

DUST

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. MIDDLE OF NOWHERE - EVENING

SUPERIMPOSED:

April 18, 1935

Somewhere in the Dust Bowl

A wasteland by any other name.

The defiant last rays of the evening sun cast a golden hue over the barren landscape.

The howling wind stirs up swirling ribbons of DUST.

A lonely HOMESTEAD stands 200 meters off the side of a gravel ROAD. A derelict WINDMILL and half-collapsed BARN erected nearby.

They are *surrounded by death*: dead trees, tumbleweeds, animal bones...

EXT. EMPTY ROAD, FACING EAST

A wiry JACKRABBIT munches on a scraggly weed as a rickety MODEL A STYLE TRUCK approaches, barely clinging to life.

Engine sputtering, the truck slows to a stop. JACK BOISEN (32) opens the driver's side door and steps out.

His eyes are fixed on something in the distance.

Tall and lean, his joyless, weathered face and ragged clothes hint at desperate times.

He stares intensely towards the WEST. His harrowed expression turns from fear and awe to sobering dread.

EXT. EMPTY ROAD, FACING WEST

A TOWERING DUST STORM obscures the entire horizon. The menacing coal-colored cloud takes up the entire western sky, thousands of feet high, rolling in on itself.

A giant black tidal wave hurling towards the earth.

EXT. DROUGHT-STRICKEN FARMLAND - MOMENTS LATER

Jack sprints across the bone-dry prairie towards the ramshackle wooden HOUSE. Wagon wheels, old plows and machine parts half buried by dust and sand pepper the landscape.

EXT. PORCH/DOORSTEP - CONTINUOUS

Jack approaches the front of the home, the wooden porch creaks under his feet. He hesitates, then bangs on the door.

JACK
HELLO? Is anyone here?!
(beat)
Hello?!

Unable to see through the windows, he jostles the doorknob. Finding it unlocked, a touch of relief washes over his face.

He lets himself inside.

INT. INSIDE THE HOME

The INTERIOR of the home is like a still life photo... empty, eery, shrouded with a heavy silence. A fine layer of silt coats nearly every surface.

The relentlessness of the wind makes the walls shiver and groan.

Jack looks around with apprehension. He walks into the next room, the KITCHEN.

Something feels *off*.

JACK
Hello? Is there anybody here?

Hearing no response, and seeing no signs of life, he moves in further.

INT. THE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A small wooden table is dead center. The walls are bare save for a couple cast iron pans.

Jack heads for the hutch at the far end of the room.

A quick but careful rummage uncovers a few dozen jars of canned goods... Pickled tumbleweed, dandelions, carrot marmalade, bacon grease, jackrabbit.

Jack reaches for a jar of MARMALADE. All is quiet as he goes to pry it open.

Beat.

(O.C.) A *SUDDEN GUNSHOT!* Shocked and startled, Jack drops the jar, ducks down and searches for a place to hide.
A *SECOND SHOT* rings out!

The BEDROOM, just off the kitchen, is his only option.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

There is a single metal framed BED at the far end of the room, a large quilt laying across it.

Jack dives for the ground and shimmies himself underneath, barely able to fit. He pulls the quilt down to obscure his presence.

Silence.

INT. INSIDE THE HOME - MOMENTS LATER

The sound of slow HEAVY STEPS on the wooden porch reverberates through the house. The door handle rattles and the door squeaks open.

INT. BEDROOM - UNDER THE BED

Jack listens, holding his breath. A beat.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

ROY CARLYLE (50s) walks into the kitchen, gruff and stalwart with a lumbering step.

He leans a 22 caliber RIFLE against the wall, and tosses two dead JACKRABBITS onto the table.

He notices the dropped marmalade, and pauses for only a moment. His expression contorts into a scowl. Beat.

In a stern, baritone voice...

ROY
Who's in here?

INTERCUT: JACK/ROY

Jack's eyes are tightly shut, breath shuddering.

Roy positions himself under the door frame. Shoulders squared.

ROY
That your truck out there?
(beat)
This is a small house, no where to hide. If you're here 'cause the storm, come on out. If you're here to rob me, you've picked the wrong place.

(MORE)

ROY (CONT'D)

(beat)

Come on, now. Hiding won't do ya
any favors. I can see your
footsteps, anyhow.

Jack takes a deep breath. Shimmying out of his hiding place,
he reveals himself.

JACK

(sheepishly)

Please. I didn't mean to intrude.
The storm--

ROY

Oh, I'm sure you didn't *mean* to
intrude.

(beat)

But here you are.

Roy stares him down for a moment, as if to size him up.

A beat.

He turns around, and leaves the room without another word.

INT. KITCHEN - SOME TIME LATER

Roy and Jack are sitting at the table, the room lit by a
flickering oil lamp. The opened jar of carrot marmalade is
joined by a plate of cornmeal biscuits and stewed meat.

