING as she has her first contractions. The MAN is wearing the rubber gloves, one gloved hand resting on his WIFE's leg, about to deliver his own baby. He wipes his brow and leaves a smear of blood as the SCREAMING goes on.

WIFE.
I can't.

MAN.
It's coming.

END OF FLASHBACK.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

A pan of water boils on the campfire and the BOY crouches under a leanto made with the tarp. The MAN opens his knapsack by the fire and produces a packet of COCOA. He fixes a cup of cocoa for the boy. He hands the BOY the cup of cocoa and as the BOY examines it and drinks, the MAN surreptitiously pours himself a mug of water and sits blowing on it. The BOY realises the MAN has left him all the cocoa.

BOY.
You promised not to do that.

MAN.
What?

BOY.
You know what, Papa. I have to watch
you all the time.

MAN.
I know I'm sorry.

BOY.
If you break little promises you'll
break big ones. That's what you said.

The MAN relents, pouring the hot water back into the pan and taking some of the BOY's cocoa into his own cup.

EXT. SUBURBS - DAY

They trudge through the suburbs on the edge of town, past what used to be the local ball park, now barren, dead, a vast flat expanse of ash and cracked, scorched earth, forlorn stands and bleachers blackened by ash and soot. They eye it as they go by.

BOY.
What is it?

MAN.
I used to watch the ball games here
with my father.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

They walk up a once tree-lined suburban street, barren now, ash and dust layer what used to be front lawns, post boxes, picket fences, porches, crazy paving. The MAN stops outside a typical, suburban clapboard house with a dead, cracked yard where the lawn used to be and a bare flag pole. The BOY eyes the MAN enquiringly.

BOY.

What is this place, Papa?

MAN.

It's the house where I grew up.

They go up to the house - clapboards have been removed for firewood leaving studs and insulation exposed. The BOY stops, reluctant to go further, and the MAN takes a few more steps then turns around to check on him.

MAN.

You coming?

BOY.

I don't want to.

MAN.

Don't you want to see where I grew up?

BOY.

There might be somebody in there.

MAN.

There's nobody there now.

The MAN takes the BOY's hand and they approach a basketball hoop by the garage. The MAN is momentarily overcome with emotion as he recalls the details, but it doesn't mean much to the BOY.

After a moment the MAN goes up the steps and the BOY follows. The BOY notices a stuffed toy dog in the window, staring out at the garden. They slip off their backpacks and dump them amongst the trash piled up on the porch, kicking through it to the door. The MAN approaches the front door and warily pushes it open.

INT. DINING ROOM/HOME - EVENING

The pine panelling is stripped from the walls, there is some broken furniture but much has been taken for firewood. They go over to the fireplace and the MAN examines it. He runs his fingers along the mantle where there is an old drawing pin still stuck in the wood.

MAN.

This is where we used to have
Christmas when I was a boy. We'd hang
our stockings right here.

The MAN examines the yellow tiled surround.

MAN.

My mother scrubbed these every day.
It's still spotless.

By the fireplace is a small pile of bones - and in the grid are more burnt bones and the skull from the family cat. The MAN takes it all in sadly.

INT. KITCHEN/HOME - EVENING

The MAN pushes into the kitchen, still holding the BOY's hand. The cupboards are open and bare except for one solitary can of butter beans. He grabs the tin and hands it to the BOY who takes it and examines it idly. The MAN turns to a sideboard with ash coated china and cutlery, a deck of cards, a box of candles. He grabs the cards.

EXT. PORCH/HOME - EVENING

The MAN and the BOY trudge up the steps clutching arms full of dead tree branches for firewood and go inside.

INT. DINING ROOM/HOME - NIGHT

There is now a fire in the grate but the smoke isn't going up the blocked chimney, it's rising to the ceiling.

The BOY stands in his parka, hood up, fanning the smoky fire with one hand, holding the opened tin of beans with the other, nervously preparing to put the tin amongst the hot coals.

The man is meanwhile lighting a bunch of candles from a box, placing them on the mantelpiece, as if it's Christmas. When he's finished, he joins the BOY by the fire. He sees the BOY nervously trying to place the opened tin of beans and takes it from him.

MAN.

Watch.

He unceremoniously wedges the tin among the coals and it begins to heat up, bubbling. From his pocket he produces the deck of cards and fans them out for the BOY.

BOY.

What are they?

MAN.

It's a game. We used to play it when I was a boy. I'll show you.

He deals the cards in the candlelight.

EXT. PORCH - MORNING

They sit shivering in blankets as the BOY wipes his finger around the inside of the empty bean tin and licks his finger.

MAN.

Watch your finger.

BOY.

You always say that.

MAN.

That's because you always do it.

The MAN spreads bits of a worn out road map on the boards and studies them.

BOY.

What are you doing?

MAN.
We have to keep moving. We have to go
south to the coast.

BOY.
Why?

MAN.
It'll be better at the coast.

BOY.
Why?

MAN.
Because we're going to freeze here. Or
we'll suffocate in this smog.

He starts folding the map away.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

The MAN and the BOY truck along the blacktop past deserted
clapboard houses with rolled metal roofs, the windows gone, ash
settled on every surface.

BOY.
Will there be other children at the
coast?

MAN.
I hope so.

At the crest of a hill they come to FADED BILLBOARDS advertising
MOTELS and stop. The BOY notices a sign in the distance, which
has words painted over a faded advertisement "Behold the
slaughter." The MAN follows his gaze.

MAN.
Do you remember your alphabet?

BOY.
Yes.

MAN.
Can you read that?

BOY (SCRUTINISING IT.)

No.

MAN.

Okay, let's go.

The MAN takes out a large REVOLVER, cocks it in readiness and places it on the tarp as they move. The BOY eyes the MAN nervously, eyes the gun and they move off.

EXT. TOWN OUTSKIRTS - DAY

They trudge through the outskirts of a burned town, no sign of life, behind them the long concrete sweep of the interstate exchanges like a ruined funhouse. The MAN has the revolver in his belt now and his parka unzipped, ready. The BOY sticks close to his side.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

They pass cars caked in ash and dust and footprints in the dried sludge on the ground. Ash and litter blowing about and the MUMMIFIED DEAD in the background, sitting on benches or at the roadside, shrivelled and drawn like latterday bogfolk, shoeless, men, women and small children.

MAN.

Don't look.

The BOY looks at the ground as they pass the motionless figure of a CHILD covering its head with its hands.

MAN.

Just remember that the things you put into your head are forever.

BOY.

But you forget some things don't you?

MAN.

You forget what you want to remember and you remember what you want to forget.

EXT. CAMPSITE - EARLY MORNING

The MAN and the BOY are asleep, now the BOY's hand rests on the MAN's chest. The MAN breathes stertorously, wheezing a little and the BOY'S small hand goes up and down on his chest.

Suddenly the MAN wakes and rolls onto his side, listening, the revolver lying beside him. He slips his hand onto the revolver and raises his head slowly. He looks at the road - nothing but the sound of a distant DIESEL ENGINE. He looks at the BOY fast asleep. When he looks back at the road he sees a nightmarish vision:

POV MAN - Shuffling through the ash, a group of HOODED MEN, some in gas masks and filthy biohazard suits, slouching along, coughing, casting their heads from side to side and swinging clubs and lengths of pipe - a ROAD GANG. The MAN listens to the sound of a DIESEL TRUCK behind the gang.

MAN.
Quickly. Quick...

The BOY jolts awake as the MAN shoves his pistol in his belt, grabs the boy by the hand and with the other hand grabs the cart. He tries to drag them off through the trees but the BOY is frozen with fear.

MAN.
It's all right. It's all right but we
have to run. Don't look back. Come on.

He slings both their knapsacks over his shoulder and they tear through the bracken...

MAN.
Run... run...

The flat bed truck RUMBLES into view, MEN from the GANG standing on the flat bed looking around, some holding rifles. The BOY falls and the MAN pulls him to his feet with such force he lifts him clean off the ground and has to dangle him back down again.

MAN.
You okay? It's all right... come on...

They rush through a break in the trees and come across an old road with a bank sloping away.

EXT. OLD ROAD - DAY

They crouch down on the bank and watch the truck move by past the trees, the motor missing and SPUTTERING, coils of black diesel smoke coiling through the woods. The motor dies with a flapping RATTLE and there's SILENCE. They listen to the GANG TALKING and raising the hood of the truck.

He puts his arm around the BOY and draws his pistol as they hear the truck begin to roll, the GANG pushing it... but it coughs and stalls again.

The MAN raises his head above the bank in time to see one of the GANG MEMBERS coming through the trees, unbuckling his belt. He is emaciated, in dirty blue overalls and a gas company cap, and has a long beard cut square at the bottom and a bad tattoo of a bird on his neck. He doesn't stop, just keeps coming, closer and closer until he's just feet away, almost on top of them. He unzips his pants and takes a piss. As he stands pissing his eyes roam around - at any moment he could look to the side and see them crouching there.

The MAN is wide-eyed, gun ready, eyes darting from the GANG MEMBER to the BOY to the GUN. The GANG MEMBER rolls his shoulders and exercises his neck... he looks down and studies the steam coming off his piss.

The MAN silently trains his pistol at the head of the GANG MEMBER who, as if by instinct, rolls his head around and looks right at him.

MAN.

Just keep it coming.

The GANG MEMBER sees the gun and stops pissing, looks back at the truck, zips his fly.

MAN.

Don't look at them. Look at me. If you call out you're dead. Where you from?

GANG MEMBER.

Does it matter? Where you from?

MAN.

What's the truck running on?

GANG MEMBER.
Diesel fuel.

MAN.
Where d'you get that?

GANG MEMBER.
I don't know.

MAN.
You don't know, huh?

The GANG MEMBER just stares, not answering.

MAN.
You got ammunition for those rifles?

The GANG MEMBER looks back towards the truck.

MAN.
I told you not to look back there.
Where d'you get all that stuff?

GANG MEMBER.
Found it.

MAN.
What are you eating?

GANG MEMBER.
Whatever we can find.

MAN.
Whatever you can find, huh?

GANG MEMBER.
Yeah...

Now the GANG MEMBER looks at the BOY, causing the MAN To raise the revolver and cock it.

POV GANG MEMBER - he looks down the barrel at the magazine and sees empty space.

GANG MEMBER.

You won't shoot that thing. You ain't got but two shells. Maybe just one. And they'll hear the shot.

On the road the ROAD GANG are looking around, MURMURING as they notice one of their number missing.

MAN.

Maybe. But you won't. It'll be through your skull and inside your brain before you can hear it.

The MAN steps closer and aims the gun at the MAN's forehead, hammer back, ready.

MAN.

To hear it you'll need a frontal lobe and things with names like colliculus and temporal gyrus and you won't have them anymore because they'll just be soup.

GANG MEMBER.

Are you a doctor?

MAN.

I'm not anything anymore.

GANG MEMBER.

We got a hurt man. It'd be worth your while.

The MAN glances in the direction of the ROAD GANG, then back at the GANG MEMBER, who is still eyeing the BOY. The BOY is sitting with his hands on top of his head, peeking out through his arms, terrified as the tension escalates.

MAN.

If you look at him again I'll shoot you in the head.

GANG MEMBER.

I'll bet that boy is hungry. Why don't you all just come onto the truck. Get something to eat. Ain't no need to be such a hard ass.

MAN.

You don't have anything to eat. Let's go.

GANG MEMBER.

I ain't going nowheres.

MAN.

You think I won't kill you but you're wrong.

GANG MEMBER.

You know what I think? I think you're chickenshit. You never killed a man in your life.

He drops his belt on the ground with a CLATTER, a canteen and army pouch hanging from it. The MAN eyes the army pouch, eyes the GANG on the road - and notices for the first time some of them are wearing the same army pouches. One is banging his stick on the side of the truck to call their lost member. The MAN is distracted by this and when he looks up the GANG MEMBER has taken two silent steps and is standing between him and the BOY, holding a knife.

MAN.

What do you think you're going to do with that?

Without a word the GANG MEMBER dives and grabs the BOY, rolls and lands on his feet holding the BOY against his chest with his knife at his throat. Simultaneously the MAN drops to his knees, trains the pistol and fires from six feet away, shooting the GANG MEMBER in the forehead. He falls back and lies with blood bubbling from the wound, eyes open, the BOY lying in his lap in shock, deafened, expressionless, covered with gore and mute as a stone.

The GANG hear the loud SHOT and freeze, they start looking around them more urgently now. The MAN grabs the dazed BOY by the hand and yells but in his deafness the BOY hears only a MUTED soup of words:

MAN (MUTED.)

Move! Let's go!

The MAN shoves the pistol in his belt, hoists the BOY onto his shoulders and sets off up the road at a run.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

They crash through the woods, the MAN straining to keep the BOY aloft and find a path through the trees - the BOY clutching the MAN's head with both hands.

There's a sickening THUD and the MAN falls, the BOY flying off with a cry. The MAN struggles to gather his wits, unsure whether he's been felled by another man.

MAN (MUTED.)
Come on. Get up, get up quickly!

The MAN swings the BOY onto his shoulders and runs.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The MAN and BOY stagger through trees and the man drops to his knees, letting the BOY down. They are back by the road again, in the distance a bridge. They listen and watch, utterly exhausted and out of breath, the MAN is wheezing, the BOY at his side, holding his hand, staring, in shock still.

MAN.
Shh. It's okay now. You're going to be OK.

POV BOY - the BOY can still HEAR nothing, temporarily deaf. But he sees the MAN talking and looking around, through 360 degrees, trying to work out where it's safe to go.

MAN.
Come on.

He grabs the BOY's hand and they take off again.

EXT. WOODS/CAMPSITE - EVENING

The MAN pulls out blankets from his knapsack. The BOY sits staring, shocked as the MAN tries to wipe the blood and gore from his face but it's thick and congealed now. His hands tremble as he tries to pick it from the BOY's hair.

MAN.

It's okay... it's okay now...

Frightened by the BOY's muteness, he wraps him in a blanket, unzips his parka and holds him close under the parka.

There is no moon, but not far away, perhaps 30 yards, a firey TORCH makes its way through the woods. About 50 yards away from that another TORCH is being used to search... shadows flicker ominously. The sounds of TWIGS snapping underfoot and BRANCHES being broken as the ROAD GANG searches wordlessly, just BREATHING heavily through their masks and beards. The MAN clutches the BOY tighter, and stifles a cough.

The MAN picks up his revolver, checks the chamber, only one bullet left. He eyes the flickering shadows in the distance and then eyes the BOY, making minute calculations of distance, calibrating the space between the ROAD GANG and the BOY. He holds the revolver up and cocks it.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

They wander through the darkness, the BOY still wrapped in his blanket, holding the MAN's hand, eyes closing, weary, ready to drop.

