

THE MAN IN THE YARD

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FADE IN:

EXT. WHEAT FIELD - DAWN

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

YOUNG GIRL (V.O.)

Once upon a time, there lived three little pigs.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - EARLY MORNING

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

YOUNG GIRL (V.O.)

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

EXT. FIELD OF RYEGRASS - CONTINUOUS

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

YOUNG GIRL (V.O.)

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

EXT. FIELD OF RYEGRASS - CONTINUOUS

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

YOUNG GIRL (V.O.)

It was the big... bad... wolf. He could smell the pig inside.

## EXT. DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

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

YOUNG GIRL'S (V.O.)

"Little pig. Little pig. Let me in," he growled. "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin."

## EXT. FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

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

YOUNG GIRL'S (V.O.)

"Then I'll huff... and I'll puff... and I'll blow your house in!"

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

## INT. CHILD'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

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

ANNIE

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

## INT. MASTER BEDROOM - SAME TIME

CLOSE ON the face of RAMONA (35). She's asleep, but her eyes are slightly open; in limbo between a restless night and yet another morning.

TEEN BOY (O.S.)

Mom.

Ramona doesn't wake.

TEEN BOY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Mom?

Poking his head through her bedroom door, is BEN (14). He holds an XBOX GUN CONTROLLER and has A HEADSET on his head.

BEN  
Mooooom.

Getting impatient, he walks to the bed and nudges her--

Ramona JOLTS awake with a STARTLED GASP. Panicked, she looks around, spots her son, and quickly calms down.

RAMONA  
(SIGH) Jesus, Ben.

BEN  
I was gonna let you keep sleeping,  
but... the power went out.

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

RAMONA  
Wonderful.

As she sits up, we see that her left arm is in a CAST. She carefully swings her right leg off the bed and straps it into a BOOT CAST. She WINCES from the most subtle of movements.

BEN  
Can you um, call the power company  
or whatever?

RAMONA  
Yeah. Yeah, I will.

A beat. Ramona rubs her eyes.

BEN  
(delicately)  
Can you do it, like, soon?  
(RE: gun)  
My Call of Duty regiment probably  
thinks I got kidnapped.

RAMONA  
(ANNOYED SIGH) Can I have a minute  
to wake up please?

Ben spots a RED FLANNEL SHIRT tangled in her blankets. After a beat, Ramona tucks it away, embarrassed and vulnerable.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Just... give me a minute.

He stares at her, concerned. She's getting annoyed.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
I'm all right, okay?

She smiles... and Ben finally leaves. She SIGHS.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The sink RUNS as Ramona SOBS into her hands. As she muffles her crying, we spot a WEDDING RING on her finger.

On a dime, she stops and turns the water off. She grabs a tissue and dries her eyes, then takes a DEEP BREATH and stares at herself in the mirror.

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

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

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

She GROANS and plugs it into a charger -- no charge. Duh.

RAMONA  
Right. (SIGH) Shit.

INT. ANNIE'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

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

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

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

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

Ramona eyes the stuffed Penguin then nods, understanding.

RAMONA  
Did you sleep in here all night?

ANNIE  
No. I slept with Ben.

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

Ramona smiles. Annie doesn't.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Outside Annie's room, Ramona closes the door. She turns to see Ben standing outside of his room, gun controller ready.

BEN  
Did you call yet? I'm missing out  
on killing Nazis.

RAMONA  
Um, I can't, actually.

BEN  
Um. Why?

RAMONA  
(sheepish)  
Phone's dead.

BEN  
(GROAN) You do realize that cell  
phones need to be charged in order  
to work, right?

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

RAMONA  
Hey, you're lucky you still have  
Xbox privileges after that call  
from Mrs. Adams yest--

BEN

Mom, I told you -- it wasn't "a  
fight!" Mrs. Adams is full of shit  
and you know it.

RAMONA

Ben, can we not today? Please?

Relying on her crutch, Ramona heads toward the stairs and slowly begins to descend. She has to carefully put both feet on each step. *First step... second step...*

BEN

Well, I guess I'll go... read the Bible like some Amish kid.

(then, insinuating)

By the way, if you let your son get his own phone like he asked, we wouldn't be in this here pickle.

RAMONA

Not now please.

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

Ben rolls his eyes and storms back into his room.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

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

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

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

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

Its subject is A HANDSOME BEARDED MAN kneeling next to a dead ten-point buck. The butt of his REMINGTON 700 HUNTING RIFLE is on the ground and he smiles proudly. Underneath a hunting vest, he wears the same red flannel shirt we saw on Ramona's bed.

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

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

...the kitchen. One step in--

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

RAMONA

Jesus! (ANNOYED SIGH) Charlie.

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Yes, hi. Hi, Charlie, hi.

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Easy, easy!

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Charlie! Come on, boy. Out. Out!

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)

(SIGH) Christ, that dog.

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

ANNIE (O.S.)

(GASP) My flower!

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

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Mommy, he's dead!

RAMONA

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

Ramona hands her a COFFEE MUG from the cabinet. Annie gently places the flower inside and fills it in with spilled dirt.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

There we go.

Ramona sets the flower on a windowsill for Annie to see. Its new home reads: "GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK."

ANNIE  
That was Daddy's mug.

RAMONA  
Mm-hm. It was.

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
You hungry?

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

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

INT. KITCHEN - A BIT LATER

The three of them sit, finishing their breakfast. The fourth chair, at the head of the table, is noticeably empty.

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

RAMONA  
(YAWN) Could be a problem at the  
plant. Or maybe something got to  
the lines?

BEN  
Like something underground?

RAMONA  
I dunno. I guess.

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

BEN  
It was probably a Graboid.

ANNIE  
(immediately concerned)  
A what?

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

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

ANNIE  
(annoyed)  
Mom!

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

ANNIE  
Who?

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

Annie shakes her head no.

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

BEN  
What about all those groceries Mr.  
Marcus brought yesterday? Is  
everything gonna go bad 'cause  
there's no power?

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

A beat. Ben takes a drink of water.

ANNIE  
Mr. Marcus smells bad.

Ben LAUGHS, SPITTING a little water from his mouth.

RAMONA  
Annie!

BEN  
He kinda does, Mom. Gotta admit!

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

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

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

BEN  
I got it, Mom.

RAMONA  
No, no. I got it.

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

BEN  
Mom, I got it. RAMONA (CONT'D)  
I can get it.

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

RAMONA  
You don't have to!

BEN  
(snapping)  
Let me DO IT!!

RAMONA  
(recoiling)  
Okay, fine.

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

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

A beat as Ben reconsiders. Then caves.

BEN  
Okay fine, you can do it.

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

RAMONA  
Annie. What did I say?

ANNIE  
But I want a treat.

RAMONA  
I said later! Maybe. Close the door.

Annie, pouting, does reluctantly.

BEN (O.S.)  
Uh, Mom?

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

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

RAMONA  
Yeah?

Ben re-enters. He looks concerned.

BEN  
There's a man in the yard.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

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

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

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

ANNIE  
Who is that?

RAMONA  
I... I don't know.

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

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

BEN  
What a creep.

ANNIE  
Do you think he's hurt?

RAMONA  
I'm uh, not sure.

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

RAMONA  
Okay, okay. Calm down.

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

RAMONA  
No you should not.

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

ANNIE  
(scared)  
Mom?!

RAMONA  
Ben.

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

RAMONA

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

BEN

He could have somethin'.

RAMONA

He doesn't.

A beat.

ANNIE

He could have a grenade.

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

RAMONA

Annie, I promise you, he does not have a grenade. (BEAT) And stop watching your brother play video games.

They all continue to stare. He remains perfectly still.

BEN

You think he can see us?

ANNIE

I think he's sleeping.

BEN

Really?

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

RAMONA

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

BEN

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

A macabre beat.

RAMONA

He's not dead.

BEN

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

RAMONA

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

BEN

Why?

RAMONA

'Cause. Clearly he's lost.

BEN

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

ANNIE

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

RAMONA

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

Another long, quiet beat.

ANNIE

We should call the police.

BEN

(pointed)

Great idea, Annie. But  
unfortunately, we can't.

