

BONES AND ALL

Screenplay by David Kajganich
based on the novel by Camille DeAngelis

Shooting Script
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The main events of this story take place in **1988**.
U.S. state names are referenced by their abbreviations.

People wish to be settled.
Only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them.

--**Emerson**, from *Circles*

It's death for no reason,
and death for no reason is murder.

--**The Smiths**, from *Meat is Murder*

INT. VA HIGH SCHOOL, CORRIDOR -- DAY

The school day has ended and the halls begin to empty. A few students come out of a side hall with battered instrument cases. Past them, back in the band wing, someone PLAYS PIANO.

INT. VA HIGH SCHOOL, BAND ROOM -- DAY

MAREN (17, Mixed Race) haltingly plays Sibelius' *Swan of Tuonela*. She wears a cardigan big enough to be her father's, and no jewelry or makeup. SHERRY (17) comes in looking more like an American teen in 1988: oversized top, lip gloss, bangs.

SHERRY

You didn't tell me you play piano.

MAREN

Hey! You are here. Why weren't you in Home Ec all week?

SHERRY

Yearbook. We missed our deadline with Jostens.

MAREN

How does it look?

SHERRY

You're not going to be in it, by the way. Mr. Esser says he reminded you three times to get your picture taken.

Maren fends this off with a shrug.

SHERRY (CONT'D)

So hey, my dad's doing inventory all night and Jackie and Kim are sleeping over. Come too.

Maren looks up, surprised, but then retreats.

MAREN

My dad won't let me.

SHERRY

So sneak out. After he goes to bed.

MAREN

How would I even get there?

SHERRY

You're down in Southwind, right?

Maren nods, almost hiding her insecurity about this.

SHERRY (CONT'D)

You know where the power lines go up the hill? That's Chesapeake Road at the top. I'm right there.

(sincerely)

You said you wanted to make more friends here.

Maren goes back to Sibelius with a tiny shake of her head.

MAREN

Thanks, though.

EXT. VA HIGH SCHOOL, PARKING LOT -- DAY

The buses are gone. Maren's father's beat-up station wagon idles out front. When MAREN'S FATHER (40, Black) sees her coming, he slides over so she can drive. Maren gets in, puts her bookbag in the backseat and turns back to the wheel, nervous.

EXT. "SOUTHWIND" MOBILE HOME PARK -- DAY

Maren parks carefully. She helps her father carry groceries to their trailer. She looks to where the high power lines disappear from view into the trees. It is a grey afternoon.

MAREN'S FATHER

That was good on the road. You've got to work on your parking --but good.

MAREN

Do you think it'll rain tonight?

Maren's father looks up at the sky as he unlocks the door.

MAREN'S FATHER

I don't think it's supposed to.

TITLE CARD: "VA"

INT. VA TRAILER, FRONT ROOM -- NIGHT

Maren and her dad eat dinner. They have few belongings. There are no photos on the fridge, no plants or pets to tend to.

MAREN'S FATHER

You got homework?

MAREN
Just some reading.

INT. VA TRAILER, BATHROOM/HALL/BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Maren finishes brushing her teeth and comes out of the bathroom and stops at the hallway closet where she palms a screwdriver from a tool box there and hides it in her robe.

MAREN
'night, Dad.

Her father is in a sleeping bag on the sofa, watching a young Rudy Giuliani on 20/20. He must sleep there. He gets up.

MAREN'S FATHER
Sleep good.

He walks her to her room. When she shuts the door he LOCKS IT on the hallway side. She doesn't react. This must be routine.

FADE OUT.

INT. VA TRAILER, BEDROOM -- NIGHT

It is dark under Maren's door. She can hear her dad SNORING in the living room, TV off now. She's dressed again, quietly unscrewing a security grill on her bedroom window that keeps it barred shut. She lifts it away as quietly as she can and then boosts herself out. She climbs down from there.

EXT. "SOUTHWIND" MOBILE HOME PARK -- NIGHT

She waits. No lights come on inside. She zips up her windbreaker and heads off. CRICKETS CHIRP madly. She makes her way under the massive power lines, which BUZZ overhead.

EXT. SHERRY'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Sherry lives in a split-level. As she walks up, Maren can see Sherry in the kitchen with KIM and JACKIE (17) fussing with a tube of instant cinnamon rolls. Maren KNOCKS on a side door. She hears the tube POP, a CHEER, and then the door opens.

SHERRY
Hey! You got pricklers all over you--

Maren's jeans are plastered from all the weeds she's climbed through. The other girls watch her enter.

INT. SHERRY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN -- NIGHT

They take big gooey bites out of the rolls. Some booze is sitting nearby. They've been drinking, but not outrageously.

KIM

So Sherry said you couldn't come because your dad's real strict or some thing?

MAREN

He's like that. I don't know why. I crawled out a window.

KIM

Does he worry you're going to get kidnapped or something?

Kim's tone hovers between slightly bitchy and slightly bored. Maren shrugs.

MAREN

That might be a relief for him. But your dad must worry plenty--

Sherry's eyebrows go up. But Kim takes Maren's sarcasm in stride, is pleased even.

KIM

Not even. He wouldn't pay a dime to get me back. Or my sisters. My brother is a different story.

SHERRY

Dads and their fucking sports boys.

JACKIE

Your dad would pay--

KIM

No. "Think of all the money we'd save on bullshit," he'd say. He calls me his *glitter baby*, and he's not being nice when he says it.

SHERRY

My sister started selling Avon. Did I tell you?

KIM

He doesn't even know where I am.

MAREN

We're the lost girls then.

Kim hooks an arm around Maren, as if claiming her.

KIM

Lost girls. Damn right we are.

INT. SHERRY'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

They've moved to the living room. Duran Duran's "Save a Prayer" plays. Maren and Kim lie under a glass coffee table on which an array of Avon testers is laid out. Sherry and Jackie try on nail polishes. Maren and Kim watch from underneath.

KIM

So you *can't* spend the night?

MAREN

Not all night. He has tomorrow off so I should be back by six to be safe.

KIM

Jesus.

MAREN

I'll just head back when you guys want to sleep.

KIM

Where'd you move here from, anyway?

MAREN

Eastern shore.

Maren's affect is flattening even as her pulse is amping up.

KIM

Is your mom not in the picture?
Sherry says you only have a dad.

Maren looks up through the table at Sherry, who looks back, seeing they're talking about something serious. Sherry knocks on the table and Kim looks up. She shows Kim her nails.

SHERRY

"Cinnamon Glaze."

KIM

We're trying to talk.

Jackie looks at Sherry, who is a bit stung. Maren closes her eyes, not wanting to be pulled into these social currents.

SHERRY (O.S.)

Kim, give me your hand.

Kim relents and puts her hand up on the table so Sherry can paint her nails. Maren opens her eyes. Kim's looking at her.

Maren really does look odd, taking shallower breaths now.

KIM

Never mind about your mom. It's not my business.

MAREN

I don't have any memories of her, or pictures even. My dad won't tell me anything.

KIM

I want to move. I'm going to divorce my family when I'm old enough. You can do that, you know.

Maren looks at her again, at her face, her neck. Kim mistakes this for envy, or attraction. She smiles, used to it.

SHERRY (O.S.)

Try that. It's "Copper Fever."

Kim pulls her hand back under the table to look at one still-wet painted nail. Maren watches vaguely.

KIM

It's too orange.

Kim shows off her hand to Maren, who pulls it toward her as if to kiss it. Sherry and Kim trade a puzzled look through the table. But when it reaches Maren's mouth, she *bites* Kim's finger, breaking skin. Kim tries to sit up, knocking her head on the underside of the glass. She starts to scream, punching Maren with her other hand. Maren strips the skin off the finger. Jackie vomits. Sherry pulls on Maren's legs, shouting.

EXT. VA SHORTCUT -- NIGHT

Maren hurries fast as she can back down the hill under the power lines and through the weeds, dazed and terrified.

EXT. VA TRAILER -- NIGHT

She doesn't bother climbing back through the window. She runs up the front steps and bangs on her locked front door. She's panicking. In a neighbor's window, a light comes on.

INT. VA TRAILER, FRONT ROOM -- NIGHT

Maren's father, woken from a dead sleep, lets her in. When he sees the blood on Maren's mouth, he seems to know exactly what's happened. He's already moving.

MAREN'S FATHER

In the car. Three minutes. What you can take in three minutes. Got it?

She nods, scared tears rolling down her face. He runs to a closet and starts grabbing things, not stopping to hug her or ask if she's okay. She's left with nothing to do but obey.

INT. VA TRAILER, BEDROOM -- NIGHT

She staggers into her room. Her father throws a duffle on her bed and disappears again. She walks up to a mirror on her closet and looks at her face, her mouth, all smeared with the blood of a schoolmate, a new friend. She can't look away.

MAREN'S FATHER (O.S.)

MOVE, MAREN!

TITLE CARDS: OPENING CREDITS

INT. MD HOUSE, MAREN'S BEDROOM -- DAY

In a different house, Maren wakes to the sound of her father BANGING around the kitchen. She stretches, blinks up at the window, barred here, too. It is light out. She looks at the clock, then leaps up.

TITLE CARD: "MD"

INT. MD HOUSE, KITCHEN -- DAY

This time they're in a small two-bedroom cottage. Maren comes into the kitchen where her father is at the sink.

MAREN'S FATHER

Pull up a chair. There'll be hash browns in a minute.

MAREN

Dad, it's a school day--

MAREN'S FATHER

It's also your birthday. I told them you've got strep.

MAREN

What?! Won't they know when I show up tomorrow looking fine?

MAREN'S FATHER

Then take a week off I guess. --I took off, too. I'm taking you to a bookstore. Then to whatever place in this town has the best lasagna.

MAREN

You're kidding.

MAREN'S FATHER

Never kid a kid about a birthday. Don't you know that?

CUT TO:

INT. MD RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

In a restaurant, a big creamy dessert is brought to Maren by a SERVER, singing through half-disguised boredom.

SERVER

--*Buon compleano a te. Buon compleano, a Karen. Buon compleano a te.*

Maren's dad sighs when they botch her name, but she's happy. When the waitress leaves, she continues the conversation.

MAREN

--they said all the bunk houses have five counselors, so, you know-- I'd never be alone with anyone.

Her dad just looks at her and slowly shakes his head.

MAREN (CONT'D)

They already asked me why I don't have any extracurriculars.

MAREN'S FATHER

Who did?

MAREN

Mr. Laker the guidance counselor. They do one-on-ones at this school. College planning. Which I guess it's time to start thinking about.

MAREN'S FATHER

Just-- stay at this table with me tonight. The rest can wait.

MAREN

Are we ever gonna talk about --what I did?

MAREN'S FATHER

Talk? No. That's never gonna happen

He glances around before drilling Maren with a look.

MAREN'S FATHER (CONT'D)

It's your birthday. I've been looking forward to this day. For a long time.

EXT. MD HOUSE, DRIVEWAY -- NIGHT

They pull into the driveway. They're no longer driving the wagon. Now it's an old sedan. Her dad turns off the engine.

MAREN'S FATHER

Don't leave your books in the car.

He says this, not unkindly, and gets out. After a moment, she follows with a full bag from a bookstore. It's a windy night.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. MD HOUSE, MAREN'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Maren wakes up slowly, coming up from a dream. It takes a few moments for her to realize how dead silent is the house.

INT. MD HOUSE, HALLWAY -- DAY

She opens her door and comes out into the hall. She passes her father's room--door open, bed not even slept in.

INT. MD HOUSE, KITCHEN -- DAY

She comes into the kitchen. An envelope sits on the table held down by a cassette tape. In the envelope is cash and a piece of paper reading "CERTIFICATE OF LIVE BIRTH." She races to the window now. The driveway is empty.

She intuits what this means immediately, her composure starting to collapse inward.

INT. MD HOUSE, MAREN'S FATHER'S ROOM -- DAY

As the tape begins to PLAY, Maren stands in front of her father's closet. It is half empty. He's taken only what he needed. His canvas work jacket hangs there, also left behind.

MAREN'S FATHER'S VOICE

I've got things to say and then I want you to make sure this tape is good and destroyed. Don't keep it because it's got my voice on it.

EXT. MD HOUSE, ATTIC -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

Maren's father sits up in the low-ceilinged attic of the rental house. There's no room to stand, but it's contained up here, maybe making it easier to do what he's doing.

MAREN'S FATHER'S VOICE

You aren't going to see me again. I can't --help you anymore. I can't do anything else, either: go to the cops or whatever somebody might do in my place. So I've gotta leave you to figure it out for yourself. You know what I mean now.

INT. MD HOUSE, MAREN'S BEDROOM/HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Maren lies in bed, shaking. Her life has turned, painfully. She's alone now, and awake to how dangerous this is. She gets up and goes into her father's room. She burrows herself under his work jacket to try to sleep there instead.

MAREN'S FATHER'S VOICE

I don't know how much of what I'm about to say you remember. Maybe you honestly don't. I've never been sure. Some of it goes way back. But just in case, I'll gonna say everything I know.

INT. MD HOUSE, KITCHEN -- DAY

Maren is in the kitchen, headphones on.

MAREN'S FATHER'S VOICE

First time was when you were three--

She stops the tape. *Three?* She started hurting people when she was *three*? She takes off the headphones, not ready for this.

INT. MD HOUSE, KITCHEN -- LATER -- DAY

She picks up her birth certificate off the table.

CLOSE ON: *It reads "WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, Certificate of Live Birth" and lists her information: "Maren Yearly. Female. 20 inches long. 7 lbs 12 1/2 ounces." Her father's name is there, FRANKLIN YEARLY and his place of birth: Edgartown, PA. But so is her mother's name: JANELLE KERNS.*

She looks at her mother's name a long time, tries to smooth the crease out of it. It's the first time she's ever seen it.

*Next to her mother's name is her mother's place of birth:
Bagley, Minnesota.*

She stares at the name of the town, scared of what she has to do next. She takes the envelope and counts the cash. It's only seventy-five dollars; a whole other kind of betrayal.

INT. MD HOUSE, KITCHEN -- LATER -- DAY

She eats a last meal out of the refrigerator. As she takes out a half-full casserole dish with leftovers, she fumbles it and it drops to the floor and cracks in two. She leaves it.

When, at some point, the phone RINGS, she doesn't pick it up. She yanks it off of the wall instead. Finally, the lights go out, leaving the kitchen dim. The power's been shut off, presumably from an unpaid bill.

EXT. MD HOUSE, DRIVEWAY -- DAY

Maren heads down her street, an Army surplus rucksack on her shoulders full and heavy. A neighbor watches her deliberately miss the school bus, but then run to hail a city bus instead.

INT. CORLIS MD GREYHOUND STATION, TICKET COUNTER -- DAY

Maren comes up to a bus station counter where an AGENT sits. She puts a road atlas on the desk and turns it around so she can point out a tiny dot labelled "BAGLEY" in Minnesota.

MAREN

Hi. I need to get here. What's the closest I can get by bus?

The ATTENDANT peers at it and then looks in a binder.

ATTENDANT

It looks like Detroit Lakes. You'll have to change buses a few times. We've only got three stations in Minnesota. From Detroit Lakes you can probably take a local.

MAREN

How much is it to Detroit Lakes?

The Attendant looks past Maren to see if she's with an adult. Then she checks a fare book.

ATTENDANT

One way, \$83. Three transfers: Frederick MD, Chicago, and Minneapolis.

MAREN

How much just to Chicago?

ATTENDANT

Shouldn't you be in school?

MAREN

You'd think.

ATTENDANT

I don't know what that means.

MAREN

It means I'm 18 in the state of Maryland and I can decide for myself where I should be.

The Attendant looks at Maren, then says, flatly:

ATTENDANT

I'll need to see a driver's license. Or a Learner's Permit.

MAREN

You can see a birth certificate.

The woman checks it carefully, and then hands it back.

ATTENDANT

Just to Chicago is \$49.

INT. MD TO MD GREYHOUND BUS -- DAY

Maren's taken a window seat near the back of a full bus. She finishes a pack of Pop-Tarts. She's done some math on the back of her ticket sleeve with a company golf pencil. She wants to go 1,417 miles with \$26 left.

A RIDER (50s) sits beside her, chatting loudly with another RIDER across the aisle. But Maren plugs in to the cassette tape and presses play as the bus pulls out of the station.

CUT TO:

Her FATHER'S VOICE rides the roads with her. She's still not ready for any of this, but she knows she needs to hear it.

MAREN'S FATHER'S VOICE

You were still with your baby teeth. I had a sitter for you then. I worked the late shift. Her name was Penny, from our apartment complex. I don't remember her last name.

(MORE)

MAREN'S FATHER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

When I came in she was on the bathroom floor. She must've been about to give you your bath as you were out of your little overalls and the tub was full. There was -- so much blood. Her face was chewed up, bad, but the worst of it was her neck. She musta been holding you when you started in on her. Her hands-- all chewed up. You were on the rug next to her. I thought you were dead, too, like maybe someone had broken in and done you both-- but you were sleeping. When I turned you over, I saw the blood on your mouth. You had something in your cheek. I fished it out. It was soft, like a wad of gum. With a little hole in it, where an earring would go. I thanked God she hadn't been wearing any. You could have choked.

She can hear her father nearly sob, but he recovers.

MAREN'S FATHER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

You woke up when I had you in the sink, washing you off. It didn't seem like you remembered. You liked her, Penny. That's the part I could never understand. She was your favorite sitter. Penny. I got the body out, bleached the place twice, and then packed us up and left. I don't know if they thought Penny had run off with us or what. She was on disability. It woulda been a while before anyone missed her. Far as I know, they never found where I put her. That was the last time I used our real last name. Now you know why.

Maren's cold inside, just staring out at farms and fields, an occasional underpass flashing by.

