

The Bigfoot of Yonah Ridge

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Based on the novel by the same name by Billy Plant

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EXT. DEEP WOODS - DAY

We soar across a rugged landscape of mountains and streams. Trees are decked out in their finest autumn hues of red, yellow, and orange. Coming into ground level, looking up a line of chopped brush, two men are surveying.

SKIP REEVES, mid-forties, is tall and weather worn, his tan face wears the wrinkles of a life of labor, a cigarette ever present, dangling between his lips. His jeans are faded and muddy, but a shiny chain hooked through a belt loop is attached to his wallet. He stands behind a surveying instrument mounted on yellow tripod legs.

HENRY DAVIDSON, thirty, is farther ahead, holding an orange and white surveying rod. Henry's beard is slightly longer than an office manager would allow and there is no logo on his ball cap. His Carhartt pants are faded and frayed from work. Henry is an old soul trying to check all the boxes of modern life. A quiet man in a world of chatter, Henry's expressive eyes betray a loneliness.

SKIP'S POV - SURVEYING ROD - SCOPE MATTE

We look through the lens of the surveying instrument as Skip aligns the cross hairs of the instrument along the orange and white length of the rod. Henry stands behind the rod, focusing on holding it steady.

SKIP (O.S.)
I'm looking!

As the instrument's lens comes to a tight focus on the prism atop the rod we hear three quick BEEPS and see red laser lights flash inside the instrument. After the last flash we hear a digital THWEET sound like an incoming message on an iPhone. Then abruptly

SKIP (O.S.) (cont'd)
Good!

BACK TO SCENE

Still looking down at the level mounted to the rod, as soon as Skip says good Henry replies

HENRY
Come ahead!

Henry looks up from the rod, turns and scans the forest behind him. Skip walks up to Henry. Both men are sweating.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY (cont'd)
Let's take a minute and have some water.

SKIP
Don't mind if I do.

Skip sits cross-legged on the ground and lights a cigarette. Henry kneels down on one knee and pulls a land deed and a sketched map from an orange stake bag.

SKIP (cont'd)
So do you think we're going to get this done today? My ol' lady's been texting me, wondering when I'll be home. She thinks you and me are up here partying in all our free time.

Henry smiles, looking up from the documents he's consulting.

HENRY
Oh yeah, all the wild nightlife of Lytle County.

Henry begins folding the documents.

HENRY (CONT'D)
We'll get close but there will be a little to do first thing in the morning. Besides, the office called while you were setting up while ago and said the developer wants to meet us out here tomorrow morning at eight o'clock.

SKIP
What th' hell's he want?

HENRY
Not sure. I think he just wants to physically see the property. Try to visualize what he plans to do with it.

SKIP
And what is he planning to do with it?

HENRY
I'm not sure but CUMMINGS told me he thought there might be plans for this to become some sort of retail outlet destination.

SKIP

It's a long way to drive to go shopping.

HENRY

I agree. At any rate we'll be back in Nashville by tomorrow afternoon. You can allay your wife's fears.

SKIP

I suppose. My paycheck hitting the direct deposit does that better than I can.

Skip takes a draw off his cigarette.

SKIP (CONT'D)

Have you got any plans to celebrate after a week in the outback?

HENRY

I have a date tomorrow night. Kinda looking forward to it.

SKIP

Where'd you meet this one?

Henry looks down, a little hesitant to say. Then

HENRY

An online dating site. In the chat room.

SKIP

Good ol' Henry, the bearded Romeo. Always looking for love. Love is like winning lottery tickets: when you stop looking for it is when it shows up, ready or not.

Skip takes a long drag off his cigarette and stands up.

SKIP (CONT'D)

Oh well. Let's get on around this boundary. The shadows are getting long. Makes it hard to see through the instrument.

Skip begins setting up the instrument. Henry stands up and walks into the woods.

A SMALL CLEARING

Henry walks into a break in the trees where there are several suitcase-sized boulders. A dead deer lies at the edge of the clearing. Henry walks over and inspects the deer.

INSERT

The deer as seen from ground level. An opaque eye is open in the glazed stare of death. We see Henry's boot lightly nudging the animals head.

BACK TO SCENE

HENRY

(yelling over his shoulder)
You're gonna love this Skip.
Another dead deer.

SKIP (O.S.)

What kind of rack has it got?

HENRY

It's a four point.

SKIP (O.S.)

Does it stink?

Skip walks into view behind Henry, who turns and says

HENRY

No. It's like it just died.

SKIP

Not a mark on 'im. This is the third or fourth one of these we've seen this year, isn't it?

HENRY

Yeah. I called wildlife resources about it. They said it was Epi, uh, zootic hemmor-, uh, hemmo-rrha-ga-ic, uh, something or other. EHD. It's a virus.

SKIP

I don't know if I'll be eating any deer meat when my brother kills one. And he will definitely offer us some. He always does.

Skip turns and walks off screen, back to the instrument. Henry stands holding the rod, facing back toward Skip.

INTERCUT BETWEEN HENRY AND SKIP

HENRY

Can you see me here?

SKIP

(looking through the lens)

Left a foot. There's a couple trees
on the line.

Henry steps a foot left.

HENRY

How's this.

SKIP

I see you good.

Henry kneels down and hammers a hub and tack into the ground. He picks up the rod and holds it plumb on the tack.

HENRY

I'm ready.

SKIP

I'm looking.

Skip aligns on the prism atop the rod and takes the shot.

SKIP (CONT'D)

Good.

HENRY

Come ahead.

Henry turns and walks about two hundred feet to where the land breaks down a steep slope, covered in mountain laurel and now darkened by early evening shadows.

He reaches out his hand and shakes an ancient fence post, then pulls the deed out of his bag and reads something that causes him to wince. From his expression we can tell the property line breaks here into the rugged, densely vegetated terrain down the ravine.

Henry unsheathes his machete and chops into the laurel. Coming through a small thicket, he breaks into a slightly more open area.

Looking down slope into the shadows thirty feet away he sees a large APE standing quietly near a hemlock tree. The ape is covered in shaggy, long red hair. Its shoulders are broad and powerful. Its arms are disproportionately long. Henry

(CONTINUED)

screams, mouth agape, stepping back. He trips over some of the chopped brush and falls backward, never taking his eyes off the ape. The ape looks curiously at Henry with an assessing gaze, then turns and walks calmly into the shadows.

SKIP(O.S.)

What th' hell? Henry? What's the matter?

Skip comes running into view. He kneels down where Henry still sits where he fell, gasping for breath and trembling with fear.

CUT TO:

INT. RIDGELINE INN - NIGHT

The local eating establishment, the Ridgeline Inn boasts walls of knotty pine paneling decorated with numerous mounted deer heads and largemouth bass preserved in mid jump. There are large windows across the front wall. There is a mix of booths and tables. A wood bar separates the kitchen and dining areas.

Henry and Skip are seated at a booth. They are still wearing their work clothes. They are looking over menus. TRACY, their waitress, late-thirties, walks up to the table carrying their drinks on a tray. She is pretty in a plain sort of way, think Diane Lane in *Perfect Storm*.

TRACY

Alright, here's your drinks.

She sits a bottle and a glass of water in front of Henry and a glass of tea in front of Skip.

TRACY (cont'd)

You boys decided what y'all want yet?

SKIP

I'll have the meat loaf, with mashed potatoes and turnip greens.

HENRY

And I'll have a cheeseburger with fries. And turnip greens.

TRACY

Well, they 'law, you must've worked up an appetite today.

(CONTINUED)

Henry looks down, faintly smiling, clearly uncomfortable with any extra attention.

SKIP

Ol' Henry here saw a boogy man in the woods today! Or would you call it a Bigfoot?

TRACY

(incredulous)

A bigfoot?

Henry leans back in protest, hands forward, palms up.

HENRY

I'm not sure what I saw. It was late. There were lots of shadows. I really can't say what it was.

SKIP

(to Tracy)

Any talk of bears around these parts?

TRACY

Well, there's been a couple of people say they've seen what they thought was a bear. They've let a few loose at Big South Fork. Lord only knows why they'd want to. It ain't too far from here.

Henry's eyes light up at the mention of bears in the area.

HENRY

It was probably a bear foraging on some berries or something.

TRACY

Could be.

Tracy turns to walk away then pauses, turning back to Skip and Henry.

TRACY (CONT'D)

Ya know, my uncle said one time that he saw a big ape or something up on Yonah Ridge. He was out hunting and he said he saw it moving around in some bushes. But he drank a lot when he was hunting. Or doing anything else for that matter. He told that story one time

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TRACY (CONT'D) (cont'd)
and after that if anybody asked him
about it he would just tell 'em he
saw a bear.

HENRY
Do you think he just said that to
keep from having to talking about
it?

TRACY
I don't know but I do think that to
his dying day he believed he saw an
ape up on Yonah Ridge.

The conversation lulls for a beat as the story sinks in.

TRACY (CONT'D)
Well I better go put your orders
in.

Tracy turns and walks off. Skip stares at her butt as she goes.

SKIP
I could watch her walk away all
day.

Henry takes a slow sip of beer and stares out the window,
lost in thought.

EXT. PASTURE - DAY

An SUV marked LYTTLE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT is stopped
at a gate at the side of SINKING CREEK ROAD. SHERIFF WAYNE
CASE get's out of the driver's seat and opens a metal gate.
Fifty, thick-set like a wrestler, the sheriff wears a
Stetson hat and buffs a shine onto his boots every morning
but doesn't hesitate to get muddy in the line of duty if
that's what the situation requires. He gets back in the
vehicle.

INT. SUV - DAY - TRAVELING

Riding with Sheriff Case across the pasture is BUDDY
MacFARLAND, sixty-ish, a business man and southern
gentleman, fond of paisley bow ties and suspenders. He
doesn't feel dressed unless he's wearing a sports jacket.
His accent is marked by erudition. When he speaks the vowels
dominate with just the suggestion of a final consonant.

(CONTINUED)

Also in the SUV is JIMMY FINNEY, fifties, and wearing glasses more commendable for function rather than fashion. He is county executive and the principal of Lytle County High. Upbeat, Finney is the perpetual booster, attending every home football and basketball game played at Lytle County High.

As the trio drives across the pasture we see cattle grazing. Thick forest and a steep escarpment loom about two hundred yards in the distance.

MACFARLAND

Sure is a long way out here.

CASE

This is a remote part of a remote county. That's why Springwater was able to buy up so much land back in the Thirties.

FINNEY

And this land is fertile. It's been clear cut twice.

MACFARLAND

And all these trees have grown back?

CASE

They didn't cut all of it. Some of it was too steep. There's still virgin timber in the hollows.

MACFARLAND

And then they just up and moved the operation to Mississippi? Why?

FINNEY

Pines, Mr. MacFarland. Pines. For making paper. Hardwood logging just isn't what it used to be.

EXT. PASTURE - DAY

The SUV pulls up next to a white pickup with a camper top parked at the edge of the woods. Henry and Skip are standing next to the truck, in stark contrast to the uniform and business attire of the occupants of the SUV, Henry and Skip have on their work clothes, complete with heavy boots and machetes hanging from sheaths on their belts.

Case, MacFarland, and Finney step out of the SUV and walk a few steps toward Skip and Henry who have taken a few steps toward them. Handshakes and general introductions.

(CONTINUED)

FINNEY

Mr. MacFarland, Henry and Skip are here conducting a survey of the property Springwater is looking to sell.

MACFARLAND

I see. Are there other parties interested in the property?

FINNEY

Not really. We just thought having a completed survey might help you in making your decision on whether or not you wanted to invest.

Case looks slightly agitated, wanting to speak up. He quickly glances at Henry and Skip, judging whether or not he should say anything in their presence.

CASE

Actually there is a conservation group interested in lobbying the State to purchase the property.

MacFarland raises an eyebrow.

MACFARLAND

Is there something particularly special about this land?

CASE

There's a waterfall back in there a ways. Virgin Falls. Comes out of a cave and falls into a sink hole.

MACFARLAND

Oh, I see.

(turns to Henry and Skip)

Well, let's get on with it. Would you gentlemen mind walking us in a ways so we could get the lay of the land?

HENRY

Of course.

Henry leads them up the chopped trail into the forest. Skip brings up the rear.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - DAY

Once past the forest edge the woods open up. The five men walk perhaps three hundred yards deep into the forest. The going is easy for Henry, Skip, and Case, all of whom are wearing boots and walk with the sure footing of men used to traveling over trails. Finney and MacFarland slip and stumble with unsure footing in their wingtips and loafers.

They stop at a small overlook of bare sandstone. They stand a moment gazing into the deep gorge below.

MACFARLAND

(bracing himself against a tree)

This certainly is some rugged terrain.

FINNEY

Yes, but it is plateau so it's relatively flat. A little dynamite and this could be made level for parking lots. Maybe even some buildings with a Bavarian flavor, like over in Gatlinburg.

MACFARLAND

Yes. As we've discussed I'm controlling partner in the Kuntry Kitchen franchise. I could imagine some scenic vistas out here for patrons of our buffet. Tied in with some shopping, maybe even some light amusement park type rides.

MacFarland takes a deep breath, taking in the fine air, surveying the view from the overlook.

MACFARLAND (CONT'D)

Yes, there is space out here for a man to create his own little world. Just like Disney World.