ANNIE

Why not?

BEN

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

RAMONA

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

BEN

(smart ass)

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

Ramona ignores this. Another beat of uncomfortable silence.

ANNIE

Is Mr. Marcus coming today?

RAMONA  
No. Tomorrow.

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

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

BEN  
How do you know that?

Ramona doesn't answer.

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

RAMONA  
I said no.

BEN  
Okay, how about this? I'll go distract him with my story about that time I threw up at EPCOT... while you sneak around behind him and...

Ben pantomimes "beating someone over the head repeatedly." Ramona shoots him an annoyed look.

BEN (CONT'D)  
(shrugs)  
Hey, no bad ideas in brainstorming.

A beat.

ANNIE  
Where's Charlie? Is he still outside?

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

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

ANNIE  
What if Charlie bites him?

RAMONA

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

BEN

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

RAMONA

That's enough.

BEN

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

RAMONA

Ben.

BEN

...tie us up...

RAMONA

Ben!

A beat.

BEN

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

RAMONA

(snapping)  
STOP IT!

She nudges him forcefully. Ben recoils.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

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

Ramona takes a DEEP BREATH, calming down again.

BEN

(timid)

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

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

ANNIE  
I wish Dad were here.

BEN  
Me too.

A beat.

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

RAMONA  
I'm gonna go talk to him.

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

BEN  
Uh, what?

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

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

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

Ramona ignores him and continues tying her boot.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Well, at least take a bat with you!

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

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

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Ramona heads for the front door.

BEN  
I vote against this plan.

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

BEN (CONT'D)  
Annie too.

RAMONA  
Too bad. I'm in charge.

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

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

RAMONA  
You're fourteen.

BEN  
Exactly! In some countries, I could be king!

RAMONA  
Oh yeah? What countries?

Ben thinks. He has no idea.

BEN  
Game of Thrones!

RAMONA  
Stay here with Annie.

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

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

ANNIE  
What's a Jehovah's Witness?

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

He smiles at Annie, trying to lighten the mood, but she remains somber. He gets down to her level, comforting her in a warm tone we haven't yet seen from him.

BEN (CONT'D)  
 Hey... I know Mom hasn't really been "Mom" lately, but I'm here.  
 And I'm not gonna let anything bad happen. Okay?

He grabs Penguin and holds him up.

BEN (CONT'D)  
 I'll look after you, and you look after Penguin, deal?

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

EXT. FRONT PORCH - SAME TIME

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

RAMONA  
 (calling out)  
 Hello? Sir?

Nothing.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 Sir? Can I help you?

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

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

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Ben and Annie watch nervously out the window.

EXT. FRONT YARD - SAME TIME

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

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

smiling.

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

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

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

RAMONA

Hello?

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)

...Sir?

The Man simply stares at her, still grinning.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Are you okay? Sir? Can I--

THE MAN IN THE YARD

Good morning, ma dear!

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

Pardon my unannounced arrival. I'm sure spottin' me out here in this manner must have frightened you and your family.

RAMONA

Um. (CHUCKLE) A little actually.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

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

A beat.

RAMONA

Can I help you?

THE MAN IN THE YARD

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

Ramona thinks, quickly running scenarios through her mind.

RAMONA

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD

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

RAMONA

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

The Man looks Ramona up and down.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

What's your name?

RAMONA

(hesitant)

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD

(savoring)

Ra-moaaan-ahhhh... Of course it is.

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

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

RAMONA

Just Ramona.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

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

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
Where is your husband this morning,  
Ramona?

RAMONA  
Hunting. He went out hunting.

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

RAMONA  
Deer.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Deer?

RAMONA  
Yes.

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

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

RAMONA  
Right. It was uh, turkey.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
(CONDESCENDING CHUCKLE) Ramona,  
that also doesn't start until  
October.

*Shit. Shit. Shit.*

RAMONA  
Squirrel. Fox squirrel.

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

A beat as Ramona stares deep into his beady, unblinking eyes.

RAMONA  
What the hell do you want?

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

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

RAMONA  
You're not my guest.

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

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

RAMONA  
When he finds you here--

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

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

Ramona turns around to head back, but--

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

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

RAMONA  
He... he had an accident.

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Did he, now?

She SWALLOWS, then nods ever so slightly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tears well in Ramona's eyes. Tortured, she nods slowly.

RAMONA  
...Yes.

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

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
"Annie."

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
Aw, young Annie had quite a field  
day signing your casts, didn't she?  
Adorable. And "Ben." Named after  
his father perhaps?

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

## THE MAN IN THE YARD

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

Ramona glances down at "BEN" on her cast.

## THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

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

(shrugging playfully)

(CHUCKLES) Kids.

## RAMONA

Get out of my fucking yard.

## THE MAN IN THE YARD

Oh, Ramona... I'm so sorry to tell you this but... (CHUCKLES) If you had any plans for today, you should go on ahead and cancel 'em.

Ramona looks around frantically, searching for something.

## THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

(feigned concern)

What is it? Whatcha lookin' for?

("eureka")

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

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

## THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

Surely he should be running up here aaaaaaaaaa moment to chase me from your property. Well...

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

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

## THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

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

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

## THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

Your Jeep ain't gonna start.

He winks.

## RAMONA

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

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

## THE MAN IN THE YARD

I was invited.

## RAMONA

By... by who?

## THE MAN IN THE YARD

Well... by you, Ramona.

Ramona stares at him, not understanding.

## THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

Every evening, after you kiss your children goodnight, you lie restless in that big empty bed, all alone... and beg for me.

On Ramona's confused face, we...

FLASHBACK TO:

## INT. MASTER BEDROOM - THE NIGHT BEFORE

Unable to sleep, Ramona lies on the right side of her king-size bed. The left side, noticeably empty. In her hands, she clutches her husband's red flannel shirt...

BACK TO SCENE:

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 (sinister)  
 You need me, don't you?

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

RAMONA  
 ...What are you gonna do... if I let you in?

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 What do you think I'm gonna do... if you don't?

As the same violent thoughts race through both their heads simultaneously, he cracks an excited grin.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 Well? Whatta'ya say?

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

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

EXT. FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

*First step, second step, third step.* Ramona shuffles across the porch, reaches the front door -- but stops.

For a long beat, she's frozen. Her hand clutches the doorknob... her heart beats out of her chest... her face is nothing but a panicked, blank stare...

Then, she TAKES A DEEP, CALMING BREATH, and turns the handle.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

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

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

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

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

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

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

She eyes her son and young daughter...

BEN (CONT'D)  
...Mom?

...and puts on a brave face.

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

She hobbles into the living room...

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

BEN  
Did he say anything?

RAMONA  
He did.

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

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

A beat. Ramona avoids eye contact with them.

*Are they going to buy it?*

ANNIE  
His nurse?

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

Another beat.

BEN

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

RAMONA

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

Ben thinks, wrinkling his brow, not buying it.

BEN

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

RAMONA

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

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)

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

Ramona flashes Annie a reassuring smile.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Ice cream?

Annie nods. Ramona takes her by the hand.

BEN

Mom, wait.

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

BEN (CONT'D)

(quietly)

What's going on? You can tell me.

A beat as she stares at her son...

RAMONA

There's nothing to tell.

...then exits into the kitchen.

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

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

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

RAMONA

Vanilla?

ANNIE

Yes.

RAMONA

Yes what?

ANNIE

Yes please.

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

RAMONA

One for Annie. Two for mom.

(calling out)

Ben? Ice cream?

(then)

Ooo! Wonder if we have any chocolate syrup.

She opens the fridge and sees some.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

We do!

Ben enters, arms crossed, skeptical.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

(to Ben)

Want some?

A beat.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Ben?

BEN

Okay, let me make sure I got it straight: this hundred year-old lookin' dude escaped from his nursing home... walked like, thirty miles...

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)  
found a wooden chair along the  
way... and just plopped down in our  
yard?

RAMONA  
(dodging the subject)  
Uh, I dunno, I guess. Vanilla or  
mint chocolate chip?

BEN  
What's his name?

