

Wither
by
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FADE IN:

EXT. OHIO VALLEY - AERIAL SHOT - DAY

Rolling mounds of green as far as the eye can see. A low-lying mist nestles in the valleys.

The sun is just breaking the horizon. Its orange glow skips off the peaks of the hills.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

TALIA (30s), sits against a tree next to a tent barely big enough for one.

Her dark hair is caked with dirt and dried blood.

Her clothes are ragged, upper lip's busted. She looks like she hasn't showered in months.

Her campsite is well concealed by brush.

A handgun lies next to her side. Next to that is a twelve inch metal tube.

The metal tube is a mechanical bolt gun. It has a quarter inch piercing rod that extends from its face by three inches.

Across from her is what looks like a modified mini-fridge on wheels.

It has clasps on the exterior of the door. A vertical handle on top to roll it like luggage.

She writes into a leather bound journal. She closes the book and etches a tally mark on its cover. This makes eight.

She looks up at the sky.

A contrail crawls along the stratosphere. The aircraft is too high to be heard or identified.

She pulls out her compass, gets a general sense of its direction. It's heading north.

A rustle inside the tent catches her attention.

She reaches inside the tent and pulls out FINNEGAN (1). She sits him on her lap. He rubs his eyes.

His thin blonde hair whips in the wind. He smiles at her with his three-tooth grin.

Talia points to the sky. Finn looks up.

TALIA
You see that?

FINNEGAN
D-Daddy.

TALIA
No, that's an airplane. That's
hope.

Talia uses the hunting knife to open a can of yams. She cleans her hand with a baby wipe and begins to feed him.

While he eats she pulls out a digital forehead thermometer. She places the sensor against his forehead and triggers it.

It reads off the temperature with a woman's voice.

VOICE
Your body temperature is 101.9
Degrees.

She retrieves a small bottle of white liquid from her bag and a plastic syringe.

She carefully measures the medicine and administers some between his bites.

Finn hands her a chunk of mushy yams. She smiles.

TALIA
Gross, little man.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Talia lumbers through the woods with her campsite in tow. Finn in a toddler carrier on her back.

He's bundled up in a dirty winter jacket. A knit cap on his head. Mittens on his hands.

She drags her mini fridge over unforgiving terrain. Its wheels struggle to spin - caked with dirt, leaves, and snow.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Talia walks up on to the main road and checks in both directions.

Not a sound, not a soul. Asphalt flanked by trees as far as the eye can see.

She begins walking down the middle of the street.

As she walks the wheels of the mini-fridge begin to shed their debris.

One of the wheels begins to squeak. As she continues it gets louder.

TALIA
That's not good.

She tilts the fridge up on its right wheel and rolls it. It still squeaks.

She tilts its weight onto its left wheel. It's quiet. She's identified the culprit.

TALIA
We're gonna need to fix that.

The squeaky wheel draws unwanted attention. Talia vigorously scans the tree line as they walk.

They head up the first gravel driveway they see.

EXT. DILAPITATED BARN - DAY

Rusted out farm equipment sits in tall grass.

The barn has holes in its roof. Planks of wood are missing from its siding.

Talia parks the mini-fridge and enters the barn's open doors.

INT. DILAPITATED BARN - DAY

It's quiet. Dark. Empty stables illuminated by streaks of sunlight breaking through holes in the exterior.

Talia walks over to a workbench in front of a busted window.

It has various rusty tools and dirty chemical containers.

She searches through the containers until she finds some oil. She shakes the plastic jug, just enough left.

As she begins to leave, she notices a folded up note with a rock placed on top of it.

She looks around then opens the note. She reads quietly.

TALIA

Eleanor Mangold. Born November
11th, 1968. Infected June 3rd,
2019. Lord forgive me for I am a
weak man. I could not kill the only
woman I've ever loved. - Robert.

Talia looks around the barn. In the dark corner is a recently built barricade. Fresh wood in an old structure.

She pulls a large hunting knife from a sheath on her belt. She places the tip of the blade on the window sill.

She tilts the blade to reflect sunlight into the corner of the room.

Something is written in red spray paint. She works the small beam of light around until she can make it out.

DO NOT OPEN

Finn points to the beam of light wiggling on the wall.

FINNEGAN

A-Yee! A-Yee!

TALIA

Shhh.

BANG!

Something inside has woken up. Talia races out of the barn.

BANG!

The wooden latch screwed on the exterior of the door holds, for now.

EXT. DILAPITATED BARN - DAY

Talia pours oil on to both axles of the mini-fridge. She discards the container.

She grabs the handle of the mini-fridge and rushes back up the driveway.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

They get to the main road and Talia slows her pace. The banging continues in the distance.

She searches the tree line for movement as she marches on.

