

FADE IN:

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "THE MADNESS OF LOVE IS THE GREATEST OF HEAVEN'S BLESSINGS - PLATO".

EXT. OLD BARN - DAY

The front side of a barn. The door closed and locked. Typical outside SOUNDS: birds chirping, bugs buzzing, etc.

A non-diegetic HUM. Soft at first. Growing louder and louder. Before it becomes unbearable, sudden SILENCE.

EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY

A utility pole.

CAROL, a young girl, jumps off her bike. Tacks a POSTER on the pole and moves on. The poster shows a black and white photo of a DOG. In bold caption, it reads: "PLEASE HELP! LOST DOG". There's a brief description with a contact number.

EXT. JOHN'S HOUSE - LATER

Carol KNOCKS on the front door. JOHN, elderly but brawn, answers the door with a kind face.

JOHN  
Hello, Carol.

Carol keeps her head down. Struggles to make eye contact.

CAROL  
Hi, Pastor John.

JOHN  
You look so sad. Is everything all right?

Carol stiffly shakes her head. Hands him a poster.

CAROL  
My dog is missing.

JOHN  
Aww, that's too bad. I'm sorry to hear that.

CAROL

If you have some time, can you say a little prayer for my doggie? It's probably really scared.

JOHN

I'll do something better. How 'bout I say a big prayer?

CAROL

Thank you, Pastor John.

JOHN

You're very welcome. I'm sure it will turn up soon.

CAROL

I hope so.

Carol turns around. Hops on her bike. Peddles away.

John holds his look of sympathy. He glances down at the poster in his hand. Closes the front door.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

John takes a seat at a piano. Displays the poster in front of him as if it were sheet music. He begins to play an old fashioned HYMN.

MONTAGE: TIME LAPSE

-- Clouds move quickly across the sky.

-- Full moon rises.

-- The old barn from earlier, drowns in darkness.

BACK TO SCENE

As John continues to play, his wife KATHRYN enters.

KATHRYN

Dinner's ready.

John acknowledges her with a nod. The hymn comes to an end. His fingers pause on the last note.

Kathryn exits.

John snatches the poster. Crumples it in his hands. Pitches it in a nearby waste basket.

INT. THE KITCHEN - LATER

John and Kathryn eat quietly at the dinner table.

After a minute, Kathryn breaks the silence --

KATHRYN

The offering was lower than  
expected.

JOHN

(shrugs)  
So was attendance. What do you  
expect?

KATHRYN

Mother always said: low attendance  
meant stale sermons.

John is visually appalled by her statement, but he keeps his  
composure rather well.

JOHN

The only thing *stale* is your  
dinner.

He gets up from the table. Heads toward the back door.

KATHRYN

Where are you going?

JOHN

Where do you think? I'm going to  
feed our son. At least, someone  
will be enjoying their meal  
tonight.

KATHRYN

He's your son.

JOHN

What did you say?

KATHRYN

I said... he's your son. Not mine.

John stands at the door, shaking his head in disbelief. He  
exits, SLAMMING the door behind him.

EXT. JOHN'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - SAME

John walks to the back of his car. Opens the trunk. Carol's DOG is in there, timid and shaking. He grabs the dog and carries it into the darkness of the night.

EXT. OLD BARN - SAME

John unlocks the barn door and opens it. A lantern faintly illuminates the inside.

INT. OLD BARN - SAME

John enters and closes the barn door behind him. Releases the dog to roam freely. He walks over to an old record player. Turns it on. As the SONG plays, something lurks in the darkness of the barn: THE CREATURE.

The creature FOCUSES ON John, and then the dog.

CREATURE

(beastly)

Doggie. Doggie. Doggie. Doggie.  
Doggie. Doggie.

JOHN

Yeah, buddy. Daddy brought you a doggie.

CREATURE

Father. Father. Father. Promise.  
Promise.

JOHN

Just like I promised.

CREATURE

Birthday. Birthday. Birthday.

JOHN

Not tonight, buddy. Your birthday is tomorrow. Remember?

The creature GROWLS, sullenly.

John exits.

EXT. OLD BARN - SAME

John sighs. Locks the barn door.

JOHN  
(softly)  
Love you, son.

The creature SNARLS.

The dog WHIMPERS. Bones CRACK. The dog YELPS.

John WHISTLES as he walks back to the house.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER

John and Kathryn lie in bed.

Kathryn faces away from John, who sits up, reading his bible. The pages of the bible are lit by a small lamp.

KATHRYN  
Why do you even bother?

JOHN  
Bother with what?

KATHRYN  
Reading your bible. You're a hypocrite, John. You act like the world around you is okay. You act like everything is okay. You act like we are okay.

