

HOME COMING

By: David Lambertson

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FADE IN:

EXT. A DEAD FOREST - DAY

Gray, cloudy, late winter skies.

Thousands of blackened, barren pine trees dot the landscape like burnt matchsticks.

On the ground, patches of dirty snow at the base of the dead trees. Clumps of red-tinted soil everywhere else.

Silent. Even the breeze has nothing to rustle.

Then - a SNAP from a breaking twig followed by the HOWL of a wolf in the distance.

The black-booted foot of a FIGURE, the cause of that snap.

The Figure wears a white parka with a fur hood. A scarf and goggles conceal the Figure's face.

FIGURE'S POV

The shadows of a dozen WOLVES weave in and out of the treeline at the edge of the forest. Low HOWLS and WHIMPERS as if they were talking to each other.

BACK TO SCENE

The Figure moves forward, crunching snow and earth beneath its boots. HEAVY BREATHING signals a fast pace.

The Figure stops when it reaches:

THE EDGE OF THE DEAD FOREST

Out in the distance, an old FERRIS WHEEL with yellow rusted buckets stands motionless against the skyline. Brown, dried trees and shrubbery encroach on the base of the Ferris Wheel.

Further off, the top floors of several concrete, multi-storied buildings visible in the skyline. The lower floors concealed by large trees, as if the buildings had been erected in a jungle.

The Figure removes its goggles, lowers its hood revealing the pale, wrinkled face of an old woman.

She has wispy gray hair. Small circular red patches dot her face. A trickle of blood leaks from her nose. This is Eva IVANOVA (73).

Eva presses her finger against the blood beneath her nose, wipes it on the white sleeve of her parka.

She takes a last look at the skyline - marches forward.

EXT. RURAL STREET - LATER

Eva walks down the center of the narrow street, filled with pot holes. Weeds grow in all directions from the cracks in the asphalt surface.

On either side, old, rust-worn cars and vans. Some upright, some on their sides. All with their windows blown out.

EXT. AMUSEMENT PARK - LATER

Eva meanders through the grounds of a ghost-like park - frozen in time. Everything rusty and motionless.

The FERRIS WHEEL she saw from the forest's edge now casts a shadow down upon her.

The hollow shells of eroded BUMPER CARS cars frozen in place, as if the electricity had been switched off at a random moment and never switched back on.

A dilapidated MERRY-GO-ROUND, ceramic horses covered in soot.

A wooden VENDOR'S BOOTH. The stuffed animals on the shelves rotted with mildew and mold.

All of the park's equipment invaded by the growth of dried grass and weeds. A place that has been untouched by man, consumed by nature, for decades.

EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DUSK

Dozens of small wooden houses in disrepair. Holes permeate their roofs and sides. No lights or sounds other than the CAWS of crows above.

SUPER: VILLAGE OF PRIPYAT RUSSIA

Eva walks in the center of the street. In the horizon behind her, the CONCRETE SARCOPHAGUS that entombs the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.

Eva scans the abandoned village - searching.

EXT. RURAL HOUSE/PORCH - DUSK

Eva ascends the steps of a wooden porch.

A board breaks beneath her feet. She regains her footing, approaches the front door. She grabs the discolored bronze knob, turns and pushes.

The door CREAKS open.

INT. RURAL HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DUSK

All the signs of abandonment. Cobwebs cover the furniture. The windows an eerie orange hue - caked with soot.

Dust covered children's toys in the corner. A rocking horse tipped over.

As Eva examines the room, she stops at a table containing mildewed, unopened mail. She picks up a letter, wipes the dust with her gloved finger. It's addressed to: "THE IVANOV FAMILY."

Eva places it back down on the table. Her eyes go to the corner. She spots a CERAMIC DOLL, covered in dirt and soot.

The floorboards CREAK as Eva walks towards the doll. She hunches down, picks it up and cleans it with her gloves.

Eva rises, heads towards a

BEDROOM

Same state of disrepair as the living room. Darkening as the sun sets outside.

Eva sets the porcelain doll down on a night stand next to a queen size bed.

Dust particles dance in the air as Eva strips the bed of the pillows, comforter and sheets.

Eva removes her boots. The bed springs SQUEAK as she lies down on the barren mattress.

She reaches over, grabs the doll from the nightstand. She opens her parka, clutches the doll to her chest.

The room is enveloped in darkness as Eva closes her eyes, falls asleep.