Ramona is trying desperately to ignore Ben.

RAMONA  
(to Annie)  
Chocolate syrup?

ANNIE  
Yes please.

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

Ramona gives Annie her ice cream.

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

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

RAMONA  
Ben, I--

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

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

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

RAMONA

Christ, Ben. Look, he...

(searching)

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

BEN

(perplexed)

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

RAMONA

Yes!

BEN

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

RAMONA

(growing frustrated)

No, I didn't. I said--

BEN

Yes you did!

RAMONA

Ben, I said--

BEN

Mom, you said it was your best guess!

RAMONA

DROP IT!

A beat. Ramona stares at him angrily.

Ben doesn't let up:

BEN

I think you should get Dad's gun.

Annie GASPS.

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

RAMONA

Go to your room.

BEN  
 (incredulous)  
 What?

RAMONA  
 Go. To. Your. Room.

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

BEN  
 (SCOFF) No.

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

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

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

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

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

Annie CRIES HARDER.

RAMONA  
 Stop crying.

She doesn't.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 Annie, if you don't stop crying,  
 I'm gonna take away your ice cream.

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

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

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

After a beat, he looks back outside.

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

DISSOLVE TO:

## THE EARLY AFTERNOON

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

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

ANNIE  
Four.

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

RAMONA  
(playful)  
Ooo, you got a ladder!

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Dang, you're good at this game.  
What's your strategy?

ANNIE  
(shrugging)  
I dunno, I just... roll the dice.

Ramona LAUGHS.

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

Ramona grabs the dice, briefly peeks out the window at The Man -- *yep, still there* -- and then rolls.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Three.

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

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

ANNIE  
(shrugs)  
Stuff happens.

Ramona LAUGHS again.

RAMONA

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

Across the room, Ben still sits in his chair, staring out the window, still "on guard."

ANNIE

Ben, your turn.

Another beat. He ignores them completely.

RAMONA

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

She rolls.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Three.

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Uh-oh. Sorry, buddy.

ANNIE

Ben, you got a chute.

BEN

I'm devastated.

Annie grabs the dice next. She rolls and one of the die tumbles off the table and onto the floor. She bends down to retrieve it--

there's A SPIDER.

ANNIE

(GASP) Spider!

Annie immediately leaps onto the couch, as Ben springs from his chair.

BEN

Whoa, look at that thing.

The spider takes off quickly across the floor and Annie SHRIEKS at its speed. Ben observes, slightly fascinated.

BEN (CONT'D)

It's a Wolf Spider.

ANNIE  
Get it, get it!

BEN  
Okay, relax.

Ben runs into the kitchen... and returns with an EMPTY GLASS.

BEN (CONT'D)  
I'll put it outside.

Ben carefully creeps toward the spider, glass upside down, ready to trap it. He calmly leans over... and slowly lowers the glass... right on top of--

*WHAM!* A LARGE BOOK is dropped on the spider, smashing it.

Ben looks up. Ramona did it.

RAMONA  
Got him.

She sits back down on the couch.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Still your turn, Annie.

They resume their game. On Ben's aggravated face, we...

DISSOLVE TO:

LATER IN THE AFTERNOON

Ben sits in his chair, but now he slouches a bit, rather bored. Likewise, The Man is -- you guessed it -- still in the same position out in the yard.

Annie and Ramona now color with crayons. A few childish drawings scatter the coffee table. Ramona draws a sunflower while Annie draws the exterior of their house.

Ramona watches as Annie grabs a black crayon and scribbles a DARK STICK FIGURE sitting outside their house. In swirling motions, she gives him a large, wide hat.

Annie stops, gets up, and heads toward the kitchen.

RAMONA  
Where you goin'?

ANNIE  
I want some water.

RAMONA

Okay. Just... come right back.

Ramona flashes a smile as Annie exits. Once her daughter's gone, she closes her eyes and take A LONG, AND MUCH-NEEDED, DEEP BREATH.

BEN

Mom, I just had a pretty good idea.

He turns around in his chair to face her.

BEN (CONT'D)

Why don't we drive over to the Marcus'?

Ramona bites her lip.

BEN (CONT'D)

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

Ramona holds up her casts.

RAMONA

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

BEN

Yeah...

(has all the answers)

...but I can.

He smiles, proud of himself.

Ramona starts to shake her head no--

BEN (CONT'D)

Come on, Dad used to let me drive the Jeep up and down the driveway all the time!

(begging)

It's ten minutes away and all on country roads!

RAMONA

No.

BEN

(aggravated)

Mom! Why not?!

RAMONA

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

Ben lets out a LOUD, OVER THE TOP GROAN.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

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

A beat. Ben is completely bewildered.

BEN

Really? With the Jeep?

RAMONA

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

BEN

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

RAMONA

I said no!

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)

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

A beat.

BEN

(under his breath)

You're a bitch.

She heard him.

RAMONA

What did you say?

Another beat.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

(stern)

Ben. What did you--

BEN  
I said you're--

AHHHHH!! It's Annie SCREAMING from the other room. Ben and Ramona jump up immediately, run towards the kitchen...

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

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

SMASH CUT TO:

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

RAMONA  
It's a little cut, baby.

ANNIE  
(through tears)  
It's a piece of the bowl!

Ramona feels terrible.

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

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

BEN  
(snide)  
Way to go, Mom.

She ignores him and exits with Annie.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

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

The Man still hasn't moved.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

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

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - SAME TIME

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

ANNIE  
I got a little blood on the stairs.

RAMONA  
That's okay. It's just blood.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

A beat as Ben listens to them go.

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

BEN  
(to himself, skeptical)  
Something wrong with the Jeep, huh?

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

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

EXT. HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

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

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

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

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

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

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

BEN (CONT'D)

(sotto)

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

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

INT. JEEP - CONTINUOUS

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

Nothing.

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

Still nothing.

BEN

Hmm.

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

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

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

RAMONA

There we go. Feel better?

Annie nods.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

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

ANNIE

Yeah.

Ramona grabs Annie's hand.

RAMONA

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

ANNIE

It's okay. It was an accident.

RAMONA

(smiles)

Right. "Stuff happens."

ANNIE

Like when Daddy crashed.

Ramona's smile slowly fades.

A beat.

RAMONA

Right.

INT. JEEP - SAME TIME

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

BEN

(frustrated)

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

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

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

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

He looks inside -- a single, long, deep gash has severed the car's motor into two worthless hunks of jagged metal. The Jeep's engine has been sliced in half.

BEN

...The fuck?

He backs away and quickly turns around--

The Man's chair is empty.

BEN (CONT'D)

Oh, shit.

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

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

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

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

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

*CRACKLE!* He GASPS and turns toward the unsettling noise--  
it's just the tarp over top of the crashed pickup truck being  
*RUSTLED BY A GUST OF WIND*.

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

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

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

He gets up, and--

bumps right into Ramona.

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

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

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

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

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

Ben's not having any of it.

BEN

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

Ben turns to Annie.

BEN (CONT'D)

Somebody hacked up the Jeep's  
engine so now we can't drive  
anywhere!

(to Ramona)

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

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

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...and points out the window.

BEN

Him!

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

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

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

BEN

But you already knew that, didn't  
you?

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

BEN (CONT'D)

(knowingly)

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

Annie eyes her mother skeptically.

ANNIE

...Mom?

RAMONA

(small)

He's outside.

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

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

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 What are you doing?

He opens it...

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 HEY!

...and pokes his head out.

BEN  
 (calling out)  
 Charlie?!

RAMONA  
 BEN!

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

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

RAMONA  
 Shut the door!

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

RAMONA  
 Close it!

BEN  
 (calling out)  
 Char--lie!

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

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

RAMONA  
Keep. The door. Locked.

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

RAMONA  
EVERYONE'S STAYING INSIDE!!

Ramona locks the door.

A tense beat. Ben stares daggers at his mother.

BEN  
He's dead, isn't he?

Annie GASPS.

Ramona says nothing.

Ben shakes his head, disappointed.

BEN (CONT'D)  
You've been telling us, over and  
over, that you have everything  
under control. But you don't, do  
you, Mom?