MAREN'S FATHER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

I couldn't leave you with anyone, but I needed to work. I wasn't a good enough thief to do that for money. So I got jobs I could take you to. Nothing happened for a few years. I relaxed.

(MORE)

MAREN'S FATHER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

You had to start school and I thought you wouldn't do it in public. And you didn't. But you got clever. So fucking clever.

Maren's been in a trance of listening, but the sudden anger in her father's voice breaks her out of it. She stops the recorder so hard the cassette pops out and falls to the floor. She scrambles to get it before anyone can step on it.

EXT. FREDERICK MD GREYHOUND STATION/TICKET WINDOW -- DAY

The bus pulls up outside the greyhound station in Frederick MD, a brick one-room depot beside train tracks.

BUS DRIVER'S VOICE

This completes service for this bus. Transfer information can be found on the boards inside.

Maren gets off with her rucksack and walks to the depot, which has a service window to the outside. She speaks through the window to the AGENT sitting there.

MAREN

Is there a place to get something to eat?

AGENT

Head that way. Town's right there.

MAREN

I'm on the bus to Chicago tonight. When do I have to be back?

AGENT

There's no bus out tonight. You've got 'til morning.

MAREN

It says 9:15. I--

AGENT

Check the date.

She looks at the ticket. She's misunderstood, and is pissed.

MAREN

I'll just wait here if it's okay.

AGENT

We lock up at nine, but open again at five, so just grab a bench.

(MORE)

AGENT (CONT'D)

It's a safe town. And the police station's that building just there--

He points across a long row of parking lots.

AGENT (CONT'D)

I'll take a drive past here before I hit the hay as well.

MAREN

You don't have to do that.

AGENT

I'll just drive past. If you're up, I'll honk at ya. I'd sleep better.

She tries to read him. Is he on her side, or about to call her in as a runaway as soon as her back is turned?

EXT. FREDERICK MD GREYHOUND STATION -- NIGHT

It's night. Maren lays on a bench in front of the station. A storm's coming. There's lightning, but no thunder. It's her first night homeless. She looks at her Walkman, deciding if she wants to hear more. No. She gets out a Tolkien paperback instead.

EXT. FREDERICK MD GREYHOUND STATION -- LATER -- NIGHT

The first drop of rain hits the page Maren's reading. She decides to move. She picks up her rucksack and goes under the roof over the front entrance. When she gets there, she notices a man is standing in front of the station, half in shadow, but facing her. This is SULLY (60). He calls out, mildly:

SULLY

I didn't mean to scare ya.

The man is in a fishing vest and chore coat emblazoned with various decorative pins. He has no luggage.

MAREN

Are you here for the bus?

SULLY

No, missy. I was looking for you. Maybe that sounds weird to you. Or maybe it doesn't.

Maren lets her shoes drop from her hand to the ground and she starts to put one on. She makes her voice sound calm.

MAREN

Do I know you?

He starts to walk toward her. Not rushing her, just walking. She toes her foot into her other shoe.

SULLY

Not in the way you mean. I smelled you, and you probably smell me now.

That's enough for Maren. She scoops up the Walkman and heads away from him. She only gets eight feet when he calls out:

SULLY (CONT'D)

When's the last time you fed?

This stops her in her tracks. She looks back. He's still walking to her.

MAREN

Stop-- Stop there. Stop--

He stops.

SULLY

You haven't in months I'd say.

MAREN

You-- can *smell* that?

SULLY

You can smell a lot of things if you know how. And we just smell anyway, whether we ate or not. Lord knows why. To find each other, maybe? To steer clear? I don't know.

He watches her as he pulls a toothpick out of a steel toothpick holder. After a moment, he turns and starts walking back toward town in the rain.

SULLY (CONT'D)

Come on, Missy--

Maren's frozen. She has a million questions for this man, but he's a stranger, and he's trying to lead her away. She decides. When he's not looking, she picks up a rock the size of a can of soup and pockets it. Then she follows him.

EXT. FREDERICK MD STREET/MRS. HARMON'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

They walk along the edge of town and begin up a wooded hill. He chews on a toothpick. She can see the top part of his ear is gone, slashed off on a diagonal, like an alley cat's.

MAREN

Where are we going?

SULLY

Someplace dry and safe. I'm Sulli-
van. But friends call me "Sully."

MAREN

I'm Maren. You live in this town?

SULLY

Nice name. Never heard it before.
Don't worry, Maren-- I'm ok. I got
rules. Number one is never eat an
eater. It's a good one. Think you
can follow it, too? I don't want to
find you gnawing on my elbow all of
the sudden.

She sees he's not kidding.

MAREN

I won't.

He gestures to a wide-porched house up a small hill.

SULLY

Through the back. We'll talk inside

MAREN

Can't we talk out here?

SULLY

I'll fix some dinner. Look, Sully's
trying to help. Is that all right?

She looks. There are houses on both sides. She can see lights
in them. People are a scream away if needed.

SULLY (CONT'D)

Here. I smelled you from the yard!

MAREN

This far?!

He goes up toward the house. Maren follows, guard up.

INT. MRS. HARMON'S HOUSE, KITCHEN -- NIGHT

They come into a small kitchen. Sully flips on the lights,
tosses his toothpick in the trash, and puts on an apron. Mar-
en sits. A half-read copy of James Joyce's Dubliners is there
on the table.

Sully grabs onions and potatoes from a pantry. Maren looks
into the living room. There are no lights on. She can only
make out the shapes of furniture.

SULLY

I'm gonna show you how to make a
Hobo Casserole.

MAREN

What's in a Hobo Casserole? Hobos?

He looks back at her, making his reaction a second joke.

SULLY

Use whatever you got to hand. Set
the oven on 400 when you start.

He finds ground beef in the fridge, some carrots, and cheese.
He grates the potatoes into a baking dish. Maren watches.

MAREN

Are there lots of us?

SULLY

Not lots. But more than you'd
think. You've met a few, sure.

(off her look)

--*that you know of*. You never had
anyone take a special interest in
you? A double-take sorta thing?

MAREN

I guess. But I just thought--

SULLY

You just thought *some people are
creepy* and left it at that. Girls
have it harder that way. You're not
wrong. It's better if we all stay
clear of one another. We're danger-
ous to non-eaters, sure, but we can
hurt one another just as bad. --I
hope you're hearing me.

MAREN

You sound like my dad.

SULLY

Good. He find out about you?

She nods. Sully layers in the ground beef with his bare hands
and tops the whole thing off with shredded cheese and adds
pepper and salt.

MAREN

What about you? You just basically
said keep away from people like us,
but you came *looking* for me.

He laughs and tosses a pinch of salt behind him.

SULLY

Sharp. What I smelled was that you hadn't eaten. And when I saw you're just a girl on your own, I thought you might be hungry.

MAREN

For casserole.

SULLY

No.

A beat. She looks again into the dark living room. Then she notices a framed sampler reading "BLESS THIS HOUSE."

MAREN

Who lives here?

Sully changes the oven racks around.

SULLY

Go look.

Maren's head starts to throb. *What has she walked into?*

INT. MRS. HARMON'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Maren turns on a lamp. Framed photos grace the walls. A couple beside the Grand Canyon decades ago, then craning up at Sequoias. There is a crocheted quilt over the sofa. An anniversary clock TICKS on the mantle. A cat rubs her leg.

She finally sees an old, hand-colored wedding photo: MR. AND MRS. DOUGLAS HARMON. JUNE 2, 1923. The TICKING CLOCK has become spooky. Maren turns and looks down a short, silent hall.

INT. MRS. HARMON'S HOUSE, HALL -- NIGHT

As Maren comes up the hall, she passes an empty guest bedroom with a pinwheel quilt and dolls on the dresser tops. A basket of knitting yarn sits beside an upholstered chair.

She next passes a bathroom with a fuzzy bathmat and a shower chair, like an older person would need. The cat slips past her and into the final bedroom ahead, where a lamp is on low. Sully comes to the entrance to the hall behind her.

SULLY

Use your nose. What do you smell?

Maren wants to scream.

MAREN

Is there a dead person in there?

SULLY

What do you smell? Describe it.

She sniffs the air.

MAREN

It's wet --and hot. Like soup.

SULLY

Good. What else.

MAREN

But metallic.

SULLY

Like blood?

MAREN

No. Like --mud. Something tangy.

SULLY

But not like rotten.

MAREN

No. But close. More like vinegar.
Vinegar in the soup.

SULLY

Yeah. --Yeah.

Caught between the man behind her and the bedroom in front of her, she takes a slow step forward. She soon sees that a woman is lying on the floor next to the bed. This is MRS. HARMON (80s). Maren takes another step. Closer now, she can hear a faint RASP of the woman's agonal breathing.

Maren spooks and backs away fast. She gets halfway down the hall before she's blocked by Sully.

MAREN

She's alive. We'll get help-- Missy--

SULLY (CONT'D)

MAREN (CONT'D)

What did you do to her!?

SULLY

I found her like that this morning.

MAREN

You're lying. Let me by!

SULLY

I followed my nose. I can smell it, especially on an old person. You did, too. You described it better than I could.

MAREN

I want to go!

SULLY

Listen. Let me bone down on this for you. Whatever you and I got, it's got to be fed.

MAREN

No. --no. It was *years* before my last time--

SULLY

That's because you're young. You'll need it more and more.

Maren nearly goes to her knees when she hears this, so badly does she not want it to be true.

SULLY (CONT'D)

And you won't always be able to hold yourself back. Maybe you already know that. There's a reason you're on your own, isn't there? Just-- be calm. Maybe I should butt out, but I know from living as long as I have--if the circumstances are safe and good, then eat. It'll last you a while, maybe keep you from doing something you'd regret more. Even more, Missy.

Maren cries silently now. Sully adjusts his tone.

SULLY (CONT'D)

I found her like that and I don't think a hospital's going to help her, old as she is. Her mail's stacked up a bit so I don't think she's got relations nearby.

(sincerely)

I don't kill people. I try not to. That leaves this, and things like it.

MAREN

Can I use the bathroom, please?

SULLY

Sure.

He lets her by. She goes into the bathroom and locks the door. He waits a moment and then goes to the door.

SULLY (CONT'D)

What I'm proposing is I take the couch and you take the guest bed. I don't think it'll be long now.

(beat)

When it's time, the smell will change. I won't even have to come get you; you'll know. So go and get right with it. Take the spare room and get right with it.

Then he goes down the stairs to give her some room.

INT. MRS. HARMON'S HOUSE, HALL/GUEST BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Maren comes out and slips into the guest bedroom. She shuts the door and locks it. She sits on the upholstered chair. A pearl-button cardigan is draped over its arm. She lifts her elbow off the sweater. There's no chance she'll use the bed, so she stays in the chair, heart racing, watching the gap under the door for any moving shadow.

CUT TO:

INT. MRS. HARMON'S HOUSE, GUEST BEDROOM/HALL/BEDROOM -- DAY

Maren stirs awake. The sky is blueing up with morning. She looks at the clock at the same moment she smells the change: it's 6:12 a.m. and Mrs. Harmon has died. She hears Sully come down the hall, pass her door, and continue on to the main bedroom. After a moment, she hears a JERK OF PLASTIC.

Theoretically, there's still time to run, but her entire reality now is appetite. She stands, takes the sweater off the chair, and puts it on backwards like a kid in an art class. She goes to the door and steps out. Sully is crouched over Mrs. Harmon, his back to Maren. He's undressed the body and put it on trash bags cut open into sheets. When she comes closer, she sees he's into the soft tissue of Mrs. Harmon's belly, chewing and swallowing methodically. It is not a frenzied attack; He's as measured as a man eating in a diner.

Maren kneels beside him. She picks up Mrs. Harmon's arm and bites into the flesh there. Sully looks at her for a moment, but knows to give her privacy. The flesh isn't cooked, so it's not like pulling pot roast off a bone. It's work.

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. MRS. HARMON'S HOUSE, KITCHEN -- DAY

Maren sits at the kitchen table, sated. Blood covers her face and hands, and is all down Mrs. Harmon's sweater. She sees on the stove the hobo beef casserole, now cold.

Sully comes in, his face a mask of blood as well. He sits next to her at the table, vague and shy, like an addict.

SULLY

Here--

He puts on the table a couple of items of Mrs. Harmon's jewelry: a wedding ring and a pink-and-cream locket.

MAREN

I'm not a thief.

SULLY

Don't misconstrue.

He goes to the living room and gets a valise. As he's leaning over it, a tatter of Mrs. Harmon's flesh falls off the front of his shirt and onto the floral sofa. He looks at it, then dismisses it with a wave.

He returns and pulls out something fuzzy and coiled from his bag, a long rope made of what can only be human hair, from dozens of heads. Brown, curly, black, blonde, straight. It's beautiful and grotesque, a sinister piece of folk murder art. Maren stares at the heavy coil in his hand. So many people.

SULLY (CONT'D)

This is how I do it. It helps me remember each one. I've been working on it for years. My great aunt had a bracelet made out of her husband's hair when he died. That's what made me think to start it. She wore it the rest of her days. It was a custom then.

MAREN

Your whole life you've done it?

SULLY

When I thought this up I was about your age.

She reaches out and touches it.

SULLY (CONT'D)

Pull it if you want. It's strong. You won't break it.

To show her he uncoils the whole thing and pulls it taut.

MAREN

Who was your first? You remember?

SULLY

Ate my own grandad while they were waiting on the undertaker.

MAREN

Did someone find you? While you were doing it?

SULLY

My mama found me, afterward. She cleaned me up and told everyone animals got in and did it. This was up an old road in Georgia. Coulda happened that way. Maybe they even believed her. But when I finally ran off no one came looking for me.

MAREN

How do you know?

SULLY

I sat up in the woods back of our place waitin' to see if they'd search for me. Never happened. Waited four days. That's the worst it's been for me--those four days. Knowing my kin was glad to see me gone.

MAREN

You lived on your own since then?

SULLY

It's not hard once someone teaches you. Got to watch yourself and stay places they can't book you for vagrancy or trespass. Woods are best. You can smell cops coming that way.

MAREN

How?

SULLY

The polish. On their badges. The gun oil. You just have to practice. Sully'll show you. Now it's your turn, Missy. --Now you disappear.

A beat. Maren looks at her red hands.

MAREN

What if I don't want that? --What if I don't want no one to find me again?

SULLY

You don't have to be alone. You can bum with me as long as you like.

He says it in a way he thinks hides how much he'd like this.

MAREN

I'm looking for someone.

SULLY

Your mama?

(off her surprise)

You mentioned your daddy last night so I know you must be running from him, or he left you. You didn't say nothing about your mama, though.

MAREN

I've never met her. I just have the name of the town she was born in. It's on my birth certificate.

He nods. They sit in silence. The first fly finds them.

SULLY

We better clean up before we dry stuck to these chairs. You go. Just leave me some hot water.

She gets up to go, but at the door turns back.

MAREN

Does that mean you only eat women? The hair-- Doesn't it have to be long enough to add to the --rope?

SULLY

No. If it isn't long enough, I just don't add it in.

He says this with emphasis. Maren nods once, and goes.

INT. MRS. HARMON'S HOUSE, GUEST BEDROOM -- DAY

After her shower, Maren's redressed in the same clothes, but she's clean and her hair is washed now. She can hear Sully in the shower now SINGING The Blue Sky Boys' "Beautiful, Beautiful Brown Eyes." She is cleaning the blood off her watch when she realizes the time. 9:15. She finds her bus ticket.

She's missed it. She quickly scans the fine print to see what happens next.

INT. MRS. HARMON'S HOUSE, HALLWAY/KITCHEN -- DAY

She comes out of the bedroom with her knapsack over her shoulders, moving fast, and is out the back door in a flash.

EXT. FREDERICK MD GREYHOUND STATION -- DAY

Maren runs up to the station. One bus is in the parking lot, loading. She hurries right up the steps.

INT. MD TO OH GREYHOUND BUS -- DAY

The BUS DRIVER looks up from where he is counting tickets.

MAREN

Where does this bus go?

BUS DRIVER

Columbus Ohio, Miss.

MAREN

I missed my bus this morning to Chicago. Can I ride this one?

The Bus Driver looks out at the ticket window where no one, at the moment, is sitting.

MAREN (CONT'D)

I can catch a Chicago bus from Ohio, can't I? Please. I need to keep moving--

He sees the state she's in and, after a moment, relents.

She takes a seat half way back at the window, silently urging the bus to move. When it finally pulls out, she sees:

MAREN'S POV: *Sully is on the sidewalk, his hair still wet from his shower, watching her leave. His expression is hard. Hurt and hard. Then he is out of view.*

She leans her head back on the seat, relieved. She catches her breath. She checks her nails: Just a bit of blood left.

MAREN'S FATHER'S VOICE

The next few I didn't see. A boy went missing at a camp you went to. I shouldn't have let you go, but you wanted to. It was just a week. You were 8.

(MORE)

MAREN'S FATHER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

*When that boy went missing, I knew:
this is who you are. I never
thought "what" you are.*

INT. MD TO OH GREYHOUND BUS -- NIGHT

Maren's left the curtains open so she can see the highway lights streak by, an accompaniment to her father's VOICE.

MAREN'S FATHER'S VOICE

*You ate them. I believe you had to.
I don't know why. They found his
pup tent pitched in heavy woods,
all bloody inside. Luke something--
Vanderbilt. If they ruled it a hom-
icide, I never heard. Vanderwall.
Something like that. I watched af-
ter, to see if you looked sad. You
didn't. That was the beginning of
saying no to things. Now you know
why for that, too.*

Maren sees the skyline of Columbus glowing on the horizon. She takes out the envelope and sees she's got only \$14 left.