MAN.

Don't go to sleep. Come on, don't drop your blanket or you'll never find it again.

The BOY says nothing, just looking around vaguely.

MAN.

Can you hear me?

EXT. EMBANKMENT - DAWN

They are by a bridge over a thin, black stream, slushy ice at the edges and grey froth. The MAN leans down and pushes ice away and scoops up a hand full of gray water. He runs it through the boy's hair to wash it and the BOY flinches with cold. He rubs more icy water into the BOY's hair, roughly, quickly, with a sense of panic as he helplessly tries to wash out lumps of flesh and blood. The BOY is weeping silently and shivering from the extreme cold as the MAN picks out the dried gore and washes the hair clean.

MAN.

It's no use crying. You have to talk to me.

He takes the blanket and dries the BOY's hair as he talks.

MAN.

I'm not going to let anything happen to you... I'm going to take care of you... I'm always going to try and be here for you... and I'm going to kill anybody who touches you.

He smooths the BOY's hair down with shaking fingers, clumsily trying to brush it out of his eyes, a fatherly instinct to make the BOY neat.

MAN.

Because that's my job. Do you understand?

When he's through the MAN lifts the BOY's thin arms, puts a vest over his head, then a ragged sweater, then he folds the BOY into his parka, zips it up to the neck and kisses him on the top of the head.

The MAN grabs his knapsack, tips it upside down, rummages inside - it's empty.

MAN.

Come on, we need to get the cart back.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The MAN walks at a clip but the BOY stumbles along more slowly until they come upon:

POV MAN - the remains of a campfire smoking in the tarmac.

MAN.

Wait here.

He starts to walk and hears little running FOOTSTEPS as ~~the~~ BOY comes after him.

MAN.

No I need you to wait. I'll hear you if you call. I'll just be a little ways and I'll be able to hear you if you get scared and you call me and I'll come right away.

He walks off but hears... the little BOY's FOOTSTEPS running after him again - he turns around.

MAN.

I said wait!

The BOY's face crinkles up and a tear rolls down.

MAN.

Stop it. I need you to do what I say. Take the gun.

The BOY freezes, refusing to take the gun.

MAN.

Just take it will you? We don't have time for this.

The MAN shoves the gun into the BOY's hand and rushes off up the road. The BOY just stares at the revolver.

INT. WOODS - DAY

The MAN searches for the cart. He comes to a clearing near the old road where they'd left the cart. It's on it's side, it's contents spilled out, mostly plundered, just a few children's BOOKS and TOYS, old pots and pans, shoes and ragged clothing remaining. Nearby are the remains of their campfire.

POV MAN - he sees charred billets of wood, ash and... the bones of the shot ROAD GANG MEMBER. Nearby is a pool of his blood and guts, still gently STEAMING. He nudges the bones with the toe of his shoe. In the distance the BOY is waiting obediently with the gun.

The MAN heads back to the BOY, trying to think what to say. The BOY hands the gun back and takes the MAN's hand and they walk away.

INT. CLAPBOARD HOUSE - NIGHT

FLASHBACK - The MAN and his WIFE are sitting across from each other with a lamp illuminating the dark. In the corner, the BOY is standing nearby, hands frozen over his face, peeking at them from between his fingers. Between them lies the revolver seen earlier. The WIFE picks up the gun and swings open the magazine. There are two bullets in it, she takes them out and places them on the table, one after the other.

WIFE.

That's all that's left. I should have done it when there were more bullets in the gun.

The MAN shuts his eyes, unable to take it.

WIFE.

Sooner or later - no listen - they will catch up with us and they will kill us. They will rape me -

MAN.

No -

WIFE.

And they will rape him -

MAN.

Please no - just - no -

WIFE.

They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you won't face it. You'd rather wait for it to happen.

MAN.

Please.

WIFE.

Stop it.

MAN.

I'll do anything.

WIFE.

Such as what?

She picks up the revolver and puts the TWO BULLETS into the chamber.

WIFE.

I thought about not even telling you.
Just doing it. I'd empty every godamn
bullet into my brain and leave you
with nothing.

MAN.

Don't say that. Don't talk this way.

WIFE.

There's nothing left to talk about...
my heart was ripped out of me the
night he was born...

MAN.

Please don't do this. I won't let
anything happen. We'll survive.

WIFE.

I don't want to survive! I'd take him
with me if it weren't for you. You
know I would. Why can't you face it?

MAN.

Will you listen? You're talking crazy -

WIFE.

It's not crazy and you know it. It's
the right thing to do.

They glance at the BOY who is up on his feet in his cot.

WIFE.

Other families do it.

She goes to the BOY, strokes his hair, kisses him, makes a
reassuring display of being motherly.

WIFE.

Time for bed, there's a good boy.

She picks him up in her arms and carries him off to bed.

END OF FLASHBACK.

EXT. RAVINE/WATERFALL - DAY

The THUNDER of a waterfall, the river disappears into space - the BOY and the MAN stand staring over the waterfall below. 80 foot down, shrouded in gray mist, it plunges into a tumult of gray curd. They stand staring the length of the river valley at the mauve horizon. A color spectrum is visible rising from the waterfall, like a rainbow - the boy is transfixed, clutching the MAN's arm for safety.

BOY.
What is it?

The MAN looks at the BOY, surprised he's talking again.

MAN.
It's a waterfall.

BOY.
Look. Colors.

MAN.
There used to be color everywhere. You don't remember. It was before you were born.

EXT. RIVER/WATERFALL - DAY

The BOY approaches the river's edge, shallow clear water, gravel and pebbles sparkling at the bottom. He scoops up some water, surprised that it seems clean.

BOY.
Look. It's clear.

MAN.
Do you want to go in?

BOY.
I don't know.

MAN.
Sure you do.

BOY.
Is it okay?

MAN.
Just don't swallow any.

The MAN unzips his parka and slips it to the ground. The BOY eyes the MAN, surprised - then does the same.

EXT. RIVER/WATERFALL - DAY

Naked, pale and shivering the BOY dives under excitedly and comes up spluttering. He wades towards the waterfall. The MAN watches him enjoying himself under the waterfall, clutching his shoulders, hopping up and down, he joins him.

EXT. RAVINE/ROCKFACE - EVENING

There is a dull sulphur light from the fires glowing against the sky. The MAN is stringing the tarp against a rockface to make a shelter. The BOY has painted his face with CRAYONS, drawing a bizarre set of FANGS and dripping blood around his mouth. The MAN studies the BOY's painted face a moment.

MAN.
Listen. That man back there... there's not many good guys left, that's all. We have to watch out for the bad guys. And we have to talk. Always. We have to just... you know... keep carrying the fire...

BOY.
What fire?

MAN.
The fire inside you.

The BOY is thoughtful a minute, and then:

BOY.
Are we still the good guys?

MAN.
Yes. We're still the good guys.

BOY.
And we always will be no matter what happens?

He eyes the BOY uncertainly, unsure if he can promise this.

MAN.
Always will be. Yeah.

The MAN goes back to tying the tarp.

EXT. THE RIVER/VALLEY - DAY

The MAN and the BOY are trudging along with the cart, away from the waterfall now.

MAN.
We have to keep moving. Other people might be attracted to the waterfall just like we were. We wouldn't hear them coming.

They stop to look at a lake surrounded by fog down in the valley

BOY.
Do you think there could be fish in the lake?

MAN.
No. There's nothing in the lake.

They move on.

EXT. GORGE - DAY

Down in the gorge they come around a bend in the road and immediately hear the ROAR of river rapids. Up ahead they see a bridge with a jack-knifed TRUCK on it.

EXT. BRIDGE - DAY

They push the cart out onto the bridge over GREY FROTHING WATER, and inspect the truck. The tyres are flat, the cab jammed against the railings.

The trailer end has swung across the road, knocked out the railings and lies with it's last few feet hanging over the side of the bridge, blocking the bridge off completely.

EXT. ABANDONED TRUCK - DAY

The MAN climbs up onto the gas tanks, wipes the glass and peers into the cab. He swings the door open and climbs inside, pulling the door shut behind.

INT. TRUCK/CAB - DAY

He looks around at discarded detritus, old magazines and trash. He checks behind the seats where there is a mattress on a bunk and calls out.

MAN.

Come up here.

INT. TRUCK/CAB - NIGHT

SNOW continues to fall on the dusty WINDSCREEN. Outside, all around snow falls, silently, covering the truck and the bridge, transforming it. They are both still awake, unable to sleep, staring at the transformed world, carpeted by snow.

BOY.

I'm hungry.

MAN.

I know. So am I.

BOY.

Can I ask you something?

MAN.

Of course.

BOY.

Are we going to die?

MAN.

No. Sometime. Not now.

BOY.
And we're still going south?

MAN.
Yes.

BOY.
So we'll be warm?

MAN.
Yes.

BOY.
And there might be food there?

MAN.
Everything depends on reaching the coast.

BOY.
Okay.

The MAN draws a blanket around him and kisses him goodnight, it is now pitch black.

MAN.
Go to sleep.

BOY.
I wish I was with my mom.

They are silent a moment, until:

MAN.
You mean you wish you were dead.

BOY.
Yeah.

MAN.
You mustn't say that. It's a bad thing to say.

BOY.
I can't help it.

MAN.
I know but you have to. You have to
stop thinking about her. We both do.

BOY.
How do I do that?

The MAN is silent, lost in thought.

EXT. TRUCK/CAB - EARLY HOURS

The man gets down from the cab and walks a few feet in the dark and snow. He coughs a bit, takes a few breaths of air, and walks away from the truck, vanishing into the mist.

EXT. CAMP/ROAD - EARLY HOURS

The MAN is alone now by the road. He takes out his WALLET and sifts through: money, ancient cards, driver's license and a picture of HIMSELF and his WIFE on their WEDDING DAY, which he studies a moment sadly. He lays everything out on the grey slushy ground, then flings the wallet into the river and walks back to camp, leaving the PHOTO and cards to blow away.

EXT. CLAPBOARD HOUSE/YARD - NIGHT

FLASHBACK - The WIFE kisses the MAN.

MAN.
Will you tell him goodbye?

WIFE.
No. I won't. I can't.

MAN.
Will you at least wait till morning?
Stay with me through the night.

WIFE.
No. I have to go now.

They kiss again, she turns and walks away out of the yard.

MAN.
What am I going to tell him? What are
we going to do without you?

WIFE.
You should move south. You won't
survive another winter here.

The MAN follows a few steps and she stops and turns to him.

MAN.
Why won't you help me?

WIFE.
I can't help you. Don't you
understand? This is how I'm helping
you.

MAN.
Where are you going to go? You can't
even see.

WIFE.
I don't need to see.

MAN.
I'm begging you.

WIFE.
Please don't. Please.

She goes, vanishing into the darkness.

END OF FLASHBACK.

EXT. ABANDONED TRUCK - MORNING

The BOY has found old TOY CARS at the bottom of the cart and is
playing with a YELLOW TOY TRUCK, pushing it along the ground,
making "ENGINE" NOISES. The MAN joins him, surveying the
trailer.

MAN.
What do you think is in there?

BOY.
I don't know.

He slaps the side of the trailer and puts his ear to it.

MAN.
It sounds empty.

He takes off his parka and climbs onto the fender of the cab, then onto the roof. He grips onto the trailer and hauls one leg up, pauses to rest, then hauls the other leg up and hauls himself onto the trailer roof.

From his high vantage point he can see that bundled at the far end of the bridge are blackened, burned tyres, ominously piled up as a ROAD BLOCK. He nervously crawls along to an opened skylight and peers inside into darkness.

BOY.
What can you see?

MAN.
Nothing. I need light.

The MAN produces a rolled up magazine from his hip pocket, lights it with his lighter and tosses it down into the trailer. A faint WHOOSHING, SMOKE and a little flame - he waits for the smoke to clear and stares down into the cabin:

POV MAN - a MASS OF HUMAN BODIES sprawled and twisted in every position, dried and shrunk in rotted clothes. The burning paper burns itself out and the light and the vision of bodies dims and disappears leaving only the incandescent embers of paper. The MAN just stares, appalled.

BOY.
What can you see?

MAN.
Nothing to see.

EXT. OVERPASS/CITY LIMITS - EVENING

They trudge past a deserted concrete overpass, the MAN pushing the cart, the revolver on the tarp.

Up ahead a cluster of three tall buildings, a dozen or so floors of concrete and glass, the upper floors of one illuminated by the flickering fire glow of candle light inside. The MAN stops and stares and the BOY follows his gaze.

BOY.
Who are they, Papa?

MAN.
I don't know.

BOY.
What if it's more bad guys?

MAN.
It won't be more bad guys. Don't worry. Stay close.

He takes hold of the gun and they walk in a different direction now, giving the high rises a wide berth.

MAN.
Keep low. We'll be okay.

When they get to the end of the block they stop and the MAN checks around the corner before they cross the street.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS/CITY - DAY

On the outskirts of the city they come to a once grand house on a rise above the road. It is tall and stately with white Doric columns across the front and a gravel drive that curves up from the road through a field of dead, foot long grass. They stand there staring at it, the BOY still holding the MAN's hand. The MAN listens - nothing but the WIND in the dead bracken, a CREAK of a door or shutter rattling.

MAN.
I think we should take a look.

BOY.
I'm scared.

MAN.
There's nothing to be scared of.

The MAN sets off up the drive. He stops and faces the BOY who is rooted to the spot.

MAN.
You want to stay here?

BOY.
No.

The BOY joins him and they set off slowly up the drive, through patches of melting snow. There is a tall dead privet fence with a deserted birdsnest in it.

EXT. PORCH/STATELY HOME - DAY

They climb the steps to the porch, the BOY clutching the MAN's hand. They notice a window is slightly open. The MAN goes to it, opens the window wide, looks inside.

INT. FOYER/STATELY HOME - DAY

They climb through the window onto black and white marble tiles and the MAN carefully shuts the window a little so it's the same as when he found it. They regard the room, an elaborate staircase in front of them, William Morris wall paper, water stained and sagging, plaster moldings and cornices sagging from the ceiling.

They cross back to the other side where there is a great hall of a drawing room, high ceilings, huge fire place with raw brick around it where the wood has been stripped, dirty old mattresses and bedding on the floor by the hearth.

BOY.
Papa?

MAN.
Shh.

INT. KITCHEN/STATELY HOME - DAY

They creep in and find blackened pots and pans, a cord with a bell for servants, trash piled on the floor and work tops, a rusted sink covered in mould, bare cupboards. In the floor is a hatch with a lock set in a steel plate. The man examines it while the BOY tugs at his arm, frightened.

BOY.
Papa, let's go.

MAN.
There's a reason this is locked.

The BOY is now panicky, hopping about, close to tears.

BOY.
Don't open it - don't!