(to Annie)  
All day long, she's done nothing  
but lie to us.

(to Ramona)  
Right?

A tense beat.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Admit it!

She can't.

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

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

Ben crosses his arms.

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

*Ouch.*

Ramona *SLAPS* Ben hard across the face.

He rubs his cheek and stares at her, shocked.

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

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

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - SECONDS LATER

...and *STOMPS* quickly up the stairs.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

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

RAMONA  
(panicked)  
Ben! BEN! STOP!

She hurries after him.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

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

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

...and opens her closet door. He shoves aside hanging clothes to reveal a TALL, THIN, BLACK SAFE. He eyes its keyhole.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Ramona crutches through the living room with urgency.

RAMONA  
BEN! DON'T YOU DARE!

She turns the corner and...

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

...hobbles up the stairs in desperate haste.

RAMONA  
GET OUT OF THERE!

*First step second step...*

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Ben throws open Ramona's dresser drawers, searching. He digs around frantically, tossing clothes, jewelry, and other possessions onto the floor.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

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

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - SAME TIME

*Fourth step fifth step sixth st--*

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

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

Ramona grabs her knee, grimacing in pain.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - SAME TIME

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

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - SAME TIME

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

RAMONA  
Ben!

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Ben pulls his hand from the bedside table drawer. He holds a SILVER KEY.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

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

RAMONA  
Ben, please!

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

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

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

She backs away from the window, scared.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

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

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

At the sight of the gun, she GASPS.

RAMONA  
No!

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Put that back!

BEN  
Give me it!

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

RAMONA  
Put it back!

BEN

Let go!

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

BEN (CONT'D)

I said let go!

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

BEN (CONT'D)

(furious)

MOM!

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

RAMONA

Wait, stop!

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

BEN

LET GO!

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

RAMONA

(scared)

Ben... Ben, no...

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Please...

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

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

INT. BATHROOM/INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

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

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

Ben clearly feels terrible, but presses onward.

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

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

He returns quickly with a LONG EXTENSION CORD.

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

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

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

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Ben?

She tries pulling again. Still won't open.

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

She pounds her fist -- *BANG-BANG!* -- on the door.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Open it!

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

BEN  
(to himself)  
Sorry, Mom.

He picks up the rifle and heads down the stairs.

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

*BANG-BANG-BANG!*

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

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

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

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

It's already loaded.

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

ANNIE (O.S.)  
Ben?

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

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

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

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

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

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

EXT. FRONT PORCH/YARD - CONTINUOUS

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

BEN

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

He raises the rifle to his shoulder.

BEN (CONT'D)

'Merica, bitch!!

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

BEN (CONT'D)

One!

Nothing.

BEN (CONT'D)

Two!

The Man doesn't move at all.

BEN (CONT'D)

Three!

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

BEN (CONT'D)

Four!

Still nothing.

BEN (CONT'D)

Five!

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

BEN (CONT'D)

Six!

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

BEN (CONT'D)

Seven!

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

BEN (CONT'D)  
(alarmed, flustered)  
Ei-eight!

With each wide step, The Man's towering height becomes more and more clear. (*Seven feet tall?*) Ben blinks erratically: "Am I imagining things?"

BEN (CONT'D)  
NINE!

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

BEN (CONT'D)  
I said "nine," you piece of shit!  
Don't make me pull this trigger!

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
(pleasant)  
You must be Ben!

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

BEN  
I will shoot you!

The Man playfully raises his hands up in a surrender.

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

BEN  
Damn straight.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Daaaamn straight! Now that's the right attitude!  
(MORE)

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
Just 'cause you got a job to do,  
that don't mean it can't be fun.  
Right?

He winks at Ben.

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

BEN  
I'll do it! Watch me!

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

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

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

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

The Man CHUCKLES.

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

BEN  
Yeah, once.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Your daddy take ya?

Another beat.

BEN  
Yup.

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

BEN  
Rabbits.

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

A long beat.

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

BEN  
No.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
No? Why not?

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

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

BEN  
Yeah.

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

BEN  
Um. Nine or ten.

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

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

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

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
Had one riiiiight in your sights...  
but you just couldn't pull the  
trigger, could ya?  
(MORE)

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 (BEAT) Do ya think you disappointed  
 your daddy that day, Ben?

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

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

A long beat.

BEN  
 No.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 Shucks.

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

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

Ben doesn't move.

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

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 But gettin' an animal to come to  
 you...  
 (MORE)

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 that ain't the real way to hunt.  
 (sinister)  
 See, what I like to do... is keep  
 the wind at my back... let my prey  
 get a whiff of me. Let 'em know I'm  
 comin'. Puts the fear in 'em.

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

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

Ben can only stare, practically hypnotized.

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

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

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

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

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

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

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

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

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

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

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

*BANG-BANG-BANG!*

On Annie, unsure what to do...

EXT. FRONT PORCH/YARD - SAME TIME

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

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

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

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

RAMONA (O.S.)  
Annie! ANNIE!

EXT. FRONT PORCH/YARD - SAME TIME

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
...Well?

BEN  
No.

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Why not, Ben?

BEN  
Because you killed my dog.

He readies the rifle.

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

The Man is taken aback.

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

BEN  
You killed Charlie!

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

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

BARK! BARK!

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

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

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

BEN (CONT'D)  
Charlie!!

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

INT. BATHROOM/UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

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

ANNIE  
Mom?

RAMONA  
 (elated)  
 Annie!! Annie, I need your help!  
 Can you open the door?

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 (remorseful)  
 Baby, I'm sorry I lied to you. I  
 just...

Annie stares at the door.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 I didn't want you to worry. So I  
 made up something else.

Ramona remembers something Annie said earlier.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 I changed the scary parts.

A beat.

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 (relieved)  
 Yes, baby! Hurry, hurry!

EXT. FRONT PORCH/YARD - SAME TIME

The dog stands oddly still in the yard.

BEN  
 Come here, boy!

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

BEN (CONT'D)  
 (suspicious)  
 ...Charlie?

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 You wanna know what else your  
 mother lied about? (BEAT) The night  
 of the accident -- y'know, when you  
 lost your daddy?

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

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

Ben nods.

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

After a beat, Ben storms back into the house.

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

The Man's devilish smile returns.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

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

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY/BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Annie almost has the figure-eight knot untied.

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

RAMONA  
Almost there, baby!

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Yes!

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

She GASPS.

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

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

BEN  
 (upset)  
 Is it true?!

RAMONA  
 Is what true?

BEN  
 You told me Dad crashed the truck.

*Oh no.* Ramona SWALLONS, caught.

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

Ramona retreats backward as Ben walks toward her.

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

On Ramona's guilty face...

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Downstairs, the living room is empty.

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

*SQUAWK!*

*...SQUAWK! SQUAWK!*

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

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

A beat.

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

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

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Ramona eyes the rifle nervously.

BEN

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

Ramona bites her lip.

BEN (CONT'D)

(angry)

Tell me the truth!

(then, pleading)

Please.

A long beat.

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

RAMONA

We left dinner that night and... we'd both been drinking. But since I'd only had two glasses of wine, I made Dad give me the keys, and...

(struggling)

...and I drove home. (BEAT) When we turned onto Lake, the wheel just... got away from me, I dunno, and...

A tear rolls down her cheek.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

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

On Ben's angry face...

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

MAN'S CALMING VOICE (O.S.)

Annnnniieeeee...

Annie creeps toward the window and slowly peers outside.

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

ANNIE

...Daddy?

Seeing Annie, his face lights up. He waves.

DAD  
Hey, baby girl!

Even though the window is closed and he's far away, Annie can hear her dad's welcoming voice as clear as day.

DAD (CONT'D)  
Aw, I've missed you.

A beat as the hesitant Annie can only stare, wide-eyed.

ANNIE  
I've...  
(smiles)  
...missed you too.

Transfixed, she slowly waves back. Her dad grins.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

The rifle's still in Ramona's face.

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

A tear rolls down Ben's cheek.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
I survived. He didn't. (BEAT) And I can't stop asking...