INT. COLUMBUS OH GREYHOUND STATION -- NIGHT

She arrives on the last bus of the night. The station's empty except for some homeless people. She's closer to the edges of society now. A man slumped against a wall next to an injured dog sings Neil Young's "Helpless," in a dead, calm voice. He stops and calls to her.

WIDE-AWAKE MAN

You a sweet tooth girl?

She looks at him, then quickly away. She finds an exit.

TITLE CARD: "OH"

EXT. COLUMBUS OH GREYHOUND STATION -- NIGHT

Maren comes out of the station into downtown. People here are camped out in the leas of buildings for the night. There is one cab sitting across the street with its lights on, so she goes over with her rucksack.

The TAXI DRIVER (50) behind the wheel looks tired, but kind.

MAREN

I just have a question. To Chicago,
is it faster to go north from here
or through Indianapolis?

He looks at her, at her rucksack. He stubs out his cigarette.

TAXI DRIVER

That really what you want to ask?

MAREN

I have to get to Minnesota and I
can't afford another bus. I've
never hitchhiked in my life. --I
don't even know how it works.

TAXI DRIVER

You've got no other way? I wouldn't
hitch if you've got another way.

Maren shakes her head. He thinks, then hits on something.

TAXI DRIVER (CONT'D)

Tomorrow's Friday. Head up this
street about twelve blocks. You'll
see campus. Ohio State. Ask around.
Some kid's bound to be driving home
for the long weekend. It'd be safer
than standing on the side of the
highway with your thumb out. And
the student union is unlocked all
night. I hope that helps you--

She nods thanks and moves on. Without a single better option,
she goes.

FADE OUT:

TITLE CARD: "IN"

INT. IN IGA, VARIOUS -- DAY

Maren comes into a rural grocery store. She passes aisles of
food, household items, toiletries. When no one is looking,
she slips a box of tampons into her rucksack, and then some
shampoo.

She turns into an aisle and sees a DRUNK MAN in a Stetson,
glaring at shelves of canned nuts, muttering to himself:

DRUNK MAN

What kind of grocery store runs out
of Lunchables?

A MOM pushing her son in a cart turns into the same aisle
from the opposite end. The man turns to her.

DRUNK MAN (CONT'D)

Whoa. You trying to run me down?

The Mom keeps moving so as not to further antagonize the man,
but he says even louder:

DRUNK MAN (CONT'D)

--You deaf? I asked you a question.

(louder)

HEAR THIS YOU DUMB HO?

MAREN

Hey, don't talk to her like that.

The drunk turns to face Maren now. But someone comes past
her: A YOUNG MAN (20s) who strides right up to the drunk with
the bored bravado of someone twice his size. This is LEE.

LEE

You're out of control, pal.

DRUNK MAN

You with the store or something?

LEE

Naw, but I'm about to escort you
out of it.

DRUNK MAN

Fucking see what happens.

LEE

What happens? You think something
bad's gonna happen?

With a look to Maren, Lee comes up and fake headbutts the
drunk man and grabs his hat, inflaming him further.

DRUNK MAN

Outside! I'm taking you outside.

Lee leads the drunk man out the opposite end of the aisle and
then Maren is alone again. She keeps moving.

She finds the canned goods. When she's sure she's not being
watched, she puts a jar of peanut butter in her rucksack as
well.

VOICE ON PA
Grant, to the freezers please.

EXT. IN IGA, PARKING LOT -- DUSK

Maren pays for a pack of gum and then comes out of the store bracing for someone to stop her. No one does. The sun's gone down, leaving a violet sky. The parking lot lights come on. And that's when Maren smells it. She glances across the lot.

That smell. She looks around the parking lot again, now realizing, with surprise, what it likely is. There are a dozen cars, mostly near the entrance. Beyond the lot is a low abandoned storefront, and then woods.

Is the smell coming from one of the cars? Before she can decide where to start looking, the young man who handled the drunk earlier, LEE (23), slips out of the abandoned building, shirtless, and splashes some water on his face and chest from a water bottle. Something about him is different: He's wearing the drunk man's Stetson. He glances at the store entrance to make sure no one's coming and sees Maren.

They stare at one another a moment, and then he comes into the lot and starts trying a set of keys on cars. He looks closed-off, but Maren walks toward him.

LEE
It's a Ford.

Maren points past him to a battered pickup truck.

LEE (CONT'D)
Yeah, that's gotta be it.

He starts walking toward it. She can see he's got blood on his neck. He goes to unlock the truck but it's already open. He tries the engine and it starts. He turns it off.

LEE (CONT'D)
He's back there about four hundred yards if you need to--

She shakes her head *no*.

MAREN
You could tell? In the store?

He gives the barest of nods. So she comes a bit closer.

MAREN (CONT'D)
I smelled you, too. I didn't know I could do that.

He looks at her uncomfortably. He's amped up, in the dull, dumb afterglow of satiation. He looks at her rucksack.

MAREN (CONT'D)

I'm going to Minnesota. I got dumped by a ride. I just stole dinner. It's all I could think to do. --You aren't local either I guess?

LEE

Why does that matter?

He growls more than say this. Maren shrugs.

MAREN

I'm 18 if you're wondering.

LEE

I was going to guess younger.

MAREN

Thanks a lot.

LEE

Look, I don't usually --talk to anyone after. I don't actually meet many others. I'm sorta glad not to.

MAREN

I get it.

LEE

I'm just saying I'm not an asshole.

MAREN

You should probably go anyway. Up close you can see blood.

LEE

We're fine.

She shakes her head, all of it starting to fry her circuits.

MAREN

No. I really don't think I am.

She's not freaking out, or about to cry, but she's not steady either. He looks at her and then decides.

LEE

You wanna get in? For a minute--?

He goes and climbs in the driver's side. After a moment, she dumps her duffle in back and gets in the passenger side.

INT. PICKUP (IGA PARKING LOT) -- DUSK

He puts the key in the ignition, but doesn't turn it. When he reaches over to open the glove compartment, Maren does her best to hide her flinch. He finds the man's registration.

MAREN

This truck's his, by the way. You can't just take it.

LEE

We've all got our rules. That's not one of my rules.

(reading)

"Barry Cook. 5278 Route 13. Pittson, Indiana."

MAREN

You're going to his house?

LEE

He didn't have any pictures in his wallet. It should be fine.

MAREN

You took his wallet, too?

LEE

I didn't take his wallet, I took the money out of his wallet. Eight bucks. I chucked the wallet in a creek back there.

She looks at the sky, which is tipping into darkness.

MAREN

I'm Maren.

After a pause, he says:

LEE

I'm Lee.

MAREN

I don't know whether to cry or scream or laugh or what.

LEE

Well, don't scream.

MAREN

I thought I was the only one. Now I meet two others in a week.

Lee looks at her. He's intense, this young man. When he looks at something, he's really looking.

MAREN (CONT'D)

It's like anything else, I guess:
You've never heard of it, then *bam*.

He looks at Maren, at her hands.

MAREN (CONT'D)

Can you help me? I just-- I'm new
at this.

LEE

No one our age is "new" at this.

MAREN

I'm new at --remembering. It all.
(beat)
I don't want to try to find a place
to sleep in the dark, okay. --I
know you don't know me, but I won't
come at you okay? And you can pro-
mise the same. I don't want to hurt
anybody--

Lee looks at her a moment, a bit amazed. *Can she really only now be learning these ropes?* Some instinct in him kicks in. Against his better judgment, he starts the truck and says:

LEE

Famous last words.

EXT. PICKUP (IN HIGHWAY 2) -- NIGHT

The tail lights of the pickup are two of many until they take the exit for Rt. 13 and Pittson. Then they're alone.

EXT. PICKUP (IN RURAL ROUTE) -- NIGHT

They drive slow, checking mailboxes until they find Barry's address. It's a rundown house in sight of other dark houses. The house is dark inside, so they pull in behind it.

EXT. BARRY'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

They get out and come to the back door. Lee KNOCKS, loudly. It startles Maren. They wait. Nothing. No dog barking, no motion inside. Lee puts the key in the lock and they go in.

INT. BARRY'S HOUSE, DEN -- NIGHT

They enter and are greeted with a wreck. Empty PBR cans are stacked in pyramids. Empty pizza boxes sit on a recliner.

On top of the TV is a paint-spattered boom box and two full ashtrays. A floor-to-ceiling KISS poster takes up one wall.

LEE

"Lick It Up." That's the one where they stopped wearing make up.

MAREN

Who?

LEE

You were home schooled, I guess?

(beat)

It smells like he's been getting stoned in here for thirty years.

(incredulous)

How do you live in this country and not know who Kiss is?!

He sees Barry's turntable and foot locker of LPs. He crouches over it until he finds Kiss' *Lick It Up!*

LEE (CONT'D)

Wait! Here it is--!

He puts it on the turntable. When the SONG STARTS, it BLARES, so he turns down the volume so as not to announce anyone is in Barry's house. He then dances around the room and up onto the couch. Maren isn't sure how to react. He grinds out moves until he smells his sweat reconstituting the blood still on him. He checks himself in a mirror there and says:

LEE (CONT'D)

I'm gonna take a shower.

MAREN

Will you check the house first?

He nods and goes, squeezing past her in the doorway. She glances down and sees a porn mag open to some peroxide horror. She sits, then stands again, unable to relax in this place.

INT. BARRY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Maren pulls some Micro Magic fries out of the freezer. When she nukes them, the lights dim. She pulls out her road atlas and sits at the table trying to understand where they are. Lee comes in showered, wearing an unfamiliar shirt.

LEE

He's got all of M.A.S.H. on tape in there! Even the fucking finale. Do you know how rare that is?!

He joins her at the table. While Maren eats, Lee goes through Barry's mail, opening one letter and reading it.

LEE (CONT'D)

Born in Louisiana. That explains the accent. His mom's got stomach cancer. Post-marked four months ago. He never even opened it.

MAREN

Does it help, knowing he was a shit?

LEE

Who needs help? An animal wouldn't need help. I just find it interesting.

MAREN

You think we're animals?

He shrugs. It's been a while since he's had a stranger's full attention pointed directly at him like this.

LEE

I know we are and I mean everyone, not just us. We need what we need, right? But everybody tries to make themselves feel bad about it. I can't. I look around and see animals and it all makes sense to me.

(beat)

It's late. We may as well stay.

MAREN

Is this-- how you live?

LEE

Not every night, but yeah, sometimes. Take the bedroom. Lock the door if you want to. I won't be offended. Just--

(cryptically)

I hope you don't get seasick.

INT. BARRY'S HOUSE, BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Maren flips on the light and sees: a California King water bed with Barry Cook's dirty laundry on top. But it's a hell of a lot better than a student union, or the woods.

INT. BARRY'S HOUSE, BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Maren brushes her teeth.

Lee has turned on a WWF WRESTLING MATCH in the other room. When she leans down to spit, she sees red at the rim of the drain--blood from Lee washing up earlier. She rinses it.

INT. BARRY'S HOUSE, BEDROOM -- NIGHT

The bedroom has no door. Maren finds some beer cans, and stacks along the floor in case anyone tries to come in. She sees a Swiss Army knife on a dresser, opens the big blade, and puts it under her pillow. Then she gets under the quilt still clothed, and turns out the light.

FADE OUT:

INT. BARRY'S HOUSE, BEDROOM -- DAY

Maren wakes to LOUD KNOCKING. It's dim in the bedroom due to a tarp nailed up over the window in place of curtains.

WOMAN'S VOICE
OPEN THE FUCKING DOOR!

Lee runs in a crouch from the living room. He trips over the BEER-CAN ALARM. He looks at Maren, realizing what it was.

WOMAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)
I HEARD THAT, ASSHOLE. I KNOW
YOU'RE HOME.

Then they hear her at the back door, JIGGLING the handle.

MAREN
It's locked, right--?!

Lee nods once. There's a long pause and then the woman starts banging on the bedroom window, startling them both.

WOMAN'S VOICE
GET OUT HERE! I NEED THE CHECK,
BARRY. WHERE'S THE CHECK?! DO YOU
GIVE A SHIT IF YOUR DAUGHTER EATS?
(beat)
OKAY. I'M GETTING HARVEY. TRY IG-
NORING HIM, DICKWAD.

They can see her face behind the sheet, trying to see inside. Then she goes. They hear her CAR START. Maren peeks out.

MAREN
Jeez. She's got her kid in the car.

MAREN'S POV: *The woman backs out in a beat-up Dodge. Beside her, unbuckled in the seat, is a GIRL (8) trying not to cry.*

LEE

No toys. No kiddie bed. That kid never stays here, thank god--
(seriously)
Let's make like a Tom and Cruise.

EXT. BARRY'S HOUSE, DRIVEWAY -- DAY

They come out with their packs, a box of M.A.S.H. tapes, and Barry's VCR to find the woman has shoved a screwdriver into one of Barry's tires. It's flat. Lee checks under the truck.

LEE

He's got a spare. Which is surprising, knowing Barry as we do. Can you see if he's got any tools behind the seat? And a jack--

He gets on his back and scoots under the truck. Maren finds a jack and a beat up tool box. Lee drags out the spare.

MAREN

What if she gets back while you're working on it?

LEE

I can change this in six minutes flat. --Time me.

Maren, game, checks her watch.

MAREN

All right-- Mark. Set. Go.

CUT TO:

The flat tire lies in the middle of the driveway and Maren and Lee are gone.

CUT TO:

INT. PICKUP (IN HIGHWAY 3) -- DAY

They take a big cloverleaf back onto the highway.

LEE

You asked me where I'm going. I need to go home. Where I grew up. Kentucky. Just over the Illinois border.

(beat)

You in a hurry?

She looks at him and shakes her head.

INT. IN DINER -- DAY

It's afternoon, but they've ordered breakfast. A SERVER comes with pancakes. Lee's also ordered bacon and a bowl of Lucky Charms. The bacon glistens. He starts on the cereal, chomping it down like a little boy. Maren watches this.

MAREN

You seemed like such a hardcase yesterday.

LEE

When you weigh 140 pounds wet, you gotta have big attitude instead.

Maren digs into her pancakes.

MAREN

Sully. That was his name. The other guy I met. He showed up at a bus station saying he smelled me half a mile away. --Can you do that?

LEE

Not that far.

MAREN

He said he could smell when people were dying, too.

LEE

Actually, I think I mighta heard of this guy.

MAREN

Really? He keeps this braid woven from the hair of people he eats.

LEE

Christ.

MAREN

It's like eight feet long.

Lee doesn't respond for a moment. Then he says, emphatically:

LEE

That's a choice. We don't have to be like that.

She nods, fully in agreement.

LEE (CONT'D)

Why didn't you tag along with him?

MAREN

I don't know. Something about him.
I do think he was trying to help--

LEE

I profoundly doubt that.

MAREN

He was just creepy I guess.

LEE

Did that dawn on you before or
after you ate Mrs. Herman together?

The WAITRESS comes and warms up Lee's coffee. He smiles at her. As soon as she's out of earshot, Maren continues:

MAREN

Harmon. Mrs. Harmon.

LEE

Does it help? Memorizing their
names?

She ignores his sarcasm. She looks at him. Something about him is clearly catching her interest. He doesn't notice yet.

MAREN

Why'd you offer to bring me along?

LEE

You seemed nice.

He shoves more pancake in his mouth. Maren watches him eat.

MAREN

I am nice.

LEE

Do I? Seem nice--?

His vulnerability catches her off guard. Him, too. He stands.

LEE (CONT'D)

Hit the john if you need it. --How
do you feel about sleeping outside?

MAREN

Okay.

He nods and goes. She watches him head back to the restrooms. Then she sees a GIRL (4) in the next booth has been listening to all of this. Maren bares her teeth at the girl like a monster until she disappears from view.

EXT. PICKUP, BED (UNDER HIGHWAY BRIDGE) -- DUSK

They've found a place to camp under a highway bridge. Lee lays out blankets in the truck bed. A moon is up.

LEE

It'll be cold tonight, but if we keep this truck, we'll get a sheet of plywood for back here.

MAREN

What's in Kentucky anyways?

LEE

My sister. I promised to give her driving lessons before she has to take her test. She's a good kid.

MAREN

Do you get home often?

LEE

A little bit. I left when I was 16. Dropped out of school.

MAREN

How come?

He doesn't answer. Maren could press, but lets it go. Instead, Lee says:

LEE

There are other ways to get an education. As it turns out.

EXT. PICKUP, BED (IN CAMPGROUND) -- NIGHT

NIGHT BIRDS CALL. Lee's sleeping a foot from Maren, but respectful of her space. Still, she looks at him a long time, the line of his neck where it meets the waves in his hair. She takes in the air around him, warm from his body, carrying his scent. Then Maren puts down her book and looks up at the underside of highway bridge they've parked under high above them, happy to be safe, with some kind of friend.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. OHIO RIVER FERRY -- DAY

It's a misty morning. They take a small car ferry across the Ohio River. They sit in the truck with the radio on. A MAN PREACHES.

RADIO PREACHER'S VOICE
*We are all brothers and sisters.
That colleague of yours who stepped
in front of you for a promotion?
She's your sister. That swindler
who broke into your car and took
your stereo? He's your brother.
We must forgive one another!*

Lee leans back on the windshield to get some sun on his face.

LEE
Can you jump stations?

MAREN
I like what he's saying.

LEE
What, you got baby Jesus in your
heart?

MAREN
No. --I mean, I don't. But that
doesn't mean this isn't comforting.

LEE
It's not *comfort*, it's bait. The
best bait in the box.

Lee chuckles darkly.

LEE (CONT'D)
I got picked up in Little Rock--
for selling cigarettes. They didn't
have any spots in the county jail
so they made me go to one of these
fucking church meetings. A guy
there raised his hand and talked
about doing it with another guy and
getting HIV from it. First time
out. He was in bad shape.