Case has been listening with interest to MacFarland's vision but rolls his eyes and turns away at the allusion to Disney World.

FINNEY

Mr. MacFarland, build it and they will come. People around here need restaurants and places to shop.

(CONTINUED)

CASE

They need the jobs more than anything else.

Henry shifts, anxious to get the tour over with so he and Skip can finish their survey and go back to Nashville.

HENRY

The bulk of the thousand acres lies behind us.

Henry turns and fans his arm indicating the broad expanse of woods behind them.

HENRY (CONT'D)

It's mostly undulating terrain that slopes down at one point to a small creek.

MACFARLAND

Mr. Davidson, have either of you gentlemen seen anything out here that would be of interest to environmentalists and conservationists?

Henry looks down at the ground, caught off guard by the seemingly strange question, almost flummoxed as his strange encounter suddenly replays in his memory. A pregnant pause then Skip speaks up.

SKIP

Just trees Mr. MacFarland. Just lots of trees.

EXT. CITY STREET, NASHVILLE - DAY

The white surveying truck makes its way down a bustling street. People walk along the sidewalk past trendy shops and patrons enjoy drinks and sunshine on restaurant patios. Occasional Halloween decorations hang from awnings and windows are painted with skeletons and ghosts. Through the windshield we see Henry driving as Skip rides in the passenger seat.

INT. SURVEYING OFFICE - DAY

Looking down the hall we see the door open and Henry, followed by Skip, walks in carrying surveying gear - two yellow instrument cases and tripod legs. Just after walking through the door they turn left into a room.

EQUIPMENT ROOM

Henry and Skip each opens an instrument case and remove batteries from the instrument. Skip plugs a battery into a charger then turns as Henry hands him the other battery. As they are doing this a man, CUMMINGS, stops in the doorway. Early fifties, he owns the company and is a surveyor too, but far from heavy pants and muddy boots, he has graduated to dress shirts and slacks. He has a high-five personality and likes to reward good work.

CUMMINGS

Well, how'd it go out there?

HENRY

Good. Skip worked his magic again. Closed out the boundary within eight tenths.

CUMMINGS

Eight tenths? Wow, I think that was about fifteen thousand feet, wasn't it?

Skip blushes as the talk of his good work.

SKIP

Something like that. It was pretty easy. A lot of it was fairly open.

CUMMINGS

Well good deal. I think that calls for a toast. Y'all come meet me in my office.

Cummings turns and walks down the hall and Henry and Skip follow him.

CUMMINGS' OFFICE

Old hardwood floors creak as they walk into Cummings' office. A large window looks out onto bustling 21st Avenue. Cummings desk is dominated by a large computer monitor. Stacks of papers and rolled plats and maps compete for the remaining space.

Cummings reaches into a drawer of his desk and pulls out a bottle of George Dickel whiskey. He pours three modest shots into paper cups then hands one each to Henry and Skip.

CUMMINGS

(holding up his shot)

To a job well done!

(CONTINUED)

HENRY and SKIP Cheers!

All three men drink their shot and loudly exhale because it burns.

SKIP
(Slapping Henry on the
shoulder)
That should help out ol' Henry's
nerves!

CUMMINGS
What?

HENRY
It's nothing.

SKIP
Henry thinks he saw a bigfoot as we
were finishing up yesterday
afternoon.

CUMMINGS
A bigfoot?

SKIP
A bigfoot!

HENRY
It was probably a bear. It was
late. There were lots of shadows
and it was in some bushes.

SKIP
Well, whatever it was shook you up
pretty good. But we're back in
civilization now. Maybe that girl
you're going out with tonight will
help you put it out of your mind.

HENRY
Actually, she texted me earlier and
cancelled.

SKIP
Then go find you another one.
(turns to face Cummings)

Boss and Boss, I'm outta here.
Y'all have a good weekend.

(CONTINUED)

CUMMINGS

You too.

Skip turns and walks out the door.

HENRY

I guess I'll be going too.

CUMMINGS

Yeah, you've been out in the boonies all week, go out and have a great weekend.

HENRY

You too.

Henry turns to walk out but Cummings calls out to him from behind his desk.

CUMMINGS

Henry -

HENRY

Yeah boss?

CUMMINGS

You really think you saw something out there. I can tell.

HENRY

It was probably just a bear or something. I really can't say what it was.

CUMMINGS

That's interesting.

Cummings looks at Henry, as if studying him. It's uncomfortable.

CUMMINGS (CONT'D)

I hope I'm not over stepping my boundaries but it might be best if you don't tell too many people about this. If that development up there goes through it promises to give us a lot of work. With the housing market still down that might make the next couple of years a lot easier for us. I know there are conservation groups interested in that property.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

That would explain MacFarland's question this morning. He asked if Skip and I had seen any interesting features on the land.

CUMMINGS

What did you tell him?

HENRY

I was a little tongue tied. But Skip told him all we had seen was trees. Lots of trees.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Henry sits alone at the bar nursing a beer, staring into the mirror, watching the back of the bar, lost in thought. He sighs then turns and looks around. He does a double take, recognizing someone across the room. Henry pulls out his phone and looks down.

INSERT

Online dating web site. On the screen is the profile, including the picture of a pretty girl. AMBER is the name on the profile.

BACK TO SCENE

Henry looks down at the screen and back at whatever has captured his attention. AMBER, early twenties, glasses and thrift shop clothes, a hipster among hipsters, stands at a high top table casually chatting and laughing with friends. Henry walks up to her.

HENRY

Hi, Amber? I was looking forward to seeing you tonight.

Amber turns and, recognizing Henry, her eyes grow wide with surprise and a hint of horror.

AMBER

Oh...Henry. I didn't know you hung out here.

HENRY

On occasion.

There is an awkward silence.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY (CONT'D)

Hey, I can see your busy. I was just wanting to see if you still wanted to meet up sometime for a beer or something.

AMBER

(facing him but not making eye contact)

Yeah, I don't know. You're a nice guy and all but-

HENRY

But what?

AMBER

I'm kind of experimenting with women right now.

One of the girls at the table snorts in amusement.

AMBER (CONT'D)

That's why I left my boyfriend.

At this point a BEARDED GUY wearing a flannel shirt, horn rimmed glasses, and skinny jeans walks up and put his hand on the small of Amber's back in a possessive manner.

BEARDED GUY

Is everything alright?

Amber starts to say something but Henry speaks first, addressing both Amber and the Bearded Guy.

HENRY

Yeah, everything is fine. Y'all have a good night.

Henry turns and walks away toward the door.

INT. HENRY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

A small kitchen in an old house. White metal cabinets and a large white enameled sink hearken back to the last time it was redecorated, ca. 1957. Henry sits at the metal kitchen table intently reading something on the screen of his laptop. Two beer bottles are on the table. One is empty, Henry sips from the other.

INSERT - LAPTOP SCREEN

CRYPTOWATCH web site. The screen is full of blog-like posts describing encounters with Bigfoot, skunk apes, and other strange creatures.

BACK TO SCENE

Henry sits at the kitchen table reading the web page.

INSERT - CRYPTOWATCH WEB SITE

We see the post as if we were scanning through it. The word Lytle County pop out at us. At the bottom the name JOSEPH WHEELER is given as the name of the investigator who documented the account. His email address appears under his name.

EXT. SUBURBAN BACKYARD - DAY

JOSEPH WHEELER, early sixties, a paunchy man with a thick shock of white hair, wearing khaki trousers and a button up short sleeve shirt. He moves deliberately, trimming back a rose bush, methodically making each cut at the proper place. The sun is shining brightly.

Wheeler pauses momentarily, pulling a handkerchief from his back pocket to wipe the sweat off his brow. He admires the three roses he has cut. They are cream colored with a pink edge to the petal. Wheeler turns and walks toward the back door.

INT. WHEELER'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

We see a kitchen that is clean and spacious but slightly dated, with wallpaper on the walls and knickknacks on the counter that must have sat there for years, like the green ceramic frog that holds the wire scrubber in its gaping mouth. Wheeler walks onto the screen carrying three roses in a slender vase. He goes to the sink and fills the vase with water. He then turns and walks out of the room through another door.

HALLWAY

A wood framed 8x10 photograph of Wheeler and a his wife LUCY sits on book case shelf. It is a classic studio portrait with Wheeler sitting slightly behind her and a little higher. There is no date but the photograph seems to show Wheeler as he might have looked five years ago. We see Wheeler's hand come into view as he sits the vase on the shelf next to the photo. Wheeler stands back a moment contemplating the photo and the roses.

(CONTINUED)

WHEELER

Lucy, your roses did really good
this year.

Wheeler turns and walks on down the hall.

EXT. WHEELER'S BACKYARD PATIO - DAY

Wheeler sits sipping a refreshing glass of iced tea. He picks his smartphone up off the patio table and begins to sort through messages.

INSERT - WHEELER'S SMARTPHONE

On the screen we see a list of Wheeler's emails. One of them says HENRY DAVIDSON. We see Wheeler's thumb tap the screen to open the message.

INT. HENRY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

The blinds are down casting shadows, leaving the room darkened. A guitar sits in a stand in the corner. Concert posters and fine art prints decorate the walls. Henry sits on the couch watching a college football game. His smartphone rings and he picks it up.

WHEELER (O.S.)

May I speak to Henry Davidson?

HENRY

This is Henry.

WHEELER (O.S.)

Mr. Davidson, this is Joseph Wheeler. I understand you had something you wanted to discuss with me.

INT. JAVA GAIA COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Java Gaia is a coffee shop filled with hippie flair from the dread-locked baristas to the acoustic guitar that sits in the corner, available to anyone who wants to pick it up and play. Original paintings hang on the wall. The art shows more enthusiasm than technical ability. There is a bookshelf filled with old books and potted plants sit on the counter and hang from the ceiling. Henry and Wheeler are seated at a table next to a window. Handmade clay mugs sit on the table in front of them.

WHEELER

So, you say this encounter happened
in early evening?

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

Yes sir. The shadows were getting too long for us to keep going. It would have messed up our accuracy.

WHEELER

And you saw what looked like an ape. Did you smell anything? Especially any particularly foul odor?

HENRY

I caught a whiff of something that smelled like decaying flesh. But that's why I think maybe I ran across a bear or some scavenger eating something. Maybe another dead deer.

WHEELER

But you said the deer looked as if it had just died.

HENRY

That's right. And oddly, when we went back the next morning to finish the survey, it was gone.

WHEELER

Gone? Like it had been dragged off by something?

HENRY

No. I didn't see any tracks where anything had drug it. It was just gone. Like it had been picked up by something.

WHEELER

Not many coyotes or even mountain lions or bears just pick up a carcass and walk away with it.

HENRY

I know. But I just - can't believe...

Henry's voice trails off.

WHEELER

Henry, bear with me here. What is your educational background?

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

I have a degree in agriculture,
emphasis in soil science.

WHEELER

So you are an educated man. You
even have a background in science.

HENRY

Yes, but?

WHEELER

In school you were taught that
science advances through research
and that research occurs through
observation. And that as scientific
observers we have to be totally
impartial, only reporting what we
saw and the conditions under which
we saw it.

HENRY

Yes-

WHEELER

Henry, your story is intriguing.
You know what you saw. You spoke of
your fear and trembling at the
sight of it. You feared it because
it was something you had never
experienced but you've tried to
convince yourself that you didn't
see it because common sense says
that a large ape doesn't exist in
North America. Only wacky
conspiracy theorists and
self-professed UFO abductees really
believe in such nonsense.

Henry looks down into his coffee cup, listening to Wheeler's
pin point analysis, his lip quivers ever so slightly.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

Henry, too often common sense is
common misconception. People don't
know something because they've
never really investigated it. They
just parrot back what they've
heard. Because something goes
unacknowledged doesn't mean it
doesn't exist. Trying to ignore a
painful memory doesn't mean the
event never happened.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

I agree.
(sighs)
So now what?

WHEELER

I'd like you to take me to the
sight of your encounter.

HENRY

I think that would be good. I'm
available next Saturday.

WHEELER

Ah, Halloween! A perfect day for
our witch hunt.

Both men chuckle at Wheeler's joke.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

I hear there's a pretty waterfall
over that way as well. Maybe we can
check it out while we're there.

INTERSTATE HIGHWAY - DAY

Henry's TRUCK rolls down an entrance ramp and merges into
sparse traffic. The truck is a decade old, the paint
slightly faded, a film of gravel road dust covers the
fenders.

INT. HENRY'S TRUCK - DAY - TRAVELING

Henry drives, Wheeler rides in the passenger seat. Both men
takes sips from Java Gaia coffee cups.

WHEELER

We'll got off the Interstate at
Smithville won't we?

HENRY

Yeah, and from there head toward
Sparta on Seventy.

WHEELER

If memory serves that should take
us through Bon Aqua?

HENRY

Yes, sir. It will.

(CONTINUED)

WHEELER

And Bon Aqua is close to Yonah Ridge, right?

HENRY

About five miles as the crow flies.

They sit quietly for a moment. Then Wheeler takes a deep breath.

WHEELER

I had a feller email me earlier this week. He was out inspecting the power lines over around Bon Aqua.

HENRY

And?