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - THE NIGHT BEFORE

We pick up where the last flashback ended. Ramona holds the flannel shirt to her face and smells it. Her face contorted in grief, she silently begins to WEEP...

BACK TO SCENE:

RAMONA  
...why?

A beat.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

I lied because... I already hate myself. I didn't want you to hate me too.

Ben lowers the rifle and hugs his mother tight.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Annie -- her small hands on the sill, eyes still wide -- is practically hypnotized by the image of her father.

DAD

Hey, guess what!

ANNIE

What?

DAD

I got you something. A gift.

ANNIE

What is it?

DAD

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

A beat. She considers.

DAD (CONT'D)

...Well? Do ya?

Annie nods. "Dad" smiles wide.

DAD (CONT'D)

Then you're gonna have to unlock the door.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

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

RAMONA

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

Ben nods, then remembers:

BEN

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

On Ramona's concerned look...

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

DAD

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

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

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

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

DAD (O.S.)

(muffled)

Let me in, Annie...

She then twists open the door knob and--

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

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

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

Annie SCREAMS.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Ramona and Ben hear the scream and run out.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - SAME TIME

Annie runs up the stairs...

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...right into Ramona's arms.

ANNIE

He's coming! He's coming!!

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

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - SAME TIME

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD

(pleasantly)

Anybody home?

On his wide, victorious grin...

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

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

INT. OFFICE - SECONDS LATER

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

RAMONA

(whisper)

We're gonna be okay. But only if we stick together.

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)

(whisper)

Grab me dad's boot.

Ben grabs THE LARGE RIGHT BOOT and hands it to her. She shoves her cast aside and puts the boot on. As she quickly ties the laces tight, she looks at the rifle in Ben's hands.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

(whisper)

Where are the rest of the bullets?

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

BEN  
(whisper)  
What do we do?

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

On her nervous face, thinking fast...

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

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

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

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

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

The office door opens. Ramona peeks out.

RAMONA  
(whisper, to Ben)  
Go.

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

...at the ATTIC ENTRANCE on the ceiling.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

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

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

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

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

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

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

RAMONA  
(whisper)  
Go, baby.

INT. DINING ROOM - SAME TIME

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

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

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

Above him, Ramona climbs into the attic.

INT. ATTIC - CONTINUOUS

STORAGE BOXES and VARIOUS JUNK fill the dark space. (It's not a liveable room; it's storage.) Two small windows are the only sources of light. Ben climbs up next, rifle in hand.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - SAME TIME

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

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

## INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

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

They hear *FOOTSTEPS* coming up the stairs. *Hurry, hurry.*

## INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

As The Man reaches the second floor, the attic door behind him closes up into the ceiling just in the nick of time.

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

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

## INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

Ben and Ramona use the extension cord to "lock" the attic closed, similar to how Ben locked the bathroom. He loops it through the ladder and passes it off to Ramona. She loops it around a wooden beam and passes it back to him.

He ties it into a knot.

## INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

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

## INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

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

They can hear the *LOUD FOOTSTEPS* of the large man below them.

## INT. ANNIE'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Long white fingers slither across the roof of a doll house... a plastic tea set... a glass jar filled with cowrie shells...

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Mmmmmmmm...

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

They listen to The Man's MOANING below.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.)  
Mmmmmmmm... Ahhh...

Ramona holds Annie close.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

ANGLE ON Ramona's bed. The DARK SILHOUETTE OF A LARGE MAN grows over the messy white sheets.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
MMMMMMmmmmmm...

The Man stands at the foot of the bed. He closes his eyes, takes a DEEP BREATH -- *sniffing?* -- and SLOWLY EXHALES...

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
(calling out)  
Ramona... Ra-moooaaann-ahhh.

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

Huddled in the darkness, they can only listen.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.)  
I'm here, Ramona. I'm heeeeeeeeere.

Ramona wrinkles her brow, still unsure what he means.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Just like you waaaaantedddddd.

Annie looks at her mother, confused. Ramona shakes her head no, trying to assure her daughter.

Ben spots something nearby and gets an idea. They whisper.

BEN  
Mom.

He points to A BOX. It reads "FIREWORKS."

BEN (CONT'D)  
We can send a signal.

Ramona debates.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Like a flare gun. The Marcuses  
might be able to see it from their  
house.

She shakes her head.

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

Ben SIGHS, annoyed.

Then, his face lights up with a better idea.

BEN  
Then let's start a fire.

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

RAMONA  
Now that's a signal.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The dark, towering figure exits Ramona's room. His long  
fingers wiggle eagerly like the legs of a tarantula.

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

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

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

RAMONA  
(whisper)  
Anything?

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
(whisper)  
That one.

Annie looks in it. Ramona then starts quietly (and very carefully) crumpling up OLD NEWSPAPER...

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

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

He playfully peers into the bathroom...

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

..then into the office.

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

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

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

Annie finds something in the camping box.

ANNIE  
(whisper)  
Mom.

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

RAMONA  
(whisper, relieved)  
Yessss.

She kisses Annie on the forehead.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

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

Right underneath it, he stops.

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

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

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

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

EXT. HOUSE / INT. ATTIC - CONTINUOUS

...leans outside. Eyeing the distance from here to the field, he realizes that this isn't going to work...

BEN

Shit.

...and begins climbing out the window onto the roof.

RAMONA

The hell are you doing?

BEN

I'll never be able to throw it over  
the backyard from in here.

Ben carefully places one foot on the (very) steep roof outside. As he lifts his other leg out, Ramona grabs the fireworks box, preventing him from continuing. (Despite whispering, things between them are as heated as ever.)

RAMONA

You're gonna fall.

BEN

I won't.

She pulls on the box.

RAMONA

Get back inside now.

He gets in her face.

BEN

(RE: box)

Mom. We don't have time for this.

A beat as Ramona listens to the *MUFFLED CRACKLING* of the firework fuses in her hands. She bites her lip.

BEN (CONT'D)  
I can do it.

Ramona just can't bring herself to let go.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Do you want me on your side, or  
not?

RAMONA  
I do, but--

BEN  
Then prove it.

She stares into her son's eyes... then finally lets go of the box and Ben climbs all the way outside.

The roof he now stands on is alarmingly slanted. He takes a few steps toward the ledge... looks out into the fields... prepares himself and, with one arm... heaves the box.

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

Ben carefully climbs back inside where he, Ramona, and Annie all look out the window, watching. They wait with bated breath. *Will it work?*

RAMONA  
(sotto)  
Come on, come on, come on.

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

Someone is trying to open it.

ANNIE  
(whisper)  
Uh, Mom...

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

BEN  
Come on, come on.

The muffled explosions continue. The box bounces with each one until -- *BOOM!*

-- it explodes completely, sending sparks, shredded cardboard and lit newspaper flying. The pieces of ignited newspaper float through the air; landing delicately in the tall grass.

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

RAMONA  
Thank you, God--

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

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

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

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

EXT. BACKYARD - SAME TIME

Meanwhile, the fire blazes in the ryegrass.

A CLOUD OF BLACK SMOKE begins to rise into the sky.

Their distress signal has been sent.

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

The Man continues to pull on the attic door -- *THUD, THUD* -- but because of the extension cord, he can only open it a few inches.

Annie looks at her mom, scared.

RAMONA  
(mouthing silently)  
Don't. Move.

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

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

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

...and coming...

...and coming...

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

The Man's arm is now ten feet long.

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

...and coming...

...and coming...

...anndd coommiiinngg...

His arm is now fifteen feet long.

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

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.)  
I know you're uuuup heeerrreeeee.

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

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Ra-mooooooooaaaannnnnnn-ahhhh...

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

To the calming music, the arm swings towards Ben. He backs far into the corner as the hand feels around near his feet.

To avoid getting caught, he grabs hold of a wooden beam above him and pulls both legs into the air. The hand passes under him, just missing his feet.

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Where arrrrrreee youuuuu...?

Feeling around, the arm is approaching the rifle, leaning against the wall. *Fuck.* Too scared to move, Ramona and Ben can only watch as his bony fingers dance toward the weapon, inch... by... inch...

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

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

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

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

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

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

RAMONA  
NO! Let... go!