INT. RURAL HOUSE/BEDROOM - MORNING

Orange sunlight peeks through a soot-laden window.

The CRACKS of branches and leaves emanate from outside.

Eva's eyes flutter open. More CRACKS from outside.

Eva rises, the doll still in her hand, goes to the window and cleans a small corner. Just enough to peep out.

THE VIEW THROUGH THE DIRTY WINDOW

The backside of a PERSON, dressed in the winter clothes of a hunter. An old rifle in one hand, the barrel pointing at the ground as the Person walks towards the rear of the house.

BACK TO SCENE

Eva breathes heavily. Blood trickles from her nose. She bolts into the

LIVING ROOM

And stands there frozen as she hears the CREAK of the back door opening.

EVA
(frantic)
Who is it?

NOTE: ALL DIALOGUE IS IN RUSSIAN, SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH.

Ominous FOOTSTEPS.

EVA
(louder)
Who is it!

The BARREL OF THE RIFLE breaches the entrance. It's followed by the person holding that rifle. Her hair clumpy and disheveled. This is SOFIA (41).

Sofia raises the rifle, takes dead aim at Eva.

Eva trembles. The blood from her nose trickles down to her upper lip.

SOFIA
Why are you here?

Eva's body rattles with the tremors of a seizure. She loses her grip on the doll. It falls to the floor.

Eva's eyes roll back in her head as she collapses.

EXT. VILLAGE STREET - MORNING

Sofia's breath mists in the air as she lumbers down the street with Eva, unconscious, cradled in her arms.

She reaches:

SOFIA'S HOUSE

At the end of the street. Sofia pushes the front door open with her foot, turns sideways and enters.

INT. SOFIA'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

In much better shape than the other house. The furniture and the windows are clean. Tables have been polished. Other than the lack of electricity - a normal looking home.

Sofia lays Eva on a sofa, props a pillow neath her head. Places the doll by her side.

INT. SOFIA'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A half dozen candles lit throughout the room cast shadows that flicker and dance on the walls.

A fire CRACKLES in a brick fireplace.

Sofia sits in a chair, her rifle propped up by her side. She stares at Eva on the sofa, still out like a light.

Beads of sweat form on Eva's forehead. Her eyelids flutter.

EVA'S POV - THE ROOM

Fuzzy at first. The furniture appears as indistinct objects. The light from the candles creating shifts in illumination.

The silhouette of Sofia in the chair.

After a moment, Sofia's face comes into clear focus.

EVA (O.C.)
Am I dead?

BACK TO SCENE

Sofia shakes her head.

Eva shakes the cobwebs from her head, uprights herself. She wipes the sweat from her brow, starts to remove her parka.

Sofia grasps the barrel of the rifle.

EVA
The fire - it's warm.

Sofia nods, releases her grip on the rifle.

Eva removes her parka revealing a frail, thin torso. Her arms ravaged with red spots. Her skin loose, as if it hung on the bones without muscles.

EVA
How long have I been out?

SOFIA
Nine, maybe ten hours.
(scanning Eva's torso)
What's wrong with you?

EVA
I get seizures. It's the last stage.

SOFIA
The last stage?

EVA
Of Leukemia.

Sofia takes this in.

EVA
Who are --?

SOFIA
Not yet. I need details.

EVA
Details?

SOFIA
How did you get in?

EVA
I don't understand.

SOFIA
There are guards around the perimeter. There are barriers on all the roads.

EVA
I took the road to the Red Forest. Abandoned my car there - at the edge. Then hiked through it.
(off Sofia's look)
No one stands guard there. It's the center of contamination.

SOFIA
You brought no provisions?

EVA
I came here to die. It didn't
matter in what manner.

Sofia's eyes narrow.

SOFIA
Why here?

EVA
Does it matter?

SOFIA
(firmer)
Why here?

EVA
To die with family.

SOFIA
There's no one here.

EVA
But there was.

Eva stands, her legs wobbly. She makes her way to the window,
stares out into the barren street.

EVA
My husband was an engineer at the
plant. My sister lived with us.
(turns towards Sofia)
In the house where you found me.
(looks out window)
She helped me take care of my
daughter.
(clears throat)
I should have been home with them
that day.

SOFIA
Where were you?

EVA
On the outskirts of the village.
Tending to Issac Nikolaev's weak
heart. I was a nurse - a caretaker.
He paid well.
(a beat)
I thought his heart would jump from
his chest when we heard the
explosion.

Eva turns, paces back to the sofa, sits.