WHEELER

He said he was walking out the right-of-way up to the crest of a hill when he felt like somebody was watching him. He turned around and there it was.

HENRY

An ape? Like the one I saw?

WHEELER

I suspect so. I interviewed him last night. As soon as I get it written up I'll post it to the CryptoWatch site.

Henry takes the deep breath of changing reality.

HENRY

Have you ever had two sightings in a week reported before?

WHEELER

No. I never have. I suspect something curious is going on over in Lytle County.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The sun shines bright as we once again soar above the autumnal woods and highlands of Lytle County. Yellow and red leaves seem to blaze at the peak of color. The sky is cobalt blue. Henry's truck rolls across the winding road which follows the Calkiller River.

EXT. PASTURE - DAY

The truck pulls up to the gate and we see Wheeler get out and open it. Henry pulls the truck through into the pasture and Wheeler dutifully closes the gate and gets back into the truck. They drive across the pasture till they reach the edge of the woods. Henry turns off the truck and they get out, stretching from the hour and a half drive over. They each grab a backpack from the truck bed and walk into the woods on the same trail Henry and Skip had used during their survey.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - DAY

Henry and Wheeler walk through the woods, each looking around enjoying the beautiful day. They arrive at the steep slope where Henry's encounter occurred.

HENRY

This is where it happened.

He points down the slope toward a thicket of mountain laurel.

HENRY (CONT'D)

That's where it was standing.
Upright. Like a man.

WHEELER

How tall do you think it was?

HENRY

I couldn't say for sure, but maybe
between and six and seven feet
tall.

Wheeler takes a few steps down the slope.

WHEELER

This is some steep terrain.

He stops and investigates a broken twig.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

There's a lot of disturbance here
but most of it looks like clean
cuts.

HENRY

Probably from where we chopped our
line.

Henry walks down the slope a short distance with Wheeler. Suddenly Wheeler stops and kneels down on a knee.

(CONTINUED)

WHEELER

Well, what do we have here?

Wheeler takes a small vial out of his backpack and pulls out the tweezers from his Swiss army knife.

INSERT

A clump of one inch white and brown hairs is caught on a rusted piece of barbed wire fence. We see Wheeler's hand holding the tweezers and gently removing the hairs.

BACK TO SCENE

Wheeler places the hairs in the vial and screws on the top.

WHEELER

Probably just a deer. But it's good to collect evidence. It's been over a week since your encounter. I imagine this is about the most interesting thing we're going to find.

Henry kicks his boot through the leaf litter in frustration.

HENRY

I knew we wouldn't find anything. Do you still believe me?

WHEELER

Of course. This is a highly disturbed area. And there's no good substrate for preserving foot prints. We couldn't have expected to find much. I just wanted to get an idea of the lay of the land.

Henry sighs.

HENRY

I guess I was hoping for some validation.

WHEELER

External validation doesn't come easy in the field of cryptozoology, Henry. Nature heals itself. Footprints, claw marks, scratches. None of that lasts very long. You just have to believe in yourself and know that you saw what you saw and that you aren't crazy.

(CONTINUED)

Wheeler pats Henry on the shoulder.

WHEELER (CONT'D)
Now let's go get some lunch.

INT. RIDGELINE INN - DAY

Wheeler and Henry sit at a table by the window. Tracy walks over to take their order.

TRACY
Well, look who's back in our neck
of the woods!

HENRY
Tracy, this is my friend Mr.
Wheeler.

TRACY
Nice to meet you Mr. Wheeler.

WHEELER
Likewise, and please, call me Joe.

TRACY
Alright, Joe. What can I get for
you young men today?

Wheeler chuckles at this comment.

HENRY
I'll have the Calkiller pale ale
and a water. And a cheeseburger and
fries.

WHEELER
I'll have a sweet tea and a
cheeseburger and fries as well.

TRACY
Alrighty then, I'll get your drinks
right out to you.

Wheeler watches as Tracy walks away from the table.

WHEELER
She's a right pleasant young lady.

HENRY
She is. She was definitely a sight
for sore eyes at the end of a hot
day of surveying.

There is a longer than comfortable pause.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY (CONT'D)

The beer I ordered is brewed near here, in Sparta. It's good. You can try a sip of mine if you'd like.

WHEELER

I wondered about the name. You don't hear the word *calfkiller* outside these parts.

Wheeler adjusts his silverware and takes a deep breath.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

But I don't drink anymore. I haven't had a drink in seventeen years.

HENRY

That sounds specific.

WHEELER

It is. Just about all recovering alcoholics can tell you the day they quit drinking.

Tracy walks up to the table and sits their drinks in front of them. Henry stares awkwardly at his beer.

TRACY

You're burgers will be out in just a few minutes.

Tracy walks away.

HENRY

I'm sorry. I wouldn't have ordered a beer if I'd known.

WHEELER

Oh, don't worry about that. I was a whiskey drunk. Beer never bothered me. I drank it for years.

Henry cautiously takes a sip of his beer. Wheeler stares out the window and nervously twirls the silverware, still wrapped in a napkin, between his thumb and forefinger.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

Henry, I drank beer for years. I always enjoyed a cold one after mowing the grass or while I was grilling steaks.

Wheeler pauses as if deciding whether or not to go on.

(CONTINUED)

WHEELER (V.O.)

One day back 1991 my wife, Lucy was her name, Lucy and I were camping over in Savage Gulf, a little south of here. We had finished up supper and I was over at the creek scrubbing out some dishes. I was kneeling down at the creek and I suddenly had the strangest feeling that something was watching me. Not some wild animal. It was a different sensation. I felt the presence of another intelligence. And something stank to high heaven.

(Chuckles)

Well, I looked up and there it was, about twenty feet away from me, standing on the opposite bank.

EXT. DEEP WOODS AT CREEK - DAY - FLASHBACK

We see a younger, thinner Wheeler, dressed in khaki cargo pants and a checkered seersucker short sleeve button-up shirt bending down rubbing a sponge around a camping bowl. He suddenly winces his nose as if he smells something, then, looking across the creek he jumps back in horror.

BACK TO PRESENT

HENRY

What did it look like?

WHEELER

You should know. You've seen one for yourself.

HENRY

What did you do then? Did you tell your wife?

WHEELER

Yes I told her. And we got the hell out of there!

HENRY

I mean after that. When you got back home.

WHEELER

Oh. Yes, I did tell several of my closest friends. They believed that I thought I had seen something.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

But no one really believed it could be true?

WHEELER

No. And that's when I started to fester. I tried to forget about it. But when you have something you need to share you either talk to people about it or pour poison on it till you kill it. Or at least put it to sleep for a while. That's where the whiskey came in. Tennessee's finest psychiatrist or the Devil's greatest ally.

Wheeler pauses, tapping his fingers on the table, staring out the window. Just as Henry is about to say something to break the tension Wheeler interrupts him.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

The way I treated my wife when I was drunk. Mmmmm. I'll never forgive myself but I know she did.

Suddenly Tracy is placing the burgers on the table, breaking the melancholy spell.

TRACY

Here you go gentlemen. Enjoy!

Both men place the top bun on their burgers. Wheeler takes a bite.

WHEELER

Mercy! That is some kind of good!

FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER

Tracy comes back to the table to check on them. She sees that Henry has cleaned his plate.

TRACY

Looks liked you enjoyed it!

HENRY

Y'all have some good burgers. Me and Skip looked forward to coming here every night after we got out of the field.

Wheeler wipes his mouth after his last bite.

(CONTINUED)

WHEELER

That was mighty fine!

Tracy picks up his plate.

TRACY

Glad you like it.

The door opens and Sheriff Case and Finney walk into the restaurant. They sit at the table next to Henry and Wheeler. Case recognizes Henry's face.

CASE

Afternoon. Aren't you the surveyor who was out here week before last?

HENRY

Yes sir. We met out at Yonah Ridge with the developer.

FINNEY

That's right. And as I recall your name was-

HENRY

Henry. Henry Davidson.
(motions across the table)
And this is my friend Mr. Wheeler.

FINNEY

And what brings y'all over to Lytle County this fine day?

Henry pauses, knowing the truth will definitely not set him free in this instance. As Henry hesitates Wheeler chimes in.

WHEELER

Henry here had told me that he had been doing some work in a lovely place and when we met for coffee this morning I suggested we take advantage of the beautiful day and drive over and see it.

CASE

I see. Well I hope you enjoy Yonah Ridge.

There is a pause, as if the conversation is over but Wheeler's curiosity gets the better of him.

(CONTINUED)

WHEELER

Henry tells me that a large retail development is planned for the land in question.

FINNEY

The developer has expressed interest in it.

Case looks at Henry, assessing if he and Wheeler are friend or foe.

WHEELER

I suspect that such a project would be a real boon to the people in Lytle County. Lots of construction jobs, followed by sales positions.

CASE

You could say that.

WHEELER

Of course I hear that a conservation group is lobbying the state to buy some land on Yonah Ridge as well. It is a lovely area with healthy forests. I hear there's a beautiful waterfall out there. It would make a wonderful park.

Case cuts his eyes from Henry to Wheeler.

CASE

I'm sure it would. But we need jobs more than we need a park.

FINNEY

This is a depressed area Mr. Wheeler. People have to drive to surrounding counties to find work. And the county needs tax revenue.

Henry, who has sat silent under the gravitas of the older men, finally speaks up.

HENRY

A park would provide revenue wouldn't it? People coming in from out of town to camp and hike. A friend of mine who spent a summer with the National Park Service told me Denali National Park is more or

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HENRY (cont'd)

less the whole economy in that part of Alaska.

CASE

I wouldn't know anything about that. But I'll take my chances on stores and restaurants.

Case looks at Finney, communicating something without saying a word.

FINNEY

It was nice talking with you gentlemen but the sheriff and I have some business to discuss. We're going to move to the corner table now that its available.

EXT. RIDGELINE INN PARKING LOT - DAY

Henry and Wheeler walk into the bright sun twisting tooth picks in their mouths.

HENRY

Well that was an uncomfortable conversation.

WHEELER

Yes, I agree. The sheriff in particular was on the defensive. But they are just looking out for what's good for the people they represent.

HENRY

But they seemed so dismissive, almost hostile to the idea that a park could have a positive impact on this area.

WHEELER

Henry, last week I was talking with a colleague of mine who is from this area. People here will drive thirty miles to the Tyson plant in Monterey to pull the guts out of a chicken carcass for a dollar above minimum wage and they feel like they've got a good job. He told me others will drive sixty miles to work at the Nissan factory.

They get into Henry's truck.

INT. HENRY'S TRUCK - DAY - TRAVELING

HENRY

So you're in favor of the development out on Yonah Ridge? Even if it destroys the habitat of a North American ape unknown to science but all too real to us?

WHEELER

No Henry, I am not.

HENRY

But what about more economic opportunity for people in depressed areas?

WHEELER

Building this outlet mall and paying somebody minimum wage to sell out-of-towners a bunch of foreign made crap is a band-aid on a larger economic problem.

HENRY

But some of those would be good jobs. Management positions, facilities maintenance.

WHEELER

It all comes down to your personal land ethic. I'm a conservationist. If people want a job bad enough or if they want a McDonald's or Super Wal-Mart down the street from 'em then there's plenty of places they can move that already have that. And even if they don't want to move their kids probably will.

HENRY

It sounds like this development would destroy Yonah Ridge. I wonder if there could be any habitat set aside if there was ever any tangible, incontrovertible proof that this ape exists.

WHEELER

It would be interesting to see how the Endangered Species Act covered this situation. It would certainly be a win for cryptozoology.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

Wouldn't it just be zoology at that point?

WHEELER

You're right. But that is a conversation for a later time.

Wheeler yawns, covering his mouth as he does so.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

It's been a good, long, interesting day. I trust your driving Henry. I'm going to take a little nap.

He adjusts himself in the seat then leans his head on the window and closes his eyes.

EXT. LOGGING ROAD - DAY

THURMOND RAINES, mid-thirties, and his son WESLEY, six, come into view walking up an overgrown logging trail. Thurmond is dressed in camouflage pants and coat. Wesley wears jeans and a camouflage coat. Both wear orange stocking caps. The day is cold and gray. The leaves have fallen from the trees and their bare branches drip from recent precipitation.

WESLEY

Daddy, will the deer come out if it starts raining again?

THURMOND

I don't think the rain bothers them son.

WESLEY

I bet their fur keep them warm.

THURMOND

I'd imagine it does. I've seen them grazing in pastures when the snow was blowing all around them. Now let's be quiet. We're getting close to our deer stand.

WESLEY

(loud whisper)
Okay daddy.

They walk a little ways farther to the top of the ridge where they come to a

EXT. DEER STAND - DAY

Thurmond and Wesley climb a ladder up to a small platform secured to a tree. They speak in whispers.

THURMOND

Alright, let's get you buckled in so you'll be safe.

Thurmond helps Wesley put on a little vest with a loop in back. He then buckles a carabineer through the loop.

WESLEY

Now we'll wait and get us a deer!

THURMOND

Why, a big ol' buck could walk by at any minute!

Time passes. We see Thurmond and Wesley from a distance as the light changes around them through a short time-lapse sequence.

INSERT

We see a dripping tree limb close up.

BACK TO SCENE

The cold and damp are taking their toll. Wesley looks tired. They haven't seen a deer or anything else all afternoon.