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

ANNIE  
AHHH!! MOMMYYYYY!!

RAMONA  
(strained)  
BEN! BEN, HELP!

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

ANNIE  
AHHHHH!!!

Ben then notices the hand is gripping Annie's shoe -- and quickly rips the shoe off his sister's foot.

That does it. Annie is free.

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

RAMONA  
Baby, are you okay?!

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

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

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

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

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

...and immediately slinks away with it.

INT. ATTIC - MOMENTS LATER

They're all huddled together in the corner. Ben peers out the window, eyeing their distress signal, rising into the sky.

A quiet beat. Then...

*CRAAAACKKKK!*

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

RAMONA  
(sotto)  
Oh, shit.

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

*CRACK!*

*CRACK!*

*CRACK!*

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

*CRACK!*

*CRACK!*

*CRACK!*

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

*CRACK!*

*CRACK!*

*CRACK!*

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

ANNIE

(GASP) Penguin!

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the other side of the room, Ben *STOMPS* his foot to draw The Man's attention.

BEN

Over here, you slime bucket! COME  
GET ME!

The poker quickly descends and Ben *STOMPS* again, then takes a step backward and readies both hands...

*CRACK!*

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

BEN (CONT'D)  
Gotcha!

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

RAMONA  
Ben!

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

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

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Puuulllll!

BEN  
I'm... pulling...

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

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

ANNIE  
This is for Penguin!

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

*KA-BOOM!*

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

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

BEN  
 For the record... she learned that  
 from Call of Duty.

He rubs Annie's head, affectionately messing up her hair. She smiles at her big brother.

Their celebration is short-lived, however, as...

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.)  
 Ah... ha... haaaa.

...A DEEP, HEARTY LAUGH begins to roll from below. As it continues, it evolves into an unsettling THROATY MOAN.

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

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

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

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

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

Ramona can't take it anymore.

RAMONA  
 LEAVE MY FAMILY ALONE!

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

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.)  
 CHILDREN! YOUR MOTHER HAS BROUGHT  
 ME UPON YOU!

Ben and Annie stare up at Ramona, confused.

RAMONA  
 He's lying!

THE MAN IN THE YARD (O.S.)  
 SHE DOESN'T CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO  
 YOUEUUU! SHE! HATES! YOU!

RAMONA

Don't listen to him! That's not  
true! THAT'S NOT TRUE!

Enraged, Ramona hacks at the floor over and over -- *CLANG!*  
*CLANG! CLANG!* -- GRUNTING with each effort.

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

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

*Beep-beep-beeeeep...*

Everyone freezes.

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

It's a car horn, approaching the house.

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

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

RAMONA  
(elated)  
Fred.

*The fire worked.*

EXT. HOUSE - SAME TIME

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

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

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

FRED (CONT'D)  
Jesus!

...and sprints toward the garage.

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Fred runs in, BREATHING HARD, and searches frantically.

Finally, he spots it in the back -- a FIRE EXTINGUISHER.

EXT. HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

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

It's working.

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

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

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

He STOMPS out the last bits.

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

FRED  
(exhausted)  
Christ.

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

For a beat, he catches his breath.

RAMONA (O.S.)  
Fred!

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

FRED  
Ramona?

RAMONA (O.S.)  
Up here!

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

FRED  
Are you okay?!

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

FRED  
Oh my God.

RAMONA  
He's inside!

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

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

INT. FRONT PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

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

He enters, bat held high...

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

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

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

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

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

INT. DINING ROOM - SAME TIME

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

He slowly checks under the table. Nothing.

He continues onward, walking slowly into...

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

...the kitchen.

Nothing.

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

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

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

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

He retreats back up the stairs.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

He exits the basement and heads into...

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...the living room.

Nobody. Nothing.

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

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

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

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

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

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

FRED  
(concerned)  
Ramona?!

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

Fred remains calm.

FRED  
You guys just hang tight, okay?

Fred goes to check the rooms on the second floor.

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

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

Ramona holds Annie close.

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

ANNIE  
We're all gonna make it.

Ramona nods.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - SAME TIME

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

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

Nothing.

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

INT. ATTIC - MOMENTS LATER

They all continue to wait.

FRED (O.S.)  
Coast is clear.

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

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

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

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - A FEW MINUTES LATER

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

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

BEN  
 Nah, I got it.

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

Ben finishes descending the ladder.

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

RAMONA  
 Yes. Thank God for you, Fred.

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

RAMONA  
 (to Ben)  
 Hey. Great idea. Y'know, with the fire. And that throw? One in a million.

BEN  
 It's a good thing Coach Kelce moved me out into right field, huh?

She smiles.

RAMONA  
 Proud of you. You saved us.

He blushes, then downplays it like teenage boys often do.

BEN

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

Ramona puts an arm around Fred (for support) and they all begin down the stairs; Ben and Annie in front, Fred and Ramona behind them. Ben keeps the rifle ready, just in case.

INT. FOYER/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

As they walk...

FRED

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

BEN

How about Dave & Buster's?

RAMONA

I don't care. Anywhere.

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

EXT. FRONT PORCH/YARD - CONTINUOUS

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

RAMONA

I really owe you one, Fred.

FRED

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

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

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

A beat.

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

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

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

*Oh my god.*

Keeping her cool, she removes her arm from Fred's shoulder.

RAMONA

I think I can walk on my own.

FRED

You sure?

Ramona nods, then uses the fireplace poker as a crutch and continues toward the driveway as if nothing's wrong.

RAMONA

(calm)

Hey Ben. Can I see that?

Ben turns around. She points to the gun.

BEN

Yeah, sure.

Ben hands her the rifle then continues walking. (Ramona now has the rifle and the poker.)

RAMONA

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

BEN

Um, sure. What's up?

Out ahead, Annie reaches the driveway and looks around.

ANNIE

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

There isn't one.

RAMONA

(to Ben, still calm)

Can you run into the field with your sister?

Ben turns and looks at her, perplexed.

BEN

...Huh?

RAMONA  
Grab Annie and run into the field.

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

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
Now. Right now. GO!

With one hand, Ramona swings the poker and hits Fred --  
*CRACK!* -- right in the forehead. Fred GRUNTS in pain and falls to the ground.

FRED  
Ramona?!

She WHACKS him in the stomach. Ben and Annie watch in shock.

FRED (CONT'D)  
What are you--?!

Ramona WHACKS him in the stomach with the poker again. Fred writhes in pain on the ground.

BEN  
Mom--?!

RAMONA  
Run!

Ben still doesn't get it.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
RUN!

Ben looks down at Fred... and finally spots the tattoo. He takes off, grabs Annie by the arm, and they run into the backyard. They head straight toward the field and disappear into the thick, tall ryegrass.

Ramona WHIPS Fred across the face once more -- for good measure -- then tosses the poker behind her so she can use both hands to COCK the rifle.

FRED  
Stop! Stop!

She puts her finger on the trigger and aims it right at his face.

FRED (CONT'D)  
No... no please...

She starts to squeeze...

FRED (CONT'D)  
Please, Ramona...

...but can't do it.

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

"Fred" grabs hold of the rifle and violently yanks it out of Ramona's hands. He KICKS her in the stomach, sending her flying across the yard.

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

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

Ramona spots the fireplace poker nearby and grabs it. She stands and wields it like a sword, ready to fight.

RAMONA  
You want me? Here I am. But you leave Ben and Annie out of it, you son of a bitch.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
You've brought this upon your family, Ramo--

RAMONA  
Stop saying that! My children don't deserve this.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
And your husband? Did he deserve his fate?

Ramona clenches her jaw, hating him.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
A man can spend his whole life fighting vice with virtue... and then, with one bad roll of the dice... his brains end up splattered all over the highway.

RAMONA  
FUCK YOU!

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 It ain't you who pays for your  
 sins, Ramona. It's your children.  
 Did you think you could gamble with  
 their fate and they wouldn't become  
 part of the game?

RAMONA  
 You touch my kids, I'll kill you.

The Man watches as she retreats backwards towards the tall grass...

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 Oh, I'll find ya. I'll find all  
 a'ya'll.  
 (grins wide)  
 Always do.