(gestures to his skin)
Like a fucking *leper*, basically. He
said he thought he was rotten --you
know *rotting* away. And you know how
the comforted him? They booed him
out of the room. They couldn't even
forgive him *that*. What the hell
would they think of us, for the
stuff that bleeds, huh?

MAREN
There are hypocrites everywhere.

LEE

No. Our great Heavenly Father would-
n't want us on our *best* days. Hell,
our real fathers didn't--

She looks at him, stung by this. He looks back.

LEE (CONT'D)

Or are you gonna tell me you ran
away from a loving home?

This is hard for Maren to talk about, so she doesn't. All she
says is:

MAREN

I didn't run away.

LEE

I'm not trying to start anything.
I'm just saying what I think. You
would have, eventually. I can't
promise that, but I believe it. We
can't stay. I haven't met a single
one of us who stayed.

Maren watches the Kentucky shore coming closer. There are
houses over there; pretty, well-loved houses, maybe with pret-
ty, well-loved kids. Behind her, a sign on a door to the
wheelhouse reads "LIFE JACKETS INSIDE."

TITLE CARD: "KY"

EXT. KY STATE ROUTE -- DAY

The truck passes a sign reading "MARVIN 5," then pulls into
the weedy driveway of a house with garden gnomes in the yard.
Lee glances around to make sure no one has seen them pull in.
The cooling tower of a nuclear plant rises in the distance.

INT. LEE'S AUNT'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM -- DAY

They park in the backyard, out of sight. Lee gets out and
approaches the house with some visible trepidation. He takes
out a key hidden in an old grill. Maren follows him inside.

The house looks like someone's started going through it.

LEE

It's my aunt's place. She died in
March.

(MORE)

LEE (CONT'D)

My house is on the other side of that plant but we'll stay here. I just can't be seen in town is all. Do you need to know why?

Maren decides and says, clearly:

MAREN

No.

The dining table is stacked with files.

MAREN (CONT'D)

What's going to happen to all this stuff?

LEE

My mom's cleaning it out, but she's got school. She's a teacher.

Maren goes to a light switch.

LEE (CONT'D)

Better if we leave them off. Don't open any windows, either. Just for tonight. I'll be back in a while. I'm going to take Kayla to the lot behind the mall and then on back roads if she can handle it.

MAREN

Your sister's name is Kayla?

LEE

I call her "Kay" to her face. Or "Idiot." --You can snoop around if you want. Just know my aunt was a very boring lady.

INT. LEE'S AUNT'S HOUSE, KITCHEN -- DAY

In a kitchen drawer are serving spoons, fancy napkins and napkin holders for holidays--Turkeys and Poinsettias--and old placemats that read "HOOKER PROVISIONS."

INT. LEE'S AUNT'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS BEDROOM -- DAY

In a sewing basket are nail files, checkbooks, paid bills. In a bottom drawer are holiday-themed sweatshirts and--in an old dry cleaning bag--a yellowing stack of lace. In a nightstand is a box of photos, including several of family trips, the Lincoln Memorial, and one of Lee (8) squinting at the camera in a Robin Hood hat, not smiling.

INT. LEE'S AUNT'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM -- DAY

Maren comes in as Lee is laying out fast food for them. He's in high spirits, really elated.

LEE

Take whatever you want.

He's laid out sandwiches in a line, all in cheery wrappers.

MAREN

It went well?

LEE

So fun. She's a natural. We only spent ten minutes behind the mall, then she was ready for real roads.

His energy is big, infectious. It makes Maren smile.

LEE (CONT'D)

It's going to get dark in a bit. There's a den downstairs. We can block the window and watch some of those M.A.S.H. tapes.

MAREN

I do love that show.

LEE

See?! See? *Fuck* the Fatherland. We're having a good time. A god damned slumber party!

MAREN

You're right, by the way. Your aunt was pretty boring. But why does she have placemats for hookers?

He thinks, trying to understand what she might be referring to, then laughs, hard. He's about to explain, but they hear the BACK DOOR BANG OPEN and KAYLA (16) comes barging in, enraged. She's in overalls and her hair tips are dyed a wild yellow. She's surprised to find Lee isn't alone. She throws a waded-up ball of paper at Lee, hard.

KAYLA

Nice work, *you motard*. I already found this note you put in my purse. You're leaving?! Already?

LEE

Kayla, this is Maren. Maren, Kayla.

KAYLA

Fucking asshole. You said you were going to stick around this time--

Lee stands, hands out, placating.

LEE

Chill chill chill. I'll be back in a few weeks. Something came up--

KAYLA (O.S.)

I don't believe you anymore, Lee. Where are you always going anyway? Don't you need a job?

LEE

I have a job. It's out of town.

He glances at Maren, not enjoying his worlds colliding, or being diminished in front of her in this way.

LEE (CONT'D)

Come on, let's go outside--

KAYLA (O.S.)

I mean-- you're such a liar. Is there anything you don't lie about?

LEE

I want to talk to you outside--

He marches her out to the back porch. Maren can still hear.

KAYLA (O.S.)

You don't miss me when you're gone?

LEE (O.S.)

You're the only person I miss. I call, don't I?

KAYLA (O.S.)

Is that your girlfriend--?

LEE (O.S.)

That's my friend friend. Maybe you can meet her some other time. We can't stay. I just wanted to take you driving like I said I would.

KAYLA (O.S.)

I hate that you do this. Dad did this. And then he left for good. Don't you understand? Every time you leave, we're fucking terrified.

LEE (O.S.)

I'll see you as soon as I can,
okay?

KAYLA (O.S.)

Whatever. You're not listening to
me. --And you look like a faggot in
that fucking shirt.

LEE (O.S.)

I heard you the first three times
you said it.

KAYLA (O.S.)

Fuck you, Lee. Honestly, *fuck* you.

Lee comes back in. Maren watches him roll his shoulders,
trying to let it go.

LEE (O.S.)

We'll go tonight. She's not so good
at hiding things. And if my mom
finds out I'm here, she'll come by
next. --Let me spare you that.

He peels off the shirt. His whole demeanor has plummeted.

INT. PICKUP (KY ROADSIDE) -- DUSK

They get a good few miles behind them before Lee pulls over.
At first Maren thinks he's still upset, but he turns on the
dome light and looks at her with a shy smile.

LEE

How do you feel about robbing a
place?

She knows Lee enough to know this must not be what it seems.

MAREN

Whose place?

LEE

A company.

MAREN

Family owned?

LEE

I like that question.

MAREN

What's the answer?

LEE

Not anymore.

EXT. HOOKER PROVISIONS, FENCE/PASTURE -- NIGHT

Lee leads Maren to a high fence. Maren can hear COWS MURMURING inside a huge barn complex. They climb over.

LEE

My uncle worked here. Forty years. It belonged to a local family, but JLB finally bought 'em out. They let my uncle go three weeks before his retirement. I've done this before. I have his old set of keys and they still haven't changed the locks. Someday they'll wise up.

MAREN

Aren't there guards?

LEE

Yeah, Dale. Can't hear in two ears.

They run and hide behind the muddy wall of an outbuilding.

MAREN

Are we robbing the safe?

He looks at her, impressed she's so up for this.

LEE

I can't get in there. But there's a cafe for visitors. They don't lock up the petty cash at night. It's probably less than a hundred bucks, but we can definitely use it.

MAREN

Visitors? To a slaughterhouse--?

INT. HOOKER PROVISIONS, CAFE -- NIGHT

They come into a dark cafe. Over the counter is a menu board reading HOOKER PROVISIONS with at least 30 styles of hamburger listed. They duck under the counter and head further in.

LEE

Wait here. Stay down in case he shines his flashlight in here.

He disappears for a long few moments, then comes back with a wad of bills in his hand. He gives it to her.

LEE (CONT'D)

You be the bank.

She shoves it in her left boot. She starts moving back to the door they came in, but he pulls on her sleeve.

LEE (CONT'D)

Wait. I want to show you something.

INT. HOOKER PROVISIONS, BARN -- NIGHT

Lee and Maren have climbed up to barn's catwalk and sit with their legs dangling over the edge. They look out across a sea of cows, all LOWING and GRUNTING. Maren and Lee keep their voices down. BACH plays quietly over the speakers.

LEE

Music's supposed to keep them calm.

MAREN

Seems like an admission of something, doesn't it?

(beat)

Do you think your sister has any idea? About you I mean.

LEE

She knows *something's* up. I hope my mom buys a new car and gives Kay her old one. I just want her to be able to leave if she wants. All you need is a car that runs.

MAREN

If it wasn't for *you know what* I'd be stuck somewhere myself.

They watch the SECURITY GUARD pass outside, oblivious.

MAREN (CONT'D)

You ever think: Every one of them has a mom and a dad-- maybe sisters and brothers. Cousins. Kids. Friends, even.

LEE

A *language*. Listen to 'em--

They listen to the soft LOWING. Their hands are side by side.

LEE (CONT'D)

You never told me what's in Minnesota anyway.

MAREN

My mom.

LEE

She lives there?

MAREN

I don't know. I don't even know if she's alive. I just know the name of the town she was born in.

LEE

It might take a while to track her down. It might even be a dead end.

MAREN

It's all I have.

LEE

Then that's where we'll start.

(off her look)

I can take you. It's a lot of driving, but I'm up for it if you are. We can take our time. See the country. Well Missouri and Iowa anyway.

MAREN

I've never been to either.

She looks at him, at how close his forehead is to hers. She runs a hand through his hair and then they are kissing. Like everything Lee does, it's intense, and careful. He takes no kiss for granted. It's a beautiful first kiss.

CUT TO:

INT. PICKUP (KY HIGHWAY) -- DAY

They are now on the highway, doing 50 mph in morning traffic. Maren's hands are cemented to the wheel at 10 and 2. She's nervous. Cars jockey around them. One HONKS.

LEE

Ignore them. You're fine. You can go a little faster if you want-- It's actually *safer* to go as fast as the other cars--

MAREN

Are we not safe right now?

LEE

Oh my god. None of these people wants to get in an accident, Maren!

(MORE)

LEE (CONT'D)

Everyone's being careful! You just have to drive like they are!

MAREN

I hate this.

LEE

(as Capt. Hawkeye Pierce)
A machine has not been invented that can test my indifference to that remark.

(beat)

Seriously, you'll hate it until you don't. It's like that for everybody. You really are doing fine.

Her jaw is set as if death is one moment away. He puts his hand in front of her eyes for a split second.

MAREN

YOU FUCKING ASSHAT! STOP IT!

CUT TO:

EXT. PICKUP (MO STATE LINE) -- DAY

By the time they cross into Missouri, Maren is more comfortable at the wheel. She's up to 65 and the honking has stopped. She's still irritated, but Lee doesn't mind. He's singing along to the radio, George Strait's "Amarillo by Morning." He's got a beautiful country-western voice.

TITLE CARD: "MO"

LEE

Amarillo by morning, up from San Antone. Everything that I've got is just what I've got on.

EXT. MO SWIMMING HOLE -- DAY

They sit on a ledge overlooking a swimming hole fed by a low waterfall. People jump and swim. Maren and Lee share an Entenmann's cake they picked up to celebrate. They cut it with Lee's buck knife. The sun's about to set.

Lee says something that makes Maren laugh. He's tracking her expressions, not a-fraid of eye contact. At some point, she understands.

MAREN (PRELAP)

It's gonna be cold again. Aren't you freezing at night?

EXT. MO CAMPSITE -- DUSK

They are kneeling in the bed of the pickup, where they're laying out their bedding for the night on plywood they've gotten somewhere.

LEE

Have you been cold? Why didn't you say something? --Some people sleep colder, I guess. It's not gonna matter in a few weeks when summer kicks in.

MAREN

What was your first time like?

LEE

It was a babysitter.

MAREN

Mine too! Why her? Do you remember?

LEE

Yeah. She was this sad cow. Used to ask me questions and pinch me if I got the answer wrong, in places it would be hard to see. *What's the capital of Idaho*, shit like that. What five-year-old knows the capital of Idaho.

MAREN

What was it like?

LEE

A rush. I felt like some kind of weird new superhero. --It feels like that every time.

MAREN

Yeah, but that only lasts an hour. What about afterward? How'd you feel about it? What'd you think?

LEE

(dissembling)

I don't remember much after.

MAREN

Bullshit.

LEE

According to you, you don't remember anything before last month. I'm not just going to tell you what you want to hear. You asked a question. I answered.

Maren thinks for a moment, then shifts her tone.

MAREN

Lee, would you do something with me? *Listen* to something with me--?

LEE

Sure.

But they hear a CAR COMING UP THE ROAD toward their campsite. Instead of passing, it pulls in.

BRAD (O.S.)

I told you they'd be back here--

Lee gives Maren a warning look and climbs out of the truck. For the moment, Maren stays put. The car parks and two men, JAKE (40s) and BRAD (30s) climb out, both grinning.

LEE

Hey--

BRAD

Hey-- We saw you guys at the swimming hole before.

LEE

Oh yeah. We saw folks swimming out there.

BRAD

Yeah. That hole was fucking *cold*.

JAKE

You were up on those rocks. Upwind of us. --You get me?

Jake smiles. Maren understands a split second before Lee.

LEE

Ah. Yeah. How's it going, man?

JAKE

Don't worry. We're friendly. I'm Jake, he's Bradley.

BRAD

I said don't call me that. It's Brad, man.

LEE

I'm Leon, this is Maggie.

JAKE

You just passing through?

LEE

Yeah, yeah. That a problem?

Jake laughs. Brad is in a Dokken concert tee and dirty jeans.

JAKE

We're not here to run you out. We though you might be in need of some beer. Not many come through here.

Jake pulls out a case of Coors, then another one.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Whattya say? We don't mean to freak you guys out, landing on ya'll like this. But this Coors needs drunk--

LEE

Let's get a fire going, then.
(to Maren)
Grab the trash in the truck to get it started--

INT. PICKUP (MO CAMPSITE) -- DUSK

While Lee talks with the men, Maren opens the glove compartment. In it is Lee's buck knife. She opens it so it's ready and puts it in the front pocket of Lee's hoodie she's got on.

EXT. MO CAMPSITE, FIRE RING -- NIGHT

The men sit in dirty lawn chairs they've brought. Brad plays his banjo, singing while Jake harmonizes in low howls.

BRAD

*I greet the day on my two legs,
slide my arms inside these red and
grey tails. Push the window open,
find the Reverend up and dressed. I
fear the Lord, but I know best--*

Maren and Lee sit on the other side of a fire. One case of beer is already gone. Maren holds her can, not drinking.

Jake watches her, her can. Lee drains his, and puts his arm around her, to send a signal. Maren leans into him. Jake looks away.

CUT TO:

Jake is in the middle of a story now.

JAKE

We ended up back in this part where there was just camo nets for cover. But you could still shoot a paintball through 'em, so there was nowhere to hide. If he'd kept running a mile he'da made it to the highway, but he was a fat fuck. Close to passin' out. Asthma maybe. Anyway I took him down easy.

BRAD

We checked his car pretty good. We didn't see an inhaler or nothin'--

JAKE

You're getting ahead of the *story*, Bradley.

BRAD

Christ, just call me the fuck what I wanna be called--

JAKE

So I'm into this now. Pulling meat, bones coming out, you know, and I start feeling watched. I look around and at first I don't see him because he's standing so still in the trees, but then I spot him and I'm like *what the fuck?* I mean I look like the red Devil at this point, and he's just watching me like I'm Doug fuckin' Henning.

Brad looks sheepishly at the fire, laughing silently.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I'm already on my feet, running at him and he pulls a fucking *pistol* on me. Turns out he's an off-duty cop. First year on the force.

BRAD

We did say we weren't gonna tell nobody that--

JAKE

Right right. So he's a cop. I mean this is middle-of-fuck nowhere in Barry County. So, you know, *not fuckin' Serpico*. I think he's gonna take me down, but he's just looking at me. And what'd I say?

BRAD

You said "Do me now or get the fuck gone cause he's not gonna be no fun to eat cold."

They both break into a moment of drunken laughter.

JAKE

So he says: "Go on back to it. I gotta get a better look at this." So I'm at gunpoint now, thinking this creep is hard for it. I'm in there between this dead dude's liver and his whatever's-next-to-a-liver and I suddenly feel him *right there* crouched down gettin a better look. He didn't smell like an eater, but there he is, so I ask him if he wants some and damned if he don't nod all serious like a food-stamp kid on samples day.

BRAD

Fuck you, man!

JAKE

So you know what I gave him?

Lee looks at Maren, who is staring at them both in complete revulsion. Before he can intercede, Maren interrupts:

MAREN

So you're not *--one of us?*

JAKE

Abso-fuckin-lutely normal, he is. Well, clearly not *normal--*
(beat)
Hasn't had his Full Bones yet, but I reckon that's coming soon enough.

LEE

"Full Bones"?

Jake's face lights up.

JAKE

When you eat the whole thing, bones and all. You ain't done that yet?

(off Lee's look)

It's a big fucking deal. Like your first time. There's before *Bones and All* and then there's after. You won't believe it. You done that, yet, girl?

MAREN

That's bullshit. What you're talking about is impossible.

(back to Brad)

How many people have you eaten?

JAKE

How many, Brad? I count three.

Brad nods, the slightest shade of pride in his features.

BRAD

Yes, miss. Three people.

Maren drills him with a look.

MAREN

And you didn't have to?

(really pissed)

You don't *have* to do this?

Brad looks at her. Lee puts a cautioning hand on Maren's leg.

JAKE

Kind of a groupie, I guess.

MAREN

Jesus Christ.

BRAD

Jake's teaching me how to smell other eaters.

Maren stands.

MAREN

No he isn't.

She walks out of the firelight. Lee watches Jake closely.

JAKE

You don't think he can do it?

BRAD

Shit, man. Is she all right?

LEE

She's still figuring all this out.