TALIA

Note to self - Shiny objects excite
Mr. Finnegan.

FINNEGAN

D-Daddy.

TALIA

No. Say Momma.

FINNEGAN

D-Daddy.

TALIA

Mom. Momma.

They continue their debate as they walk down the desolate road.

The squeaky wheels have been silenced.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Finn is now asleep in the carrier.

Talia comes across a faded hand-written sign that's staked into the grass next to the road.

*Survivors in 10 miles. 512 Cedar
Ridge Lane.*

She walks over to the sign and wiggles it loose. She pulls it out and tosses it into the brush.

She looks off to the sun behind her. It's sinking below the horizon.

TALIA

We'd better set up camp.

After no response from her rear companion...

TALIA

You awake back there, Mr. Finnegan?

Finn murmurs, repositions his head for a more comfortable resting spot.

Talia makes her way into the woods.

INT. DILAPITATED BARN - DAY

The banging continues. No snarls. No growls. Just the relentless weight of a body being thrown against the door.

The wooden latch gives way. The door busts open.

In a flash the prisoner is gone. Eleanor is on the hunt.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

A dim light illuminates the fabric of the tent. It's set up deep in the woods.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

The tent is illuminated by a hand crank lantern and a large candle.

Talia spreads peanut butter on a cracker and feeds it to Finn. He pleads for another.

He puts his thumb to his fingers and touches his fingertips together, the sign for more.

She checks her inventory.

TALIA

Last one. We've got to save the rest for breakfast.

She hands him his cracker. He devours it.

He spreads his arms out wide.

FINNEGAN

All gone.

TALIA

That's right, buddy. All gone.

She opens a metal canteen of water and lets him wash it down.

She puts the lid on the peanut butter and places the food back into her bag.

Twigs snap somewhere in the distance. Talia freezes, listens.

For a moment, there's nothing. Then another. Closer.

Talia grabs the bolt gun. It has a peg near the bottom that she sticks her boot on.

On the back of the hammer weight is a nylon strap.

She grabs it with both hands and struggles to pull it back until it cocks.

She waits for more noise. Nothing. Talia shrugs.

TALIA
(whisper)
Maybe it's just a deer?

As she says that, heavy footsteps crunch snow near her tent. They stop just outside.

Talia waits. Silence.

She unzips the front of the tent. With the bolt gun in one hand and the lantern in the other, she exits.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Talia stands at the mouth of the tent. She uses the lantern to check both sides. Nothing.

It's eerily quiet and beautiful. The moonlight illuminates enough snow to see through the woods for hundreds of feet.

There's nothing out there.

She crawls back inside.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Talia zips up the doorway behind her. She turns.

A face is pressing through the fabric of the tent. It's mouth is wide open, inches from Finn who doesn't even notice.

Talia lunges. She places the bolt gun on the top of its head and pulls the trigger.

CLANK!

The captive bolt slams home piercing through the fabric.

The head of the intruder slumps to the ground snapping one of the tent rods. Talia grabs Finn and pulls him close.

They watch for movement. There isn't any.

Talia pushes the head away with her boot. Snow crunches as the body rolls over.

Finn points to where the intruder was, oblivious to the danger.

FINNEGAN

A-yee. A-yee.

Talia kisses his cheek, hugs him tightly.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Talia exits the tent with her bolt gun ready.

At the back of the tent a heavy-set woman lies face down in the snow. Her grey hair so thin you can see her scalp.

Most of her clothes are shredded or missing.

Talia grabs her by the ankles and drags her away from the tent down into a ravine.

EXT. RAVINE - DAY

Talia sits next to her for a moment. She notices a wedding ring and works it off her finger.

She inspects the inside of the band. The inscription reads...

R&E FOREVER

She returns the wedding ring to its owner.

She takes out her journal and rips a piece of paper from it.

She writes the name "Eleanor Mangold" on it.

She crumples it up and places it inside of Eleanor's dead hand. She closes her fist around it.

TALIA

If I ever come across your Robert,
I'm going to punch him in the face.

She smiles for a moment but it fades. A guilt settles over her.

TALIA

I'm sorry. I shouldn't joke. At least you lived and you were loved. That's all I want for my son. He's already got the loved part.

After a moment of silence she closes her journal and etches another tally mark on its face. Today is nine.

She gets up and heads back to the tent.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Desks and papers are scattered about the hallways. Sunlight filters through the dust by the windows.

This is a 1950s era school with large cinder block walls and coat hangers lining the corridor.

A poorly constructed barricade of desks and chairs are stacked against the main entrance.

A crowbar wedges between the doors. It torques until the internal locks give way.

A push at the door loosens the barricade. Another push. The desks slide easily on the tile floors.

One last push and the door cracks open enough for DANE, (40s), to squeeze his large frame through.