WESLEY

Daddy, where are the deer? Why don't they come out?

THURMOND

They don't always come out son. Sometimes we just sit in the woods and wonder where they are.

WESLEY

But they have to eat. If we sat here every day would we see one?

THURMOND

Of course we would. They're all over the woods. The challenge of hunting is trying make sure you and me and the deer are all in the same place at the same time.

(CONTINUED)

WESLEY

I wish we had gone fishing.

THURMOND

But we don't always catch a fish.

WESLEY

But at least it's not cold.

Thurmond looks around puzzled and amused at the lack of logic in what Wesley just said.

WESLEY (CONT'D)

I've got to pee.

Thurmond takes a deep breath. The light is fading. There is a sudden rustling in a grove of mountain laurels.

WESLEY

Daddy, what was that? A deer?

THURMOND

I doubt it son. They don't usually make that much noise.

They both wrinkle their noses at a sudden foul odor.

WESLEY

Daddy! That smells awful!

THURMOND

I know. It does. I better go down and see if some scavenger has drug a carcass over here.

Thurmond slings his rifle on his shoulder and begins climbing down the ladder.

WESLEY

And after that I can go pee.

Now on the ground Thurmond steps away from the ladder and looks around. There is more violent rustling in the laurels. Thurmond slowly removes his rifle from his shoulder and holds it in his hands. From atop the stand we here Wesley in a panicked voice.

WESLEY (O.S.)

Daddy! What is it?

Thurmond cautiously steps toward the laurels. Suddenly a diseased deer stumbles through the brush and collapses at Thurmond's feet. He jumps back, with a startled gasp.

(CONTINUED)

WESLEY (O.S.) (cont'd)
Daddy! Daddy! I'm scared!

From the other side of the deer stand the APE crashes through the brush with a loud roar. It runs toward Thurmond who turns toward the ape with surprise and fear in his eyes.

The ape grabs Thurmond by the skull, clearly breaking his neck. Blood and flesh fly through the air as the ape throws Thurmond's body against trees where we hear bones snap before it falls to the ground with a heavy thud.

The ape stops, scans his surroundings. He sniffs the air. Wesley sits huddled atop the deer stand, shaking with fear, his glazed eyes staring into the looming darkness.

TOP OF DEER STAND

WESLEY
(trembling whisper)
Daddy? Daddy?

Wesley's eyes roll back under their lids and he passes out.

ON THE GROUND

The ape SNORTS then his eyes turn toward the deer. Groaning, the ape picks up a rock and smashes the deer's head. He lifts the shattered skull to his mouth and licks the contents.

The ape's agitated grunts subside as though he were an addict getting his fix. A few minutes pass and the ape calmly picks up the deer carcass and walks into the shadows.

INT. KENDALL RAINES' LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The room is dark except for a floor lamp next to a recliner. A can of soda and a bag of microwave popcorn sit on a table next to the recliner. A college football game plays low on the television. KENDALL RAINES, early forties, dozes in the recliner. Square framed and solid, but with a kind, gentle manner, he wears the same faded jeans and work boots on this Saturday as he wears at his job all week framing houses the next county over. Kendall's cell phone rings loudly startling him from his sleep.

KENDALL
Hello.

VOICE ON PHONE (O.S.)
Kendall, it's Kayla.

(CONTINUED)

KENDALL

Oh, hi-

KAYLA (O.S.)

Kendall, have you seen Thurmond and Wesley?

KENDALL

No, I-

KAYLA (O.S.)

They went hunting out at Yonah Ridge this afternoon and haven't come home or even called yet and it's nearly eight o'clock. He doesn't answer his phone. I'm worried.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - NIGHT

A new-ish full sized pickup driven by Kendall Raines rolls to a stop in front of a neatly maintained stick-built vinyl siding house. KAYLA RAINES, early thirties, plain but pretty with shoulder length hair and wearing blue jeans and a Carhartt hoodie, she runs out the front door to the street and opens the door of the truck.

INT. KENDALL'S TRUCK - NIGHT

KAYLA

Thanks for coming out.

KENDALL

No problem. We need to find my errant brother.

KAYLA

This just isn't like Thurmond to be out this late and not call or anything.

KENDALL

That's why we need to find him.

EXT. SINKING CREEK ROAD - NIGHT

As if we were riding along in Kendall's truck as it rolls slowly down the deserted country road, we see a parked truck fall under the beams of our headlights. The gravel crunches as we pull to the shoulder.

INT. KENDALL'S TRUCK - NIGHT

KENDALL

That's Thurmond's truck. Sit here
while I investigate.

EXT. SINKING CREEK ROAD - NIGHT

The truck door swings open and Kendall Raines gets out. He walks up to Thurmond's truck, looking it over for any signs of trouble. He faces the woods and cups his hands around his mouth megaphone style.

KENDALL

Thurmond? Wesley? Thurmond, are you
out there?

He walks back to his truck and opens the door.

INT. KENDALL'S TRUCK - NIGHT

KAYLA

Oh my God! What if they're still up
there? It's getting so cold.

KENDALL

I'm going to check it out. But I'm
going to call the sheriff's
department. If there's been an
accident I'll need help carrying
them out.

EXT. SINKING CREEK ROAD - NIGHT

We see headlights come around a bend and stop behind Kendall's truck. It is an SUV marked LYTTLE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT. DEPUTY CHRIS CHUMLEY opens the door and steps out of the vehicle. Late twenties, red headed and a little chubby, Chumley is the newest addition to Sheriff Case's five man department. He relies on his badge to command respect as he hopes this new position of authority will help him better understand his place in the world. Chumley walks up to Kendall who is standing on the side of the road. They shake hands.

KENDALL

The trail up to Thurmond's deer
stand is over here. It's an old
logging road.

Chumley clicks a flashlight on and off three times.

(CONTINUED)

CHUMLEY

I'm ready.

EXT. LOGGING ROAD - NIGHT

The men walk up the steep trail in darkness with just the beams of flashlights weakly penetrating the thick forest around them. They are both winded by the steep climb.

CHUMLEY

So you think they're still out here?

KENDALL

I wouldn't have us both out here freezing our ass off if I didn't.

They take a few more steps.

KENDALL (cont'd)

His deer stand is just a little farther on at the top of the ridge. If they're up there they should be able to hear us from here.

Kendall stops and cups his hands around his mouth.

KENDALL (cont'd)

Thurmond? Wesley?

They listen for a response. SILENCE.

KENDALL (cont'd)

Thurmond? Are you out here?

They listen again. Then faintly they hear Wesley's weak voice.

WESLEY (O.S.)

I'm up here. Uncle Kendall...

KENDALL

Wesley?

WESLEY (O.S.)

Uncle Kendall. I'm scared.

KENDALL

I'll be right there son!

EXT. DEER STAND - NIGHT

Kendall Raines and Chumley come crashing loudly through the underbrush. Kendall runs to the deer stand and climbs up the ladder.

TOP OF DEER STAND

Wesley is huddled and frail looking. Kendall picks him up, wrapping his arms around him.

KENDALL

Where's your daddy? Can you tell me
where Thurmond is?

Wesley doesn't speak. He is shivering and whimpering then begins to cry.

KENDALL (cont'd)

It's okay son. We'll get you down
to your momma.

Amid Wesley's sobs we are startled by a loud gasp down on the ground.

CHUMLEY (O.S.)

Oh my god!

ON THE GROUND

We see the beam of the flashlight move up the length of Thurmond Raines' crumpled body and come to rest on his face which is torn away partially exposing his skull.

EXT. SINKING CREEK ROAD - DAWN

The side of the road at the mouth of the old logging trail. There are two Lytle County Sheriff's Department SUV's and Kendall Raines' pickup. Thurmond Raines' pickup is still there as well. Sheriff Case stands next to Kendall Raines sipping coffee from a thermos cup. A thermos sits on the hood of the vehicle. Chumley and another DEPUTY stand off to the side talking, hands in their pockets, burning nervous energy by jangling their keys and toeing circles in the gravel with their boots.

CASE

I bet this is hard for Kayla. Has
Wesley said anything about what
happened?

(CONTINUED)

KENDALL

No, Sheriff. He was sleeping,
sedated, when I left the hospital.

CASE

I know Kayla wants him to be able
to rest and all but-

KENDALL

Wayne, when we get up there you'll
see. Let's not push Wesley too hard
right now. He went through hell out
here last night.

CASE

I understand.

Abruptly we hear the sound of an engine and see headlights
coming toward the parked vehicles. It is an ambulance marked
LYTLE COUNTY EMS.

CASE (cont'd)

Here's Luke and Jim. I guess we're
ready to go.

Case shakes the last drops of coffee out of the cup and
screws the cup to the top of the thermos. The ambulance
crunches to a halt behind the other vehicles. LUKE SUDDERTH,
early-thirties, an Army infantryman who's experienced
combat. He is a country boy who has seen the world and that
has made him love his own postage stamp of earth even more.
JIM GAITHER,, mid-thirties, in shape but gaining the slight
gut of middle age. Friends since elementary school, on the
job Jim and Luke move in unison like each anticipates the
other's every move.

Luke opens the back door of the ambulance and Jim pulls out
a stretcher. Each carrying one end of the stretcher, they
walk up to where the other men are assembled.

CASE (cont'd)

(nodding to each)

Luke. Jim. We'll be heading up this
logging road.

Case turns to the group.

CASE (cont'd)

Everybody ready?

Grunts of uneasy acknowledgement.

(CONTINUED)

CASE (cont'd)
Okay then. Let's go.

EXT. LOGGING TRAIL - DAY

The men trudge up the steep logging trail. The sky has lightened with the sunrise. Kendall Raines walks in front followed by Case, then Luke and Jim carrying the stretcher. The two deputies bring up the rear.

EXT. DEER STAND - DAY

We are looking down the trail and see the men walk into view. Kendall leads the men over to where Thurmond Raines' crumpled body lies in the leaf litter covered in frost.

KENDALL
Here he is Sheriff.

Looking at his brother's body, then turning away, Kendall becomes emotional.

CASE
Okay Kendall. Let us handle this.
You can go back to be with Kayla
and Wesley if you'd like.

KENDALL
I just wanted to make sure we get
him off this godforsaken ridge
before the scavengers get to him.

CASE
And we will. You know we'll show
your brother every respect.

KENDALL
Thanks Wayne. Thanks.

Kendall bends over and starts to pick up Thurmond's rifle.

CASE
Kendall, I promise I'll get that to
you. But we need to get a few
pictures of everything just like it
is right now.

Kendall stiffly rises back up.

KENDALL
Sure Wayne. I understand.

Case turns to the other men.

(CONTINUED)

CASE

Deputy Tarpley, take some pictures
before we move Thurmond's body.

The men step out of the way of the photos.

CHUMLEY (O.S.)

Sheriff! Sheriff! You better have a
look at this.

The men all jerk their heads toward Chumley's excited
command. Chumley's face is screwed into an astonished
grimace as Kendall and Case walk up behind him.

CASE

What is it Chumley?

Looking down on the ground we see a row of three large
human-like footprints in a muddy depression.

CASE (cont'd)

What in God's name...

INT. TELEVISION NEWSROOM - NIGHT

Amid a cacophony of assorted synthesized sharps and sevenths
that make up the theme song, we see the anchor desk with an
attractive anchor woman, late forties, short hair.

SUPERIMPOSE - "DEMETRIA KALODIMOS"

DEMETRIA

Good evening everyone and welcome
to Channel Four News at Six.

The camera zooms out and we see a screen behind the anchor
desk. On the screen is a reporter, IRIS DEVONKAMP, wearing a
Northface parka. Her eyes express focus, intelligence, even
a bit of impatience as she waits for the story to be pitched
her way. Her hair glows with a healthy sheen, her teeth are
immaculate. She is the sort of television news reporter that
inspires single men to watch the news weeknights between six
and seven.

DEMETRIA (CONT'D)

We start with breaking news out of
rural Lytle County where last night
a deer hunter was killed in a
gruesome attack. Our Iris Devonkamp
is there.

(CONTINUED)

IRIS

Good evening Demetria. Behind me you can see the sheriff's department police cars. They are parked at the bottom of a logging trail that leads to the scene of the attack. And as I understand they will keep deputies posted throughout the night to safeguard any evidence.

CUT TO:

IRIS'S VIDEO OF THE WOODS THEN THE PRESS CONFERENCE

IRIS (V.O.)

Thirty-six year old Thurmond Raines and his six-year-old son came into these woods yesterday afternoon to hunt deer and spend time for some father and son bonding. But a trip that was supposed to create happy memories ended in tragedy.

PRESS CONFERENCE - DAY - RECORDED

Sheriff Case stands under a dripping tent behind two microphones and three cell phones used as recording devices. Beside him is DAVID HIX, early fifties sporting a black mustache with streaks of gray. He wears a uniform, grey shirt and dark green cargo pants. On his chest there is a badge and on his shoulder a prominent patch of the TENNESSEE WILDLIFE RESOURCES AGENCY logo.

CASE

We speculate that Mr. Raines was killed in some sort of animal attack. For that reason I've enlisted the help of David Hix with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency.

INT. HENRY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Henry is standing directly in front of the television in the glow of a wall lamp in the corner. He slowly lowers a bottle of beer from his lips and listens in astonishment.