JOHN  
(setting bible aside)  
We're not?

Kathryn turns and faces him. She chortles mirthlessly.

KATHRYN  
Are you insane? Of course, we are not okay!

She climbs out of bed. Glances out the window. Her arms crossed.

KATHRYN  
We haven't been okay since that *thing* came into our lives!

JOHN  
(climbing out of bed)  
It's not a *thing*! It's our son!

KATHRYN

Yes, I gave birth to it. It was normal. But it changed, John. That thing is a spawn of the devil!

JOHN

Shame on you!

KATHRYN

No! Shame on you! That is your seed out there! That monster is your fault!

JOHN

How is it my fault?

KATHRYN

Because you have unconfessed sin. You need to ask for forgiveness. You have the church fooled, but not me.

For a minute, John remains silent.

JOHN

If you want to blame me for our son becoming different, then go ahead. He never asked to be born. He's innocent. I love him with all my heart. There's nothing that I wouldn't do for him.

He walks toward the threshold as if to leave. Turns to face her.

JOHN

From now on, he'll only be my son. Because that's what you want. It's what you've always wanted. To be free. Well, you're free now. Free from this burden.

John points a scolding finger. There's nothing more to say. He turns and leaves.

LATER

Kathryn sleeps comfortably in bed. The moonlight floods the bedroom. The red glow from an alarm clock illuminates her face. It's 11:59pm. It flips to 12:00am, setting the ALARM off and waking Kathryn. She reaches over. Turns the alarm off. She turns in bed and notices that John is not there.

A silhouetted FIGURE stands in front of a window.

KATHRYN

John? What are you doing?

JOHN

Something that I should've done...  
a long time ago.

Before Kathryn has a chance to react, John's hand covers her mouth and nose with a white rag. She struggles until her body goes limp.

John grabs her ankle. Yanks her off the bed. She collapses on the floor with a loud THUD.

INT. OLD BARN - LATER

Kathryn wakes up to a SONG playing on the record player. It's the same song from earlier. She struggles to her feet. Tries the door. It's locked.

The lantern is not as bright.

KATHRYN

John?

JOHN (O.S.)

(from outside door)

Yes, dear?

KATHRYN

Let me out.

JOHN (O.S.)

I can't. I promised my son a  
birthday present. It's his  
birthday, you know. His *mother*...  
would've remembered that. If he had  
one.

Kathryn hears SOMETHING in the darkness. She warily looks around. Makes her way to the record player. Turns it off. A broken BRACELET lies on the ground. Next to it, a torn NECKTIE. A ripped BLOUSE. Blood-stained clothes and accessories are scattered about.

MONTAGE: FLASHBACK - JOHN AND KATHRYN GREET CHURCH MEMBERS

-- A YOUNG WOMAN wears the bracelet.

-- A YOUNG MAN wears the necktie.

-- An OLD LADY wears the blouse.

-- etc.

BACK TO SCENE

Kathryn HEARS something behind her. She spins around and comes face-to-face with the creature.

The creature rears up, extending its long arms in a menacing manner. It GROWLS ferociously as it bares its claws.

Kathryn breaks into SONG --

KATHRYN

(voice quavering)

Isn't he the most beautiful baby?/  
Isn't he the most beautiful boy?/  
Isn't he just wonderful?/ Doesn't  
he bring such joy?

The creature, cocking its head, seems to show interest. It drops its arms at its side.

KATHRYN

Remember that? I used to sing that  
to you when you were a baby.

She tries to SING it again --

KATHRYN

(still quavering)

Isn't he the most beautiful --

The creature rears up again. Lets out a thunderous GROWL. Swipes its long claws across Kathryn's face. Blood spatters across the record player.

EXT. OLD BARN - SAME

John stands outside, facing the barn door.

JOHN

Happy birthday, Son.

He walks toward the house, WHISTLING with satisfaction.

EXT. JOHN'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

John reads a newspaper. Just over the brim of the paper, he sees carol peddling on her bike.

JOHN  
(waving her over)  
Carol!

Carol approaches the porch. Hops off her bike.

CAROL  
Hi, Pastor John.

JOHN  
I have some good news.

CAROL  
You do?

JOHN  
I found your dog.

CAROL  
(filled with glee)  
Really?!

JOHN  
Yep.

CAROL  
Where is it?

JOHN  
My wife is allergic. So, I had to  
put it in my barn. Come on. Let's  
go get it.

He steps off the porch.

Carol throws her arms around him.

CAROL  
You're the best, Pastor John.

John chuckles.

JOHN  
I'd like to think so.

He leads Carol to the old barn...

FADE OUT.

THE END