...and uses his fingers to blow a QUICK PIERCING WHISTLE.

*BARK-BARK-BARK-BARK!*

Behind him, on the far end of the front yard, A LARGE BROWN BEAST comes barrelling out of the ryegrass. Sharp teeth snarl... foam drips from its mouth... colossal paws dig into the ground, kicking up dirt as it races straight at Ramona.

Her face falls -- *oh my god* -- it's Charlie.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
 GIIT 'ER!

Ramona turns and runs into the fields, disappearing into the tall grass like her children.

RAMONA  
 (calling out)  
 RUN, KIDS! RUNNN!

"Charlie" follows, BARKING WILDLY. The Man walks casually towards the fields, rifle in hand; a hunter, excited to hunt.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 Ben? Little Annie? Yoo-hooooo...

EXT. FIELD - SAME TIME

Ben and Annie run through the dark, suffocating jungle of six-foot high grass.

RAMONA (O.S.)  
(in the distance)  
DON'T STOP!

Annie follows her brother as quickly as her little legs can.

EXT. ELSEWHERE IN THE FIELD - SAME TIME

Ramona, in agony, hobbles away from the beast far behind her.

*BARK-BARK-BARK-BARK!*

Sweat pours down her face as she forces herself to keep moving through the maze, GRUNTING with every painful step.

EXT. ELSEWHERE IN THE FIELD (BEN & ANNIE) - SAME TIME

The continue to run. Ben looks back and sees Annie is lagging behind.

BEN  
Come on, Annie! Run!

He grabs her by the arm, pulling her along. Behind them, their house begins to disappear in the distance.

EXT. ELSEWHERE IN THE FIELD (RAMONA) - SAME TIME

*Keep going keep going keep going...*

Behind Ramona, the horrible growling grows louder. The beast is getting closer...

*BARK-BARK-BARK!*

*Keep going.*

*BARK-BARK-BARK!*

*Keep going.*

*BARK-BARK-BARK-BARK!*

...until finally she stops, turns around, and sees the rabid "Charlie" speeding toward her like a heat-seeking missile. She digs her back heel into the dirt, crouches down, and readies the fireplace poker.

The GROWLING beast leaps at her as she -- *YELP!* -- pierces its chest.

In one swift motion, she tosses him over her head, where the dog lands lifeless -- *THUMP* -- in the grass behind her.

RAMONA  
(SIGH) Christ, that dog.

She creeps toward his lifeless body, poker still stuck in it. She watches as his brown fur fades into a grisly shade of grey. His legs, head, and torso begin to crumble away, like a burnt log in a camp fire, until his entire body disintegrates to ash...

Ramona picks up her weapon and treks onward.

EXT. ELSEWHERE IN THE FIELD (BEN & ANNIE) - SAME TIME

Thinking they're far enough away, Ben slows down and eventually stops. Annie too. HUFFING AND PUFFING, they both lean over to catch their breath.

Ben turns and peers through the grass. His heart sinks as, in the distance, he spots The Man, rifle in hand, somehow hot on their trail.

He immediately ducks back down.

BEN  
He's tracking us.  
(realizes)  
He's hunting us.

He locks eyes with his sister. He sees the fear in her eyes.

Ben suddenly gets an idea...

BEN (CONT'D)  
Come on.

...grabs her hand and they take off again. This time, they curve to the right, heading in a new direction.

IN AN AERIAL SHOT, we watch Ben and Annie run through the grass in a "U-shape," heading back toward the house...

EXT. ELSEWHERE IN THE FIELD (THE MAN) - MOMENTS LATER

(The sun has now set, suffocating the field in darkness.)

Cool, calm, and frighteningly in his element, The Man In The Yard treks through the field. He stares down at the grass and the dirt, spotting minuscule indentations -- unnoticeable to the untrained eye -- and follows them.

Never once doubting himself, he pursues the children with ease, turning and heading back toward the house like Ben and Annie did a few moments before.

EXT. ELSEWHERE IN THE FIELD (RAMONA) - SAME TIME

Ramona hurries blindly through the grass.

RAMONA  
(whispers)  
Ben? ...Annie?

Nothing.

She's not sure where to go, but continues anyway.

EXT. ELSEWHERE IN THE FIELD (THE MAN) - MOMENTS LATER

*A bent blade of grass here, a groove in the dirt there...*

The Man continues to follow the kids' "trail" with ease.

Suddenly, he stops. He looks to his right, then to his left, then forward. He's come to an unexpected fork in the road. For a beat, he stands there, unsure. He licks his lips, excited for the challenge, but then--

He spots Ben, walking toward him, completely unarmed. The Man furrows his brow, a bit confused.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
While I admire your bravery, Ben, I  
must say, I expected more intellect  
from the so-called "man of the  
house."

He raises the rifle.

BEN  
Psh, some hunter you are.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
(insulted)  
Beg your pardon?

BEN  
You said it yourself: gettin' an  
animal to come to you? That ain't  
the real way to hunt.

The Man cracks a smile.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 Son, if I've lead you to believe  
 that I follow a moral code... well,  
 I'm sorry to disappoint.

He aims the rifle again and--

BEN  
 (puts his hands up)  
 Okay, okay! Wait, wait, wait!

The Man listens.

BEN (CONT'D)  
 If that's the case -- you want my  
 mom, right? Fine. I can give her to  
 you. Hell, all day, she's done  
 nothing but put us danger. Just...  
 promise you'll let me and Annie go.

The Man lowers the rifle.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 (sly smirk)  
 Deal.

A beat.

BEN  
 (calling out)  
 Mom! Hey, Mom!

EXT. ELSEWHERE IN THE FIELD (RAMONA) - SAME TIME

BEN (O.S.)  
 Mom, we're over here!

Ramona hears him. He's not that far.

BEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 I got him! I got him, Mom!

On her skeptical face...

EXT. ELSEWHERE IN THE FIELD (BEN & THE MAN) - SAME TIME

BEN  
 (calling)  
 But... Annie's hurt! Hurry, come  
 quick!

They wait, Ben's hands still in the air.

BEN (CONT'D)  
 Hey... you wanna hear a funny  
 story?

The Man doesn't answer.

BEN (CONT'D)  
 So for my sixth grade class trip,  
 we went to Disney World. Dope, I  
 know. My cousin's class went to  
 D.C. (FART NOISE) but we got lucky.

A beat.

BEN (CONT'D)  
 Anyway, we go to EPCOT one day,  
 right? And we're at the Japan  
 restaurant for lunch and Chris  
 Fillbach dares me to eat a ton of  
 raw eel. So obviously, I did. I had  
 like, twenty-five of those things.  
Disgusting. Plus, I drank a whole  
 bunch of Dr. Pepper. Not part of  
 the dare, I just love that shit.

Listening, The Man cocks his head, quite confused.

BEN (CONT'D)  
 So then like, an hour later, we're  
 all in line for "Mission: Space"  
 and I feel somethin' brewin' inside  
 the ol' tum-tum. Somethin' mean. I  
 knew I needed to get to a bathroom,  
 but I didn't want to lose my spot  
 in line... so I yacked all over the  
 place.

The Man can only stare.

BEN (CONT'D)  
 I tried to stop it, y'know, by  
 putting my hand over my mouth? But  
 man, that just made things so much  
 worse 'cause then it sprayed out  
 like a fire hose.

Ben puts one hand over his mouth and uses his other hand to pantomime "projectile vomiting."

BEN (CONT'D)  
 Blugh, blugh, bluuuuugh! Eel and  
 Dr. Pepper go everywhere -- the  
 ground, my friends, Mrs. Adams...  
 (MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

And because Molly Drake was wearing flip-flops, a little chunk of eel ended up in between her toes, I felt so bad. (SIGHS) Hands down, worst stomach ache I ever had in my life. (BEAT) But, y'know...

(sly smile)

...I bet your stomach's about to feel even worse.

Bewildered, The Man opens his mouth to finally speak--

A sharp object PIERCES right through him. Eyes wide, jaw dropped, he looks down at the fireplace poker sticking out of his stomach. In shock, he turns around... and sees Ramona.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

(furious)

You bitch...