BRAD

Good thing she's got you to help.

Maren sits in the truck looks at Brad, who downs a beer, neck exposed. Jake's smiling. He points his little finger at Lee.

JAKE

There's the one who needs the help,
Brad. You can see it a mile away.

(to Lee)

You remind me of every junky I ever
met. You look like the kind that's
convinced himself he's got this un-
der his thumb. But you pull on one
little thread and--

He makes an odd *SHU-SHU-SHU* sound, gesturing like a weaving
is unravelling.

JAKE (CONT'D)

But maybe love'll set you *free*,
man. Maybe love will *set you free*.

Now Lee holds his reactions. He wants to look to make sure Ma-
ren isn't hearing this, but it's too dark to tell anyway.

CUT TO:

INT. PICKUP (MO CAMPSITE) -- NIGHT

The fire is low now, and the two men are passed out in their
lawn chairs. Lee makes his way back to the truck. He quietly
climbs in to find Maren seething where she sits in the pass-
enger seat, holding his buck knife.

LEE

I'm gonna put this truck in gear
and roll it back down to the road--

MAREN

We have to kill them. --Brad at
least.

(off Lee's look)

You heard him. He's *murdering*
people--

LEE

He's with an eater. Those people would be dead anyway.

MAREN

We don't know that. And who knows what he's capable of now--

LEE

Are you hungry?

MAREN

What? No, but--

LEE

Then we shouldn't be talking about killing anybody.

MAREN

But Lee, he's got to be stopped--

LEE

Then we'll drive into a town and call the cops.

MAREN

And say what?

LEE

That two guys approached us at this camp talking about killing people. Then we hang up and keep driving.

MAREN

I'll do it, then--

She reaches for the door handle. Lee stops her.

LEE

Maren. Think about it. You see how they get on each other's nerves? I'd give it two more weeks, tops, before Brad wakes up with the other guy's teeth in his neck. --He'll get his. I promise he will.

Maren still has her hand on the door.

LEE (CONT'D)

I don't want this to touch us. We need to get you to your mom.

Something about the words "us" and "we" used like this convinces her.

Lee takes the knife, gets out of the truck, and creeps over to the men's station wagon where he crouches down beside one of the rear tires. Maren watches as the car slowly sinks a few inches on that side. He deflates the other rear tire and then comes back. He climbs in and very quietly wrenches the truck into neutral.

INT. PICKUP (MO CAMPGROUND) -- NIGHT

The truck rolls backward, softly clanking down the road. Lee watches his side mirror, Maren watches the men to make sure they don't wake up. But Jake's eyes open, peering at them.

MAREN

Lee--

Lee looks and sees him, then watches the side mirror again so they don't go off the road.

LEE

Fuck. Is he getting up?

MAREN

GO LEE GO--

As soon as Lee has enough room, he whips the truck around, starts the engine, and floors it.

Maren looks behind them. In the red of their taillights, Jake is right there, trying to reach the back gate, but he can't keep up. He gives up with YELL and is swallowed back up by the darkness.

CUT TO:

INT. PICKUP (MO/IA STATE LINE) -- DAY

Maren drives while Lee sleeps. They cross a "State Line" into what must be Iowa. The landscape has flattened out again. Lee stirs in his sleep and she watches him a long moment.

TITLE CARD: "IA"

INT. PICKUP (IA STATE FAIR TRAFFIC) -- DAY

Lee is driving now. The sun is close to setting and the cloud-stacked sky is an intricate fortress of gold light. Traffic starts to slow to a crawl ahead. Everyone has on their right turn signals. She checks the atlas.

MAREN

Something going on in Mason City, I guess. We're still a ways from 35--

But then she sees it. A billboard. CERRO GORDO COUNTY FAIR JUNE 2-13. She grins at Lee. He turns on his BLINKER.

EXT. NORTH IA FAIRGROUNDS, MIDWAY -- NIGHT

They walk hand-in-hand on the busy midway. People clutch plastic beer cups, push strollers, or fix their hair after being whipped around on rides. Unlike in the Mid-Atlantic, or even Appalachia, everyone here is white. Holding Lee's hand adds a sharpness to the scrutiny coming Maren's way.

EXT. NORTH IA FAIRGROUNDS, FERRIS WHEEL -- NIGHT

They end up on the Ferris Wheel, 30' over the crowds. This carnival isn't where they fall in love. That's been happening for twenty pages. The carnival is where we ask: *can these two kids be happy?* For the moment they are, and it feels like the easiest thing. But when they get to the top, Maren leans over and looks at the drop, her body tingling with a safe kind of fear, and tells him:

MAREN

I'm hungry, Lee.

EXT. NORTH IA FAIRGROUNDS, STALLS/BALL TOSS -- NIGHT

They walk among the food and game stalls. A group of 12-year-old girls dances to a-ha's "The Sun Always Shines on TV" playing on a radio. It's not the sexy teenage dancing of now; just girls jumping up and down.

They walk up to a restroom and Maren goes in. While Lee waits in the food line, a BOY (9) goes up to the next booth, a Ball Toss game, to play. The BOOTH MAN (32) squints at the boy.

BOOTH MAN

Three tickets, three tries.

The kid pulls tickets out of his pocket and counts three. He looks up at the prizes: stuffed farm animals hanging from ropes. Ducks, horses, pigs, cows, and foxes.

BOOTH MAN (CONT'D)

You're wasting your money.

There's something in his tone that makes Lee keep watching. The Booth Man takes the first ball and tosses it to the boy, but without warning, so the boy misses it and has to run after it. The boy returns and takes his first toss. He misses.

The Booth Man hands him his second ball. He misses again. The Booth Man smiles as he hands the boy his final ball.

BOOTH MAN (CONT'D)

Nobody teach you how to throw, kid?

The Booth Man glances up and sees Lee watching. He says, to the boy, but more for Lee's benefit:

BOOTH MAN (CONT'D)

It's my job to psyche you out.

The boy tries a different strategy this time, he throws it underhand to get more height. It lands in one of the milk cans.

BOY

I won! I won!

BOOTH MAN

Naw, you didn't little man.

BOY

But it's in the can!

With some degree of pleasure, the man dramatically sweeps out his arm and points to a list of rules painted onto a board like commandments. The first rule is "NO UNDERHAND THROWS."

BOY (CONT'D)

What does that mean?

BOOTH MAN

What you just did. No underhand.

The boy is caught between wanting to honor a rule and suspecting he's been played.

BOOTH MAN (CONT'D)

You can read, can't ya? Now go on.
Unless you got three more tickets.

The boy goes to his pocket, but knows he shouldn't. He keeps himself from crying and leaves. Lee steps forward to the Ball Toss booth.

BOOTH MAN (CONT'D)

Hey, man. You tryin' to win one for your girlfriend? I saw you walk up.

LEE

She's just a friend. You know?

The Booth Man hands him a ball. Lee tosses and it goes in.

LEE (CONT'D)

Can I win a second prize if I sink
it again?

BOOTH MAN

You're not supposed to. --But no
one has to know. You know?

His flirtation is unmissable now. Lee tosses, and misses.

BOOTH MAN (CONT'D)

Disappointing.

LEE

What's there to do for fun around
here beside this dumb-ass carnival?
After my friend leaves, I mean.

The Booth Man hands him his last ball and says, eyes on Lee.

BOOTH MAN

I close up at eleven. I got some
weed in my car--

Lee smiles and gives him a small, savage nod. He tosses the
third ball and misses again. But the man goes and fetches the
ball and plops it into a milk can.

BOOTH MAN (CONT'D)

Lucky, lucky.

LEE

My luck's not gonna run out, is it?

BOOTH MAN

Naw, man. I'll see that it don't.
Which two do you want?

LEE

Gimme two foxes.

The Booth Man pulls them down and hands them to Lee.

LEE (CONT'D)

I'll see you in an hour.

BOOTH MAN

Behind the arcade.

Lee nods, looks around, and heads off.

INT. PICKUP (FAIRGROUND PARKING LOT) -- NIGHT

Maren and Lee sit in the pickup, lights out, having moved it to the back of the parking area. The lights of the last rides go off. They are sitting together with their heads touching. They are sharing a pair of headphones.

MAREN'S FATHER'S VOICE

I can't protect you anymore. And maybe I shouldn't. Maybe no one should. I hope there's some kind of answer out there for you, I do. I just know I --can't be part of it.

Lee looks upset by what he's hearing. He reaches over and takes Maren's hand.

MAREN'S FATHER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

That's everything. Now mind me and cut this tape up into pieces and pour glue over it, or burn it, whatever. Don't just throw it away. I haven't thought much beyond this tape. I can't. I don't know what's going to happen to you. Or what should happen to you. I'll wake up nights sick to death wondering. Hoping. Hoping whatever troubles you is over, and you're just a regular girl, with regular problems, and regular pain. And you've stopped wanting things you shouldn't want, Maren. --And that your heart has a chance.

They wait for more, but they hear him switch off the recorder. Lee tries to absorb this, but it stinks like shit. They take off the headphones and sit in silence for a moment. He looks at her. He tries to find some words, but can't. Somehow, she's dry eyed. She's grown up a lot in a week.

MAREN

I knew that's how it would end. I hope you get better. --Maybe he's right and I should pray I wake up someday to find they've built a maze around me.

LEE

Don't say that. Don't. He's wrong.

He puts a hand on his cheek and strokes it. She looks at him in the dark cab.

MAREN

What happened to *your* dad, Lee? I can read between the lines.

LEE

Nothing good. Just --a waste. A big waste. Only in my case, I gave him the tape.

He chuckles darkly, barely audibly. It's a strange sound, coming from Lee. When he glances toward the entrance, Booth Man is standing there lighting a cigarette and looking around.

MAREN

We should go, Lee. Barry Cook was drunk. This guy isn't.

LEE

I'll be fine. Just-- see where we go and give me a few minutes. Ten is plenty. Gimme ten minutes.

Lee gets out and walks across the lot toward the man. Maren slouches down just in case there's enough light to see her. Lee walks up to him and says something Maren can't hear.

BOOTH MAN

It's Lance.

Lee again says something Maren can't hear.

BOOTH MAN (CONT'D)

Where'd you come up from?

Lee says something that makes the man chuckle. Now the Booth Man lowers his voice as well. They walk along the edge of the cornfield. Maren watches as Lee kisses the man. She scans the parking lot to see if anyone else can see this. There's no one. When Maren looks back, Lee and the man are making out. Lee motions Booth Man into the rows of corn.

Maren looks at the dash clock to wait more minutes, but she can't. She gets out.

EXT. NORTH IA FAIRGROUNDS, PARKING LOT/CORN -- NIGHT

Maren walks to where she saw them go into the corn. She hears SOMEONE MOVING AROUND, and then some MOANING. She ducks into the corn a few rows and sees:

MAREN'S POV: *Lee's shirt is off and he's standing behind the Booth Man--whose pants are around his ankles--giving him a handjob. Lee is whispering encouragement in his ear, but Lee reaches with his free hand to his back pocket for his knife.*

He's opened it an inch already and pries it the rest of the way on his leg. Then, as the man is cumming, Lee slits his throat. The man's orgiastic gasp turns into a blood-clogged wheeze. Lee holds him tight and sinks to the ground with him. While the man bleeds out in the dirt, Lee catches his breath.

Maren is repulsed by Lee's easy violence. But the fact that he is using his skill for her eroticizes it, too. Lee looks up and has a silent, cold reaction to her having seen this.

LEE

Here.

She goes. He makes room beside him for Maren to kneel down in the corn row. But he takes the first bite, right into Booth Man's chest.

EXT. PICKUP (IA RURAL ROUTE) -- NIGHT

Lee's pickup cuts the night with its headlights, driving on a rural road. The Booth Man's car follows behind.

INT. BOOTH MAN'S CAR (IA RURAL ROUTE) -- NIGHT

Maren drives in that sated daze. She follows Lee past a mailbox. He slows, but does not turn in. He goes a quarter mile further and pulls over.

EXT. IA RURAL ROUTE -- NIGHT

Maren parks behind him and waits. Lee jogs back and gets in.

MAREN

What's wrong?

LEE

That's the place listed on his license, but there are lights on. I'm going to walk back and make sure no one's there.

MAREN

I'll go. You've got blood on you.

He turns her face gently in his hands. It's oddly intimate.

MAREN (CONT'D)

I cleaned up. He had wipes. I'll see what I can see from the yard.

He doesn't look convinced, but he doesn't protest.

LEE

Okay.

EXT. BOOTH MAN'S HOUSE, YARD -- NIGHT

Maren jogs back toward the house until she reaches the edge of the sideyard.

Through a window, she's startled to see: A woman, BOOTH MAN'S WIFE (30), on a phone, checking her watch, not happy. She's bouncing a baby in her arm.

Maren stands there, frozen, until her stomach drops and she starts running back.

EXT. IA RURAL ROUTE -- NIGHT

Maren appears back at the car where Lee is waiting.

LEE

What? --Maren, *what?!*

But Maren doesn't answer. She digs through the Booth Man's glove compartment. There's the bag of weed the man was talking about. She looks through the arm rest, then pulls down the visor. That's where she finds them, taped to the back: family photos. *A wife. A toddler son. A baby daughter.* Maren puts a hand over her face.

LEE (CONT'D)

Christ. --Okay. We didn't know. We didn't know. Hey--

He puts a hand on her shoulder, but she pulls away.

Lee sees headlights in the distance and curses.

The coming car turns into Booth Man's driveway. A WOMAN in a nightgown (50s) takes the baby from the Booth Man's wife, who then gets into the car.

He pulls Maren out and hurries her into the pickup. Then runs back to the Booth Man's car. He wipes everything down, every spot Maren's touched.

Lee gets in the truck, starts it up, and puts it in drive. He heads in the opposite direction.

INT. PICKUP (IA RURAL ROUTE) -- NIGHT

As they put more and more ground behind them, Lee looks over and sees Maren's worrying flat affect.

LEE

I'm gonna drive a while. Get some miles between us and here. Bagley is only about five hours away.

(MORE)

LEE (CONT'D)

If I can, I'll drive straight through. Get some sleep if you want.

MAREN

Sleep?

LEE

There wasn't a car seat, Maren.

MAREN

I know.

LEE

He wasn't wearing a wedding ring--

They make it to the highway and Lee gets on, northbound.

MAREN

I've been trying to think of it as just death, Lee. My --*condition*, it means I have to keep being there when people-- have death. Live people and then they're dead people. But that's not what it is. At all.

LEE

We have to eat. That's what it is.

MAREN

We murder people, Lee. Steal their stuff and move on. We ruin lives we don't even see. Everyone's got family, even if they hate each other, even if they lie--

She says this pointedly, but if Lee understands she's talking about him, too, he doesn't show it.

LEE

No one will find him until they harvest the field. That's months away.

MAREN

Oh Lee, that's worse. Listen to me.

LEE

The way he was behaving, sneaking around, it coulda happened to him anytime, for any number of reasons!

MAREN

It's not ours to judge!

LEE

It's not ours to *fix*, either! Mar-
en! FUCK THIS. Why are we even
talking about it like this?! We
have to do this-- *We gotta do it--*

MAREN

We should feel --*something*. We've
killed and it's *murder*.

At this word, Lee begins to shut down, pulling out of reach.

LEE

My conscience can't feel any less
than it does. And that took years--

MAREN

I'm talking about the future, Lee.
About being a *friend* to yourself.
If you don't have that it's --too
much. My god, we've got whole life-
times ahead of us-- 60, 70 years of
this--

LEE

As soon as you factor that in,
we've lost, okay? *Why do you want
us to lose?!*

He glares at her.

LEE (CONT'D)

How dare you make this harder.

She is shaking her head over and over.

LEE (CONT'D)

What do I do, Maren--? What do I
say to get you out of this?!

MAREN

Just drive. Just get there, Lee.

He looks at her as long as he can before looking back to the
road. She stares out at the night trying to catch her breath.

INT. PICK UP (IA RURAL ROUTE) -- LATER

The first dim signs of dawn are rising in the east, but the
headlights and dash are still lonely in the darkness. Maren's
asleep, hood up, turned away from Lee. Lee's driving, his
hands tight on the wheel. He's in the middle of a breakdown.
Shaking, tears--all of which he's forcing himself to keep
quiet so as not to wake her.

It makes the whole thing more painful, more isolating. He is a young man lost, caught in circles of trauma.

CUT TO:

INT. PICKUP (MN ROAD) -- DAY

Railroad tracks wake Maren up. She looks over at Lee. He's worn out, but doing okay now. She squints out at all the sun.

LEE

You were dreaming.

She gets the road atlas out. They pass a sign reading "GRANT LAKE - RICE LAKE - MISSISSIPPI RIVER HEADWATERS."

LEE (CONT'D)

We're two towns away. We just passed through Wilton--

MAREN

I slept through Minneapolis?

He nods. The road cuts through woods and lakes now, passing marinas and holiday cabins.

TITLE CARD: "MN"

INT. MN GAS STATION -- DAY

Maren comes out of the toilet and comes in to return the key. A grey-braided CLERK (60) smiles and returns it to its hook.

MAREN

Do you have a telephone book? The one outside's gone. --I'm looking for someone in Bagley.

CLERK

This is for the county, sweetie.

She hands Maren a worn directory. Maren looks up "KERNS." There are six listings, but only one is in Bagley.

KERNS Barbara. 122 Lakeview St. Maren copies this on her hand and passes the phone book back.

INT. PICKUP -- DAY

Lee drives on. Maren is keyed up, anxious to get there.

LEE

You don't want to call first?

MAREN

I don't know who'd be picking up.
My mom may've changed her name. It
could be my grandmother. A cousin.
If whoever it is hung up on me, I--
(beat)
I'd just rather show up.