MAN.
I need something to pry it open.

BOY.
No!

The MAN goes out abruptly and the BOY follows, wringing his hands in fear.

EXT. BACK GARDEN/STATELY HOME - DAY

The MAN comes out the back door with his revolver drawn, looks around and sees an old station wagon with flat tyres on the dead grass. Beside it is a 40 gallon cauldron on the blackened remnants of a fire. There is also a wooden SMOKE HOUSE with thin wisps of smoke coming off it. The MAN studies it nervously, sniffing the air, then goes to the tool shed and starts sorting through tools. He finds a long handled spade and hefts it in his hands.

INT. KITCHEN/STATELY HOME - DAY

The spade chops into the wood around the lock on the hatch. The MAN hacks away, then prizes up the hatch, lock and all, revealing a gap of darkness.

BOY.
Papa...

MAN.
Listen to me. Just stop it. We're starving. Do you understand? I have to do this. I don't have any choice.

The MAN opens the hatch fully and lies it on the floor.

MAN.
Just wait here.

BOY.
I'm going with you.

MAN.
Okay. Just stay close to me. Nothing's
going to happen.

They descend the rough wooden steps.

INT. CELLAR/STATELY HOME - DAY

There is a terrible stench and they have to cover their mouths and noses with their parkas. The MAN gets out his lighter, lights it and tries to light the way.

POV MAN - BLACKNESS except the small area illuminated by the lighter as the MAN searches: part of a stone wall; then a clay floor; an old mattress with dark stains. The glow of the flame crawls across the floor to a corner as the MAN steps closer, then plays the lighter along from the corner to reveal:

Huddled against the wall, all trying to hide, shielding their shining eyes from the light, NAKED MEN and WOMEN, thin as skeletons like inmates in a death camp. The BOY jumps, shocked and the MAN freezes, staring, dumb struck by:

On a mattress on the floor lies a NAKED MAN with his legs gone to the hip, their stumps blackened and burned, cauterized. The BOY covers his eyes.

MAN.
Jesus...

The MAN on the MATTRESS turns to them and WHISPERS, a low indistinct murmur at first.

MAN ON MATTRESS.
Help us... please help us...

MAN.
Christ... oh Christ...

The others join in, an eerie chorus of WHISPERING, "Help us... please help us..." The MAN turns and grabs the BOY and rushes for the steps.

MAN.

Hurry... go... move!

The MAN drops the lighter as he tries to push the BOY up the steps. Out of nowhere a BEARDED FACE appears at the foot of the stairs, blinking.

BEARDED FACE.

Please... they're taking us to the smoke house.

The BEARDED FACE reaches out and feebly tries to grab the MAN's arm but he breaks free and concentrates on getting the BOY up the steps, following in a blind panic, fumbling and missing his footing.

MAN.

Hurry - hurry!

They scramble up the steps towards the light of the hatch as the BEARDED FACE reaches out and tries one last time to grab at the MAN's feet but he kicks free.

INT. KITCHEN/STATELY HOME - DAY

The MAN scrambles out, slams the door shut and drags a solid table over the door. He looks around for the BOY.

MAN.

Christ. Run!

The BOY is near the window, dancing up and down in terror, pointing out the window to:

EXT. FIELDS - DAY

Coming up the path toward the house are four BEARDED MEN and two WOMEN, all suspiciously well fed and healthy-looking. One of the MEN holds hands with one of the WOMEN, as if they were returning from a stroll before dinner.

INT. KITCHEN/STATELY HOME - DAY

The MAN stares a moment, frozen with horror, then grabs the BOY by the hand and jerks him away.

MAN.

Run. Run!

INT. FOYER/STATELY HOME - DAY

They tear through to the front door, the MAN fumbles to get it open but it has a well-maintained deadlock on it. He stares out the window next to the door and sees:

POV MAN - The WELL-FED PEOPLE are climbing the steps of the porch. The MAN Grabs the BOY and they rush through into kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN/STATELY HOME - DAY

In the kitchen the hatch is being lifted from underneath and the table elevating inches. They rush back out again.

INT. FOYER/STATELY HOME - DAY

As they reach the stairs, a key turns in the lock and the MAN picks up the BOY in his arms and they sprint to a door under the stairs. As they get through the door the front door swings open and the WELL-FED PEOPLE drift inside.

INT. REST ROOM - DAY

They are in a small rest room under the stairs, just a toilet and a basin. The BOY's face is level with the basin and while the MAN is holding the door shut the BOY comes face to face with the contents of the basin:

POV BOY - bloodstained clothing soaking in bloody water and tallow in the basin. Around the basin are bloody red hand prints on the white porcelain.

POV MAN - through a thin crack he sees the WELL-FED PEOPLE on the far side of the foyer, chatting casually. He is not close enough to hear everything they say, but close enough to see that the MEN's beards are trimmed and they wear well-repaired clothes.

WOMAN.

I'm going to freshen up.

BEARDED MAN.

I need a drink.

WOMAN 2.

I'm going up to change.

He hears one of the WOMEN STOMPING across the old floorboards and up the stairs to change while the other WOMAN takes a few steps towards the rest room, then turns back towards the window as the conversation lurches on.

BEARDED MAN 2.

Who left this window open?

WOMAN.

I leave it open for the smell.

BEARDED MAN 2.

What smell?

WOMAN.

You don't smell it anymore?

BEARDED MAN.

Who wants a drink?

They hear the sound of the WINDOW BEING CLOSED and LATCHED. As all this goes on, the MAN is frozen, eyes wide with fear, he slips the pistol from his belt, cocks it and squats on his haunches so he's close to the BOY, desperate, unable to decide what to do, unable to think straight with fear.

The BOY is staring from the door to the pistol to the bloodied basin as if hypnotised, in shock, babbling somewhat.

BOY. (MUMBLING, TO SELF.)

Bad guys... bad men...

MAN.

Shh, shh...

There are FOOT STEPS outside the door as the WELL FED PEOPLE drift closer and then away again. The man starts to cough but he has the revolver in one hand and the BOY's hand in his other. The MAN tries to stifle his cough but can't. Then the BOY notices and holds his own small hand to the MAN's mouth, stifling his coughing as the talk goes on outside:

WOMAN.

Will you help me with the dirty dishes?

BEARDED MAN 2.

I'm hungry.

As the coughing subsides a little the MAN takes the BOY's hand from his mouth and pushes the revolver into it.

MAN.

Take it.

The BOY tries to resist, shaking his head, terrified, mute.

MAN. (WHISPERS.)

Take it.

The MAN puts his left arm around the BOY's tiny, thin shoulders and holds him close.

MAN. (WHISPERS.)

Don't be afraid. If they get hold of you, you're going to have to do it just like everybody else. Do you understand? Shh. No crying. Do you hear me?

The WOMAN turns from the window and one of the BEARDED MEN pours whiskey and hands her one.

The BOY is weeping and shaking his head as the MAN shows him again what to do with the gun.

MAN (WHISPERS.)

Stop crying. You have to be a brave boy. You know how to do it.

BOY (WHISPERS.)

I think so.

MAN (WHISPERS.)
Say "Yes I do Papa."

He stares down at the little BOY who just holds the gun feebly... he realises the BOY won't use it. After a moment of torturous contemplation, the MAN very gently takes the gun from the BOY's hand and the BOY sits forlornly, staring down at his hands, afraid to look at the MAN now. When the BOY looks up again he is staring down the barrel of the pistol, the MAN aiming the large revolver at the BOY's forehead.

BOY.
What are you doing?

The MAN's hand shakes, his thumb trembles on the hammer as he cocks it...

BOY.
Papa?

MAN.
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

BOY.
Will I see you again? When will I see you?

The MAN's finger trembles on the trigger as he slowly squeezes it... At that moment there's a loud THUMP from the kitchen and the WELL FED PEOPLE stop and listen, then rush through to the kitchen, and immediately there's a commotion as they see the state of the hatch with the table over it.

BEARDED MAN 2(O.O.V.)
What the fuck do you think you're doing? Huh? What the fuck do you think you're doing...?

WOMAN (O.O.V.)
Don't look at me like that. What are you doing?

The MAN gathers his wits and opens the door a crack.

MAN.
Follow me, take my hand, don't let go.

INT. FOYER/STATELY HOME - DAY

The MAN bursts out of the rest room with the BOY and they make a dash for the open window. He sticks his gun in his belt and wrestles with the window, an old colonial style frame which sticks.

From behind the closed kitchen door they hear muffled GRUNTS and SHOUTS until the MAN wrenches the window open, stuffs the BOY through and follows.

EXT. PORCH/STATELY HOME - DAY

The MAN picks the BOY up and they rush down the steps.

EXT. DRIVEWAY/STATELY HOME - DAY

They rush down the driveway and the MAN drags the BOY through a gap in the dead privet hedge onto the road.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

They hesitate a moment on the road, deciding.

MAN.

Come on, keep running!

They rush across the road to the woods on the other side, the BOY ahead as the MAN checks behind them. The MAN looks back towards the house and two of the WELL-FED PEOPLE have come outside, looking around suspiciously.

He hits the ground and takes the BOY with him, they lie flat at the edge of the woods and the road. They are wildly out of breath, chests heaving, the MAN coughing.

MAN.

Keep your head down.

POV MAN - the WELL-FED PEOPLE walk a few steps down the drive and a BEARDED MAN looks through BINOCULARS at the road and the woods, but not directly at the MAN and the BOY hiding.

The WELL FED PEOPLE start looking around the side of the house, walking away. The MAN and the BOY get up, dash through the treeline and disappear into the woods.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

There is a dull moon hidden in the ashen sky and the outlines of trees as they set off through the woods, sleepy, stumbling like drunks now. They hear a HIDEOUS SHRIEK in the distance, coming from the house. They stop, hearing another SHRIEK and a MAN'S SCREAMING. The MAN holds the BOY close and tries to cover the BOY's ears as they stare and wait for it to pass.

BOY.

They're going to eat those people
aren't they, Papa?

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

The MAN and the BOY have stopped at the edge of a field by the woods. The MAN sits cradling the tired BOY in his lap, a blanket around them both. The BOY shuts his eyes, a tear squeezes from it, he looks like he's given up, and then:

BOY.

Papa? Papa, we wouldn't ever eat
anybody would we?

MAN.

No. Of course not.

BOY.

No matter how hungry we were. Even if
we were starving?

MAN.

We're starving now.

BOY.

Because, because we're the good guys?

MAN.

Yes.

BOY.

And we're carrying the fire.

MAN.

Yes.

The BOY drifts off to sleep and the MAN leans down, gently stroking the BOY's hair and kissing him on the forehead.

EXT. SUPERMARKET/PARKING LOT - DAY

They truck along, the BOY staring but not speaking on the outskirts of town. They roll into a supermarket. A few old cars in a trash strewn parking lot. The MAN leaves the cart in the parking lot and heads through the defunct automatic doors.

MAN.

Come on. There's nobody here.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

The MAN and the BOY trudge the empty aisles, only litter remaining, the once brightly-colored packaging strewn around, it's contents long since looted.

In the empty gun section there is a deer's head mounted on the wall. The boy stops and stares, mesmerised while the MAN searches the empty shelves for ammo, finding only empty boxes.

On their way out they come to a pair of vending machines tipped over, the sodas looted, coins scattered around in the ash. The MAN sits beside one and feels inside the gutted machine, eventually producing a single unopened can of COCA COLA.

BOY (EXCITED.)

What is it, papa?

MAN.

It's a treat for you. Here. Sit down.

He helps the little BOY off with his knapsack and sits him down and opens the can of COKE ceremoniously. The BOY looks startled and sniffs the fizzing can as if it's the strangest thing he's ever seen in his life.

MAN.

Go ahead.

The BOY takes the can.

BOY.
It's bubbly.

MAN.
Go ahead. Drink it.

The BOY takes a sip and considers.

BOY.
It's really good. You have some, papa.

MAN.
No. I want you to drink it.

BOY.
But I want you to have some.

The MAN reluctantly takes the can and has a tiny sip, hands it back to the wary BOY.

BOY.
It's because I'll never get to drink another one, isn't it?

The MAN doesn't know what to say.

EXT. EDGE OF TOWN - LATE AFTERNOON

They round a bend in the road and come upon an old frame house with chimneys and gables and a stone wall. It is deserted, isolated, lost in dead brambles. The BOY stops and listens, stares around.

MAN.
What's wrong with you?

BOY.
What was that?

MAN.
I didn't hear anything.

BOY.
Listen.

MAN.
I don't hear anything.

They listen more until, very faintly we hear a DOG BARK in the distance. The BOY turns around 180 degrees to listen.

MAN.
It's a dog.

BOY. (EXCITED.)
A dog! Where did it come from?

MAN.
I don't know. Come on.

The MAN walks towards the house, pushing the cart and the BOY follows, bouncing up and down, over-excited.

BOY.
We're not going to kill it are we
Papa?

MAN.
What? No, we're not going to kill it.
Why did you say that?

BOY.
You still got one bullet left.

MAN.
We're not going to hurt the dog, I
promise. We're not going to kill it
and we're not going to eat it either.

EXT. OLD HOUSE - DAY

They approach the porch - many of the boards have been lifted and taken for firewood - there are gaping holes.

BOY.
I'm scared.

MAN.
We have to go in. We've got to find
something to eat.

BOY.
I'm not hungry. I'm not!

The MAN just looks at the BOY, takes his revolver from his belt and goes up the path but the BOY stays where he is, rigid with fear.

MAN.
We'll be all right. Come on. You want to stay here this time?

The BOY nods vigorously.

MAN.
All right.

He goes back, takes the BOY's hand and they go to the porch.

MAN.
Sit here on the stoop and don't go away.

The BOY sits and the MAN goes to the front door, which is open. He slips the revolver from his belt and creeps inside.

INT. OLD HOUSE - DAY

The floorboards CREAK horribly, swollen from rain or ripped up, as he creeps into the living room. The timber cladding is stripped from the walls, the ceiling plaster is collapsed, beams exposed. The MAN pads through to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN/OLD HOUSE - DAY

The kitchen is similarly dilapidated, the cupboards stripped bare. On a shelf by the window are dusty jars of fruit, preserved. He grabs a jar, prizes open the lid and finds a an oily slick of black mucus floating in the top, like rotted mushroom spores. He sniffs it suspiciously, holds it up to the light. In the light small black fish hook-shaped spores drift from the top of the jar to the bottom. He replaces the lid, appalled.

EXT. PORCH/OLD HOUSE - DAY

The BOY is sitting on the steps of the porch. Across the road is another big old house, much of the clapboard missing, swathed in dead brambles - the BOY is staring at it, waiting.