Jack consumes the biscuits with enthusiasm, the sound of his
crunching distructs the uncomfortable silence.

ROY

Quite the appetite.

JACK

(without looking up)

I suppose.

Beat.

ROY

Boy, I get so goddamn tired of
eatin' jackrabbit.

Jack doesn't respond. A long beat...

ROY

You been on the road long?

JACK
Long enough.

After a moment, Jack looks up to see Roy staring at him with an unnatural intensity.

The two men lock eyes, awkward tension growing between them. Roy clears his throat.

ROY
Well, I ain't got much for comfort here. Just the one bed, and you'll forgive me but I ain't about to share it.

JACK
I don't need much. I'll be on my way by morning.

ROY
I suppose we'll see.

Jack stops eating, furrowing his brow.

JACK
What does that mean?

ROY
Means I bet you that little truck of yours ain't gonna survive this dust storm... gonna have to dig it out. Could be stuck here awhile.
(he grins)
Eatin' jackrabbit.

Jack gives half a smirk. He looks down at his meager meal, and continues eating.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Jack is leaned up against the wall, visibly uncomfortable. He shifts his position a few times, trying to get it *right*.

Roy enters the room with a burlap sack in hand and tosses it to Jack.

ROY
Here. Threw some old rabbit pelts 'n rags in there, might work as a pillow.

JACK
Much obliged, thank you.

Roy stares at him, expressionless, for no less than 5 long, uneasy seconds.

Without ceremony, he suddenly turns and walks to his room, shutting the door behind him.

Jack stares at the bedroom door, listening... the floorboards creak and Roy's footsteps come to a stop.

Jack lays his head down on the burlap sack, and shuts his eyes.

EXT. THE NIGHT SKY - DEAD OF NIGHT

The worst of the storm has passed, but the gusting winds remain.

A FULL MOON is barely visible through the haze of dust and sand.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Jack is sleeping. The house is calm and still, save for a few errant gusts of wind giving the walls a tremble.

(O.C.) the faint sound of a desperate scream, muted by the wind, causes Jack to stir. He rouses, briefly, but doesn't fully wake.

He drifts back to sleep, but then--

--A HEAVY THUD!

Jack jolts awake.

(O.C.) A bloodcurdling SHRIEK deteriorates into a raw, agitated gurgling.

Jack's wide-eyed attention is fixed on the FRONT DOOR. He stares with a look of abject terror.

Indistinct sounds of *ripping, flesh tearing, bones crunching* emanate from the front porch.

Jack scrambles up off the floor--he nearly tumbles over himself, tripping on his burlap sack.

He spots Roy's RIFLE still propped up in the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The visceral sounds of an unknown horror are growing in intensity just outside... *gurgling, snarling, ripping...*

Jack grips the rifle and ducks down by the hutch.

(O.C.)--**THUD!**

Silence.

With slow, measured steps... he inches in the direction of the bedroom, aiming the gun towards the front of the house.

Jack's eyes fixed at the door, he readies his weapon.

--A SUDDEN EARSPLITTING HOWL unlike that of any natural hound *shatters* the silence.

Jack throws his hands up to his ears, dropping the gun. It gives a modest **clunk** as it hits the wooden floor.

Quickly, Jack recovers the rifle, eyes like saucers.

The BEAST outside now rumbling a low, ominous growl--

--***BAM***! A BURST of dust explodes off the door, the whole house rattles. A *pause...*

SLAM! ...

SLAM! ...

The beast begins scratching and clawing ferociously at the thin wooden barrier between itself and a cowering Jack.

QUICK BEAT.

Jack glances back to the bedroom door. He starts to make a run for it--

INT. LIVING ROOM - THAT EXACT MOMENT

--***BAM***! The front door gives way and SMASHES open. Splintered wood flies *everywhere*.

A MASSIVE, HULKING FIGURE, reared on two legs, BUSTS through the doorframe, gnashing at the air.

Standing nearly 6' tall with thick, black fur, the WOLF-LIKE BEAST slams to the ground, landing on all fours.

Two *pale yellow eyes* catch the light of the FULL MOON through the gaping doorway.

INTERCUT: LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN

The beast's lips curl into a snarl, revealing a set of alabaster white teeth, irregular in size.

All needle-sharp, all distinctly *canine*... glistening, dripping with a blend of saliva and the blood of whatever it just killed.

A very quick beat.

Jack fumbles the rifle, he lifts it up with no time to aim--

--**POP!** --*HE FIRES A SHOT!*

The BEAST REARS UP AND HOWLS. Blood drips from the side of its neck.

The animal now distracted by its wound, Jack lunges to the bedroom and barrels through the door--

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

--*the room is filled with DUST.* Jack is blinded, coughing. He stumbles forward and finds Roy's bed... the bed is EMPTY.

Jack squints through the cloudy air and spots an OPEN WINDOW.