BACK TO PRESS CONFERENCE

CASE

We will be keeping the area closed until our investigation is complete.

INT. MACFARLAND'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The room boasts wood floors and is well appointed with high end furniture. Buddy MacFarland stands by a small table pouring scotch from a fancy decanter into a glass with one ice cube. His head is turned slightly toward the television where the news story plays at low volume as he pours.

BACK TO PRESS CONFERENCE

CASE

At this time I believe it is in everyone's best interest to stay off of Yonah Ridge.

INT. WHEELER'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Wheeler stands beside a waist high wall partition wiping his hands on a dish towel. He looks into the darkened living room where we see the flicker of the television and hear the news coverage.

BACK TO NEWSROOM

Demetria is turned toward the screen where Iris is reporting live.

DEMETRIA

Iris, did the sheriff give any indication as to the type of wounds the victim suffered?

IRIS

No, Demetria. The Sheriff was pretty vague on details. But one man who spoke with me on condition of anonymity told me the wounds inflicted were horrific, those are his words, not mine.

DEMETRIA

And the little boy, has he said what he saw?

(CONTINUED)

IRIS

I asked that same question but the Sheriff said the hunter's son was too traumatized to be questioned as of this afternoon.

DEMETRIA

Such a strange and sad story.

She turns toward the camera.

DEMETRIA (CONT'D)

In other news...

INT. WHEELER'S OFFICE - DAY

The office of the Director of Water Resources, there are windows and a houseplant overflows out of a hanging pot. Wheeler's ASSISTANT, mid-twenties, dressed in slacks and a button-up collared shirt stands in front of Wheeler's desk. Wheeler is sorting through a folder, irate.

WHEELER

That sum'bitch has been falsifying his turbidity readings for five months! A water treatment operator like that could make a whole community sick!

He pushes the folder across the desk to the assistant who picks it up.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

Fine him, fine the municipality, and schedule a hearing. We're going to take his water treatment plant operators license.

The Assistant turns and walks out. Just as he leaves the phone on Wheeler's desk rings.

WHEELER

Water Resources, Wheeler speaking.

EXT. SINKING CREEK ROAD - DAY

David Hix stands by his large, white government pickup truck. A TWRA logo is prominently displayed on the door.

HIX

Joe, it's David Hix.

(CONTINUED)

WHEELER

Well, David. Didn't I see you on the TV last night?

HIX

Yeah, that's what I'm calling about.

WHEELER

Yes? And how may I be of help?

HIX

You're still part of that bigfoot research outfit aren't you?

WHEELER

Yes, and as I recall you've never thought too much of it from a wildlife resources perspective.

HIX

Can you come over to Lytle County this afternoon, to the crime scene. I've got something you might be interested in.

EXT. RIDGELINE INN, PARKING LOT - DAY

Wheeler walks up to Hix who is standing by his truck. The men shake hands.

HIX

Good to see you.

WHEELER

I don't believe I've seen you since that GIS training back in the spring.

HIX

It's been awhile.

INT. HIX'S TRUCK - DAY - TRAVELING

WHEELER

So I'm terribly curious about what you called me out here for.

HIX

It's for the investigation into the death of that deer hunter.

(CONTINUED)

WHEELER

Yes, that was something else. I understand the man's son was with him but has been too upset to talk.

HIX

Joe, please don't tell anyone else, but the boy has talked. And what he described corroborated what I'm about to show you.

EXT. DEER STAND - DAY

As though we were at ground level, we see Wheeler and Hix walking toward us. Small limbs slightly clutter the field of view.

HIX

Here they are.

Wheeler and Hix stand in front of the muddy depression where four large human-like footprints are clearly visible.

WHEELER

Oh me! These are the best prints I have ever seen! Do you mind if I get a picture?

Hix looks around.

HIX

No but make it quick. Sheriff Case really doesn't want word of any of this getting out.

Wheeler lays his Swiss army knife on the ground near one of the tracks and takes a three quick photos.

HIX (cont'd)

Hurry, put up your phone.

WHEELER

Wh-

Deputy Chumley brusquely walks up to Hix.

CHUMLEY

Who's this?

HIX

This is my colleague Joseph Wheeler with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation.

(CONTINUED)

CHUMLEY

(relaxing)

Oh, okay. The sheriff just doesn't want anyone coming into the crime scene.

WHEELER

Don't worry son, I'm just here to offer Officer Hix some advice.

There is a commotion in the woods as three more people come up the trail. Sheriff Case walks in front with Finney and MacFarland following behind, thrashing at the bare twigs of the underbrush as they try to walk two abreast. Case sees Hix and Wheeler and immediately walks over to them with a stern look on his face.

CASE

David, I was hoping we could minimize the number of people we brought up here.

HIX

Sheriff, this is my coll-

CASE

Mr. Wheeler and I have met.

WHEELER

Yes, around the end of October I believe at that wonderful restaurant you have up here.

MACFARLAND (O.S.)

Got-dammit its slick!

MacFarland stumbles out of the brush with Finney directly behind him. They walk up to where the other men are standing..

FINNEY

Mr. MacFarland, this is David Hix, the TWRA agent who is helping us out with the investigation.

Finney turns to Wheeler.

FINNEY (CONT'D)

And I believe we've met but I don't recall your name.

(CONTINUED)

WHEELER

Wheeler. Joseph Wheeler. I'm with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation.

MACFARLAND

Well Sheriff, I see you've assembled quite the group of specialists.

CASE

Mr. Wheeler is a guest of Officer Hix.

MACFARLAND

Mr. Wheeler I understand your people are interested in establishing a park up here.

WHEELER

Yes, there is a beautiful waterfall just a about half a mile from here, as the crow flies. It would be the crown jewel of a state natural area where people could go hiking and camping.

MACFARLAND

Sounds like you have it all planned out.

MacFARLAND turns to Case.

MACFARLAND (cont'd)

Sheriff, I understand you have found some sort of tracks? You think they are pertinent to the investigation?

CASE

I can only imagine that these tracks have something to do with what happened up here.

MacFarland walks around the others to get a look at the tracks.

MACFARLAND

And what sort of tracks do you suppose they are? A bear, a man in those shoes that look like gloves?

(CONTINUED)

HIX

They're not a bear.

WHEELER

They're the tracks of some sort of ape. And not some pongid ape escaped from a zoo. These look like human feet. But much larger.

MACFARLAND

An ape? In Tennessee? Whoever heard of such a thing.

WHEELER

I've interviewed over a dozen people who have seen them. One encounter happened within a mile from here last month.

Finney and Case look at Wheeler, making the connection with their first meeting. Wheeler notices.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

That's right Sheriff. That's why I was here with that young man in the restaurant. He's a surveyor and he had an encounter while working out here on Yonah Ridge.

MACFARLAND

That's an intriguing pass time you have Mr. Wheeler.

Turns to Case.

MACFARLAND (CONT'D)

Sheriff, please tell me you have a more plausible explanation than that the deer hunter was killed by Bigfoot.

CASE

His name was Thurmond Raines. His brother is a friend of mine. He had a wife and young son who loved him very much. His son woke up last night screaming something about a hairy monster.

Case walks up to MacFarland, staring him directly in the eye.

(CONTINUED)

CASE (CONT'D)

I'm going to keep my options open until I hear more of what Mr. Wheeler has to say. I owe it to Mr. Raines' family.

MACFARLAND

Look Sheriff, we all want to help Mr. Raines' family find peace of mind about what happened up here. But I'm keenly interested in investing in this community and I would appreciate it if you kept the police work as professional as possible and tried not to cause too many looky-loos and curiosity seekers to impede the sale of this land.

MacFarland exhales and seems to relax. He looks at his watch. Finney looks at his watch as well.

FINNEY

Gentlemen, Mr. MacFarland and I have an appointment at the bank at five o'clock. And it's going to be getting dark soon. If you'll excuse us.

CASE

Deputy Chumley, please escort Mr. MacFarland and Mr. Finney back to the vehicles. We'll be down shortly.

MacFarland and Finney follow Chumley back into the woods down the trail. As they recede into the forest Case takes a breath then turns to Wheeler.

CASE (CONT'D)

Mr. Wheeler, convincing the people you serve that one of their own has been killed by Bigfoot is a hard sell.

WHEELER

Yes Sheriff, I imagine it would be. I don't envy your position one bit.

CASE

Have any of the people you've interviewed ever described a violent encounter?

(CONTINUED)

WHEELER

Not so far. In fact, everyone I've spoken with talked about how calm the creature seemed to be.

Hix pulls a vial from his shirt pocket and holds it out for Case and Wheeler to have a look at.

HIX

I've collected these hairs from the scene. They don't look like deer or anything else I've ever seen. More importantly there is follicle on them. I'm going to have the lab test them for the EHD virus.

Case looks at Hix questioningly.

HIX (cont'd)

Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease. There has been an outbreak among several deer populations in the state. We also found it in some coyotes out in Humphreys County. They had become real aggressive toward cattle and even killed three of those big Pyrenees dogs that were out there watching the farmer's goats before the old man finally shot two of them. Our agency performed an autopsy and found the EHD virus rampant in their brains.

CASE

So you're thinking this creature may have become violent because of some virus?

WHEELER

It's possible Sheriff. The surveyor you saw me with that day told me about coming across a dead deer the evening of his encounter. The next morning when they went out to finish up their work the deer was gone. As if it had been carried off.

CASE

Hmmmm. And the boy talked about a deer walking out of the bushes before the, the, whatever it is, attacked his father.

(CONTINUED)

WHEELER

You're in a tough spot Sheriff. But
I'll help in any way I can.

INT. HENRY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Henry sips a bottle of beer and watches as a saucepan of red spaghetti sauce bubbles on the stove. He looks bored. The phone rings.

HENRY

Hello.

WHEELER (O.S.)

Henry. Check the text message I'm
sending you.

Henry's phone BINGS as it receives the text message.

INSERT - HENRY'S PHONE

Henry opens the text message and sees a photograph of the footprints.

WHEELER (O.S.)

Henry, if you can come over I'll
tell you all about it. I'll even
order us a pizza.

Henry turns and looks at the simmering pot of limp red liquid.

HENRY

Sure, I'll be right over.

INT. WHEELER'S STUDY - NIGHT

Wheeler walks in followed by Henry. The room is lit by a lamp in the corner. Reminiscent of Theodore Roosevelt's Explorer's Club, dark and woody. The only thing missing is swirling cigar smoke and animal skins on the wall. Instead there are maps and a large bookcase. A dissecting scope sits on the large oak desk.

WHEELER

This is my man cave.

Henry looks around, taken in by the Victorian era charm of the room.

HENRY

Very nice.

(CONTINUED)

WHEELER

David Hix from TWRA called me this morning. He's helping the sheriff down in Lytle County with the investigation into the attack on that deer hunter. These tracks were found at the scene.

HENRY

Do you think that-

WHEELER

I think it's very likely. What's more, David Hix told us about some coyotes that had been infected with that EHD virus and had become unusually aggressive.

HENRY

So you think the same thing might be happening to the creature I saw?

WHEELER

It's been observed. I'm not making a leap of faith.

HENRY

That means other people could be in danger.

WHEELER

I can only imagine anyone out on Yonah Ridge might be.

HENRY

So what do we do? Is the sheriff going to let people know about it?

WHEELER

I doubt it. He has to solve a crime but telling people Bigfoot killed their loved one is a hard sell.

HENRY

Do you think it would help if I told someone about my encounter?

WHEELER

It would at least be one more outlet for putting the idea into the national consciousness. Who do you have in mind?

INT. JAVA GAIA COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Dressed in well-worn khaki overalls and a flannel shirt with the arms rolled up exposing a thermal top, Henry sits at a table by a window flipping through a book, A GUIDE TO CEDAR GLADES AND COMMON APPALACHIAN WILDFLOWERS. He looks up as the door opens and Iris Devonkamp walks in. She wears her North Face coat and a plaid scarf. Henry stands up when he sees her but Iris walks immediately to the counter and is greeted by a DREAD-LOCKED BARISTA.

BARISTA

What can I get for you?

IRIS

I'll have an Earl Grey please.

Henry walks to the counter.

HENRY

Ms. Devonkamp.

Iris turns toward the voice.

IRIS

You must be Henry.

She extends her hand and they shake hands.

HENRY

Please let me get your drink.

IRIS

No, that's alright. In fact, since I'm here for a potential story I was going to buy yours.

HENRY

No worries. I went ahead and grabbed us a table over by the window.

TABLE BY WINDOW - MINUTES LATER

Henry and Iris are seated across from one another.

IRIS

So you said in your email that you might have some information that could shed some light on the death of the deer hunter in Lytle County.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

Yes.

Henry very deliberately pushes the book to the side of the table, as if stalling to collect his thoughts.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I hope you don't think I'm crazy after our conversation.

IRIS

I'm sure it will help me better understand the situation. The whole time during the press conference I had a feeling that the sheriff was holding something back.

HENRY

He was.

A beat, then

HENRY (CONT'D)

Like I said I was doing some work up on Yonah Ridge recently. We were surveying the boundary of a property a developer was interested in buying to build a large retail complex on.

IRIS

That would help out their economy. In doing my research I discovered that Lytle County is the poorest county in the state.