EXT. BACK YARD - DAY

The MAN comes outside and regards the deadened yard, old garden hoe and spade, gardening equipment and several dead apple trees. He goes over and examines the ashen ground where there are several small, dark brown, shrivelled spheres spaced several feet apart - apples. He bends down and picks one up, examines, sniffs. He gathers up the strange apples and stuffs them in his pockets.

EXT. PORCH/OLD HOUSE - DAY

The BOY is still staring at the house across the road when he notices A GHOSTLY FACE, completely still, in a window. The BOY stands, surprised, not believing his eyes - it is the face of a SMALL BOY roughly his age, which disappears almost immediately, receding back into the gloom like a ghost.

INT. PANTRY/CLAPBOARD HOUSE - DAY

The MAN is in the looted pantry. He empties a jar of shrivelled raisins into a handkerchief, folds it and pockets it. He starts sifting through a sack of grain with his fingers when he hears:

BOY. (O.O.V.)
Stop - stop!

The MAN freezes, then charges out.

EXT. PORCH/CLAPBOARD HOUSE - DAY

The MAN rushes out and stares about frantically for the BOY - he's gone.

EXT. HOUSE OPPOSITE - DAY

The BOY has run across the road to another house.

POV BOY - peeping around the side of the house is the other SMALL BOY, the same age, similarly grimy and thin, wearing an outsize woollen coat. The other SMALL BOY disappears down the side and the BOY runs after him.

BOY.

Wait! Come back! I won't hurt you!

EXT. BACK YARD - DAY

The BOY runs to the bottom of the yard where there is various suburban garden detritus, a dusty lawn mower, a clothes line, a shed, bikes with no tyres.

BOY.

Where are you?!

The MAN comes sprinting up the side of the house and seizes him by the arm.

MAN.

What are you doing? What the hell are you doing?

BOY.

There's a little boy, Papa, I saw a little boy.

MAN.

There's no little boy. What's the matter with you?

BOY.

Yes there is! I saw him! A boy just like me.

The MAN takes the BOY by the arm and drags him back through the yard, up the side of the house, the BOY resisting, crying and looking back all the way.

BOY.
Why? Why can't I go and see him?

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Out the front of the house the BOY digs his heels in and the MAN has to drag him, his feet slithering through the dirt.

BOY.
I need to see him! I need to!

MAN.
Why?

BOY.
I just do!

The BOY has gone limp, weeping bitterly, resisting being moved. The MAN gives up and squats beside the sobbing BOY.

MAN.
Okay, I'm sorry. I understand.

He holds him, wipes his tears from his cheeks.

EXT. TOWN STREET/OVERPASS - EVENING

In the failing light they come across a late model Chevy abandoned under an overpass.

BOY.
Papa? Will there be other boys like me
at the coast?

MAN.
I hope so.

The MAN goes to the car, wipes thick dust from the windscreen and peers in - it's empty.

INT. CHEVY - NIGHT

They try to get comfortable in the leather seats, the MAN spreading the blankets over them and tucking the BOY in. They are quiet a moment as they watch darkness start to fall. Then:

MAN.

I got you something

The MAN produces from his pocket one of the tiny hard brown apples and holds it up to the remaining light.

BOY.

What is it?

MAN.

It's an apple.

He hands it to the boy who examines it curiously. The MAN takes out a pocket knife, takes the apple back, cuts the apple in half to reveal a woody brown interior. They regard the mahogany apple uncertainly, the MAN is the first to take a bite, with some difficulty. The BOY bites his half and makes a face.

MAN.

Suck it a while and it'll soften.

They sit sucking and chewing the ancient apple.

BOY.

Did you ever have any friends?

The MAN eyes the BOY - curious at the sudden question.

MAN.

Yes. I did.

BOY.

Lots of them?

MAN.

Yes...

BOY.

Do you remember them?

MAN.
Yes. I remember all of them...

BOY.
What happened to them?

MAN.
They died.

BOY.
All of them?

MAN.
Yes. All of them.

EXT. FARM - DAY

They pass through an orchard with a barn facing, a thin red neckerchief nailed to the barn door. As they pass the barn, the MAN notices an area of ground on the far side splashed with dried BLOOD and hunks of human HAIR. The BOY doesn't notice, his head down walking and talking.

BOY.
Do you know where we are Papa?

MAN.
I think we're about two hundred miles from the coast. As the crow flies.

The MAN is now on his guard as they walk.

BOY.
"As the crow flies?"

MAN.
It means, going in a straight line.

POV MAN - An empty courtyard. But right next to him on the courtyard wall of the barn something catches his eye and he turns his head slowly to find himself staring straight at:

A frieze of HUMAN HEADS, dried with taut grins and shrunken eyes. Some are tattooed with targets and runic slogans. Some are skinless, with signs and words inked onto them. One has suture marks etched on it, like a blue print for assembly

The MAN stares at the heads as the BOY continues his conversation, unable to see the heads from where he's standing back around the corner.

BOY.

There aren't any crows are there? Just in books.

MAN.

Yes, just in books.

BOY.

Do you think there might be crows somewhere?

MAN.

I don't know...

BOY.

But what do you think?

MAN.

I think it's unlikely...

They keep walking and talking, the MAN grim-faced but the BOY oblivious, loquacious.

BOY.

Could they fly to Mars or some place?

MAN.

No, they couldn't fly to Mars...

BOY.

Because it's too far?

MAN.

Yes.

The MAN discretely herds the BOY away towards the road...

BOY.

What if they tried and-and-and they just got halfway or something and then they were too tired? Would they fall back down...?

EXT. FIELD/FARM OUTSKIRTS - EVENING

There is a thick carpet of gray snow. Out of the murky sky more gray snow is falling. The MAN is lighting a fire and is distracted by a sudden noise, the LOUD CRACK of sheering wood - this time very close. He looks around just as:

Out of nowhere a tree branch sails down, barely missing them, landing with a heavy WHUMP just feet away.

MAN.
Move! Quickly!

He tries to get the BOY to his feet but he is limp, staring around blearily, exhausted.

They hear another loud WHUMP. Then the GROAN of timber and another WHUMP as trees start to keel over around them. The MAN grabs the BOY with one hand and the cart with the other and runs as best he can through the snow and falling trees.

BOY.
What's happening?

MAN.
Just keep moving, run!

They rush through the woods as more and more trees fall one after the other, WHUMP, WHUMP, WHUMP, great loads of snow falling from limbs to the ground with a BOOM, setting the woods shuddering. The BOY is getting bogged in the snow and the MAN stoops and scoops up the BOY and they set off again, the MAN dragging the cart frantically.

After a moment he has to stop, wheezing, eyes squeezed shut as his chest burns.

BOY.
Papa? What's wrong?

MAN.
Just keep going, I'm all right.

EXT. EDGE OF WOODS - EVENING

BIRDS EYE VIEW - in the dying light it's clear the woods have collapsed, all around are prone trees in the snow like fallen bowling pins. On the edge of the wood the MAN and the BOY stop to examine footprints in the snow on the road.

In the silence after the falling trees the MAN listens and hears: the low THUDDING of BULL DRUMS in the distance. He looks at the exhausted BOY a moment.

MAN.

We can't go back on the road.

BOY.

Why, Papa?

MAN.

I think someone's coming.

The BOY stares at the tracks. The MAN stares in both directions, examining the road in the distance. He moves a few paces and notices tied to a dead sapling another thin red neckerchief. He takes a few steps and through a gap in the trees sees a clearing - snow and a mass of BLOOD RED FOOTPRINTS, the icy snow stained blood red like a sorbet. A killing floor.

BOY.

Will they see our tracks?

MAN.

We'll cover them.

The MAN moves the BOY away and kicks snow over their tracks - then lays fresh ones going in several different directions. The BOY copies him, leaving his own maze of tracks. They grab the cart and wheel it away as fast as they can, keeping parallel with the road but staying off it. The MAN keeps his eyes fixed on the rear view mirror until he sees:

POV MAN - in the distance TWO FIGURES appear on the road.

MAN.

Here they come.

The MAN now looks over his shoulder for a good look, then grabs the BOY's hand and takes off.

EXT. HIGH GROUND - EVENING

TWO MEN come prowling on the ROAD, they are MILITANTS from some sort of ARMY, wearing the same red neckerchiefs and carrying weapons, searching, predatory.

WIDER - we see that only 30 feet away, concealed amongst the trees, the MAN and BOY are crouched in blankets, watching. The two MILITANTS stop and look around, as if they sense the BOY and the MAN - who freeze, frightened to breathe. The MILITANTS sniff the air menacingly.

One of them walks over to a stone by the side of the road, leans down and starts sharpening his lance, made from a the straightened coil spring of a car. The MAN and the BOY watch - wide-eyed. Eventually the MILITANTS walk off up the road.

BOY.

What are we going to do?

MAN.

We have to hole up somewhere until it's safe.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

They are camped amongst a copse of dead trees, surrounded as if by a picket fence, a fire blazing, the MAN stacking on dead brush, the BOY staring into the fire.

There is the sudden CRACK of shearing wood as a tree falls and the MAN looks up. There is another CRACK.

MAN.

Just a falling tree, it's okay.

The BOY stares into the darkness, unnerved.

MAN.

All the trees in the world are going to fall sooner or later. But not on us.

BOY.

How do you know?

MAN.
I just know.

The MAN takes from his pocket the handkerchief filled with raisins, offers them.

BOY.
That's all there is, isn't it?

MAN.
Yes.

BOY.
There's nothing left anywhere.

MAN.
No.

They sit eating raisins, saying nothing until they're finished.

BOY.
Can I ask you something?

MAN.
Sure.

BOY.
Are we going to die now?

The MAN Just looks at the BOY, then looks away.

MAN.
What do you think is going to happen?
We're just going to suddenly keel over
and die? It takes a long time to die
of starvation. The important thing is
water to stop you dehydrating. We've
got water. We'll be all right.

EXT. PATIO/TOWN HOUSE - MORNING

The MAN stands on the back patio of a new house on the edge of town, the BOY at his side, fields stretching out before them. the land flattened and dead, ravaged fences running the perimeter.

In the yard are a few dead trees, a fence, a metal tool shed, an old barbecue on the patio made from a 44 gallon drum. The MAN slides the patio door open and peers inside gingerly.

INT. BEDROOM/TOWN HOUSE - MORNING

The MAN is in the bedroom looking around for useful things - it has been stripped, the wooden frame gone from the window, the bureau ransacked and chopped up - only a summer dress on a wire hanger on the back of the door remains. He glances at empty drawers on the floor and a cupboard before turning his attention to the bed.

He blinks and sways a moment, trying to focus on:

POV MAN - underneath the filthy, dusty blankets a thin, dried head pokes out, the blankets pulled up to the chin. On the pillow are long hunks of rotted hair.

He takes hold of the lower hem of the blanket and tows it off the bed, revealing a desiccated corpse. He ignores it, shaking the blanket out and folding it under his arm. He notices the BOY at his side, watching wide-eyed.

MAN.

Nothing you haven't seen before.

They go out.

INT. KITCHEN/TOWN HOUSE - MORNING

The MAN opens and shuts empty cupboards, slamming the doors, increasingly desperate, close to tears of frustration now. Eventually he feels dizzy and has to sit on the floor. He just sits there, alone on the kitchen floor, clenching and unclenching his fists, his head in his hands, when he hears:

BOY. (O.O.V.)

Papa!

The MAN draws his pistol and goes out, alert again.

INT. TOWN HOUSE - MORNING

The BOY is staring at himself in a dusty, flyblown full length mirror. As the MAN comes in he sees the BOY's reflection and his own and jumps.

BOY.

It's us.

The BOY stares at his reflection - he looks like an alien, skinny with giant staring eyes on shaky legs.

BOY.

We look skinny.

MAN.

We are skinny.

The MAN finds a blanket, puts it around the BOY's shoulders. He notices an old upright piano, covered in ash and dust. The BOY stares as he goes to it, lifts the lid and plays a chord. The BOY's eyes light up and he is magnetized, instantly coming over and waiting for the next note. The MAN plays another chord.

BOY.

What is it?

MAN.

It's a piano.

BOY.

What's it for?

MAN.

For making music. This... (HE PLAYS.)
... is music. Your mother played very well.

BOY.

I don't remember that.

MAN.

Yeah. We had one of these.

BOY.

What happened to it?

MAN.
Chopped it up for firewood.

EXT. YARD - MORNING

The MAN comes out of the tin shed with a spade and crosses the dead grass. He stops and stamps about a bit, listening. He digs the spade into the dead grass and hear's it CHOMP into wood. He digs more urgently, increasingly exhausted, until a door is revealed in the dirt. He is so engrossed he hasn't noticed the BOY standing a few feet away, watching with saucer eyes, scared.

BOY.
Don't open it, Papa.

MAN.
It'll be okay.

BOY.
Please, Papa, please.

MAN.
It's okay.

BOY.
No it's not! What if there's people
hiding down there?

The BOY has his fists bunched up to his chest, bobbing up and down with fear. The MAN drops the spade and puts his arms around the frightened BOY.

MAN.
There's nobody hiding down there. This
door looks very like the other door,
but I think there may be things in
there we need, and we need to take a
look. There's no place else for us to
go. This is it. And I want you to help
me. Do you think you can help me?

The BOY eventually nods.

MAN.
Will you hold the pistol for me while
I dig?

The BOY takes the pistol gingerly. The MAN chops the plywood around the lock, gets the spade under a corner and levers the door open.

The MAN starts to descend a hand made wooden stair case in the bunker. He reaches out and takes the lamp from the BOY, gives the child a kiss on the forehead and then disappears into the bunker, leaving the worried BOY staring after him. The BOY looks around at the deserted yard as the evening draws in, now even more frightened.

MAN. (O.O.V.)
Oh my God... oh my God!

BOY.
What is it, Papa?

MAN (O.O.V.)
Come down. Oh my God come down.

The BOY is in the hole and down the steps like lightning.

INT. BUNKER - EVENING

The little BOY CLATTERS down the steps.

BOY.
Papa? What did you find?

MAN.
Everything. I found everything.

Stored in the bunker are crate upon crate of canned goods: tomatoes, peaches, beans, apricots, canned ham, corned beef, hundreds of gallons of water in jerry cans and in boxes paper towels, toilet paper and trash bags stuffed with blankets.

The MAN takes the BOY's hand and helps him down, then goes back up the steps and draws the door shut and jams a pair of metal pliers through the heavy inside hasp to stop the door being opened. He goes back down the steps to the BOY and holds up the lamp to illuminate the shelves.

MAN.
Can you see?

BOY.
What is all this stuff?

MAN.
It's food! Can you read the labels?

The BOY stares at the brightly colored packaging, he's never seen anything like it before. The MAN hands the BOY a tin.

BOY.
"Pears." It says "pears."

MAN.
Yes! It does! Oh yes it does! Pears!