After a few moments, Maren says, quietly:

MAREN (CONT'D)

My mom's not going to want anything
to do with me, either, is she? She
could've remarried. Had other kids--

LEE

Or she could be an eater like you.

MAREN

Have you heard of that? Can this be
handed down?

He shrugs.

MAREN (CONT'D)

Then why say it?!

She rubs her eyes, tired in her soul.

MAREN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

LEE

You've got nothing to be sorry for.
Just-- we'll see when we get there.

MAREN

If you ever feel like ditching me,
please say so. Don't just leave me
in a parking lot.

LEE

I'm not gonna leave you in a park-
ing lot.

EXT. PICKUP (STREETS OF BAGLEY MN) -- DAY

They drive around Bagley until they find Lakeview St. Then they head up the street until they get to 122. It is a tidy white house with plants in the yard. Lee parks on the road in front of it.

LEE

I'll come with you.

Maren is about to answer when they see a woman coming out of the garage with a trash bag. Maren gets out and says to Lee:

MAREN

No. Stay here.

EXT. MRS. KERNS' HOUSE -- DAY

Maren comes up the driveway and calls out.

MAREN

Excuse me. Are you Barbara Kerns?

The woman, BARBARA KERNS (70s), turns. She looks at Maren. She sees the color of her skin, does the math, and turns back to her front steps, wanting nothing to do with this.

MAREN (CONT'D)

Mrs. Kerns. Wait. My name is Maren Yearly. I've come a very long way.

She watches as the woman stops, resigned.

INT. MRS. KERNS' HOUSE, LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Barbara Kerns sits in an armchair beside a cold stone fireplace, looking at the birth certificate Maren's given her.

BARBARA KERNS

So they didn't marry. We wondered.

Barbara folds the birth certificate and hands it back.

BARBARA KERNS (CONT'D)

My husband. He died, years ago.
Throat cancer.

MAREN

I'm sorry. --And I'm sorry if I surprised you. I was afraid to call.
In case you didn't want to see me.

(beat)

You didn't know your daughter had a child, I guess.

BARBARA KERNS

No. When she wanted to get married, we didn't agree. It drove her away.

MAREN

Where did she meet my dad?

BARBARA KERNS
He didn't say?

MAREN
He wouldn't say anything about her.

Barbara's look suggests she approves of that approach.

BARBARA KERNS
College. Down in Mankato. She finished her second year before he talked her into leaving. Did he drive you here? --Is he outside?

MAREN
No. He's --in Maryland. He let me know where to find you.

BARBARA KERNS
So you've not run away?

MAREN
No. My father thinks I'm --old enough to live on my own.

A hint of something like fear crosses Barbara's expression.

BARBARA KERNS
Well, if you're looking for a home with your mother, I'm sorry to tell you she's not with us anymore.

Maren exhales. It's over. She puts her hands to her eyes.

MAREN
When? --How?

BARBARA KERNS
A lot of years now. And it's nothing I'd like to tell you about. I hope you can respect that.

Maren registers the oddness of this. A beat.

MAREN
I'm her daughter.

BARBARA KERNS
It makes sense now, why she came back so --*bereaved* is the word. She wouldn't tell us anything, either. So much hiding in one family. I'm sorry you're the child of it all.

She puts her hands on her knees, about to stand, interview over. But there's one more thing Maren needs to know.

MAREN

What was she like, as a girl?

BARBARA KERNS

Like?

INT. MRS. KERNS' HOUSE, DINING ROOM -- DAY

Barbara's taken out photos of Maren's mother: A toddler in a cloud costume; a girl in a choir; a teenager washing a car.

MAREN

She was your only child?

BARBARA KERNS

Not even ours. Rob and I couldn't have babies of our own. Then we heard about Janelle. She'd been left behind at a Sheriff's station in Bemidji. It was in the paper.

Maren is hearing this through a very particular lens.

BARBARA KERNS (CONT'D)

We told the county folks we were interested. There was a form to sign. It wasn't like it is today.

MAREN

So you don't know anything about her biological parents?

BARBARA KERNS

Nothing 'cept what they did to their baby. She could've froze. It's cold here all the time.

MAREN

My mother-- Did she--

Maren stops herself, not sure how to put it. Barbara stands.

BARBARA KERNS

Take the photos if you want them.

MAREN

--did she ever *hurt* anyone?

BARBARA KERNS

(startled)

What kind of question is that?

MAREN

I bet she did. I'm sure she did. I don't know what you had to do to keep it quiet or how much it hurt--

BARBARA KERNS

Stop this at once!

MAREN

--look, you're never going to see me again. You may not be her family by blood, but I am. I need to know.

Barbara is now at the sideboard with her back to Maren, visibly shaking. Finally, she says:

BARBARA KERNS

Then ask her yourself.

MAREN

What? How?

Barbara keeps her back to Maren.

BARBARA KERNS

I don't know you. You have to understand that. I didn't know what you wanted coming here. But I hope you mean what you say about never coming back here. That sounds cold, but I want to be clear with you.

(long beat)

I let you think she was dead, but she's in a town called Fergus Falls. In a state hospital there.

Barbara turns, wide-eyed.

BARBARA KERNS (CONT'D)

It wasn't us who put her there, if that's what you're thinking. She signed her *own* papers--

But Maren's already moving for the door.

EXT. MRS. KERNS' HOUSE/PICKUP -- DAY

Maren pistons her way out of Barbara's front door and down the front steps. Lee is waiting beside the truck looking worried. Barbara can be seen in the gloom of the house, pulling shut the screen door, then shutting the front door.

Maren grabs the atlas from the dashboard and spreads it out on the hood.

She drags a finger south from Bagley over and over until she finds it: *Fergus Falls*. She looks up at Lee.

MAREN

Here. My mother's here.

INT. PICKUP (MN RURAL ROUTE) -- DAY

They pass a sign reading "LEAVING BAGLEY, WE'LL MISS YA UP NORTH!" and then they're out in woods and fields again. Lee looks over at Maren once, but Maren is staring ahead, as if willing them on past the horizon, all the way to her mother.

EXT. FERGUS FALLS TREATMENT CENTER, PARKING LOT -- DAY

The pickup pulls into the parking lot of the old state hospital, a weathered brick building with many windows, most with metal bars. Maren gets out. Lee does as well.

LEE

Maren--

MAREN

I'll handle it.

She walks up all the stairs to the hospital's entrance. Lee watches her go.

INT. FERGUS FALLS TREATMENT CENTER, CORRIDORS -- DAY

Maren follows a nurse, GAIL (40s) up into the wards. She's a big friendly woman in scrubs, her hair up in a pioneer bun.

GAIL

Mrs. Kerns' *daughter*-- I sure didn't expect this when I woke up this morning.

It's quiet. Patients pass by with state-funded haircuts, eye-glasses, and pajamas. Sitting on a bench in the hall, a FEMALE PATIENT (40) reads. She smiles at Maren as she walks by.

MAREN

How long has it been since she's had a visitor?

GAIL

Your mother's never had a visitor.

Maren is floored.

MAREN

What?! I never knew where she was.
If I'd known I would've come--!

GAIL

Please don't regret that. We wouldn't have allowed a minor in to see a patient in her condition. She's in a secure unit.

MAREN

Is she dangerous?

GAIL

It's been many years since that was a concern.

MAREN

Why was it ever one?

GAIL

Aggression, toward the staff. Self-harm. But, as I said-- long ago. But she asked to remain in that ward, so that's where she stays.

Maren doesn't know what this could mean. Gail unlocks a door to a more secure wing. They go through.

GAIL (CONT'D)

It's possible she won't understand who you are.

MAREN

I just-- I need her to know I'm finally here.

GAIL

She's already taken her morning meds, so she may nod off anyhow. We'll see.

They come to the door to Janelle's room. Gail unlocks it and motions Maren to wait while she goes in first.

Through the doorway, Maren can see into the sunlit room.

GAIL (O.S.) (CONT'D)

There's someone here to see you, Ms. Kerns. A surprise. A wonderful surprise.

She waves Maren in.

INT. FERGUS FALLS TREATMENT CENTER, JANELLE'S ROOM -- DAY

Maren comes in and finally sees her MOTHER (30s) sitting in a corner. The girl in the photos is gone.

Her mother's watery eyes are pinned to Maren's face. She doesn't smile or speak. In her lap, Maren sees her mother's forearms end in stumps, long healed. She hides her dismay as well as she can.

MAREN

It's Maren. --I'm Maren.

Her mother works her jaw, making vague noises of concern.

MAREN (CONT'D)

Can't she speak?

GAIL

It's the medication.

Janelle stares at her, slack jawed, but intently.

MAREN

I'm not with Dad. I'm not with Dad.
I just came on my own--

GAIL

Shall I give her your letter? I
fetched it on the way up.

Janelle half-nods, her eyes never leaving Maren. Gail takes out of her pocket a sealed envelope and gives it to Maren.

GAIL (CONT'D)

She wrote this, oh fifteen years
ago now, must be. I've kept it safe
in her file out there, in case.
--I'll be right over here.

MAREN

She knew I'd come?

Gail nods and goes. Maren looks at her mother and opens the envelope. There are two pages in her mother's handwriting.

JANELLE (V.O.)

*Hello, Little Yearly. But you must
not be so little if you're here.
I'd hoped you never read this let-
ter because I hoped you'd never
come. --Your father wasn't supposed
to tell you about me. And if a day
came when you showed up here, I'd
know it's because he told you.
And I'd know why.*

The directness of all of this is jarring to Maren. She can't help but look up at her mom.

Janelle is still and attentive, but her face is the face of chaos, tragedy.

JANELLE (V.O.)

I loved you and I loved your father. He didn't know what I was when we married, but he figured it out by the time I was pregnant. I promised I'd never hurt either of you, but how could we be sure. So I found this place. I wanted to be near my folks in case they'd visit. My real mother and father I never knew, but I can guess about them. --Maybe you wonder why I didn't end my life instead of coming here. I wanted to be here in case you ever came. To be of use to you. Listen--

This is so confusing. Is her mother glad she's here? Angry?

JANELLE (V.O.)

When a man eats, he wants to be out of control. It excites him. We're not like that. We have to take life and make life. How? Our bodies want too much. All I ever wanted in this world was love. But I can't have it as I am. Not a woman. Not a mother. Not a wife.

Maren moves to the wall. She notices on the wall a taped-up image of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus.

JANELLE (V.O.)

Their faces are gone in here, all the ones I ate up. And when I fall asleep here, it's just --darkness. And I'm grateful. The world of love wants no monsters in it, Little One. So let me help you out of it.

Maren looks up, shocked, as her mother plants her feet under her and *springs out of the chair*. She makes an attempt to get to Maren's neck, forcing a screaming Maren a-against the wall. Maren is just able to keep her back, just millimeters from Janelle's gnashing teeth.

Gail rushes in to restrain Janelle. Gail is a big woman, but Janelle is full of adrenaline and fifteen years of waiting for this moment. They struggle.

GAIL

Calm down! --What's going on?!

Janelle tries to shake off Gail and get to Maren. Maren is already trying to flee the room. She's pulling on the door, but it stays tight.

GAIL (CONT'D)

Press the button. Press it!

JANELLE

(slurring)

MAKE HER STAY! MAKE HER STAY!
MAREN!

Maren presses the button and it releases the door. She flees out to the hall and sprints down the corridor.

EXT. FERGUS FALLS TREATMENT CENTER, PARKING LOT -- DAY

Lee is waiting by the truck. When he sees Maren at a patient-proof side door trying to get out, he runs over and opens it. She comes out still holding her mother's letter. She gets in the truck and throws it on the dash.

MAREN

Just drive.

LEE

You don't have to say anything else, but tell me if you're okay.

MAREN

You were right. Congratulations.

He comes carefully to the window, but she cranks opens the door again and gets out.

MAREN (CONT'D)

Why the fuck did she have me? Why get pregnant if you're just going to leave your baby *behind*?

LEE

Maybe it wasn't planned--

MAREN

She said she loved my dad. She said she *wanted* to be a mom. --She could have stayed, Lee. Taught me what I needed to know. You know how different this would've been if I'd had one person to talk to? *One person* on my side?

Tears trapped under this anger start fighting their way out.

MAREN (CONT'D)

If she'd stayed, I wouldn't have done half of what I've done. She'd have known from the beginning not to let me out of her sight. Luke would be a fucking park ranger now if it wasn't for her--

LEE

Who?

MAREN

Fuck her.

LEE

If she's stayed, she might have hurt you, or worse. You might not be here now. Believe me, I know what I'm talking about-- This is better than what I went through--

MAREN

STOP TALKING LEE JUST STOP!

Lee reaches out to take her hand, but she doesn't let him.

LEE

You're pissed off, you're scared-- Fair enough. If you wanna go at yourself with all this, I can't stop you, but don't come at me.

MAREN

You slit his throat, Lee--

Lee looks at her, stunned. There is so much going on in this conversation all he can do is react.

LEE

You sat in this truck just the other night and asked me to do the same to someone else.

MAREN

That was different.

LEE

Only because you need it to be.

(beat)

You know what I think? I think you got used to being locked in at night and invisible and now you're out in the world and somebody's seeing you and you *like it*.

(MORE)

LEE (CONT'D)

But it makes you see yourself, too, and that's fucking you up. It's fucking me up, too, okay? That's how this works.

MAREN

How what works?

LEE

This. Whatever this is.

Maren is surprised by this outpouring. But he didn't say the word "love," and that must mean something.

MAREN

You're wrong.

LEE

About which part am I wrong?

(beat)

What happened back there, Maren, you need to understand: there are worse things.

MAREN

My God, Lee. This isn't about you—Your father, whatever. You've had your chances to tell me about your father and you won't.

LEE

You know what? It's *all about him* for me, every fucking minute. Just like every minute from now on for you is going to be about her back there. They're us. We're them.

MAREN

(angry, but sincere)

Then what happened?

LEE

It doesn't matter. I love you.

Finally he says it, but for the wrong reason. She exhales.

MAREN

Right. Well. I'm going to decide no, Lee. I'm deciding that right now. I'm not going to make her choices. I'm not going to be her.

She gets back in the truck and slams the door.

LEE

Yeah? Well. If you can pull that off, you're my fucking hero.

She doesn't answer. He gets in the truck and turns it over.

INT. PICKUP (MN STATE ROUTE 1) -- DAY

They've switched places. Maren is driving now. Lee--who drove all the previous night--is completely shut off. He's sleeping or pretending to. Maren looks over at him, then at the road, then back to Lee. She looks unsettled, like a bird startled into the air with no safe place to land. Where to now? Where to fly?

EXT. MN GAS STATION -- DAY

They pull into a gas station on a wooded state route.

INT. PICKUP (MN GAS STATION) -- DAY

Lee opens his eyes.

MAREN

Just getting gas.

LEE

You've got the money.

With that, he closes his eyes again. Maren gets out and, once he's back to sleep, takes the money out of her boot and leaves it on the dash. Then she quietly pulls her rucksack and coat out of the bed. With a last look, she walks away, runs across the road, across a field there, and into dense trees.

EXT. MN WOODED HILL -- LATER -- DAY

She's sat down to wait and now watches Lee wake up. He goes inside, comes out, realizes her backpack is gone, and runs to one end of the lot and then the other, calling for her. He checks the gas station's bathroom. Nothing.

LEE

MAREN!

MAREN--!

He's distressed, panicked even. Finally, he gets in the truck and drives off to start looking along the roadsides.

This is the absolute opposite of the rejection and abandonment Sully described when he left his family. But Maren watches all this through the cold calm of self-loathing.

Finally she stands.

She reconsiders her birth certificate and photo of her mother she's holding. They are useless now, at best, so she drops them and leaves them there, on the ground.

CUT TO:

INT. PICKUP (MN STREETS) -- DAY

Lee is driving the same roads over and again, hoping to spot her. As his adrenaline fades and he comes to grips with the idea she is gone for good, a manic desolation sets in. As he drives, he's trying to see everything at once--every front porch on every house, every parked car in every parking lot, any place Maren could be sitting, standing, hiding.

CUT TO:

EXT. MN RURAL ROUTE -- DAY

Maren comes down a different road. She looks dead on her feet. A van passes her. She sees ahead a farm stand with bins of produce from local farm and a few people there. The van pulls into the same lot as the farm stand.

EXT. MN FARM MART -- DAY

Maren comes up closer to the farm stand, but then sees who's in the van, singing "Beautiful Brown Eyes." He's found her. He gets out, chewing on a toothpick, and grinning.

SULLY

You're glad to see ol' Sully aren't ya, missy?

He comes to where she's standing and gives her a consuming hug. Maren is alarmed, but calm. She puts it together fast.

SULLY (CONT'D)

It worked out! I hardly believe it.

MAREN

You went through my things. In Maryland. When I was in the shower--

SULLY

And you ran out while I was taking mine.

(kindly)

I sure was curious. Saw your birth papers. Saw your mama's town and you said you were headed here--

MAREN

You've been following me since Bagley?

SULLY

It felt crazy to me, too. But I didn't know what else to do.

MAREN

Did you --talk to my grandmother?

SULLY

No. I found the address and waited for you to come along. And you did. Day after I parked on her street--

MAREN

But why, Sully?

SULLY

We didn't get to say our goodbyes. And I been worrying on you. On your own like you are. And, for me, one place is as good as any other.

MAREN

Why not say hello in Bagley then?

SULLY

Oh no. It's not my way to interrupt. You were with a friend. --And where'd he go anyway? He took off outta here *fast*, wiping tears away. He your boyfriend now? Or just a hobo you been hanging around with?

MAREN

Just a friend.

SULLY

Oh. Maybe he didn't get that telegram. He one of us?

Maren nods.

SULLY (CONT'D)

Follow your nose or he follow his?

MAREN

Both. Thanks for showing me how.