EVA

The guards beat us back that night. They wouldn't let any of us go back to our homes. For our own good, they said... I waited for word for days. Finally, word came. They said that my husband was in the plant at the time of the explosion. But that his body was never found.

Eva picks up the porcelain doll, studies it.

EVA

They said that my sister's body was found in a car near the plant. That she may have taken my husband to work that night. They said that my daughter was with her.

Eva holds up the doll for Sofia to see.

EVA

This was hers.

Eva cradles the doll.

EVA

The bastards cremated them both! The corpses had too much radiation they said. They just burned them, like - like trash --

A raspy COUGH consumes Eva. She clears her throat - tries to regain her voice.

EVA

Thirty-six years later, the radiation got me.

(coughing again)

I just want to be with my family again. That's why I'm here.

Eva leans over the armrest of the sofa, vomits violently. She collapses back into the sofa. A residue of blood trickles from the corner of her mouth.

Sofia stands, rushes to the kitchen and reenters, a towel in her hand. She sits on the sofa by Eva, now curled up in a fetal position.

With one hand, Sofia uses the towel to wipe the blood from the corner of Eva's mouth. She gently strokes Eva's wispy gray hair with the other.

SOFIA
You are Eva Ivanova?

EVA
(feebly)
How - how did you know?

Eva, too fatigued now, closes her eyes, listens. Sofia continues to stroke her hair.

SOFIA
There were twelve of us left in
this part of the village after the
explosion.

EVA
Left?

SOFIA
They thought we were already
condemned. That we wouldn't last
more than a few days. So they
quarantined us - here.

EVA
My husband...?

SOFIA
Was not among us.
(a beat)
Your sister and your daughter were.

Eva's eyes flicker open - is she dreaming?

SOFIA
Renata and Maria.

EVA
(weakly)
What happened to them?

SOFIA
Renata only lasted three weeks.
Maria, almost a year. She was six -
yes?

Eva's eyes tear as she nods.

SOFIA
I was ten. We were playmates. She
talked of you often.

EVA
(crying)
My baby girl.

SOFIA
She did not die alone. I had
cradled her in my arms for a full
day. She was peaceful. She was
ready. And when you are, I will
take you to be with her and Renata.

EVA
How did you survive?

SOFIA
I don't really know. But I do know
that the wolves, the boars and the
deer have all multiplied many times
since that day. Trees grow. Food is
plentiful. Maybe I am... what's the
word - resistant somehow. Like the
wolves.

EVA
And you never left?

SOFIA
The last person passed when I was
fourteen. By then, this was my
home. I had no one. So, I hid when
the guards came by. They never
stayed long. They couldn't because
of the radiation. Eventually, they
stopped coming altogether.

EVA
(near last breath)
You shouldn't stay here.

SOFIA
Maybe it was God's will that I be
here when you came home. You will
be with your family. I promise.

Eva's eyes are closed. She's near gone. Sofia holds her hand.

EVA
(in a whisper)
Are you my angel?

EXT. PRIPYAT PARK - DAY

A small park converted to a makeshift cemetery.

There are twelve graves, each with a WOODEN MARKER crafted with boards torn from houses. Each hand-etched with a name.

On one of those wooden markers: "RENATA POPOVA - 32."

Another with the marker: "MARIA IVANOVA - 6." The porcelain doll that Eva held now secured in the ground at the head of the grave.

Next to Maria's plot, a freshly dug grave. At the head of the grave, a newly made marker: "EVA IVANOVA - CAME HOME AT 73."

EXT. A DEAD FOREST - NIGHT

A full moon cascade lights on the blackened trees creating eerie shadows in the snow.

Sofia, wearing Eva's parka, trudges up an incline. She stops - listens, hears The ROAR of a truck pass on the road above.

Sofia waits a moment, then continues her struggle upwards.

She finally reaches the top of the incline, plants her boots on the pavement of a highway.

Sofia lowers the hood of her parka, scans the horizon. In the distance, the Sarcophagus of Chernobyl. The moonlight creating an aura over the structure.

Sofia looks down the highway. Spots an abandoned car on the shoulder. She reaches in the pocket of the parka, removes a set of car keys as she paces towards the car.

Sofia takes one last look around, unlocks the car, enters.

A moment passes.

Then an engine REVS to life. The bright red tail lights of the car pierce the darkness.

Dust from underneath car spits in the air as the car pulls away, drives down the highway - disappears into the night.

FADE OUT.