They inspect the shelves: chilli, corn, stew, soup, spaghetti sauce, the BOY's eyes are like saucers.

BOY.
Is it real?

MAN.
Oh yes, it's real all right.

The MAN pulls a box of butane lighters from the shelf and tests one, it doesn't work. He tests another which works, it has a large flame - he uses it to read the labels.

BOY.
Why is it here?

MAN.
Because someone thought it might be needed.

BOY.
But they died.

MAN.
Yes. What would you like for breakfast?

BOY. (THINKS.)
Pears.

MAN.
Pears it is.

The MAN claws open a box and pulls out a tin of pears. He gets paper bowls from a stack, plastic forks and spoons, lays them out. He finds batteries and tries them in a torch, almost none work until finally he finds a batch that do. He puts batteries in a lantern too and blows out the smoky lamp. He finds a can opener and opens the pears while the BOY watches silently, wrapping a blanket around himself and sitting on the soft bunk bed.

BOY.

Is it okay for us to take it?

MAN.

They'd want us to.

The MAN dishes up two bowls of pears and they sit side by side on the bunk with spoons and pears.

MAN.

These will be the best pears you ever tasted. The best. You just wait.

They eat in silence. They lick the spoons and drink the syrup from the bowls. The MAN opens another tin.

CUT TO:

Ham and eggs frying in a pan on the camping stove. The kettle is boiling on another ring of the stove. The BOY just stares at the bubbling food as the MAN cooks.

Nearby a breakfast table is set out on a stack of boxes acting as a breakfast bar: biscuits, a plate of butter, condensed milk, salt and pepper plates and utensils. The MAN brings the pan over and forks over chunks of ham onto the plates, then spoonsfull of scrambled eggs from a second pan, then baked beans from a small pot. The BOY just stares, as if drugged, uncomprehending, the food alien to him.

MAN.

Go ahead. Don't let it get cold.

BOY.

What do I eat first?

MAN.

Whatever you like.

The BOY eats a hunk of ham as the MAN pours coffee.

BOY.
Is this coffee?

MAN.
That's right. Careful it's hot.

He hands him coffee.

BOY.
We did good, didn't we Papa?

MAN.
Yeah, we did good.

INT. BUNKER - NIGHT

The MAN puts the BOY to bed in a bunk and smooths his filthy hair tenderly, smiling with relief, until the BOY shuts his eyes and nods off. He covers the BOY with a blanket and kisses him. He just sits watching the BOY sleep... after a moment he starts to sob and makes an effort to pull himself together.

Stirring classical music fades up and into:

INT. THEATRE - EVENING

FLASHBACK - Close in on a pair of LEGS in stockings, a summer dress, a WOMAN's hands holding a MAN's hand in her lap. The MAN feels the tops of the stockings with his fingers.

WIDER - the MAN is with his WIFE in a concert theatre, at a recital. The seats are velvet, gold scrollwork adorns the boxes, an illustrious, fortunate world.

END OF FLASHBACK.

EXT. LAWN - DAWN

The hatch opens and the MAN's face appears, as he looks around. He opens the hatch more and clambers out with a couple of Jerry cans of water, the yard is quiet. Next, the BOY's face pops up and peers around. He clambers out carrying a big pot with a camping stove in it.

INT. BATHROOM - DAWN

They empty the jerry cans into the huge pot, light the stove and put the pot on the stove to heat the water.

CUT TO:

The BOY is in the bath, filthy and scrawny, as the MAN bathes him, rubbing him with soap, scrubbing his dirty neck.

MAN.
What do you think?

BOY.
Nice and warm.

He washes the BOY's hair, lathering water over him with the pot.

CUT TO:

Now the MAN is in the tub, also scrawny and filthy, soaping up, washing his hair - the BOY helps.

CUT TO:

The MAN trims his beard off with scissors in a mirror. He lathers up with shaving cream and starts to shave with a plastic safety razor. The BOY watches all this fascinated, he's never seen the MAN shave. When the MAN is done he turns to the BOY, wiping away the foam.

MAN.
How do I look?

BOY.
Weird. Won't you be cold?

CUT TO:

Now the MAN is cutting the BOY's hair with kitchen scissors and a plastic comb. The BOY has a towel around his shoulders and long locks of hair decorate it. The MAN finishes, takes the towel off, wipes the BOY's neck and face with a flannel, holds up a mirror for the BOY to see.

BOY.
I look funny.

INT. BUNKER - MORNING

They sit on the bunk bed with a checkerboard between them sipping Coca Cola from plastic mugs and concentrating on the board, empty Coke cans in the foreground and their worn out, wet blue jeans drying on a drying rack in the back ground.

They are both wearing new sweaters too big for them, plundered from the stores. The MAN watches the BOY fondly, absorbed in checkers.

EXT. LAWN - NIGHT

Heavy rain slashes down on the lawn, already pools of water are flooding the lawn.

INT. BUNKER - NIGHT

A shiny new quart of whiskey is slipped from its paper liquor store bag and opened with a soft CRACK. The whiskey is poured into a glass with a satisfying GLUG.

WIDER - another feast is laid out, ham and powdered mash potato and biscuits and gravy. The BOY is eating while the MAN pours a whiskey. The BOY stops eating to watch the MAN drink the whiskey. The MAN's eyes glaze as he sips the strong liquor, dizzy already.

BOY.
Can I try some?

MAN.
No. You won't like it. Makes you feel funny.

The BOY stares, curious, wanting it.

MAN.

You think I come from another world,
don't you? Filled with all these
strange things you've never seen.

BOY.

Sort of.

MAN.

Well, I do I guess.

EXT. LAWN - EVENING

The MAN just stands in the middle of the lawn COUGHING his guts up in the dark rain - again the phlemy wet cough. He bends over, sweating, listening, knowing it's the sound of fluid on the lungs.

As he listens he hears something above the rain - he keeps shifting position, as if hearing different sounds from different directions. Nevertheless he anxiously looks around, then goes to the porch and drags an old mattress over, across the dead grass to the hatch.

He lays it half across the hatch, crawls through the remaining gap and hauls the mattress the rest of the way over the hatch, then pulls the hatch closed with the old mattress lying on top. It just looks like an old mattress lying on a lawn in the rain.

INT. ANTECHAMBER - EVENING

Whether it was the sound of fluid on his lungs, or something else he heard isn't clear, but the MAN is agitated, anxious, a bundle of nervous energy. He searches on a shelf above the bottles of gas - there are boxes of batteries, a box of .45 Cartridges and shotgun shells. He looks a little disappointed as he sorts through them, looking fruitlessly for bullets for his .38. In the background is the distant PATTERN of rain on the mattress above.

INT. BUNKER - EVENING

While the BOY is asleep, the MAN sits on his bunk with a box cutter and the box of .45 Shells. He is trying to shave them down to size for his .38. The lead is too hard and he grits his teeth with effort, then gives up and sits thinking.

INT. BUNKER - DAWN

Now the MAN is whittling a tree branch with the box cutter. He cuts an inch off the end and carves it into the shape of a bullet. He flicks open the chamber on the pistol and tries to fit the bullet in. It won't fit so he shaves a bit more off with the knife. He slips it into the chamber again and this time it fits. He slips the bullet out, dabs his fingers into the soot on the discarded lantern and rubs it all over the wooden bullet. He flicks open the chamber on the pistol and fits the bullet back in. He spins the chamber, it appears to be full of bullets.

He listens to the PATTERN of rain and hears another sound... something or someone RUSTLING around the mattress above. He hears the sound of the MATTRESS being DRAGGED off of the door. He hears SCRABBLING and SCRATCHING on the door and freezes, staring at the lock, waiting for the inevitable... He quietly picks up the revolver. He looks across and sees the BOY is now wide awake too, staring, wide-eyed.

BOY.
What is it?

MAN.
Shh.

BOY (WHISPERS.)
Maybe it's a dog.

MAN (WHISPERS.)
It's not a dog.

The MAN cocks the revolver and positions himself under the hatch, ready. After a torturous moment the sounds die away.

MAN.
Come on. Let's get out of here.

BOY.
I don't want to go.

MAN.
I know but it's not safe.

BOY.
What are we going to do with all this stuff?

MAN.
We'll just have to take what we can.

BOY.
I wish we could live here. And we
could keep the dog and the dog could
catch food for us.

MAN.
Look, there is no dog, okay? I'm sorry
but there just isn't.

BOY.
Please Papa.

MAN.
No.

BOY.
Just say it's going to be all right,
Papa. Say it. Just say it, please.

The MAN doesn't know what to say, losing patience.

MAN.
Listen, trouble comes when you least
expect it. So maybe the thing to do is
to just always expect it.

BOY.
Do you always expect it? Papa?

MAN.
I do, yes.

BOY.
You always think bad things are going
to happen but we found this place.

The BOY sits up, looking around, bleary eyed as the MAN starts
loading cans and packets into a carton. He gathers a couple of
large jerry cans of water.

BOY.
Maybe we'll find another place like
this at the coast.

MAN.
Maybe.

The MAN dumps the box on the floor and packs another.

EXT. LAWN - MORNING

The cart is loaded up and tied with the blue tarp.

BOY.
What are you doing?

MAN.
I'm burying the trash. Don't drop anything. We'll have to cover our tracks from now on.

The MAN dumps a carton full of trash, empty tins and packets from their time in the bunker into a big hole he's just dug and starts filling it in with an old pitchfork or shovel.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

The MAN pushes the cart across a bridge, stagnant black water underneath, the cart is now laden with jerry cans of fresh water and cartons containing as many tins of food and supplies as they could manage. The BOY trails along behind. They are a strange sight, clean clothed, clean shaven, short haired, in their new jumpers - and now both wearing new surgical masks which they raise off their faces to speak.

The MAN keeps checking the rearview mirror.

POV MAN - in the rearview mirror he sees the glint of glass, perhaps a pair of BINOCULARS watching them.

The BOY watches anxiously as the MAN gets out his own BINOCULARS and looks through them.

POV MAN - a mysterious winking glint of light which quickly disappears.

POV - through a different pair of binoculars, a completely different POV, we see the MAN looking through his binoculars at us.

MAN.
I think they're following us.

BOY.
Who?

MAN.
I don't know.

BOY.
You think it's bad guys?

MAN.
Probably.

BOY.
What if it's good guys?

MAN.
I don't think we're likely to meet any
good guys for a while. We have to be
careful now. We've got food.

EXT. WOODS - DAWN

The MAN and the BOY are camped in the woods, wrapped up in blankets, a fire going. The BOY is asleep but the MAN is awake, coughing. He sits up, still coughing. He gets up and walks away from the campsite, trying to stifle the coughing.

EXT. CLEARING - DAWN

He wanders into a clearing, coughing uncontrollably, falls to his knees in a foot thick shroud of mist and coughs up a gob of something dark and nasty, spits it into the misty ground.

POV MAN - the mist before him clears to reveal a spattering of dark blood on the pale ash. He stares, shocked, knowing what it signifies.

EXT. WOODS - DAWN

The BOY opens his eyes, he hasn't been asleep, listening to the MAN cough, worried. The MAN returns and eyes the worried BOY.

MAN.
What's wrong?

BOY.
I had a weird dream.

MAN.
What about?

BOY.
I don't want to tell you.

MAN.
Why not?

The BOY considers it.

BOY.
I heard you coughing in the night.

MAN.
Were you awake?

BOY.
It was in my dream. Then it woke me up.

MAN.
What else was in the dream?

BOY.
Just you.

MAN.
What happened to me?

The BOY's face crinkles up, he starts to sob.

MAN.
Listen, when you dream about bad things happening it shows you're still fighting. You're still alive. It's when you start to dream about good things you should start to worry.

BOY.
Do you dream about bad things too?

MAN.
All the time.

EXT. BEND/THE ROAD - DAY

As they round a bend in the road they see a hunched figure walking ahead of them. The MAN stops abruptly, gets out the binoculars and watches:

POV MAN - a distant, hunched figure hobbling away from them.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

They come up behind an OLD MAN, hunched over, withered, silent as he hobbles ahead. He wears layers of torn clothing and his feet are wrapped in rags and cardboard tied with green twine. They slowly approach and the man stops, turns and watches them suspiciously as they draw level.

OLD MAN.

I don't have anything for you. You can look if you want. I got nothing.

MAN.

We're not robbers.

The OLD MAN leans an ear forward, deaf.

OLD MAN.

What?

MAN.

I said we're not robbers.

OLD MAN.

What are you?

MAN.

We're just like you.

OLD MAN.

What are you following me for?

MAN.

We're not following you.

BOY.

We've got food we could give him.

MAN.
He's not getting any food.

The OLD MAN looks away, avoiding their eyes.

BOY.
He's scared, Papa.

MAN.
Everybody's scared.

BOY.
Please Papa.

MAN.
All right!

The MAN eyes the road to the left and right, then draws his revolver.

MAN.
If this is an ambush, he goes first.

He goes out to the cart and rummages in it while the BOY and the OLD MAN stare at each other. The MAN comes back with a tin of fruit cocktail and a tin opener and opens it and hands it to the BOY. The BOY places the tin of fruit on the road in front of the OLD MAN.

BOY.
Take it. Here.

The OLD MAN doesn't move.

BOY.
What about a spoon?

MAN.
He's not getting a spoon.

The BOY urges him on, miming with his hands, as if feeding a raccoon.

BOY.
Eat it. It's good.

The OLD MAN picks up the tin and his filthy long nails CLATTER on the tin as he tips it to his mouth, the juice running down his chin, his head jerking as he swallows.

BOY.

Look, Papa. He's hungry.

MAN.

I see it. And I know what you're going to ask me. And the answer is No.

BOY.

What's the question?

MAN.

We can't keep him.

They watch him eating painfully slowly. The OLD MAN finishes and sits down in the road holding the tin, staring at it, as if it might refill.

MAN.

When did you last eat?

The OLD MAN just stares.

MAN.

Do you want to eat with us?

OLD MAN.

I don't know. What do I have to do?

MAN.

Tell us where the world went.

OLD MAN.

What?

MAN.

You don't have to do anything. Can you walk okay?

They help the OLD MAN off the road and hand him his cane but he pushes it away.

OLD MAN.

I can walk.

They walk off the road towards the dead, blackened woods.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

As they leave the road the OLD MAN studies the BOY. The BOY goes to take his hand:

MAN.
(TO BOY.) Don't hold his hand.

BOY.
He can't see.

MAN.
Don't.

The trio walk into the woods.

MAN.
How old are you?

OLD MAN.
I'm ninety.

MAN.
Ninety my ass. Is that what you tell people? So they don't hurt you?

OLD MAN.
Uh-huh.

MAN.
Does it work?

OLD MAN.
Nope.

MAN.
What's your name?