HENRY

Yeah, so you understand that this development going through is really big deal to them. So at the end of the day I was scoping out one last place to throw a point for the next leg of our traverse when I suddenly felt like I was being watched. I looked around and, off in shadows in a bunch of mountain laurel, I saw this-

Henry shifts his eyes, looking down at his coffee, nervously tapping his finger on the table.

(CONTINUED)

IRIS
What did you see?

HENRY
It was standing upright, sort of like a man. But it was big. Really big.

IRIS
What was it?

HENRY
It was an ape or something. I don't know. It stood there for just a second then turned and walked away.

Iris rolls her eyes.

IRIS
So you saw a bigfoot? Out in Lytle County?

HENRY
I did. It was there and I feel like more people are in danger now.

IRIS
Mr. Davidson, I'm not sure what your motives were for inviting me out here tonight but you're not the first fanboy to invite me out for a drink under the pretense of having a legitimate news story to share.

HENRY
I swear it's true!

IRIS
I'm sure. But I think I'll let you break this story yourself. After all, there must be big money in being the one who finally proves the existence of Bigfoot!

Henry stiffens with anger. He stands up.

HENRY
Mrs. Devonkamp, I'm sorry to have wasted your time.

Iris grabs his wrist as he starts to walk away.

IRIS

Henry, I apologize. I can see it in your eyes that you believe what you say. I'm just a little jaded. I don't want to sound stuck on myself, it's exactly the opposite, but you wouldn't believe the number of emails I get asking me out on dates. I guess it's the downside of being on television every night.

Henry relaxes.

IRIS (CONT'D)

I do believe that you think you saw something out there. But I don't know how in the world I could report such a story.

Henry sits back down.

HENRY

Maybe this will help.

Henry pulls out his phone. He opens the photograph of the footprints and hands it across the table to Iris.

INSERT - HENRY'S PHONE

The photo of the strange footprints fills the screen.

IRIS (V.O.)

Footprints?

BACK TO SCENE

Henry speaks as Iris runs her fingers across the screen to enlarge the image.

HENRY

These were found yesterday morning at the scene of the attack.

IRIS

How did you get this picture?

HENRY

I have a friend who investigates Bigfoot encounters. Really North American apes is the proper nomenclature. The TWRA called him and asked for his help.

(CONTINUED)

IRIS

Thank you for sharing this with me.
But I still can't think of any way
my news director would let me go on
air with this story. Not yet
anyway.

Henry runs his hand through his hair and sighs in
frustration.

HENRY

I understand.

IRIS

But Henry, please keep me posted
about any future developments.

HENRY

I will.

EXT. VIRGIN FALLS - DAY

We begin in the tree tops, darkly evergreen hemlocks and the bare branches of large tulip poplars. We see Virgin Falls emerging from a cave and falling one hundred feet into a large bowl-like depression ringed by an amphitheater of shaley debris and boulders the size of sofas and smart cars. Some of the trees around the amphitheater are very large. Virgin timber that was never logged due to difficulty of access.

Two people are at the base of the waterfall. A girl is posing as the man takes pictures. CHIP, late twenties, good looking and metrosexual, he wears stylish eyeglasses. He is holding a DSLR camera.

LAUREN stands in the foreground, framed by the waterfall. She is in her mid-twenties, shoulder length hair curls around her ears and she is artsy. Her expression alternates between an ethereal gaze to an unseen horizon to holding her mouth in a perpetual pout because this is serious art. She wears a toga. The din of the falling water causes them to have to yell to communicate.

LAUREN

I'm ready to recite my poem.

CHIP

What?

LAUREN

I'm ready to recite my poem!

(CONTINUED)

CHIP

Okay. Go for it. If we can't hear
it we can always dub in the sound
later.

Lauren steps atop a large boulder and raises her hands above
her head as if making an offering to the gods.

LAUREN

*As time in nature's boughs/The
water of life is given/The nature
of my life is revealed/A hell on
earth or heaven/When bicameral
desire is riven And both my loves
allowed/The sanctity of my true
love is heaven/My lover's carnal
pleasure is hell*

She ends the recitation with a pout on her face and turns
toward the waterfall and stares sadly at the water.

CHIP

That was really good. Forcefully
emotive.

LAUREN

It's about you and my husband.

CHIP

I know. But let's not talk about
him.

LAUREN

He'll be home next weekend from
Guatemala for Thanksgiving.

CHIP

Aren't we out here to forget that?

A beat passes as Lauren rubs her hand across the wet surface
of liverwort growing on a boulder in the splash of the
waterfall.

CHIP (CONT'D)

It's going to be getting dark
before long. Let's go up and check
out the cave and then go set up our
camp.

INT. CAVE - DAY

The cave has a large opening. Eight feet high and about twenty feet wide. As if we were inside the cave, we see Chip and Lauren entering the cave, framed by the daylight. Chip carries a small flashlight.

LAUREN

It's so dark. And that is such a strange breeze.

CHIP

And not exactly a fresh breeze at that.

Chip and Lauren carefully step from one rock to another walking through the creek inside the cave. They walk in just far enough to turn a small bend and the daylight disappears.

CHIP (cont'd)

Do you remember Plato's parable of the cave?

LAUREN

Vaguely? But not really.

CHIP

It's about someone who has lived their entire life in a cave. In this-

Chip turns off the flashlight leaving them in near total darkness.

CHIP (CONT'D)

All they could see were the shadows of real things. And that became their reality. They had no way of describing this-

Chip gently turns Lauren by the shoulder and takes one step around the bend to see the light of day framed by the darkness of the cave.

LAUREN

It's like, what would your perspective of the outside world be?

CHIP

As artists, it's our job to describe that to people.

(CONTINUED)

They turn back toward the darkness. Chip takes a step and slips on a rock, his foot splashing loudly into the water.

CHIP (CONT'D)

Shit!

As the echoes of Chip's expletive fade he and Lauren hear splashing footsteps from deep within the cave, as if something were running away.

LAUREN

What was that?

CHIP

I'm sure it was just some animal we disturbed. Something that lives its life in the darkness and is terribly afraid of us.

LAUREN

Just like Plato's unfortunate creature.

They laugh as they turn and walk out toward the daylight.

CAMPSITE - DAY

Virgin Falls can be seen and heard through the tree boughs as Chip takes a swig from a wine bottle then sets it down and starts erecting a tent.

DEEP WOODS - DAY

Lauren, who has traded her toga in favor of jeans and a sweater, collects firewood on a slope surrounded by mountain laurels and trees. She hears a strange WHISLITE. She stops picking up wood and stands up. She hears the whistle again. She resumes collecting firewood but nervously looks around as she does so.

CAMPSITE - TWILIGHT

Lauren walks into the camp site and drops an armful of sticks at a small circle of stones Chip has arranged for their fire.

CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Chip and Lauren sit by the campfire, shoulder to shoulder. Chip takes a drag off a cigarette and passes it to Lauren who takes a drag.

(CONTINUED)

LAUREN

Fires are so magical. It's like having another living thing in camp with us. We nurture it and it grows and keeps us company.

Chip takes a swig off the bottle. He contemplates the fire and muses over Lauren's words, trying to get into the same groove. But he has something else on his mind.

CHIP

Yeah, fires are nice. Warm. Comforting. Just like a certain pretty girl I know.

He buries his face in her hair.

CHIP (CONT'D)

What d'ya say we try out that new tent?

LAUREN

I'm tempted.

They kiss.

CAMPSITE - NIGHT

We see the fire burning low and hear sounds of sexual pleasure coming from the tent. Suddenly there is a loud, eerie whistle.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Lauren abruptly raises up. She is topless.

LAUREN

What was that?

CHIP

What was what?

He tries to pull her back toward him. There is another loud whistle.

LAUREN

That. It's the same whistle I heard in the forest while I was gathering firewood.

CHIP

I don't know. Maybe it's a nightingale or whippoorwill. Let's not think about it too much.

(CONTINUED)

There are three loud knocks on a nearby tree. Chip raises up.

CHIP (cont'd)
Alright. That was weird.

LAUREN
Chip, I think somebody is out there
messing with us.

CHIP
I doubt it. It's a long hike back
to where we are.

LAUREN
But those knocks on the tree?
That's not an animal sound.

CHIP
Maybe it was a woodpecker.

Chip rubs Lauren's bare shoulder.

CHIP (cont'd)
Where were we...

From nearby in the forest we hear a GROWLING HOWL and the sound of a large stick hurling through the tree branches. It crashes a few feet from the tent.

CHIP (cont'd)
Alright, fuck this!

Chip grabs the lantern and crawls out of the tent. He stands in his boxers holding up the lantern.

CHIP (cont'd)
Who is out there? You better leave
us the fuck alone!

We hear the same loud roar and the commotion of a large creature running through the surrounding mountain laurels. Chip turns and sees his assailant. His face is filled with terror.

The ape grabs Chip's head and with enormous power throws him to the ground. Chip's head crashes against a rock, killing him instantly. The ape stands still a moment, looking around. Lauren whimpers inside the tent. The ape walks over to the tent and listens.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Lauren is huddled in the far end of the tent. She holds the sleeping bag with both hands, pulling it up to her chin.

LAUREN

Please. Please go away. Please
don't hurt me -

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The ape roars and grabs the tent, flipping it into the air. The tent rips open. Lauren falls out onto the ground half in the sleeping bag, half out. She curls into the fetal position sobbing. The ape walks over to her. He kneels down.

LAUREN

Please don't hurt me. Please!
(Quiet sobs)

The ape grunts as if frustrated. He gently runs a finger across Lauren's ribs. She continues to sob. The ape softly whimpers, frustrated, almost sad. Slowly, he stands up and walks back into the forest.

INT. HENRY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Henry is awoken by the Hmmm! Hmmm! of MAX, a Rottweiler, Henry is dog-setting for the weekend. Max is giddy, poking his nose in Henry's face.

HENRY

Okay! Okay! I didn't know dog
sitting came with a free alarm
clock!

Turning over in bed Henry pats Max on his large head. Wearing plaid boxers, Henry gets out of bed and walks out of the bedroom.

KITCHEN

Henry looks at the time on the
stove.

HENRY

Seven-thirty. So much for sleeping
in.

He opens the backdoor. Max runs out into the fenced backyard.

EXT. HENRY'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

With Max wagging his stubby tail at his heels, Henry opens the door of his pickup and slings a daypack into the passenger floorboard. He then motions for Max, who jumps in.

INT. HENRY'S TRUCK - DAY

Henry is stopped at a drive-thru window. The attendant, a PRETTY GIRL, late teens, passes Henry a brown paper bag and a large cup of coffee. He smiles at her.

HENRY'S TRUCK, ON A COUNTRY ROAD - DAY - TRAVELING

Henry takes a bite of a biscuit. Max watches him with pleading eyes.

EXT. VIRGIN FALLS TRAILHEAD - DAY

Henry's truck pulls up behind a Subaru with out-of-state plates. Henry gets out and shoulders the daypack. He motions for Max who jumps out of the truck and runs off into the woods.

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

Henry walks along the trail, musing in the tree dappled sunshine. He walks down a slope to a

CAVE

At the mouth of a cave he rubs his hand across the trunk of a large tree and peers up into the canopy high above. He walks down to a small creek flowing out of the mouth of the cave and something in the creek gravel catches his eye. Henry bends down and picks up an arrowhead. With a big smile he slips it into his shirt pocket and walks back up to the main

TRAIL

Henry looks around and notices that Max is not nearby. He cups his hands around his mouth and yells.

HENRY
Max! Maaaaaxxxx!

Suddenly there is a shrill scream. Henry jerks his head toward the sound. Max comes running down the trail toward Henry. The dog is shaking and afraid.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY (cont'd)
What was that Max?

Henry runs toward the scream. A little way ahead he sees Lauren leaning against a large tree. She is huddled in the torn sleeping bag. She screams as she see Henry and Max coming toward her. As Henry reaches her he kneels down, placing his hand on her shoulder.

HENRY (cont'd)
It's okay! It's okay. We're gonna
get you out of here.

LAUREN
(hysterical, sobbing)
Please! Please! Don't let it come
back! Don't let it come back!

Henry scans the area and notices the campsite. He runs over to the tent to get Lauren some clothes. He gasps as he sees Chip's mangled body and the pool of congealed blood at his head.

LAUREN (O.S.)
Please! Don't let it come back!

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

Sheriff Case, Deputy Chumley, Luke Sudderth, and Jim Gaither walk along the trail to Virgin Falls, following Henry. Max walks alongside Henry on a leash. Luke and Jim carry a stretcher between them.

EXT. VIRIGIN FALLS - DAY

Henry leads the group into the area around the campsite.

HENRY
I found the girl leaning against
this tree.

Henry pats the trunk of the tree with his hand.

HENRY (cont'd)
And there. There's the man's body.

Henry vaguely points toward Chip's body. Several flies buzz around the bloody wound to his head. Jim and Luke walk over to the body.

CASE
Chumley, get some pictures please
before we move him.

(CONTINUED)

Chumley walks off leaving Case and Henry alone.

HENRY

This is close to where that deer hunter was killed, isn't it Sheriff?

CASE

It was nearby, yes.

HENRY

When I found the girl she kept saying 'Don't let it come back'. What do you think she might have been referring to?