SULLY

Life with Sully's never dully!
What do ya say, want to ride with
Sully for a bit?

She glances at the people at the farm market. A FARMER (50s) running it is looking over at them, but looks away.

MAREN

It's weird you followed me here.

SULLY

It's only been a week. Life'll get
weirder, I promise.

(beat)

I liked our talk. I don't see
people much. I know what I told you
when we met, but it's a hard and
lonely road for us. There ain't no
sense making it any lonelier if you
don't have to.

MAREN

I'm a girl.

SULLY

My daughter's age, if I had one.

MAREN

Is that what this is?

SULLY

(getting frustrated)

How do you like that?

MAREN

I'm not trying to upset you, Sully.
You drove a long way. I'm just not
comfortable with this.

SULLY

Is it because I have a van? Vans
are creepy. I get it. I'll get a
better car.

She watches him. How this kind of life must warp people over
time. She shudders.

MAREN

It's not about the van.

SULLY

You've never fit with someone?

MAREN

I have. It --just has to work both ways.

A long beat.

SULLY

You don't like Sully.

MAREN

Why do you say your name like you're two different people.

SULLY

You don't like me.

MAREN

I don't trust you. And it doesn't matter if I'm right or if I'm wrong about that, it only matters I feel it.

SULLY

So you're not gettin' in.

MAREN

Not gettin' in.

Sully gets a petulant look on his face and regards her.

SULLY

Fuck you, then. Fuck you, Missy.

MAREN

Sully--

He takes a step forward, then a step back, furious.

SULLY

You dumb *cunt*.
I dried off next to you. I never done that before. With anybody. That *means* something. I *dried off* next to you--

Maren stares at him, trying to understand his fury. She looks over at the farm stand, where the Farmer is definitely following this now, along with one of his customers.

She's about to say more when Sully get into his van. He starts it up, backs out, and squeals away. Maren watches the van disappear, thrumming with fear now.

CUT TO:

INT. MARSHALL MN, CAFE -- DAY

The cafe is all but empty. Out the front window we see the road coming into town. In a moment, Maren appears. When she gets close enough, she takes a big rock she's been carrying out of her pocket and tosses it to the roadside.

Outside the cafe, she stands at an intersection looking at a building across the street. She hesitates, starts toward it, then hesitates again. Then she comes into the cafe instead. Two cops are there, she looks at them on her way to a seat by the window. One of them looks back, gives her a polite nod.

She looks exhausted. She'll never be a regular girl. She'll always want what she shouldn't. A waitress comes and puts down a cup of coffee and goes. Maren just stares out the window. The building across the street is a *police station*.

Under the table, she takes out her father's cassette tape and considers her options. She rewinds it as if to play it from the beginning for someone. She circles the inner spool with her finger.

INT. MARSHALL MN, POLICE STATION -- DAY

She comes in and walks up to the little sliding window. A POLICE RECEPTIONIST (40s) sits behind it.

POLICE RECEPTIONIST
Can I help you?

MAREN
I need to talk to a detective.

POLICE RECEPTIONIST
Well, we don't have a detective,
but there's a sheriff if you don't
want to talk to a regular officer.

MAREN
The sheriff then, please.

POLICE RECEPTIONIST
He's on a call if you can wait.

Maren nods and turns to sit down, but then turns back.

MAREN
Do you have a tape player here?

But Maren looks into the office behind the receptionist and sees, on top of a filing cabinet, a boom box.

MAREN (CONT'D)

Never mind.

Maren goes and sits. She's alone in a strange town, ready to turn herself in. She's facing a wall of framed photos of every officer at the station. *Smiling men in uniform*. There's a gap where a photo was removed, someone fired, or dead. That's where her focus goes.

She sits looking at the space left by some missing young man. *Doesn't her heart deserve a chance?* She thinks about what she is about to do, then thinks again. Then she stands, and quickly leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. PICKUP (MN BUS STATION) -- NIGHT

Lee is parked outside the bus station in Detroit Lakes. He watches people go in and out the front entrance, including a few men his age, one with kids already. He settles in for the night, exhausted, knowing Maren's not likely to appear here, but unwilling yet to close his eyes. Finally he has to.

INT. PICKUP (MN BUS STATION) -- PRE-DAWN

Lee wakes himself up YELLING, terrified. It takes him a few moments to orient himself and remember where he is, and why. Once the terror is gone, the anger remains.

EXT. PICKUP (MN BUS STATION/STREET/HIGHWAY) -- PRE-DAWN

Lee's truck pulls out of the lot, heading south. We follow him a long way to get to the highway, but then he leaves us behind on the open road.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. MO BOWLING ALLEY -- DAY

Through the side windows of a bowling alley, the snack counter is visible, where a MAN sits next to a pair of WOMEN having a beer. He's flirting with them, but they're not finding it funny. They get their purses and move. So he gets up, gathers his cigarettes, and heads outside. He's drunk on his feet. The parking lot has few cars in it. We finally see this is Brad, from the campground. The "Groupie." Jake is nowhere to be seen. Brad comes out into the parking lot.

Lee is sitting on the hood of his car. Brad sees him.

LEE

Where's Jake, Brad? --Did you eat
Jake?

BRAD

Look who it is! *Loverboy!*

Before Brad can say more, Lee drops down and swings the tire iron he's got in his hand. It hits Brad in the mouth and he goes down. Lee swings several more times. Brad rolls on his side to try to evade the hits, MEWLING through his shattered teeth. Lee takes one last swing and the parking lot is silent again, except for the faint sound of BALLS HITTING PINS inside. Lee looks down at Brad, then leans over and pulls him onto his back so that he starts choking on his own blood.

Lee doesn't drag him into the woods, or get the body into a car to drive away with it to eat. He just leaves Brad bleeding out on the cement.

CUT TO:

EXT. MO GENERAL STORE -- LATER -- NIGHT

Lee's truck is parked outside a country bar. He is at a payphone. He checks his watch and dials. Kayla picks up.

LEE

Hey, idiot. Is it too late to call?

KAYLA (V.O.)

No, mom and I were watching LA Law.

LEE

Is it good?

KAYLA (V.O.)

What do you mean? It's LA Law.
What's going on? You sound weird.

LEE

It's nothing.

KAYLA (V.O.)

Where are you?

LEE

I'm coming home, okay? I'm driving.
I'm not too far.

KAYLA (V.O.)

Will you be here tonight?!

LEE

Super late, but yeah.

KAYLA (V.O.)

Can you stay?

LEE

Yeah. This time I can.

KAYLA (V.O.)

I'm really glad, Lee!

LEE

Me too. Can we-- make a plan? Maybe we can drive up to Louisville or something? Hit the Kingdom. Go for a drive, huh?

KAYLA (V.O.)

Are you crying?

LEE

No. What are you talking about?

But he is.

KAYLA (V.O.)

Are you in trouble?

LEE

No. I'm just --on the road.

KAYLA (V.O.)

Can I tell mom you're coming?

And with the hopeful resignation of a true penitent, he says:

LEE

Sure. --Sure you can.

FADE OUT.

TITLE CARD: "KY"

EXT. CAR (KY ICE CREAM STAND) -- DAY

A group of teenage girls crowds the front of a walk-up ice cream stand. They hang together with their dipped cones and shakes. Kayla's there, her yellow-tipped hair in a ponytail. Maren watches them from where she sits on the hood of a car parked in front. Once the last of them has her ice cream and the group passes her, Maren calls out.

MAREN

Hey Kayla--

Kayla turns and peers at her.

MAREN (CONT'D)

It's Maren. Lee's friend-- I saw you at your aunt's house a couple months back--?

KAYLA

I remember.

Kayla tells her friends to go on. They walk away, but with lingering, curious looks back at Maren.

MAREN

I wanted to say hi that day, but-- Look is Lee here?

KAYLA

He was at my aunt's place for a while, but my mom wouldn't let him alone, so he took his tent and moved out to the lake.

MAREN

Lake?

KAYLA

"Land Between the Lakes." A state park down 641--

Maren can barely hide her excitement at this, her relief.

KAYLA (CONT'D)

He comes into town when he wants to. He's just --going through something, I guess. I asked him about you and he just said you "went another way."

(vaguely)

I wondered why he's been staying. I guess he was hoping you'd show up.

Maren sees how disappointed this makes Kayla.

MAREN

Well, I don't know about that. He may not even want to see me. I know he wanted to get back to see you, though--

KAYLA

He said that?

Maren nods. Kayla tears up, and is immediately embarrassed.

KAYLA (CONT'D)

God, he's an asshole. Why is he like this?! I tell him no one even remembers all that stuff with the cops anymore. That was *four years ago*. And he's been out of town for three and half of them. It's not fair.

MAREN

Is this something about your dad?

KAYLA

He didn't tell you?

(beat)

Our dad's a drunk. So-drunk-he'd-piss-on-the-wall kinda guy. He got in Lee's face a couple of times when Lee would try to calm him down, and the day he left he wound up hitting Lee. When I tried to break them up, he hit me, too. Lee lost it, told me to call the cops. When our dad ripped the phone out of the wall, Lee got him in a head-lock, and told me to ride his bike into town. It's four miles.

Maren looks truly sad to hear this, and whatever is next.

KAYLA (CONT'D)

When I got back with the cops, Lee was pretty beat up and Dad's car was gone. Lee told 'em he took off, but there was blood on Lee so they put him in the holding cell to test it. For a minute everyone was like *Lee killed him Lee killed him*, but it was all Lee's blood, all bullshit, so they let him go. --Now he won't ever live here again.

Maren reaches out and takes her hand. What's remarkable is that Kayla lets her, saying, softly:

KAYLA (CONT'D)

A Lee is a Lee is a Lee...

MAREN

(smiling gently)

I know that poem.

KAYLA

I just want him to be happy.
--Maybe that's too much.

It's a heartbreaking thing to say. Kayla stands up so she won't cry more. Maren walks a few steps over to her car.

MAREN

Hey-- I meant to ask: Did you pass your driver's test?

KAYLA

Yeah. In my friend's pickup. Thank god Lee taught me in one or I never woulda got the parking down.

MAREN

I got this car for almost nothing.
I'd like you to have it.
(off Kayla's look)
I don't need it anymore. You can just take it off my hands.

She gets her pack out of the back and hands Kayla the keys.

KAYLA

Are you sure? Holy Crap! Thank you!
(thinking)
How are you going to get out to see Lee? Want me to drive you?

MAREN

Don't worry. I'll manage.

As Maren walks away, she sees Kayla looking at the car she is already thinking of as hers, and smiles.

EXT. KY CAMPGROUND -- DAY

Lee is coming back from the pump with two full jugs of water. He nods at people as he passes them, but it's hard to be around so many families. He's nearly back to his campsite when he hears someone calling his name.

He looks and there is Maren, on the camp road peering into each campsite. When she sees him she stops, then and runs over. They don't quite know what to do with their bodies until Lee pulls her into a hug.

MAREN

I'm sorry, Lee.

LEE

Quit that right now. Are you okay?

MAREN

Yeah, I'm fine. I'm *good*. --You?

LEE

Better, yeah. A whole lot better.

She sees his tidy tent and camp.

MAREN

This your set up?

LEE

You like it? It's a good tent.

MAREN

We should really use it, then.

A beat. Then he pulls the "we" into his side of the conversation as easily as she hoped he would.

LEE

Where we going?

MAREN

How about *not* north again?

LEE

Yeah, north is bullshit.

MAREN

Total bullshit. --*Fuck* north.

MAREN (CONT'D)

Yeah. *Eat me*, north.

And they laugh, and all is right again.

LEE

So, *not north*, and *not here*. Good.

EXT. KY LAKE -- NIGHT

Lee and Maren swim in the lake with fifty other campers, all under the fireworks lighting up the sky directly over their heads. It's like some kind of aquatic rave.

Lee discreetly points out a drunk man who is stumbling back up the little beach toward the campground. He nods to her and then swims casually after him, following him to shore.

EXT. KY CAMPGROUND -- NIGHT

Maren walks to their camp in a towel.

She looks for Lee and sees: *He's at the edge of the woods, 300 yards away, waving her over, predator to predator. The colored light from the fireworks stains Lee.*

She goes to join him.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. PICKUP (NE RURAL ROUTE) -- DAY

Barry Cook's pickup barrels along a rural highway through uninterrupted stretches of grassland that undulate as far as the horizon. The grasses are loud with BUZZING KATYDIDS.

TITLE CARD: "NE"

EXT. NE GAS STATION -- DAY

They've stopped for gas. While Lee fuels up, he checks the engine again. Maren comes out of the restroom and finds him chatting with a man who is an OGLALA SIOUX (50s).

LEE

The knocking happens every time now.

OGLALA SIOUX GUY

It's the rod bearings, then.

LEE

Shit. That means a new engine. I'd rather sell it for parts. --Wanna make an offer? I'll sell it to you right now.

OGLALA SIOUX GUY

You don't want to sell it out here. Look around, man. How you gonna get home?

They laugh. Maren watches. He catches her looking and the glance that passes between the two of them opens the way to what's next.

They've found each other again, crossed the country for each other. This look is the first completely adult, unambiguous exchange of love we've seen between them.

He is hers and she is his.

EXT. OGLALA NATIONAL GRASSLANDS -- SUNSET/DUSK

They've camped on a low ridge that gives them an epic view of the sunset on the sea of grass. The buttes in the distance are their only company. The tent flaps are open and they stir in the breeze.

Lee lays on his sleeping bag, watching the sun on the horizon. Maren is next to him reading Marilynne Robinson's House-keeping. He watches her next. Finally, she looks up.

LEE

It really is like you go someplace else--

MAREN

Watching me read? Well, you should know after this I'm out of books. We'll have to find a bookstore.

LEE

It might have to wait 'til Omaha on our way back.

(beat)

By the way, that guy told me we should keep two days of water with us in case that engine goes. In case we have to wait a while for a ride. As soon as we can we'll get another set of wheels.

MAREN

I wish we could save it.

LEE

I'd rather have a van anyway.

MAREN

I learned to drive in that truck.

LEE

You learned to *kiss* in that truck.

MAREN

I *knew* how to kiss before you, Mr. Kentucky.

LEE

I sang to my girl in that truck.

They share a long look. When he looks away, Maren decides. She says, gently:

MAREN

Kayla told me about what happened,
with your dad. --I just, I wanted
you to know I knew.

Lee peers out at the dusk and says nothing for a long moment.

LEE

Kayla doesn't know what happened.

MAREN

What she pieced together, then.
He sounds like he was as asshole--

LEE

I don't want to talk about my fa-
ther. I don't just sweat this stuff
out like you do.

He looks at her, then away. But Maren won't back down.

MAREN

Kayla said he hit you both the day
he left.

LEE

Yeah. I told her to get the cops.
(beat)
And then he left.

A beat. She moves a bit closer to him.

MAREN

I guess I don't believe that. There
must've been a lot of blood on you
for the cops to bring you in--

LEE

As soon as she was gone, he went
for me, okay? To rip me open. With
his teeth.
(beat)
I know I smelled that first on him.
He knew what I was before I did.
And he didn't help me, either.

So they're both the children of eaters. The implications are
deep.

MAREN

What happened?

Lee really doesn't want to say more, but the woman he loves
is asking. So he pulls out every word, like rotten teeth.

LEE

I got him in a sleeper hold until he passed out. Then I hit him with an ashtray to make sure he stayed out. I dragged him out to his car and drove him to a place I knew, about half a mile from there, a barn that belonged to a guy who used to sell me and my buddies weed. He was in California so I knew no one was gonna be in there for a while.

Maren puts her hand on his leg, just to touch him.

LEE (CONT'D)

I put the car in the barn, and duct taped the shit out of him. I left his nostrils open, but everything else I taped up tight.

He's living this all over again as he says the words. He presses his fingers against his eyes.

MAREN

How long was he in that barn?

LEE

Three days? Yeah. Three days. The way he was breathing when he heard me come back in was-- He knew what was going to happen.

Maren tears up hearing this. They are, in many ways, the same kind of orphan.

MAREN

What did you do?

LEE

I ate him right the fuck up.
(beat)
I took off his shoes, his socks. Then I took the tape off his eyes so he could watch me. And then I ate his feet.

He's scared, the wiring that tells a boy not to kill his father is short-circuiting all over again against the voltage of an older boy's rage, his need to kill the father.

LEE (CONT'D)

I stripped the muscle off his legs. He passed out, came to, passed out again. He vomited at some point.

(MORE)

LEE (CONT'D)

I could smell it. Maybe he choked on it. Or died from the blood he lost. It was *great*. I was high with it. I put what was left of him in the trunk and drove all the way past Memphis. I sunk his car at the bottom of a quarry down there. But I fucked up Kayla's life. Fucked up my mom's life. I couldn't deal. I didn't sleep for two weeks. I think I woulda killed myself if it wasn't for Kayla. I would've done it-- I think I should've done it--

She reaches out to him and pulls him to her. He won't look at her. They are holding one another, but can't see each other.

MAREN

Lee-- I would have done the same thing. In my own way, but I would have done it.

He says, in a quiet voice, a boy's voice.

LEE

You don't mean that--

MAREN

You protected the people you love.

She can see a spasm of doubt, even under all his armor.

LEE

I can't hear this right now. Okay?

MAREN

Hold my hands and look at me.

He shakes his head. But reluctantly, he does. When he sees she is smiling at him, with love. He cries again.

LEE

You don't think I'm a bad person?

MAREN

(simply)
All I think is that I love you.

After a moment, he pulls her close. Now the weeping really begins. It floods out of him in a way his body can barely keep up with. She holds him close and rides out the sobs with him.

MAREN (V.O.)

Where do we go now?

LEE (V.O.)

We can go anywhere. Anywhere.

MAREN (V.O.)