OLD MAN.
Ely.

MAN.
Just "Ely?"

OLD MAN.
What's wrong with "Ely?"

EXT. CLEARING/WOODS - EVENING

There's a camp fire now. The OLD MAN sits wrapped in a quilt, eating with a spoon and licking his plate clean.

MAN.
How come you're still alive? What do you eat?

OLD MAN.
I don't know. People give you things.

MAN.
No they don't.

OLD MAN.
You did.

MAN.
I didn't. He did.

The OLD MAN eyes the BOY, closely, half blind.

OLD MAN.
Are you a little boy?

MAN.
What does he look like?

OLD MAN.
I don't know. I can't see real good.

MAN.
Is that right? Can you see me?

OLD MAN.
No. But I can tell somebody's there.

MAN (TO BOY.)
Okay. You need to sleep. Come on.

He gathers up the BOY and takes him a few feet away, settles him down in blankets while the OLD MAN stares into the fire.

When the MAN returns he has his gun which he surreptitiously places on the ground in full view of the OLD MAN.

MAN.

You can see that, right? Okay. Tell me now. You're not a shill for a pack of road agents?

OLD MAN.

I'm not anything. I'll go if you want me to. I can find the road.

The MAN stares at the OLD MAN cynically but the OLD MAN just stares back blankly.

OLD MAN.

I live like an animal. You don't want to know the things I've had to eat. When I saw that boy I thought I'd died and he was an angel. I never thought I'd see a child again. I never thought that would happen to me.

MAN.

He is an angel. To me he's a God.

OLD MAN.

Well I hope that's not true. To be on the road with the last surviving God would be a pretty frightening experience.

MAN.

Why do you say that?

OLD MAN.

Where men can't live, Gods can't either. The road gangs would tear you limb from limb, both of you.

The low RUMBLE in the earth is heard again, an earthquake, this time in the distance. They listen a moment.

OLD MAN.

I knew this was coming. This or something like it. There were warnings. People thought it was a con - I always believed in it.

MAN.

Did you try to get ready for it?

OLD MAN.

No. What would you do? Even if you knew what to do you wouldn't know what to do. Suppose you were the last man left alive?

MAN.

How would you know if you were the last man alive?

OLD MAN.

I don't guess you would know it. You'd just be it.

MAN.

Maybe God would know.

OLD MAN.

If there is a God up there he would have turned his back on us by now. Whoever made humanity will find no humanity here.

The MAN pours hot water into mugs to make coffee, hands one to the OLD MAN. They drink.

MAN.

Do you ever wish you would die?

OLD MAN.

No. It's foolish to ask for luxuries in times like these.

MAN.

Don't you want to end it all?

OLD MAN.

Nope.

MAN.

Why not?

OLD MAN.

I'm stubborn.

EXT. EDGE OF WOODS - MORNING

The BOY and the OLD MAN are standing by the cart. The MAN is watching from further away. The OLD MAN is fitting another can of peaches the BOY has given him into his knapsack.

MAN.

You should thank him you know. I wouldn't have given you anything.

OLD MAN.

Maybe I should and maybe I shouldn't. I wouldn't have given you anything.

The OLD MAN looks around, orientating himself, and goes, tapping his cane, without a glance back at the BOY or the MAN. The MAN gives the BOY a reproachful look and the BOY looks defiant for the first time, a new distance between them.

BOY.

He's going to die and you don't care.

MAN.

I care enough. Maybe when we're out of food you'll have more time to think about it.

BOY.

You always say watch out for bad guys but that old man wasn't a bad guy and you can't even tell anymore.

EXT. ROAD/RAILWAY LINE - DAY

They are trudging along the blacktop adjacent to a railway line. There is a SHOTGUN blast in the distance and the MAN and the BOY stop and look around. The MAN checks the rear view mirror instinctively.

POV MAN - a thin spike of smoke from a campfire rising up in the woods behind. The BOY notices and looks behind.

BOY.

Do you think they're still following us?

MAN.
I think they've been following us for
a long time.

BOY.
Maybe it's Ely - the old man?

MAN.
How? On a broom stick?

The BOY thinks about this for a moment as they approach the railway line. The MAN takes the revolver from the cart and sticks it in his belt - the BOY notices anxiously.

MAN.
We should lay in wait a while. See who
they are.

EXT. BLUFFS/RAILWAY BRIDGE - EVENING

The MAN and the BOY are swaddled in blankets up amongst the rocks with a birds eye view of the road and a railway bridge - they can see along the road and the dead trees for half a mile. The BOY is nodding off, his head lolling as the MAN keeps watch.

A FIGURE appears in the distance on the road and stops. The MAN puts his binoculars to his eyes. A moment later another two FIGURES appear.

POV MAN - TWO MEN and a PREGNANT WOMAN are standing waiting, staring at the ground. As ANOTHER FIGURE joins them they start walking along the road towards the bluffs. The PREGNANT WOMAN carries a pack on her back and walks slowly with a waddling gate, heavily pregnant, imminently expectant. The three men are bearded and emaciated with packs on their backs. They keep walking along the tracks, their breath steaming in the night, not speaking.

The MAN watches them go by the bluffs and vanish one by one like ghosts into the darkness where the dead tree line is. The MAN stares into the darkness, feeling very alone as the BOY sleeps.

EXT. BLUFFS/WOOD - MORNING

As they come down from the bluffs, the MAN is staring into the dead woods where another thin stem of SMOKE is rising.

BOY.
What is it?

MAN.
More smoke. I think we should take a look.

BOY.
I don't want to. Let's just keep going.

MAN.
Whoever it is I don't want them behind us.

BOY.
What if they're bad guys?

MAN.
What if they're good guys?

They look at each other, a stalemate. The MAN stands and starts to pack up the tarp.

MAN.
Look. Whoever it is out there, it's better to know about it than to not know.

BOY.
Why?

MAN.
Because we don't like surprises. Surprises are scary. They could sneak up on us further down the road. You need to learn this.

The MAN folds the tarp and sleeping blankets and starts heading down the slope to the cart, the BOY following.

EXT. TREELINE - MORNING

The MAN is pushing the cart, the BOY trails behind, he still looks doubtful. The MAN stops and SNIFFS the air, excited.

MAN.
They left their food cooking.

BOY.
We scared them away.

The MAN swings him onto his shoulders and they head for the woods.

INT. CLEARING - MORNING

A deserted campsite, nothing left but something burnt on a skewer over the red hot coals of a campfire, recently abandoned. The MAN lets the BOY down, checks out the perimeter and surrounds. But the BOY is staring at the fire and suddenly he cringes away from it, burying his head against the MAN.

MAN.
What is it? What is it?

BOY.
Oh Papa!

The BOY is wide eyed with shock - the MAN looks quickly at the fire and sees:

POV MAN - a CHARRED HUMAN INFANT, headless and gutted and blackening on the spit, burned up, the fat still SIZZLING.

The MAN bends and sweeps the mute BOY up and runs for the road as hard as he can.

MAN.
I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry...

EXT. WOODS - MORNING

The MAN awakes beside the cart, a campfire and the tarp beside him - he reaches out a hand to touch the BOY and he's not there. He sits bolt upright and stares around. He grabs his revolver, cocks it and gets to his feet, staring around wildly through the trees.

EXT. RAILWAY LINE - DAY

The MAN crashes through the tree line by the railway line and stares around, frantic. Then he notices it: A huge electric diesel locomotive with eight stainless steel passenger coaches behind it - an awesome vehicle. Right by it is the BOY, just standing, staring at it. The MAN goes over and joins the BOY, who just looks at him. They stand there, both silent, staring at the magnetic vision.

MAN.

I guess somebody was taking it south
and ran out of fuel.

EXT. PINES/COAST ROAD - DAY

Open country now, flat plains, pale sandy earth under the ash. They are stopped amid a copse of dead pine trees, the conical shape still clear. The BOY unfolds the threadbare map on the ground, a crayon in his hand.

MAN.

You know where we are?

BOY.

No.

MAN.

Where do you think?

The BOY points to a place on the map.

MAN.

More.

BOY.

Here?

MAN.

No. We're closer than you think.

He takes the crayon and points on the map.

MAN.

This is us. This is all sea.

BOY.
Is it blue?

MAN.
The sea? I don't know. It used to be.

The MAN picks up a desiccated pine cone from the ground, and stares at it, hollow-eyed, hungry. He squeezes it and it crumbles to dust. He takes a few steps, sniffing the air.

MAN.
Can you smell that?

BOY.
It smells different.

MAN.
Everything is going to be different.

EXT. DUNES/BEACH ROAD - DAY

The landscape has changed, dead salt bush and sand at the side of the road and finally, as they come around a bend in the road: dead sea grass sloping up to sand dunes up ahead. They look at each other and head for the dunes excitedly.

EXT. COAST ROAD - DAY

POV BOY - Gray beach, lead gray sea and waves rolling in slowly with a distant ROAR. On the beach a tide mark of wet gray ashy sludge and a skirt of glistening bones, fish skeletons bleached white on the sand.

They take their parka hoods down and just stand there staring at the beach, the wind HOWLING around them, dozens of bleached SKULLS and RIB CAGES of LIVESTOCK and HUMANS who have made it this far only to die. The MAN looks at the BOY and sees the intense disappointment.

MAN.
I'm sorry it's not blue.

EXT. DUNES/BEACH - DAY

They sit on the beach wrapped in blankets staring out at a surreal wall of impenetrable smog not far beyond where the waves are breaking. The MAN eyes the silent BOY, buffeted by wind, wrapped in a blanket, staring at the empty ocean... there is nothing and nobody there. They keep staring out to sea, filled with disappointment. The BOY impassively surveys the wall of smog which is like an iron curtain.

BOY.
What's on the other side?

MAN.
Nothing.

BOY.
There must be something.

MAN.
Maybe there's a father and his little
boy and they're sitting on the beach
too.

BOY.
And they could be carrying the fire
too?

MAN.
They could be, yes.

The MAN sees the BOY's hopefulness reappearing and strokes his head, his heart breaking for him.

EXT. BEACH - DAWN

FLASHBACK - The MAN is yawning and stretching and inspecting the remnants of a campfire with orange driftwood coals still glowing in it. Nearby a pan lies left over from dinner with T-bones and live crabs CLATTERING about scavenging the bones. The MAN inspects the crabs then goes to his WIFE who is asleep by the fire. He kneels and smooths her hair tenderly, very much in love, as she sleeps.

His hand on her wakes her, she looks at him surprised and pleased.

WIFE.

Hello.

The MAN kneels by his WIFE and she kisses him and they look out at the blue ocean and the white sand and green sea grass and she puts an arm around him.

WIFE.

If I were God and I were making the earth, this is how I'd make it.

END OF FLASHBACK.

EXT. WATER'S EDGE - DAY

The MAN and the BOY stand with their shoes off, the black sea washes up the sand at their filthy, blistered feet.

BOY.

What are our long term goals?

MAN.

"What are our long term goals?" Where did you hear that?

BOY.

I don't know. You said it.

MAN.

When?

BOY.

A long time ago.

MAN.

When your mother was here?

BOY.

I guess.

MAN.

And what was the answer?

BOY.

I don't know.

MAN.

Well, I don't either.

They stare at the water - charred, quotidian household objects rolling back and forth in the surf - a mixing bowl, a soup ladle, a suitcase.

BOY.

Can I go swimming?

MAN.

Swimming? You'll freeze your nuts off.

BOY.

I know.

MAN.

I don't want to have to come in after you.

The BOY lets the blanket fall and strips out of his parka and clothes. He runs along the beach naked, skinny and white, leaping SCREAMING into the icy surf.

The MAN watches until the BOY comes out of the water, gasping with cold, shuddering. He wraps the BOY in the blanket and dries him off.

EXT. BEACH - EVENING

The BOY is wrapped in blankets by the fire as LIGHTNING flickers in the distance, illuminating the empty beach. The MAN gets the tarp from the cart and drapes it over them. He puts his arms around the BOY who is shivering and sweating, looking a little wild eyed, babbling a little.

BOY.

How many people do you think are still alive?

MAN.

In the world? I don't know. Not very many.

BOY.

There could be people alive someplace else. Besides on earth?

MAN.
I don't think so. They couldn't live
any place else.

BOY.
Not even if they could get there? If
they had a-a-a spaceship?

MAN.
No. It's unlikely.

The BOY stares, shivering, thinking.

MAN.
Are you all right? What is it?

He cups his hand to the babbling BOY's forehead.

BOY.
I don't feel so good.

The BOY bends away and vomits and the MAN helps, rubbing his
back and wiping the BOY's mouth when he's done.

BOY.
I'm sorry.

MAN.
That's okay, you didn't do anything
wrong.

The MAN picks the BOY up, looking for somewhere to shelter.

EXT. CLIFF FACE - EVENING

The MAN struggles barefoot up the beach and over to the cliffs,
sits against the rock and lays the BOY down across his lap in
the shelter of the cliff face, covering him in blankets and the
tarp as the rain falls all around.

MAN.
It's okay. You're going to be okay.
It'll pass.

BOY.
Don't leave me here, don't go away
Papa. Not even for a minute.

MAN.
I won't go away. I'm right here.

He sits holding the BOY tightly. He feels for the BOY's heart. He drops droplets of sugar water from a bowl into the BOY's mouth. As the BOY shuts his eyes and dozes he checks the pulse at his neck and wipes his mouth with the blanket.

EXT. CLIFF FACE - NIGHT

The BOY is sleeping fitfully across the MAN's lap - he is still awake, staring in horror as the BOY sweats and shakes in his sleep. He wipes the BOY's brow, looks up to the heavens:

MAN.
Oh no. No no. Not this. Jesus Christ
what have you done to us? What have
you done?

EXT. BEACH - MORNING

The BOY is fast asleep, motionless but for stertorous breathing through his mouth. The MAN lies beside him, just staring at him, watching him sleep. The BOY opens his eyes and focuses weakly.

BOY.
Hi Papa.

MAN.
I'm right here.

BOY.
I know.

The BOY shuts his eyes and goes back to sleep. The MAN strokes the BOY's hair tenderly, takes the pistol from his belt and carefully lays it on the sand beside the BOY, stands, takes one last look and walks away...

EXT. SPIT/WATER - DAWN

The MAN is alone now, staring at the hull of a wrecked boat keeled over in ten feet of gray water a few yards out from the spit - a sixty footer, twin masts.

POV MAN - Further out in the roiling water, a rip appears about a hundred yards away in probably 40 feet of water. The MAN stares, anxiously as: from the rip emerges the tip of something silvery gray and slimy far beneath the surface, the tentacle of a great squid encrusted with white suckers. The tentacle is about a foot thick and comes fully out of the water to a height of about 10 feet, then coils up languidly and disappears again.