CASE

I don't know. Maybe, whatever killed this man. A bear or something.

HENRY

With all due respect I think you know that's bullshit!

Case turns toward Henry with an affronted look.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Mr. Wheeler showed me the pictures of the tracks. He told me about the hunter's little boy saying something about a big hairy monster.

CASE

Your friend Mr. Wheeler talks too much.

HENRY

There's a holiday weekend coming up. People are going to be out here. You've got to let them know that it isn't safe.

CASE

And tell everybody there's a goddamned ape out here killing people? That's conjecture. Luke over there, and Jim - they knew Thurmond Raines. And that young man laying dead over there has a family somewhere. You tell them that the best the Lytle County Sheriff's

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CASE (cont'd)
Department can do is guess that he
was killed by an ape.

HENRY
Then what sheriff? Do we let others
keep coming up here and getting
killed and you just keep
stonewalling the press or blaming
it on bears?

CASE
I'll try to make my decision based
on what's best for our community!

Case takes a breath and relaxes.

CASE (CONT'D)
It's going to be getting dark soon.
We have to carry this man out of
here and notify his family. I'm
sure Luke, Jim, and Deputy Chumley
would appreciate your help with the
stretcher.

Henry kicks his boot in the dirt, hands the end of Max's
leash to Case, and walks over to where the other men are
lifting the stretcher.

EXT. SCENIC OVERLOOK - SUNSET

Henry leans against the hood of his truck at a roadside
pullout for a scenic overlook. He looks at the sunset and
while talking to Wheeler on his phone.

HENRY
So what do I do Mr. Wheeler? A
second person is dead and Sheriff
Case still doesn't want to tell
people the truth.

INTERCUT BETWEEN HENRY AND WHEELER

INT. WHEELER'S STUDY - SUNSET

Wheeler's study is dimly lit by a floor lamp in the corner.

WHEELER
Henry, Sheriff Case is in a
tremendously difficult position. He
still doesn't have definitive proof
that an ape killed those people. We
know it's likely the case because
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WHEELER (cont'd)

we've both seen one and know they exist. But blaming the deaths on a bigfoot, as people will surely call it, could do irreparable harm to the sheriff's reputation.

HENRY

But does his vanity allow more people to get killed?

WHEELER

He's also looking out for the community Henry. Lytle County badly needs that development to go through. Bad press could stop that in its tracks.

HENRY

I can't stand back and let this happen again. People need to know what's going on up on Yonah Ridge.

WHEELER

I agree. And I think you're the man to do it.

HENRY

How?

WHEELER

Post your encounter on the CryptoWatch website. Then tumble it, tweet it, facebook it, reddit. You get the picture. Go out to social media with it. You'll get a response.

HENRY

It's scary. I feel like I'm telling the world something its afraid of finding out.

WHEELER

Bold moves take great courage Henry and you are a courageous young man. As Teddy Roosevelt would say, this is your crowded hour. Own it.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

A spacious office with knotty pine paneling. A deer head and a largemouth bass hang on the wall. Sheriff Case sits at his desk typing an email. A telephone rings loudly.

CASE
Sheriff Case.

INT. FINNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

A school principal's office with interior windows and white walls decorated with framed motivational posters. Finney sits at his desk.

FINNEY
Wayne, its Jimmy. Have you seen the breaking story on the mid-day news?

INTERCUT BETWEEN FINNEY AND CASE

CASE
I don't usually have the time to look at daytime T.V.

FINNEY
To my great annoyance my secretary does. Anyway, turn it on channel four. We've got big trouble on our hands. Some guy has told the world a giant ape has been killing people in Lytle County and he's invited anyone interested to join him on a big hunt the Saturday after Thanksgiving. That's in three days!

CASE
Ah, Jesus!

There is the sudden sound of Fur Elise playing on a crappy speaker. Finney looks at his cell phone.

FINNEY
MacFarland's calling me. I'll call you back.

Case hangs up the phone. It immediately buzzes. Case punches a button.

CASE
What is it Chumley?

(CONTINUED)

CHUMLEY (O.S.)
 Sheriff, there is a lady from
 channel four news on the line. She
 wants to speak with you. I think
 it's that good looking girl that
 was at the press conference.

CASE
 Tell her I'm not here.

CHUMLEY (O.S.)
 But I've already told her you were.

CASE
 Tell her you were mistaken.

Case punches a button on the phone ending the call.

INT. RIDGELINE INN - NIGHT

The restaurant is packed with customers and there is a
 general buzz of excitement running throughout the crowd.
 Everyone stops talking and turns to look as Case and Chumley
 walk through the door. MARTY RYDELL, early-fifties, wearing
 a puffy vest and a foam trucker's ball cap speaks up.

MARTY
 Well Sheriff, looks like Lytle
 County made the news again!

MIKE HOGAN, late thirties, a big barroom bully type, wearing
 a flannel shirt and greasy camouflage ball cap chimes in.

MIKE
 Yeah, maybe we'll get us a reality
 T.V. show: It's Squatchin' You! Get
 it?

There is a round of laughter.

CASE
 Alright. That's enough.

TREVA GRIMES, forties, overweight, aggressive alpha female
 with cropped hair. She wears a black hoody. She is sitting
 with her girlfriend, who is a slight woman of similar age
 sporting a bad perm.

TREVA
 So tells us Sheriff. Did a bigfoot
 kill Thurmond Raines and that other
 man up on Yonah Ridge?

(CONTINUED)

Kendall Raines, who has quietly been sipping coffee at the bar with his back to the crowd, turns around and stands up.

KENDALL

Yeah Wayne. Tell us. This fella that put all this stuff on the Internet says you've found tracks out there at Thurmond's deer stand. He said that girl you found kept talking about some monster that attacked her. My nephew described the same thing. So tell us Wayne. We elected you. You owe us the truth.

A rumble of murmurs runs through the restaurant. Case waves his hand through the air to hush the crowd. He looks Kendall in the eye.

CASE

Yes Kendall. All that is true. We are still investigating it.

Kendall relaxes his body and sighs.

KENDALL

I'll be out there Saturday.

CASE

I understand. But don't be surprised if I ask you for some help keeping some kind of order.

Case turns and addresses the packed restaurant.

CASE (cont'd)

Sheriff Spivey from over in Van Buren County has agreed to help with crowd control. I urge all of you to stay away from Yonah Ridge Saturday but if you must show up just know that we're not going to put up with any nonsense. The thought of a lot of people with guns out looking for Bigfoot scares the daylight out of me.

Case walks a few steps, all eyes on him, his eyes casting a piercing glare at his audience.

CASE (cont'd)

I could stop this snipe hunt altogether but then people would

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CASE (cont'd)

just go up there alone, and they're liable to shoot anything that moves, and that's even more dangerous. So I'm going to allow this hunt to happen. But I'm determined to keep this event as safe and organized as possible.

EXT. SINKING CREEK ROAD - DAWN

Several trucks (fifteen to twenty) are parked along the side of the road. Men stand in small groups talking. Some sip coffee mugs. Sheriff Case and SHERIFF SPIVEY walk along the road exchanging indistinct greetings with the men in the groups. Sheriff Spivey, late forties, is a tall, wiry man. Like Case, he walks with an upright demeanor that commands respect. Two trucks parked nose to tail contain dog boxes. We hear the loud BAYING of coon hounds.

WHEELER'S SUV

Wheeler, Henry, Iris, and David Hix are standing at Wheeler's white Buick Enclave studying a topographic map spread out on the hood.

HIX

Joe, if the main group goes up this logging road then maybe, you and Henry could lead a smaller group out the trail to Virgin Falls. The two attacks took place about a mile apart and that would allow us to cover the most ground.

Sheriff Case and Deputy Chumley walk up.

WHEELER

Good morning Sheriff, Deputy.

CASE

'Morning. I think we're about ready to get started. I'm going to address the group. David, I'll need you for a minute.

Case and Hix walk to the far side of the road and everyone closes in a small semi-circle to listen. Case pulls out a megaphone.

CASE (cont'd)

Alright, everybody listen up. We're about to get started.

(CONTINUED)

COUNTRY VOICE (O.S.)
Sheriff you're goin' to scare it
away with that megaphone!

CASE
That's my intention. If there is
anything to scare away.

A short rumble of nervous laughter runs through the crowd.

CASE (CONT'D)
Now we have Mr. Davidson over here
to thank for everyone being here.

Case nods toward Henry.

CASE (CONT'D) (cont'd)
He told everyone there was a
strange creature out there to
find and I wish he hadn't but he
did.

Laughs from the crowd.

CASE (CONT'D) (cont'd)
Now I recognize most of you but
there are several I don't know. It
looks like just about everybody
brought guns for this snipe hunt
Mr. Davidson initiated. I want to
make it real clear - do not carry a
gun into those woods unless you
have a valid hunting license issued
by the state of Tennessee. Officer
Hix to my left is with the TWRA and
he or one of my deputies will be
checking before we get started.

COUNTRY VOICE TWO (O.S.)
C'mon Sheriff. Just turn us loose
to go get that thing!

CASE
Soon enough Joe David, soon enough.
Let me be clear: don't shoot
anything out there unless you are
one hundred per cent sure of what
you're shooting at. The only
successful outcome I'm hoping for
today is that everyone comes out of
those woods the same as you walked
into them this morning, as pitiful
as that might be for some of you.

Laughs from the crowd.

(CONTINUED)

CASE (CONT'D)

Okay. Let's go.

TAILGATE OF A TRUCK

The tailgate drops and two Walker coonhounds jump out and run off into the woods followed by two brindle mountain curs.

WHEELER'S SUV

Iris examines a small camera.

HENRY

Aren't you coming with us?

IRIS

My journalist sensibilities tell me I'd better follow the dogs. It's a guaranteed visual.

Henry looks disappointed.

HENRY

Oh. I guess it would be.

IRIS

Henry, be careful.

Iris gives Henry an awkward hug. He looks surprised but smiles. She turns and walks away toward the men following the hounds. Henry opens the car door and gets in.

INT. WHEELER'S SUV - DAY

Henry sits in the passenger seat staring out the window. Wheeler is turning the key in the ignition.

HENRY

It's going to be dangerous isn't it? If we find this creature?

WHEELER

Yes. Based on past events I suspect it might be.

Wheeler looks at Henry.

WHEELER (cont'd)

Oh, I see. You're worried about Iris. She seems like someone who knows how to handle herself. And remember Henry, the deer hunter and

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WHEELER (cont'd)
that other fella never knew what
hit them. We have the power of
numbers and we know what we're
looking for.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - DAY

The sky is brighter with the sunrise but still gray as the men in Case's group walk in a loose row up a steep slope. They talk casually. It seems as though the morning's edge has worn off and they are just enjoying an excuse to be outdoors. Iris has run ahead of the group. She kneels down and shoots some video of the line of men walking through the woods.

EXT. VIRGIN FALLS - DAY

Henry, Wheeler and three other men, all from CryptoWatch and carrying cameras, stand atop Virgin Falls looking into the cave.

CRYPTOWATCH MAN
My goodness. This is about the
strangest natural phenomenon I've
ever seen. Comes out of a cave and
falls into a sinkhole. No creek
above, no creek below.

WHEELER
It's actually a quite common
feature of karst geography. What's
unique is seeing it on such a grand
scale. We're going to get this land
for a park. That developer can go
to hell.

Suddenly the coonhounds begin BAYING. Casually at first, but then rising in intensity. Wheeler turns his head toward the sound.

WHEELER (cont'd)
Hear that? They've got something
treed. Just in that next holler
over.

HENRY
We should check it out.

WHEELER
You're more fleet on your feet than
I am but I'll be right behind.

(CONTINUED)

Henry takes off running up the slope. Wheeler calls out to him

WHEELER (cont'd)
Henry, just be careful, in case
they start shooting.

EXT. LARGE TREE BY CREEK - DAY

The ape stands with its back to the tree as the coonhounds bark and the curs snarl and lunge. Iris hears the dogs attacking and runs toward the sound. As she arrives at the creek her jaw drops at what she sees. She astutely raises the camera and begins filming. One of the curs bites down on the ape's hand and will not let go. With an anguished cry the ape breaks the dog's jaw and throws it limply to the ground. With a mighty sweep of his hand the ape cracks the skull of one of the baying coonhounds, causing it to crash skull to skull with the other coonhound and fall dead. The other coonhound staggers off unevenly, whimpering, wounded.

The hunters from Sheriff Case's group arrive just as the ape runs off into the woods. They raise their rifles and SHOOT at the ape but apparently miss. Luke Sudderth, tears in his eyes, runs over to the carcass of the dead coonhound.

LUKE
Buck! Oh, Buck, I'm sorry. I'm
sorry I let this happen.

Jim Gaither kneels at the side of the dead cur, lightly stroking its blood soaked fur.

Henry arrives, out of breath. He looks around for a moment, noticing the dead dogs. He walks over to Iris who is obviously shaken. He places his hand on her shoulder.

HENRY
Are you okay?

IRIS
I'm fine.

Tears well up in her eyes. Henry wraps his arms around her. There is an undercurrent of disbelief running through the group. Wheeler and another man walk onto the scene.

WHEELER
What the-

With a sneer Sheriff Case turns toward Wheeler, Henry and Iris.