He drops the rifle and falls to his knees. Ramona picks it up as Ben and Annie (stepping out of her hiding place) come and stand behind her. Ben smiles.

BEN

Had me riiiiight in your sights...  
but you just couldn't pull the trigger, could ya?

The Man grabs his stomach; his beady eyes starting to panic.

THE MAN IN THE YARD

No... nooo...

He MOANS AND GROANS as he collapses onto the ground, his face contorted in pain.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

Aghhh... AGGGHHHHH...

They watch, as he falls onto his hands and knees.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)

Gaggghhhhhaaaahhh...

But suddenly... the moaning stops. On all fours, The Man remains oddly still for a long beat.

Annie grabs Ramona's arm.

ANNIE

Did you... did you kill him?

RAMONA

I...

The Man slowly turns his head at them--  
he's smiling.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
(crushed)  
No.

He begins to LAUGH.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
Ah... ha... haaaa.

The Man slowly gets up... they all watch in horror as he now stands at least twelve feet tall.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
Kill me? KILL ME?!

Grinning, he RIPS the poker out of his body and stares down at them, his long, pointy face now frozen in rictus.

THE MAN IN THE YARD (CONT'D)  
Try as haaaard as you might, little  
Annie... you'll never even hurt me!  
Give up! Giiiiiive upppppp!

He tosses the poker away and CACKLES WILDLY.

RAMONA  
RUN!

Ramona, Ben, and Annie turn and race back toward the house.

As they sprint away, The Man follows, his entire torso now towering above the tall grass.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
GO, GO, GO!

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

EXT. BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Ben and Annie emerge from the tall grass. Ramona exits last, rifle still in hand. They all run around to the front of the house...

EXT. FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

...and head toward the driveway.

Halfway across the yard, Ramona stops.

RAMONA  
You two go on!

Ben turns and pulls on her arm.

BEN  
Not without you!

She shoves him off.

RAMONA  
I'll just slow you down! Go!

BEN  
Mom, we're not gonna lea--

She grabs Ben by the collar.

RAMONA  
Listen to me!

Ramona speaks to her son in a stern, commanding tone that we've never seen from her.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
You pick up your sister and you run  
down to the road. Someone will  
drive by. And until they do, you  
run as fast as you can. And don't  
look back. Do you understand?!

Scared, he doesn't respond.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
DO YOU UNDERSTAND?!

Ben nods. Annie wraps her arms around her mother's waist.

ANNIE  
(through tears)  
Mommy, no!

Ramona tries to shove her off.

RAMONA  
Go with your brother.

ANNIE

But-but, you saw... we can't hurt  
him! We can't hurt him!

Ramona looks into her daughter's eyes.

RAMONA

But that doesn't mean we stop  
fighting.

Annie and Ben stare at their Mom, inspired.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

GO! NOW!

Ben picks up Annie (still CRYING) and takes off across the yard. As they disappear down the long driveway, Ramona prepares for her last stand.

EXT. FRONT YARD - MOMENTS LATER

From the back yard, The Man casually walks around the house; the top of his hat now as high as the second story. The slender giant gazes down at the tiny Ramona, standing in the middle of the yard, rifle ready.

With his enormous gate, he strolls confidently across the yard. Ramona stares up at him, unafraid.

RAMONA

This is your last chance. Get the  
hell out of my yard.

As The Man approaches her, he slowly shrinks back to normal size with each step.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

You hear me? Leave! Leave and never  
come back!

He continues... now just about six feet tall. Ramona holds her ground as he walks toward her.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Stop! Don't you come any closer! Or  
I'll shoot!

She raises the rifle and aims it right at him. He finally stops about ten feet away from her.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 I'll do it! I'll blow your head  
 right off! Let's see you survive  
that, you bastard!

The Man can't help but CHUCKLE.

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

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

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

Ramona lets out a QUIET GASP. She finally understands.

On her shocked face, we...

#### FLASHBACK TO:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - THE NIGHT BEFORE

We pick up where the last flashback ended. Ramona, tears in her eyes, looks toward her closet door. Coming to a decision, she lets go of her husband's flannel and reaches into her bedside table for the silver key.

Then, eyes glazed over, she climbs out of bed and walks toward her closet... opens it... shoves aside her clothes... and uses the key to unlock the safe.

Inside is the Remington rifle.

A MOMENT LATER, Ramona is sitting back on her bed, staring down at the long rifle laying across her lap. Finally, she loads it, then COCKS it. She tilts her head back, places the gun vertically between her legs, puts one finger on the trigger, and rests her chin over the muzzle.

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

A long beat.

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

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

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

BACK TO SCENE:

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

He slowly walks toward her.

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

Tears well in Ramona's eyes.

RAMONA  
(softly)  
No...

As he approaches, a terrified Ramona backpedals -- and trips.  
She falls to the ground.

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

He squats down next to her.

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

A tear rolls down her cheek.

RAMONA  
(ashamed)  
Death.

The Man nods knowingly.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
That's right.

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

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

EXT. DOWN THE DRIVEWAY - SAME TIME

Ben runs down the long driveway with Annie over his shoulder.

ANNIE  
What about Mom?! WHAT ABOUT MOM?!

Annie begins punching Ben in the back.

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

Ben doesn't stop.

ANNIE (CONT'D)  
Ben! Ben! PUT ME DOWN!!!

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

BEN  
Stop! Annie, stop!

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

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

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

Annie WEEPS. Ben tries to convince her...

BEN  
She told me to run!

...and convince himself.

BEN (CONT'D)  
She told me to.

Annie shakes her head.

ANNIE  
 (through tears)  
 She told us to stick together!

On Ben's face, unsure...

EXT. FRONT YARD - SAME TIME

A defeated Ramona gazes up at The Man, tears in her eyes, remorseful.

RAMONA  
 I... I never meant to put Ben and  
 Annie at risk. Truly, I didn't, I,  
 I...

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 Shhhh... I know, I know.

He rubs her cheek, like a father comforting his daughter.

RAMONA  
 It's just... It's too much.  
 (sobbing)  
 I can't live with it.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 Shhhhhh... Here. This will help.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ramona finds one last ounce of strength and tries to turn her head away from him.

RAMONA  
 No... noo...

But The Man grabs her by the hair and forces her chin back over the muzzle.

THE MAN IN THE YARD  
 I admire your spirit, Ramona. I  
 really do. But fight me off now,  
 you know I'll be back...  
 (sly smirk)  
 ...sooner or later.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RAMONA  
 Not today, fucker.

She watches as his decapitated body begins to crumble... and slowly turns to ash. A light breeze *WHIPS* across the yard, and the tiny grey flakes that once made up his body blow high into the air... and disappear into the night.

*She won.*

EXT. FRONT YARD - A MINUTE LATER

Ben and Annie run up the driveway and see a smiling Ramona hobbling toward them, trying to use the rifle as a crutch.

Seeing their mother alive, their faces light up.

BEN  
 Mom!

ANNIE  
Mommy!

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

RAMONA  
Thought I told you to run and not stop.

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

Ramona smiles.

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

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

She stares up at her mom, her brow furrowed.

RAMONA  
The world's full of monsters, Annie. Some big and scary, and others... just in your head. But no matter what, don't believe anything they say. You're stronger than them. I promise.

She smiles. Annie smiles right back, taking this to heart.

BEN  
Mom... why did he come here?

Ramona takes a moment to collect her thoughts. Then:

RAMONA  
Because I needed a reminder of why I have to keep going.

She puts her arms around them.

In an EXTREME WIDE, we watch as they trek slowly across the yard toward the front porch. Suddenly, a few lights in the house flicker and then turn on all at once.

*Power's back.*

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

CLOSE ON Ramona, sound asleep. As we PULL OUT, we reveal Annie, on her mother's right shoulder. And as we PULL OUT even further, we see Ben on her left.

WE SETTLE on a wide of the bed, where all three sleep together soundly.

After a beat, the DARK SILHOUETTE OF A LARGE MAN grows over them... then vanishes.

For now.

FADE OUT.

THE END