The MAN waits a moment, then starts stripping off his clothes. He stares anxiously into the roiling water not far from where he saw the squid but there's no sign of it now.

He stares back along the beach to the distant figure of the BOY, sitting up wrapped in his blankets, looking around, bemused and scared. The MAN collects himself and wades cautiously into the gray soupy water. He takes a breath and starts swimming to the boat. He swims along the steel hull, grabs the sheer rail and hauls himself the rest of the way to the transom where there is worn gilt lettering saying "Pajaro de Esperanza. Portugal" He tries to haul himself aboard but the transom is loose and pulls away from the hull, swinging the MAN out over the water, his legs kicking wildly. He drops into the black murk.

EXT. UNDER WATER - DAY

The MAN plunges under the dark water, peering through the murk wildly for danger, trying to scrabble back to the surface but quickly losing his bearings. He sees nothing but darkness and cloudy water and bubbles. He SHRIEKS into the suffocating darkness and leaps out of the water, scrabbling desperately at the boat hull, reaching for the sheer rail, staring at the water, out of his mind with shock and fear.

Sure enough the tip of the curious squid's enormous tentacle lazily breaks the surface some distance away and casually mooches off.

MAN.

Oh Christ. Oh Christ...

EXT. BOAT - DAY

He hauls himself on deck and lies there a moment, noticing a seam of black mould and, around it, bottle-GREEN ALGAE sprouting from the joins in the wood. He scrapes a little off and stares, mystified.

INT. BULKHEAD/CABIN - DAY

Stagnant bilge, trash and furniture tipped against one side. Locker doors hang open. He cautiously paddles through to the galley, going through the doorway very slowly, expecting the worst - sea monsters, cannibals, corpses.

INT. FORWARD CABIN - DAY

Bedding and clothing piled against a wall, a mattress in the middle of it all and a big locker by the bow. He picks up damp blankets and stuffs them in a canvas sack from the locker. He delves in the locker and finds yellow rubber seaboots, a nylon jacket and a souwester.

He looks up and there's a strap hanging down. He examines it and finds it's a board covering a hatch, with the corners latched. He unlatches the corners and pulls the board down with the strap to reveal a BOX of 8 FLARES. Inside the box of flares is a black plastic case which he opens to find an old .37 mm bronze flare pistol. He takes it out of the case and examines it.

At the back of the compartment he sees a box with a red cross on it, a FIRST AID KIT. He grabs it and opens it, finding bandages, disinfectant, Aspirin and antibiotics.

EXT. BOAT - DAY

When the MAN re-emerges on deck he is wearing the yellow rubber seaboots, nylon jacket and souwester. The water is ominously still. He eyes the shore and the cliffs anxiously, looking for the BOY. He stares frantically, no sign of him. He kicks off the boots and souwester, takes one more look at the ominously still water and dives in.

EXT. SHORELINE - DAY

The MAN struggles from the water and scans the beach, still no sign of the BOY. He dumps the booty from the boat and heads for the cliff face where he last saw him.

EXT. CLIFF FACE - DAY

The MAN runs over the sand and reaches the spot where he left the BOY. Nothing. He runs on towards a rocky out crop and rushes around it. Once he's turned this corner he sees:

POV MAN - the BOY running for all he's worth up the beach, pistol in hand, he glances over his shoulder at the MAN.

POV - the MAN rushes after him in his yellow rain jacket, slowly gaining. As the camera swings around and pulls back the POV takes in the BOY too and we realise it isn't the BOY's POV but a third POV - as if somebody is watching them.

EXT. CLIFFS - DAY

The MAN catches up with the BOY, grabs his shoulder with one hand and the gun with the other.

MAN.

Where are you going? What's happened?

The BOY stops and stares at him, bemused, feverish, wild-eyed, he grabs at the yellow jacket.

MAN.

It's okay, it's just me.

The BOY collapses, exhausted, into the MAN's arms.

EXT. BEACH/CAMPFIRE - DAY

POV - from a considerable distance: They have a fire and the MAN is stripping the shaking, sweating BOY out of his parka and the rest of his clothes and sitting him further away from the fire.

The MAN opens the first aid kit, selects various pills, crushes them up and hands them to the BOY with a cup of rainwater. The BOY swallows the pills and the water, shivering.

BOY.
I'm cold.

MAN.
I have to get your temperature down.

He takes a pan of canned soup from the fire, puts it down on the sand and holds up a spoonful to the BOY's lips. The BOY eats tentatively.

BOY.
Can I ask you something?

MAN.
Of course you can.

BOY.
What would you do if I died?

The MAN stops, spoon frozen in mid air.

MAN.
If you died I'd want to die too.

BOY.
So you could be with me?

MAN.
So I could be with you, yes. But
that's not going to happen.

They look at each other a moment, unsure, the BOY shivering and sick-looking. The BOY lies down again and shuts his eyes. The MAN relents and puts a blanket over him.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

The strange lattice work of lightning fills the sky, illuminating the MAN with the BOY in his lap. The BOY is half asleep and the man is feeding him crushed aspirin and water and mopping his forehead with a wet cloth. The MAN coughs endlessly, a nagging cough that won't go.

EXT. BEACH - MORNING

POV MAN - the BOY is kneeling beside him, watching him calmly, no longer sweating, recovered.

BOY.
Papa?

The MAN rouses himself from sleep, sits up and just stares at the BOY, amazed, as if he has arisen from the grave

MAN.
How are you feeling?

BOY.
I feel kind of weird.

MAN.
Are you hungry?

BOY.
Just thirsty.

The MAN gets up and fetches water from a jerry can, pours a cup, hands it to the BOY who drinks thirstily. The MAN reaches out and strokes the BOY's hair as he drinks. When he has finished drinking the MAN takes him in his arms.

MAN.
You okay?

BOY.
I'm okay.

MAN.
Okay.

They sit their holding each other, overcome with relief.

EXT. BEACH/CLIFFS - NIGHT

There's a campfire burning and the MAN is unpacking the flare pistol from its case.

BOY.
What is it?

MAN.
It's to signal with. When you're in trouble.

BOY.
Who's going to see it?

MAN.
Nobody.

BOY.
Because there's nobody to signal to, is there?

MAN.
It's too smoggy.

The MAN eyes the disappointed BOY, unsure what to say.

MAN.
We'll see it. Don't you want to see it?

BOY.
Okay.

MAN.
You want to shoot it?

BOY.
Okay.

He hands the BOY the pistol and the BOY just stares at it. They walk away from the camp towards the water.

BOY.
You shoot it Papa. You know how to do it.

He hands it to the MAN and they stop near the water. The MAN stands loading the pistol with shells. He cocks it, aims it out over the bay and fires. The FLARE arcs up into the murk with a long WHOOSH and breaks in a cloud of light, hanging there; hot tendrils of magnesium drifting down to the water, the waves and the sand bathed in the weird glow. The BOY watches ~~amazed~~ transported, and the MAN watches the BOY.

POV - again from a distance, as if a third party is watching, we see the flare.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

The deserted campsite. The MAN and the BOY return to the fire and the MAN looks for their shoes and the cart in a sudden panic - everything has gone.

MAN.
Oh Christ. You stupid ass! You stupid
ass!

BOY.
What happened?

MAN.
The cart's gone. They stole our shoes.

BOY.
Do you think it was stolen by the
people who are following us?

MAN.
I don't know. It doesn't matter.

BOY.
It does matter.

The BOY goes quiet, staring out at the desolation in despair.

MAN.
What's wrong?

BOY.
I don't know what we're doing.

MAN.
There are... (HE TRAILS OFF, LOST FOR
WORDS.) There are people... there are
people and we'll find them. You'll
see.

The BOY just shuts his eyes and slumps onto the sand in despair.
The MAN eyes him worriedly.

MAN.
Please. Listen to me. Don't lose
heart.

EXT. COAST ROAD - MORNING

On the road in the middle of desolate salt flats, the strange
lattice of lightning flickering across the sky, the MAN is
looking through the binoculars, the BOY waiting unhappily, they
are barefoot on the tarmac.

POV MAN - up ahead is the THIEF, trundling the loaded cart along
the road.

MAN.
Come on.

They take off after the thief, bare feet thudding on the tarmac,
the MAN in front, the BOY trailing, trying to catch up. The
THIEF looks in the rear view mirror at them and speeds up, head
bent down over the handle running for his life. When he looks
back again the MAN has drawn his pistol and is aiming it
directly at him. He stops the cart, pulls a carving knife from
his belt, and turns to face them, standing behind the cart. The
MAN faces him, stock still, holding the BOY's hand, training the
gun on the THIEF.

MAN.
Get away from the cart and put the
knife down.

The MAN spits and brandishes the knife desperately, he's
scrawny, sullen, bearded and filthy in the yellow plastic rain
coat from the boat, tied with string.

MAN.
If you don't put down the carving
knife and get away from the godamn
cart I'm going to blow your brains
out.

BOY.
Papa?

MAN.
Be quiet.

The MAN cocks the pistol and there's two loud CLICKS. The THIEF stares at the magazine which looks full.

MAN.
God damn you.

BOY.
Papa please don't kill the man.

THIEF.
Come on man, I done what you said,
listen to the boy.

The BOY starts crying - the THIEF looks at the BOY and then the angry MAN, this seems to be sobering. He puts the knife on the cart and steps away, hands in the air, his thumbs are missing.

MAN.
How long have you been following us?

THIEF.
I wasn't following you. I saw the cart
on the sand an' I just took it.

BOY.
Please Papa.

MAN.
Take your clothes off. Take them off,
every godamn stitch.

THIEF.
Come on man, don't do this.

MAN.
I'll kill you where you stand.

THIEF.
Don't do this, man.

MAN.
I won't tell you again.

THIEF.
All right, all right, just take it
easy.

The THIEF looks at the BOY who is now covering his ears and the MAN takes an intimidating step closer with the gun.

The THIEF starts stripping and piling his rags in the road.

MAN.
The shoes.

THIEF.
Come on man.

MAN.
The shoes.

He sits naked in the road and unlaces the rotting shoes.

MAN.
Put them in the cart.

The THIEF stands and drops the shoes in the cart.

MAN.
Put the clothes in.

The MAN drops the clothes in and stands there covering himself, shivering.

THIEF.
Don't do this to me man.

MAN.
You didn't mind doing it to us.

THIEF.
I'm begging you.

BOY.
Papa.

THIEF.
Come on, listen to the kid.

MAN.
You tried to kill us.

THIEF.
I'm starving man. You'd have done the same.

MAN.
You took everything.

THIEF.
I'll die out here.

MAN.
I'm going to leave you the way you left us.

The MAN grabs the cart by the handle, pulls it around, puts the pistol on top and holds his hand out for the BOY.

MAN.
Let's go.

The BOY doesn't take his hand but they set off along the blacktop, the BOY snivelling and crying, leaving the THIEF shivering and whimpering.

BOY.
Oh papa.

MAN.
Stop it.

BOY.
I can't stop it.

MAN.
What do you think would have happened to him if we hadn't caught him? You've got to learn.

BOY.
I don't want to learn!

MAN.
I won't be here forever. Sooner or later you'll have to look after yourself.

The BOY just looks at him - and keeps crying.

EXT. ROAD/COAST - DAY

Some distance away the BOY looks back at the THIEF, still crying.

MAN.
You have to stop crying.

BOY.
I can't.

The BOY looks back one last time as the THIEF disappears from view - still just standing there, utterly lost.

The MAN stops and puts his shoes on. He walks back up the road to the bend but the THIEF has gone.

MAN.
He's gone. Come on.

BOY.
He's not gone. He's not.

The MAN looks helplessly at the tearful BOY as he fits his shoes on for him, the tears streaking the soot on his face.

MAN.
What do you want to do?

BOY.
Just help him, Papa. Just help him.

The MAN looks back down the road, weighing it up.

BOY.
He was just hungry Papa. He's going to die.

MAN.
He's going to die anyway.

BOY.
He's so scared.

MAN.
I'm scared. Do you understand? I'm
scared.

The MAN tries to look the BOY in the eye but he keeps his head bowed, sobbing.

MAN.
You're not the one who has to worry
about everything.

The BOY mumbles, tearful and snotty.

MAN.
What? What did you say?

BOY.
Yes I am. I am the one.

The MAN stops and faces the innocent BOY angrily, stares, then summoning all his strength, turns the cart around and they start wheeling it back the way they came.

MAN.
Help me push.

The MAN takes the BOY's hand and puts it on the cart handle and they push.

EXT. ROAD/COAST - EVENING

As the light starts to fade they look for the THIEF and call out "Hallo!" Etc. After a moment they stop.

BOY.
He's afraid to answer.

MAN.
Is this where we stopped?

BOY.
I don't know. I think so.

They keep walking, hands cupped to mouths, hallooing mindlessly. The MAN stops to rest and watches the BOY a moment, ~~he has~~ stopped crying as he calls out for the thief.

Finally the MAN piles the THIEF's shoes and clothes in the road. He puts a rock on top of them.

MAN.

Come on. We have to go.

The BOY eyes the close sadly, silent now.

EXT. ORCHARD - DAY

THE MAN'S DREAM - a dream and a memory of an early summer day, the MAN and his WIFE are in an orchard, lying in the sun on a picnic blanket, an array of food, bread, fruit and wine beside them. The MAN lies back and his WIFE cradles his head in her lap, stroking his brow. She brings her face down and gently plants a simple kiss on each of his eyelids, then on each of his lips.

POV MAN - his WIFE's face, smiling a dazzling, radiant smile, framed by sunlight and the indistinct shapes of leaves and blossom and petals against the sky - to him she is angelic. Then he kisses her on each eye and on the lips too - their ritual caress.

END OF DREAM SEQUENCE.

EXT. ROADSIDE DUNES - DAWN

The MAN awakes distressed, he wipes a tear, blinks in confusion. The BOY appears to be sound asleep beside him.

EXT. RESORT TOWN - DAY

They approach a small beach resort with a faded "Welcome" sign across the road, the BOY holding the MAN's hand now.

EXT. RESORT TOWN/WATER'S EDGE - DAY

They are down by the water. Small pleasure boats are half sunken in the grey water. Faded colored bunting and painted signs advertise ICE CREAMS, FOOD and a FUN FAIR. The BOY helps the man push the cart through the sand until they can go no further, they stop and drop onto the sand, exhausted.

BOY.
Can I tell you something?

MAN.
Yes.

BOY.
You tell me I shouldn't cry but I've
heard you crying. I hear you coughing
and crying to yourself in the night
when you think I'm asleep.

MAN.
What of it?

BOY.
So if I shouldn't cry you shouldn't
cry either.

They look at each other.