(CONTINUED)

CASE

Mr. Davidson, looks like we found
your Bigfoot.

Case nods his head in the direction of the dead dogs.
Kendall Raines takes note of the Sheriff's comment.

KENDALL

No Wayne. If it wasn't for Mr.
Davidson telling the truth that
could have been a dead person over
there, just like my brother. Now I
intend to get that sonofabitch.

The group has noticed the tension between Kendall and
Sheriff Case. Speaking louder, Kendall addresses them all.

KENDALL (CONT'D)

That THING is what killed my
brother. It killed another man last
weekend.

He raises his rifle in the air.

KENDALL (CONT'D) (cont'd)

I'm going after it. If I don't find
it today, I'll be back tomorrow.
And the next day and the next till
we kill that sonofabitch.

The crowd erupts in CHEERS, HOOAHS, and one REBEL YELL.

INT. CAVE - DAY

The ape is in a close space on a dry shelf by an underground
creek. Shafts of sunlight weakly penetrate through tree
roots. The ape lies on a bed of hemlock branches. He moans
as if in pain, but there is also sadness. He holds his
wounded hand wrapped in moss. He looks up toward the light,
still moaning.

EXT. DEEP WOODS, CREEK - DAY

Sheriff Case's group walks along a creek. Henry, Wheeler,
and Iris are with them.

IRIS

This is such a beautiful area. I
understand why they would want to
establish a park up here.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

Since our first meeting I've wanted to bring you out here.

WHEELER

It would be a shame for all this to be destroyed by development.

CASE

It's a greater shame for a whole county to have to move away to find work.

WHEELER

It is a difficult position Lytle County is in Sheriff. I don't envy your part in it. How did Mr. MacFarland respond to today's hunt?

CASE

Like he responds anytime something doesn't go his way Mr. Wheeler. With agitation and threats to pull the plug on the development.

They walk on a moment in silence then Wheeler stops, putting out his hand indicating he wants the group to stop. He motions for Henry to follow him. They wade into the shallow creek toward a tangle of roots on the far bank. Wheeler lifts some of the roots and cranes his neck to look inside.

CASE (cont'd)

What is it?

WHEELER

A cave. This could be where the ape lives.

Henry pulls a long red hair from a tangle of roots.

HENRY

Here's a hair.

Case looks at the hair then turns to Wheeler

CASE

What do you recommend? Should we go in to look for it?

WHEELER

Sheriff, if the ape is in there, sending someone into that cave would be utter suicide.

(CONTINUED)

CASE

You're right.

Case turns and addresses the group.

CASE (CONT'D)

Luke, you and Jim and you, you with the stubble. Stay here and guard the entrance.

WHEELER

And you three young men need to stay vigilant. If you smell an odor like rot and excrement then that means the creature is nearby.

LUKE

Yes sir. Thanks.

The group gathers around as Henry discusses their options with Sheriff Case.

HENRY

This has to be part of the same cave system then comes out above Virgin Falls which is just around the bend. I think it would be wise to head that way. At some point we'll have to explore these caves.

CASE

I don't know that anyone came prepared for that today.

HENRY

I agree. We'll have to save that for a later day. In the meantime we can at least walk out to Virgin Falls and see if we find anything.

The group continues walking down the creek. The water gradually begins to decrease and eventually disappears except in small pools.

IRIS

I guess that is why they call this Sinking Creek Road.

HENRY

It's pretty odd isn't it?

(CONTINUED)

IRIS

It's like there's a creek then no creek. It just disappears.

WHEELER

It's all underground. There is likely a whole network of underground caverns under our feet. But I suspect this is the same water we'll see again when we get to the waterfall.

IRIS

This sand is like Jell-o. Are you sure it's safe to walk on?

WHEELER

These trees haven't toppled over yet so I'll take my chances.

INT. CAVE - DAY

The ape sits on his bed of hemlock branches rubbing his wounded hand, moaning weakly. Suddenly he hears the sound of faint human voices. He looks up toward the shafts of light coming through the tree roots.

The ape roars as if angry and slams his fist into the earthen wall of his lair. A soft trickle of sandy soil begins to run down the side of the wall, reminiscent of an hour glass.

EXT. TOP OF RIDGE - DAY

Sheriff Spivey, Chumley, Hix, and Kendall Raines lead a small group totaling seven hunters. The remaining mountain cur is with them.

SHERIFF SPIVEY

This has been a helluva a day. I didn't know what I was getting myself into when I agreed to help out Sheriff Case with this, this, "crowd control" as he called it.

CHUMLEY

Do you think we should kill the Bigfoot if we see it? I mean, it's something we never knew existed.

HIX

No. Emphatically no. We need to keep people safe but killing this creature on site is wrong.

(CONTINUED)

KENDALL

That thing killed my brother.

HIX

I'm sorry Mr. Raines. It's a dilemma and I understand your emotional attachment. But I'm a wildlife biologist. There are things we can learn.

KENDALL

Tell that to Thurmond's son.

HIX

Look, I have two children. In your situation I might understand feeling the need for revenge. But I don't want my kids to think that I advocate killing something just because everybody is afraid of it.

Sudden barking and snarling as the dog goes crazy. The ape has burst through the opening and stands on top of the ridge roaring threateningly at the hunting party. Two of the men fire their rifles. One of the shots hits the ape in the shoulder. He staggers a step backward.

EXT. VIRGIN FALLS - DAY

Case and Wheeler stand together near a large boulder. Henry is with Iris who is filming the waterfall. A handful of other men are standing together in idle conversation. Suddenly the crack of the rifle fire startles the group. Everyone looks up toward the ridge. A bullet whizzes nearby and thuds into a tree.

CASE

They're shooting into us. Take cover!

Case and Wheeler dive behind the boulder. Iris jumps behind a large poplar and Henry scurries to another tree twenty feet away.

EXT. TOP OF RIDGE - DAY

The ape is reeling from the bullet to his shoulder. He bends down and picks up a softball sized stone and rears back.

SHERIFF SPIVEY

Watch out, it's about to throw something -

(CONTINUED)

The stone hurls through the air hitting Spivey square in the ribs. He collapses immediately. The ape then jumps behind a boulder the size of a refrigerator as the men fire twice more. Deputy Chumley aids Sheriff Spivey who is still lying on the ground writhing in pain.

With a mighty roar the ape pushes the boulder over the edge of the ridge where it begins a thunderous roll, smashing into trees. The ape runs down the slope in the wake of the boulder.

EXT. VIRGIN FALLS - DAY

The group watches as the boulder comes barreling down the slope, smashing trees. Case and Wheeler look at one another with horror in their eyes. The boulder is rolling directly toward the tree where Iris is standing.

She watches, nearly paralyzed with fear. Henry sees the boulder getting closer. At the last moment he lunges from behind his tree and grabs Iris. They jump out of the way just as the boulder crashes into the poplar, splintering it. Iris has dropped her camera and the boulder rolls over it, crushing it.

Just a few yards down slope one of the CryptoWatch men huddles pitifully behind a small tree, paralyzed by fear. The boulder smashes the tree and instantly crushes the man, killing him. Henry and Iris shrink back in fear as the ape rushes past them, ten feet away.

Two of the hunters turn from the trees and fire at the ape. The ape stumbles, shot in the back.

Sheriff Spivey's group comes running and stumbling down the far slope.

The ape splashes into the water above Virgin Falls, headed for the cave. One of the men in Sheriff Spivey's group steadies his rifle and fires, hitting the ape square in the chest. Another shot hits the ape in the leg causing him to fall to his knees.

Silence.

Both groups of hunters converge on the opposite banks of the creek above the waterfall.

The ape softly moans, painfully staggering to his feet. Henry stands in awe, softly touching Iris, as if to shield her. A tear runs down Iris' cheek. Hix looks on, his eyes filled with emotion.

(CONTINUED)

The ape sways on his feet, grunting low. With a sudden fit of rage, the ape roars loudly precipitating a volley of gun fire. The ape staggers backwards, falling over the edge of the waterfall.

The group rushes to the edge peering down at the creature.

GROUP OF HUNTERS

Yeah! Hoop! Hoop!

BELOW THE WATERFALL

Reminiscent of an hourglass, small trickles of sand and water begin to run in narrow paths opening up crevices which turn into holes. With a mighty rumbling sound the earth opens up into a large cavern, swallowing the ape and burying him under a mass of boulders and trees, sand, and soil.

TOP OF WATERFALL

Case and Wheeler stand dumbfounded looking into the gaping chasm. Henry and Iris stand next to them, Henry's arm around her shoulder.

CASE

What sort of God could make such a creature?

WHEELER

One whose work allows for false starts and dead ends.

CASE

Do you think there are anymore of his kind?

Wheeler wipes a tear from his eye.

WHEELER

I can only hope so.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

It is late April. Young leaves cloak the tree lending a green blush to the hillsides. Henry's truck winds around the curvy road which runs alongside the Calkiller River. Through the window we see Henry driving and Iris riding along. They both have big smiles on their face.

EXT. MARKET - DAY

Country men wearing overalls and Carhartts lean on the beds of dinged up pickup trucks idling away a Saturday morning. Henry's truck, which is parked in front of the door, fits in well.

INT. MARKET - DAY

Henry and Iris are finishing up paying for their order. The CASHIER, a slightly overweight country woman in her thirties wearing a plain red t-shirt, hands Iris the change.

CASHIER

Here ya go.

Iris takes the change.

IRIS

Thanks you.

As Iris puts the change in her wallet Henry picks up the bag of supplies. They open the door and walk outside.

EXT. MARKET - DAY

Just as they walk through the door they literally run into Sheriff Case. They immediately recognize one another.

HENRY

Sheriff Case! Good to see you.

They shake hands.

CASE

Mr. Davidson. Ms. Devonkamp. What brings ya'll back up this way?

IRIS

We're going hiking. We wanted to see Virgin Falls in the spring.

HENRY

We had to stop in for some picnic supplies.

CASE

I see.

HENRY

How is Sheriff Spivey doing?

(CONTINUED)

CASE

Oh, he's fine. His ribs have healed up. At least enough for us to go crappie fishing last week out on Center Hill Lake.

HENRY

I'm glad to hear that.

CASE

And how is my buddy Mr. Wheeler?

HENRY

He's good. He retired last month and right now he's out in California visiting his grandkids.

CASE

Well good for him.

There is an awkward moment of silence. Case holds his hat in his hand, running his fingers along the brim.

HENRY

Look Sheriff, I'm sorry about what happened up here. I heard MacFarland pulled out of the development.

CASE

Yes. Those things happen. Seems like ol' Lytle County just can't catch a break. Sometimes a place can just about seem like it's cursed.

HENRY

But I hear the legislation has passed to establish that park up here around Virgin Falls. That's got to account for something.

Case jerks his head and glares at Henry and Iris.

CASE

It accounts for people like you and Ms. Devonkamp coming up here and buying a soda, a bag of chips, maybe a tank of gas. Try keeping up schools and roads with that kind of revenue.

Henry and Iris step back, affronted looks on their faces.

(CONTINUED)

CASE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. That was uncalled for.
It's just that I wanted to bring
some hope to this community. But
maybe that's just too much to ask.

Case puts his hat back on his head.

CASE (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Mr. Davidson, Ms. Devonkamp. I hope
you enjoy your outing on this fine
day.

Case turns and walks into the market.

EXT. VIRGIN FALLS TRAIL - DAY

Henry and Iris walk along the sun dappled forest trail with
smiles on their faces. They walk past the side trail to the
cave. An assortment of wildflowers beautifies their path.
They arrive at Virgin Falls. We can see it through the
trees. Henry walks over to the boulder where Case and
Wheeler had taken cover. He kneels down and touches the
petal of a DWARF CRESTED IRIS.

HENRY

Look! It's named after you.

Iris kneels down next to him, smiling.

HENRY (cont'd)

It's beautiful. Like you.

Henry's hand begins to tremble. He looks around and sees the
splintered tree behind which Iris had taken cover. He gasps
and breaks down into tears.

HENRY (cont'd)

It's all so beautiful. I just
wanted everyone to know how full of
wonder-

Henry leans back against the boulder. He holds his hands
over his face, sobbing hard. Iris wraps her arms around him.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry they all
died. I'm so sorry.

Iris holds Henry.

(CONTINUED)

IRIS

It's okay Henry. Honey, it's okay.
Nothing was your fault. It's all
okay.

BELOW THE WATERFALL

Henry and Iris are having their picnic. We see them from a distance talking, laughing, happy. Henry wraps a piece of prosciutto around a cube of cantaloupe and hands it to Iris. Then we drift up, slowly, into the green boughs of poplar and hemlock. We drift above the top of the falls, to the cave from which it springs.

INT. CAVE - DAY

A young hand, not a human hand, but the hand of a YOUNG APE, rubs the cool, smooth stone wall of the cave. He peers around the corner, looking into the weak sunlight that penetrates the cave.

A hawk screams and the young ape runs back to his MOTHER who sits just at the edge of the light. But he walks back toward the light. He takes a few unsure steps toward the mouth of the cave and we see him from behind. He stands silhouetted against the glorious sunshine which penetrates the cave.

Beyond we see the green riot of spring in the tree branches. We hear the chirping of birds and the steady gurgle of running water.