A sudden gust of wind causes the dust in the room to swirl and churn. The FULL MOON weakly shines in, enough light for Jack to see his exit.

(O.C.) *the beast growls, the sounds of clawed feet on hardwood rapidly clacking towards him.*

Jack, gun in hand, launches himself through the window.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jack lands hard on the ground, recovers quickly, and rolls on his back. He quickly aims the gun at the window. A beat.

He lay still, listening to the sound of the beast gnashing and galloping through the bedroom.

The wind kicks up, dust and sand swirl through the air and into Jack's eyes--he reacts, jerking his head down and releasing one hand from his weapon to shield his face.

His eyes open just in time to see the beast's face emerge in the window--

--**POP!** *Jack fires a shot!*

A chunk of flesh is blasted off the animal's left cheek, it yelps in pain and lurches backwards.

Jack prepares to fire again--

The beast LEAPS through the opening--

--POP!

The giant animal howls and falls to the ground, a near miss from where Jack is laying at the ready.

Jack springs up, he goes to fire another shot--

--*click*!

He tries again... --*click*! While the beast starts to recover its footing, Jack rolls over to make a run for it but is suddenly jerked backwards--

--Jack SCREAMS.

The beast's jaws have closed around his ankle like a bear trap. It violently shakes its head, blood pouring from his mouth.

Jack wails in pain through a frenetic struggle.

He grips the barrel of the gun and SMASHES the butt into the beast's head, wounding its eye. It yelps and Jack's leg is freed from its jaws.

He SMASHES its face *again, again, again*. The butt of the gun is now dripping in blood. The beast collapses.

Jack scrambles away, leg dragging.

He tries using the gun as a make-shift crutch, but fails... the barrel sinks into the inches of soft dust.

Not far from the BARN and WINDMILL, he has to crawl.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE BARN - BASE OF THE WINDMILL

A round metal tank sits at the bottom of the dilapidated windmill--uncovered, any remaining drinking water has turned to sludge.

Jack hurls himself over the flimsy sheet metal, plopping in the shallow mud.

He winces in pain and reaches for his shredded ankle. With barely enough light from the moon, he takes off his BELT to form a makeshift tourniquet.

Beat. The wind whistles through the rickety blades of the windmill...

A shrill HOWL pierces the air.

Jack reacts to the sound, his face grimacing with pain and fear.

He looks around--desperate. The feeble metal barrier would be no match for even a normal wolf.

Jack uses the gun to hoist himself up, reaches for the frame of the windmill, and begins to climb.

The faintest hints of sunrise give a pink tinge to the horizon.

Jack's injured foot hangs limp beneath him as he pulls himself up, rung by rung, gun tucked precariously under his arm.

A sudden strong gust of wind shakes the unsteady structure. Jack loses his grip of the gun, it falls to the tub below and hits the sheet metal with a loud CLANG!

Jack freezes in fear. A matter of seconds go by...

Suddenly--the BEAST leaps into the air out of the darkness.

Lunging straight up, unable to get footing on the wooden slats, the animal takes hold of the dangling belt from Jack's tourniquet.

As the beast falls backwards down to the ground, chunks of flesh are *ripped* from Jack's injured foot along with the belt.

With a bloodcurdling scream, Jack tumbles to the ground, the decaying frame of the windmill giving way.

The sun peeks over the horizon.

Beat. Silence.

Jack lay, unconscious, at the base of the windmill. He rouses, weakly... and looks to the side.

The broken body of a man--Roy--is draped, face up, on the edge of the metal tank.

Still breathing, Roy turns his head towards Jack. His face battered and bloodied... he speaks between raspy, shallow gasps.

ROY
I'm sorry...
(beat)
... about your foot.

Jack stares, breath heavy and shaking.

With one last exhale, Roy is dead.

Beat.

Jack looks away from Roy--raising his head off the ground just an inch. His face contorts at the sight of his brutalized foot... or, what used to be his foot.

He rips off what's left of his shirt, and wraps it around the exposed bone and muscle, tying it as tightly as he can muster.

Gun out of sight, Jack uses a broken slat from the now-collapsed windmill to pull himself up.

He hops on his one usable leg, slowly, inch by inch, towards the HOUSE. He coughs in the dusty air.

EXT. THE ROAD OUTSIDE THE FARM

The road has vanished.

Remnants of a vehicle poke out from under mountains of dust and debris... Jack's truck is completely buried.

EXT. PORCH/DOORSTEP

Jack has made it to the front of the house. The remains of a shredded jackrabbit litter the wooden porch.

Bloody canine footprints are scattered throughout.

Jack hobbles through the busted doorframe.

INT. THE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Mounds of dust have formed against every wall and surface in the home... the air only slightly more breathable than the outside.

Jack drops the wooden slat, and collapses onto the kitchen chair.

A beat.

The half-eaten jar of stewed jackrabbit is still on the table.

Jack opens it, and takes a bite.

FADE TO BLACK.