EXT. PORT - LATE AFTERNOON

On the port side of town the MAN wheels the cart through the deserted docks past rotten piers, a row of empty wooden warehouses and a rusty red tanker washed up. He is COUGHING and the sound echoes off the warehouse walls. The BOY is trailing a few paces behind, they're not speaking now.

EXT. BACK STREET - EVENING

As they pass the last of a row of deserted warehouses the MAN slows down to let the BOY catch up. Without warning something WHISTLES over their heads very close and hits the wall beside them with a loud CLATTER. The MAN lunges at the BOY, landing on top of him to cover him and tries to grab the cart which tips over, spilling everything out.

The MAN desperately tries to take cover while he looks over his shoulder and sees:

POV MAN - in the upper window of a warehouse a man is drawing a bow and arrow aimed right at them.

In desperation the MAN covers the BOY and tries to scrabble away but there's a DULL TWANG of bowstring and an arrow THUDS into his leg.

MAN.

Oh you bastard! You bastard!

The MAN claws the blankets from the upturned cart aside and scrabbles around for the pistol but it has fallen from his belt onto the cobbles and scattered out of reach. He spots the flare gun and seizes it, resting it on the cart and aiming carefully at the empty window. When the lone ARCHER appears again he squeezes off a shot and the flare goes rocketing up towards the window in a firey arc, ablaze with color, clean through the window. They can hear the ARCHER SCREAMING inside and see the colored light still flaring from the window.

BOY.

Oh Papa!

MAN.

Stay just like you are.

He gets up and runs limping across the street.

INT. WOODEN STAIRS - EVENING

He limps up the stairs of the old warehouse as quickly as he can, flare gun at the ready, arrow in his leg.

INT. WAREHOUSE FLOOR - EVENING

He bursts into the main room and trains the gun. At the far end a WOMAN is sitting with the prone form of the ARCHER, covering him with her coat. The floor is burnt in a huge patch left by the flare and is still in flames.

ARCHER'S WOMAN.

You son of a bitch cock sucking
fucking motherfucker!

MAN.

Who else is up here?

ARCHER'S WOMAN.

You shit kicking fucking asshole!

The MAN looks down, his leg is bleeding heavily now and the arrow is still sticking out.

MAN.
Where's the bow?

ARCHER'S WOMAN.
I don't have it.

MAN.
Why are you following us?

ARCHER'S WOMAN.
We're not following anybody. You were following us!

The MAN stares at the WOMAN, looking her up and down, she looks sick and thin and desperate. He looks at the ARCHER, lying there dead, his chest and one arm and his face burnt, still smoking. The WOMAN covers his face with the blanket and the MAN doesn't know what to say, ashamed. He goes.

EXT. JETTY - DAY

POV - again from a distance, as if a third party is watching, we watch the MAN and BOY, they are on the jetty.

The MAN tries to pull the arrow out but just pulls the wooden stem out. He takes off his bloodied trousers and examines the gaping wound with a flap of flesh and the arrow head, made from a SPOON, buried inside.

MAN.
See if you can find the medical kit from the boat. Quickly.

The BOY rummages in the cart, finds the kit and hands it over. He stares as the MAN slowly extracts the spoon, wincing in agony. The MAN dowses the wound in antiseptic from the kit and searches through the kit for a needle. He finds a suture needle in a sterile envelope, rips it open with his teeth and, using the light coming in through the parlour windows he threads some silk thread into the needle. He starts to suture up the wound, grimacing in pain as the BOY watches in silence, until eventually commenting:

BOY.
Does it hurt?

MAN (STARES.)
Yes! It hurts!

BOY.
What does it feel like?

The MAN eyes the BOY, surprised at his inopportune chat.

MAN.
At least you're talking to me now.

EXT. JETTY/WATER FRONT - NIGHT

They have a campfire by the jetty and sit overlooking the bay, silent until:

MAN.
Do you want me to tell you a story?

BOY.
No.

MAN.
Why not?

BOY.
Your stories aren't true.

MAN.
They don't have to be true. They're stories.

BOY.
In the stories we're always helping people. But we don't help people. We just shoot people. And in the stories good things happen but we just get sick.

MAN.
We're still here aren't we? Doesn't that mean anything?

EXT. BEACH/SHORELINE - DAY

The MAN pushes the cart slowly, finding it a great effort, it CRUNCHES as it trundles over bleached bones and fish skeletons. The BOY helps push, eying the MAN with concern. The MAN stops and rests on the cart and the BOY pushes on a few more feet then stops and looks back as the MAN COUGHS for a long painful moment. He takes the bloodstained surgical mask from his face, his breath foggy in the cold, he wrings out the blood and saliva, puts his head between his knees and coughs until he can cough no more, gasping for breathe, bloody drool unspooling from his lips into the sand like scarlet twine while the BOY watches, weeping silently.

MAN.

We have to leave the cart. I can't push it anymore.

EXT. ESPLANADE/BEACH - DAY

They are trudging along a concrete causeway by the beach road, the beach below, the BOY carrying a battered suitcase now, the MAN carrying sacks and bags. They stop and the MAN leans against a concrete rail impossibly breathless, his lungs packing up.

The BOY takes his hand gently.

BOY.

What are we going to do Papa?

The MAN can't answer for breathlessness.

BOY.

Well, what are we?

The MAN sits heavily on the ground, totters, then keels over like a dying animal as the BOY stands watching him, eyes welling with tears.

BOY.

Oh no, Papa.

EXT. BEACH/DUNES - DAY

The MAN is drifting in and out of consciousness in the sand. The BOY comes over with a cup of water and holds it to the MAN's lips, he drinks. The BOY has also lit a fire. He spreads out blankets.

MAN.

Don't get comfortable. You need to keep going. You don't know what might be down the road.

BOY.

No.

MAN.

We were always lucky. You'll be lucky again. You'll see. Just go.

BOY.

No. I can't.

MAN.

It's all right. This has been a long time coming. Just keep going south. Do everything the way we did it.

BOY.

No. You're going to be okay Papa. You have to.

MAN.

Keep the gun with you at all times. Don't let anyone take it from you. You need to find the good guys but you can't take any chances. Do you hear me?

BOY.

I want to be with you.

MAN.

I want to be with you too but I can't.

BOY.

Please.

MAN.

You have to go off on your own now.
You have to carry the fire.

BOY.

I don't know how to.

MAN.

Yes you do. You know everything about
it.

BOY.

Is it real? The fire? Papa?

MAN.

Yes it is.

BOY.

Where is it? I don't know where it is.

MAN.

Yes you do.

BOY.

Where?

MAN.

It's inside you. It was always there.
I can see it.

The BOY stares at him, not sure what to believe.

MAN.

You have to let me go.

BOY.

Just take me with you please. Please,
Papa! What should I do?

MAN.

Just hold my hand.

The BOY grips the MAN's hand, bouncing up and down, agitated.

BOY.

You said you wouldn't ever leave me.

MAN.
I know. I'm sorry.

The BOY falls on the MAN, hugging him tight, face pressed to his chest, sobbing.

MAN.
My boy. You have my whole heart. You always did. You're the best guy. You can talk to me and I'll talk to you. You'll see.

BOY.
How will I hear you?

MAN.
You just will.

BOY.
How do you know?

MAN.
You just have to practice. Just don't give up okay? You'll be okay. You're going to be lucky. I know you are.

The MAN closes his eyes and takes deep, rattling breaths.

BOY.
It's okay Papa. You don't have to talk anymore.

Camera pulls back and the BOY is sitting with the MAN saying nothing. It's starting to grow dark. The BOY crouches down on the MAN's chest and goes to sleep there, rising and falling with his father's breathing.

EXT. BEACH/DUNES - NIGHT

Darkness all around, the BOY is lying across the MAN, his hand rising and falling on the MAN's chest slowly, irregularly as the MAN's breath rattles in his lungs.

EXT. CORN FIELD - DAY

FLASHBACK - and the MAN'S LAST DREAM - a birds eye view of a bucolic mid-west farming landscape saturated in orange sunlight, corn fields, a FARMER PLOUGHING a nearby field, grain silos and a hay stack... the intense BUZZING of summer insects and the SONG of songbirds as in the title sequence.

EXT. BEACH/DUNES - MORNING

The BOY is awake but doesn't move, his hand still on the MAN's chest, now motionless. He looks at the MAN who is cold and stiff now, long dead. The BOY gets up and holds the MAN's cold stiff hand. Tears course down his face silently.

BOY.
Oh Papa. Papa. Papa...

EXT. BEACH/DUNES - NIGHT

The BOY is building a campfire. He lights it and sits there watching the MAN's motionless body.

EXT. BEACH/DUNES - MORNING

The BOY has slept beside the MAN, he wakes, blinks, bewildered.

EXT. BEACH/DUNES - DAY

The BOY is zipping up the MAN's parka carefully and heaping blankets on top, talking all the while.

BOY.
Can I tell you something? I had a bad dream. I had this penguin that you wound up and it would waddle and flap its flippers. And we were in that house we used to live in and it came around the corner but nobody had wound it up and it was really scary because-because-because...

He goes quiet as he finishes tending to the body and puts his own parka on, zips it up.

BOY.

The winder wasn't turning.

He takes the gun, checks the magazine, takes out the wooden dummy bullets leaving the real ones there, shuts the magazine and stands, shoving the pistol in his belt.

EXT. WATER'S EDGE - DAY

The BOY is standing at the water's edge looking out at the smog and the emptiness. Out of nowhere a man in a gray and red ski parka with the hood up appears carrying a shotgun over his shoulder and a belt of shells.

He goes over to the BOY, he is bearded and scarred with a wandering eye and a crushed cheekbone, a veteran of many skirmishes. The BOY doesn't flinch, but his hand goes to the gun at his side. When the man speaks he has some sort of speech defect, possibly caused by missing teeth.

VETERAN.

Where's the man you were with? (NO
REPLY.) Was he your father?

BOY.

Yes. He was my Papa.

VETERAN.

I'm sorry.

BOY.

I don't know what to do.

VETERAN.

Well, I think maybe you should come
with me.

The BOY's finger tightens on the trigger of the GUN.

BOY.

Are you one of the good guys?

VETERAN.

Yeah. I'm one of the good guys. Why don't you put that pistol away?

BOY.

I'm not supposed to let anybody take the pistol. No matter what.

VETERAN.

I don't want your pistol. I just didn't want you pointing it at me.

The BOY lowers the gun to his side and the VETERAN comes a few steps closer, causing the BOY to back up a step.

VETERAN.

Where's your stuff?

BOY.

I don't have much stuff.

VETERAN.

What have you got? Blankets?

BOY.

My Papa's wrapped in them.

MAN.

Show me.

The BOY doesn't move. The MAN holds out his hand for the BOY to take, the BOY sees he has a THUMB MISSING and hesitates, wary. The MAN squats, leaning on his shotgun.

VETERAN.

Look. You got two choices here. You can stay here with your papa or you can go with me. If you stay you need to keep off the road.

BOY.

How do I know you're one of the good guys?

VETERAN.

You don't. You'll have to take a shot.

The BOY weighs it up, eyeing the VETERAN.

BOY.
Do you have any kids?

VETERAN.
Yes we do.

BOY.
Do you have a little boy?

VETERAN.
We have a little boy and a little girl.

BOY.
How old is he?

VETERAN.
He's about your age. Maybe a little older.

BOY.
And you didn't eat them?

VETERAN.
No.

BOY.
You don't eat people?

VETERAN.
No. We don't eat people.

BOY.
Are you carrying the fire?

VETERAN.
Am I what?

BOY.
Carrying the fire.

VETERAN.
You're kind of weirded out, aren't you, kid?

BOY.
Well, are you?

VETERAN.

Yeah. I am. I'm carrying the fire.

BOY.

And I can go with you?

VETERAN.

Yes, you can.

The BOY hesitates.

EXT. BEACH/DUNES - DAY

They go over to where the MAN lies dead and the VETERAN squats and lifts a blanket to take a look.

VETERAN.

Are these all the blankets you have?

BOY.

Yes.

VETERAN.

Is that your suitcase?

BOY.

Yes.

The VETERAN stands and studies the BOY.

VETERAN.

Why don't you go up onto the road and wait for me. I'll bring the blankets.

BOY.

What about my Papa?

VETERAN.

What about him?

BOY.

We can't just leave him here.

VETERAN.

Yes we can.

BOY.
I don't want people to see him.

VETERAN.
There's nobody to see him.

BOY.
Can I cover him in leaves?

VETERAN.
The wind will blow them away.

BOY.
Could we cover him with one of the
blankets?

VETERAN.
Okay. I'll do it. Go on now.

EXT. ROAD/COAST - DAY

The BOY waits and in a moment the VETERAN emerges from the dunes carrying the suitcase with the blankets slung over his shoulder. He sorts through them and hands one to the BOY.

VETERAN.
Here. Wrap this around you. You're
cold.

The BOY eye the blanket uncertainly, holds out the pistol for the VETERAN to hold.

VETERAN.
You hold onto that.

BOY.
Okay.

VETERAN.
Do you know how to shoot it?

BOY.
Yes.

VETERAN.
Okay.

BOY.
What about my papa?

VETERAN.
There's nothing else to be done.

BOY.
I think I want to say goodbye to him.

VETERAN.
Will you be all right?

BOY.
Yes.

VETERAN.
Go ahead. I'll wait here for you.

The BOY turns around and heads down to the beach.

EXT. BEACH/DUNES - DAY

The BOY trudges through the sand over to the corpse of the MAN which is now neatly wrapped up in a blanket from head to toe. The BOY kneels beside him and starts to cry silently and whisper.

BOY.
I'll talk to you every day. And I won't forget. No matter what. No matter what, Papa.

The BOY dries his eyes, takes a breath, gets up and walks back to the road...

EXT. CAUSEWAY/ROAD - DAY

As the BOY walks out of the dunes holding the gun, a MOTHERLY WOMAN who is standing with the VETERAN comes towards him.

MOTHERLY WOMAN.
Oh. I am so glad to see you.

The BOY just stares at her, bemused - a short distance away stands the rest of the family - a BOY his age and a GIRL.

The BOY stares at the OTHER BOY and recognizes him - it's the same BOY he chased earlier.

The MOTHERLY WOMAN goes over and puts her arms around him.

MOTHERLY WOMAN.

We've been following you. Did you know that? We saw you with your Papa and we tried to catch up but you were too quick for us.

VETERAN.

There was some discussion about whether to even come after you at all.

As she's chatting, the MOTHERLY WOMAN gently takes the gun from the BOY and hands it to the VETERAN.

MOTHERLY WOMAN.

We're so lucky. We were so worried about you. And now we don't have to worry about a thing.

She kisses the BOY on the forehead and holds him at arm's length and looks at him.

MOTHERLY WOMAN.

How does that sound? Is that okay?

CLOSING CREDITS.

(MORE)