Let's drive back, until the truck gives out someplace, and then we'll just --stay. Get a place. Jobs. Like people do.

LEE (V.O.)

(charmed)

You want to be people? Let's be people.

MAREN (V.O.)

Yeah. Let's be them for a while.

FADE OUT.

EXT. MI HIGHWAY, ONRAMP -- DAY

They stand near the onramp to Route 69 with their packs, looking out for cops, thumbs out. Finally, a scuffed yellow two-door with a small dresser lashed to the top pulls over.

TITLE CARD: "MI"

Maren jogs up to see HARMONY (22) behind the wheel in cheap Aviators. She's alone, but her car is full of boxes.

HARMONY

You heading to Detroit?

MAREN

Yeah. But with our packs we're like four people--

HARMONY

It's all right. I can make room.

She turns on her hazards and gets out. Lee jogs up.

HARMONY (CONT'D)

I'm headed to Ann Arbor. That'll get you half way. --I'm Harmony.

MAREN

I'm Mary, that's Luke.

Whether she means to choose this name on purpose or not is unclear. She comes around and opens the trunk and starts pushing things into a tighter configuration.

HARMONY

This is my last year. I've been going to Tiffin, but I wanted to do my last year at UM so I can say I graduated from there. --Hand me that big bag from the backseat--

Lee goes and comes back with a new mesh laundry bag full of bedding. Harmony takes it and starts shoving it into place.

MAREN

Smart. Do you have friends there?

Maren glances at Lee, wondering why he's not taking the lead in this conversation. But he seems happy to let Maren do the talking, to be the front-facing part of the team now.

HARMONY

Give me that plastic toolbox and there's a trash bag of clothes--
(beat)
I don't really know anyone yet, but it'll be worth it. It wasn't as hard to get in as I was led to believe-- What year are you?

MAREN

My brother and I are taking time off.

Lee returns with the toolbox and trash bag.

HARMONY

Oh! --That's cool. Your brother.

MAREN

Stepbrother.

She shoves them in as well and shuts the trunk. It closes.

MAREN (CONT'D)

We're seeing the country. Luke had leukemia. But he made it through. This is his welcome back trip.

This stops Harmony short. She looks at Lee, how thin he is.

HARMONY

Welcome back--?

MAREN

To life!

Harmony looks at Maren.

HARMONY

You must be the nicest sister I've
ever heard of.

(louder, to Lee)

I'm sorry about your cancer.

EXT. HARMONY'S CAR (MI HIGHWAY 2) -- DAY

The convertible comes into the city and takes the campus
exit. Maren is up front. Lee can be seen crammed in back with
their two backpacks.

INT. HARMONY'S CAR (ANN ARBOR STREETS) -- DAY

Maren looks out at chaotic student neighborhoods.

HARMONY

Where do you want me to drop you?

MAREN

Anywhere. We're just going to find
a motel and hit the road again to-
morrow. Just chill tonight.

HARMONY

No place to stay?

Maren shakes her head in just the right way. Harmony says,
thinking it's her idea:

HARMONY (CONT'D)

You can stay with me if you want.
I'm in a building that's all stud-
ents, so it might be loud, but--
You'd just have to help me move in.
It'll be quick with three of us.

MAREN

That sounds great. Thanks. --You
okay to carry boxes, Luke?

LUKE

Yeah. I mean, I'd love to help.

INT. HARMONY'S CAR (KING AND COURT APARTMENTS) -- DAY

They pull up to a curb in front of a small, two-story apart-
ment building with a set of outdoor stairs.

HARMONY

I just need to go upstairs and get the key from the manager.

They watch her get out and bounce away. Lee turns to Maren.

LEE

You heard that, right? No one knows her here. She's brand new.

Undergrads in t-shirts and ball caps yell to one another across busy streets, hug, and high five.

LEE (CONT'D)

This is a --unique opportunity.

Maren is about to respond, but Harmony returns.

HARMONY

No one was there, but my key was taped to the door with my lease. I get a whole garage!

EXT. KING AND COURT APARTMENTS -- DAY

Lee takes the little dresser. Maren and Harmony haul a ton of stuff between them as well.

INT. HARMONY'S APARTMENT -- DAY

The apartment is tiny, a kitchen, a bedroom, and a bathroom.

HARMONY

Everything against that wall for now. There's no order.

Maren and Harmony are laughing like friends now.

INT. HARMONY'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Lee brings in the last load. Maren and Harmony are chatting away. But when Maren glances at Lee, he gives her a signal. She thinks for a moment and then announces:

MAREN

I saw there's a movie theatre down the street. Anybody want to go?

LEE

That sounds fun--

But then he looks candidly at Harmony.

LEE (CONT'D)

Unless you want to do anything else here, Harmony. You tell me. I'm happy to do whatever you want--

Harmony is suddenly being presented with an opportunity she didn't know she was going to have. She looks at Lee. He looks handsome and free, like a Rust Belt poet. She can hear a few students outside LAUGHING. She doesn't register any danger.

HARMONY

Well-- I'm not sure any of this furniture's really where I want it. We might try to move things around

LEE

You go, Maren. I'll finish helping here, then we'll see you when? 9?

MAREN

Yeah, 9. At the earliest--

Harmony is a bit amazed at how well this is going.

EXT. DOWNTOWN ANN ARBOR -- DUSK

Maren doesn't go straight to the movies. She walks through town, seeing a life she might be having were it not for the strangeness in her. So many kids. Some are frat and sorority bots, but there are plenty of foreign students, quiet kids, and a-bit-lost types. A few kids on the street smile or say a "hi" to her as they pass. On some level, she wants this so badly for herself.

INT. ANN ARBOR MOVIE THEATRE -- NIGHT

Maren sits in a quarter-full theatre watching THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST. She spends as much time looking at the students on dates around her as she does the screen.

EXT. HARMONY'S APARTMENT -- LATER -- NIGHT

It's full dark now. Maren knocks quietly on Harmony's door. Lee lets her in.

INT. HARMONY'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

All the shades are drawn. Lee's face and hands are red from having been scrubbed clean. He's chewing gum. A lava lamp on the dresser oozes tomato-red light across the bare bed.

MAREN

Where is she?

LEE

Trunk of her car.

MAREN

Already?

LEE

We didn't have a chance to plan this well. As soon as you left, she took mushrooms and was all over me. Unless I wanted to fuck her--which I did not--I had to get it done. I wish you'd come back a lot sooner.

(re: the bathroom door)

She had some cleaning stuff, but I wouldn't go in there yet.

MAREN

For how long after is it --still good? I never thought about that.

LEE

It's been almost four hours. You wouldn't have wanted it. We'll figure something else out for you.

MAREN

We can stay here then?

Lee comes over and puts his hands on her shoulders, excited.

LEE

That's what I was trying to say: She's a *transfer* student, Maren. Nobody's met her yet. You could be Harmony Watt for all anybody knows.

MAREN

Watt would I want to be her for?

But Lee is too dialed in to laugh.

LEE

The apartment's paid through the semester. She told me. She already registered for classes. Her schedule's right there. She said her parents rarely call. We can make this last a few weeks if we want.

(beat)

Everything here belongs to *you* now.

It's the strangest gift she's ever received, but its a gift from the man she loves. She doesn't think of refusing.

INT. HARMONY'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Maren finishes at the bathroom sink while Lee makes breakfast at the stove. He's on the phone.

LEE (O.S.)

Ann Arbor now. --We're with all the students at *UM*.

(beat)

Maybe-- We'll see where we end up and how long we stay. But maybe.

(to Maren)

Kayla says hi. She says she wants to drive up and see us.

Maren waves.

LEE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Maren says hi.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, LECTURE HALL -- DAY

Maren sits in a lecture hall full of undergrads. She's wearing one of Harmony's shirts. A Teacher's Assistant hands her a syllabus. The PROFESSOR (40s) is addressing the room.

PROFESSOR

For the first weeks, we'll discuss examples of "*opera seria*" and then what's called "*opera buffa*." Based on those two words alone, who can guess the difference?

One or two hands go up. Shy as she is, Maren's does also.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, BUILDING LOBBY -- DAY

Maren's come from the bookstore. She sits in a lobby and takes her books out to look them over: Formal Logic, A Short History of Opera, The Divine Comedy. She's excited to be somewhere books are even the slightest bit holy.

EXT. KING AND COURT APARTMENTS -- DAY

Maren comes up the front stairs of the apartment complex past a trio of young women knitting.

INT. HARMONY'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Maren has her key out, but she finds the door unlocked. She comes in and crosses the threshold into total ruin.

MAREN

Lee? You're gonna love it. I answered a question--!

There's no response from the bathroom. *But the smell is stonger here.* And all the blinds have all been pulled down.

Then she sees, by the bed, a satchel. She remembers where she's seen it a second too late. Someone rushes her from the corner closet and a hand is clamped over her mouth. *Sully.*

He drags her over to the bed, a 6" buck knife in one hand.

SULLY

I'm gonna take my hand away, and you're not gonna scream 'cause Sully's a friend and we don't scream at friends.

She nods. He takes his hand away. She's terrified, but angry, too.

SULLY (CONT'D)

Now where's your cutie pie? I saw him walk out half an hour ago.

MAREN

I don't know.

SULLY

I don't think that fella'd like me much. Depending on what you told him.

MAREN

I barely told him anything.

SULLY

That kinda hurts Sully's feelings.

MAREN

How'd you find us?

SULLY

Doesn't matter, Missy.

MAREN

I'm asking. A friend is asking and you don't ignore a friend. --And I wish you wouldn't call me Missy.

SULLY

It's short for Maren.

MAREN

No. It isn't.

SULLY

Ever since I drove away from you up in Minnesota, nothing's felt right.

MAREN

What does that mean?

He looks away from her as if he can't quite bear to have her eyes on him as he says:

SULLY

It means-- It means unfinished business.

MAREN

That guy Lee-- We're *together* now, Sully.

Sully can't keep the rage out of his voice when he says:

SULLY

That's not the business I'm talking about.

But he calms himself and lays his head on Maren's chest.

SULLY (CONT'D)

I don't mind if you don't like Sully. What I mind is how much you know about him. What he's done. Who he's done it to. I don't know *why* I told you all that stuff. I never told anybody before you.

MAREN

You think I'd tell anyone? Who'd ever believe me? --And I thought you didn't kill people, Sully. You told me that. You don't kill--

SULLY

I used to tell people the truth, you know. They never took me serious. I got so tired. I wanted to be with someone who understood.

MAREN

You can't do something just because you're lonely.

On the ceiling, Maren can see a growing wedge of sunlight. She can't see the door, with Sully blocking her, but someone is coming in. She forces her eyes to stay on Sully.

SULLY

I saw you outside that police station. You were thinking of saying *something to somebody--*

MAREN

I was going to turn myself in. I was sick of myself.

SULLY

You mighta told them about me, too.

It's Lee coming in. He's out of breath and has a plastic shopping bag in both hands, six feet behind Sully. Lee's head is rising into Maren's view, but she doesn't look up. She squirms so there's a bit of noise and Sully has to keep his focus on her.

MAREN

You never get sick of yourself?

SULLY

Sully just wants to sleep at night. Sleep it off.

MAREN

I said stop calling yourself Sully!

He's about to reply, but he stops and takes in the air. A look crosses his face. As Sully begins to turn, Lee slams the bag down over his head and yanks it around his throat. Maren sees what's about to happen and yells:

MAREN (CONT'D)

He's got a knife--

Before she can grab back his arm, Sully is able to jab at Lee. The knife hits Lee at an awkward angle, right in the hollow of his shoulder, right under his collarbone. Lee BARKS in pain. Sully tries to stab at Lee again, at his face, but now Maren grabs his hand with both of hers.

Lee yanks Sully backward to get him off his balance and Sully falls, pulling Maren with him. The knife nicks Maren in the chin. Sully's face is contorting behind the thick yellow plastic, already wet with condensation. He yanks Maren around, trying to keep hold of his knife, but she bites savagely into his wrist and he lets go. As soon as he does, she grabs it off the floor and sticks it into his belly. Then again.

Sully yells. Lee has him in a hold now, one arm up over his head. Sully tries to rip the bag open so he can breathe.

LEE

Don't stop, Maren--

Sully has to leave the bag to try to fend off Maren's knife, trying to see her through the plastic. Blood hits her in one eye. Then she sinks it between his ribs, then again on the other side. Sully's yells turn to gasps as his lungs deflate. He kicks at Maren and she stumbles backward, putting the bloody point of the knife into the laminate floor.

LEE (CONT'D)

The bathtub-- Help me--

Lee starts dragging Sully toward the bathroom. Sully is weakening. Maren gets a grip on his kicking legs and together they half-drag, half-carry him into the bathroom.

INT. HARMONY'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM -- DAY

Lee gets into the tub and pulls Sully over the lip of it and on top of himself, keeping Sully in a tight hold. Sully tries to get free, but he's so weak it's easy for Maren to push him down and climb on top of him. Lee bites hard into the back of Sully's neck. Sully gags on the pain, eyes wide on Maren through the bag. She pulls open Sully's shirt revealing his leaking wounds. She jams two fingers into one of them and yanks it open further. Sully claws one last time at the bag and this time rips the plastic. His face pushes through the membrane like a man being born. He gulps the air and weakly bats back at Lee, who switches from eating his neck to latching onto his hand. Maren pulls the gut wound open enough to begin pulling out fat. Finally, Sully dies. Lee lifts Sully's arm free of his shirt and drapes it around his own neck so he can rest a moment and try to catch his breath. They're not his children, but Sully was somehow their future, one terrible version of it.

Maren looks up and sees their two faces side by side. She sees Lee is crying and knows why. He is killing his father all over again. Like he once said, he will *always* be killing his father. And what does that mean for her. She climbs out of the tub and flees the room.

INT. HARMONY'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Maren stagger down the hall back into the bedroom, Lee a few paces behind her.

LEE

That was that man you met? The one
who followed you?

(MORE)

LEE (CONT'D)

(beat)

I smelled him two blocks from here.
I ran all the way. All the way.

Maren sees Sully's satchel beside the bed and goes to it. She looks through its contents. Wallets, Mr. Goodbars, Western paperbackbacks, and, of course, the rope of hair.

She unwinds it from its coil, afraid of what she knows is there: *Near the bottom, at the end, bright yellow-tipped hair is braided into the rope. Kayla.* That's how he found them.

Lee leans against the wall and then slides down it, leaving a trail of blood on the plaster.

LEE (CONT'D)

He was so much bigger. Heavier.
But, man, was he quick on his feet.
More than this guy, even--

MAREN

Who was?

She can't stop looking at Kayla's hair, at the tragedy she's holding in her hands. But Lee is coughing and wheezing now. She looks over and sees he is seriously hurt.

She goes over to him, dragging the braid with her. She looks closely at his injury.

MAREN (CONT'D)

Oh Christ, Lee. He hit your lung.
We've got to get you to an ER--

LEE

I let my guard down. Am I doing it
good? --Am I *bad*?

MAREN

No, Lee-- You're good, all right?
You're really good.

LEE

Am I *really* bad? Tell me.

She listens to his wound. There are bubbles in the blood.

MAREN

Air's coming out. I can see it.

He stares at the end of the rope. It's Kayla's hair. There's no denying it.

LEE

He got Kayla.

MAREN

Don't think about that now. We can't take care of this ourselves-- We have to go.

LEE

No. Maren-- *Maren*. Eat.

The smell of open meat in the apartment is pulling her hunger toward it, strongly, but she's repulsed and says instead:

MAREN

I don't want it-- --Not him.

He puts an arm around her and she puts her head on his chest.

MAREN (CONT'D)

Does this hurt?

LEE

Nothing you do could hurt me.

He's calming himself, but what he calms into is worse. He kisses her on top of her head and says, his voice tired:

LEE (CONT'D)

Don't feel bad, okay? Don't feel anything. I want you to do it. This was always going to be it. Love me.

Maren tries to pull away, but he pins her there.

LEE (CONT'D)

Eat.

Then she realizes what he means. He means her to eat him.

MAREN

No! Lee, no-- I won't--

Maren tries to pull away, but he won't let her.

MAREN (CONT'D)

Lee, for God's sake, let me *up*--

LEE

I want you to eat me. I want you to feed! Bones and all! I'll just-- go, ok? Up to space. Come find me later--? Ok?

Maren starts to be able to hear Lee's heartbeat under his breastbone. It is hard to know the moment her own affect begins to shift, but Lee holds her to his chest until finally, inevitably, she bites into it.

CLOSE ON: Heavy pain contorts Lee's face, but he doesn't yell. He doesn't scream. She must be burrowing into his flesh now. He's letting her do it. The blood loss makes him faint, confused. At some point he must be hallucinating. The last thing he says, though the agony, is: unintelligible.

She makes anguished, animal noises as she eats. Not animal because they're too savage to be human; animal because they are emotional and vulnerable, as animals are. At what point Lee dies she'll never know; she can't see his face. We can.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HARMONY'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Maren is gone. The apartment is silent, once again for rent. The remains of Lee are gone. The remains of Sully are gone as well. The place has been cleaned well.

There is a stain on the floor beside the bed, but it's hard to tell what left it, or how long ago. There is the space under the bed. The camera pushes into that space, which begins to widen out and become...

EXT. NE GRASSLANDS -- DAWN

The sky is becoming light, but is still lost in deep hues of transition, the world rotating toward, but not yet in view of, the sun. We see their tent, Barry's truck, then two figures sitting naked at the edge of the ridge, the edge of the world. Maren and Lee.

Is this a memory? A fantasy? Are in Maren's head? Lee's? None of that is something we can know. All we have is what we see, and what we see is youth, freedom, beauty, and, most of all, love. The country belongs to them here, not the reverse. There is no abandonment, no shame, and no harm. Not anymore.

They are welcome here. They can stay.

END