He's bald but has a year's worth of facial hair. He's stocky and would be intimidating if he didn't look so scared.

He's dressed in Gothic attire - Black trench coat, black pants and boots.

He hurries to close the door behind him and reinforce the barricade.

He's soft on his feet being careful to not make a sound as he explores the interior.

He carries a hunting knife in one hand, spiked brass knuckles in the other. A backpack is slung over his shoulder.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE - DAY

He enters the office and closes the door.

Everything inside has a thick coating of dust that's been left undisturbed for some time.

He starts going through a large wall of file cabinets.

After coming up empty, he checks the desk drawers.

Inside one of the larger bottom drawers he finds a cardboard box. He pulls it out.

He dusts off the lid.

WAIS

Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale

He opens the box and removes the contents -- Four smaller boxes, some paper scales, and a manual.

He opens the manual. The oxidized yellow paper shows the age of this antiquated test.

He pulls a candle from his backpack and lights it with some matches.

He finds a pencil from the desk and sharpens it with his hunting knife. He begins, timing himself on every task.

-- He puts diagonal blocks together to match patterns --

-- He puts objects together to form the correct design --

-- Flips through a notebook with various pictures and jots down his answers --

-- Answers questions from the booklet on vocabulary, arithmetic, and comprehension --

After finishing the test he compiles his answers. He jots down the calculated number.

FSIQ = 152

He stares at it for a moment.

DANE

Okay.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Dane constructs a leg snare with some fine rope and some large sticks.

He slings the rope over the branch of one of the nearest trees and ties it to a busted log for counterweight.

He sets the trigger device and tests it by stepping on one of the sticks.

The noose wraps around his ankle with speed and force. He undoes it and resets the trap.

He hammers a large branch into the ground until it stands vertically. He hangs a draw-string baby doll from it.

He knots fishing line to the draw string and feeds it into the window of the school.

LATER

The fishing line pulls at the draw string and releases. The baby doll wails.

It repeats again. And again.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Dane sits inside the window. He pulls the draw string and waits. Then he repeats.

EXT. STREET - DAY

A wide shot of the school shows its architecture.

A two story building constructed of beige bricks and metal-framed windows.

It's eerily calm. The baby doll's cry echoes through the town.

A male ZOMBIE races by.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

The zombie runs straight for the crying doll. He stops just in front of it.

He's thin and frail. His hair is matted down with dirt and blood. He's missing an eye.

He sniffs the air, looks past the doll. As he begins to step away, the toy cries again.

He spins right into the snare and sets it off. The noose wraps tightly around his leg.

It jerks him down for a second, but he stands and tries to escape.

He pulls the counterweight up until it wedges against the larger branches.

He's stuck. He continually lunges forward trying to break free to no avail.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Dane grabs the crowbar and takes a deep breath. He exits the room.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Dane sneaks up behind the zombie. He holds the crowbar in a batter's stance.

His hands shake. He's having second thoughts. The zombie turns and lunges at him.

Dane cracks the zombie over its head as he trips.

The zombie writhes on the ground. He's dazed but not finished.

Dane jumps on his back, pins him down with all his weight.

Dane pulls back the right sleeve of his jacket exposing his arm. He pulls the zombie's head up by his hair.

Dane dangles his arm in front of the monster. His jaws snap trying to take a bite of it.

Dane inches his arm closer and closer, just outside the reach of the gnashing teeth.

The zombie's hair slips from his grip. It lunges and takes a huge chunk of flesh from Dane's arm.

DANE
Motherfucker!

Dane jumps off and grabs the crowbar. He smashes the zombie's head to bits in a fit of pure rage.

He drops the weapon and grabs his wounded arm. He runs back to the school.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Dane stumbles into the hallway. He leans against the wall and slides down to sit.

He studies the damage to his arm. Blood gushes from the wound.

DANE

You'd better be fucking right about this.

His breaths become labored. He lies down on the floor. He stares up at the ceiling as if it's disappearing.

His body begins to convulse. He foams at the mouth and pounds his fists on the floor.

His entire body becomes rigid as if a bolt of electricity hit him. He spits his last breath into the air and goes limp.

He's gone.

For a moment, he looks at peace. As if he'd never wake back up.

He jolts up with a scream. It takes a moment for him to gather his bearings.

He stands, checks the wound on his arm. It no longer bleeds.

He begins to smile. His little experiment has worked. He's not a zombie. He's something much worse.

He starts to laugh. His cackle reverberates throughout this hard concrete cavern.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Talia and Finn continue their pilgrimage.

Finn munches on the pieces of crackers that Talia hands to him while he enjoys his vantage point from her back.

She stops as she comes across another sign.

*Survivors in 5 miles. 512 Cedar
Ridge Lane.*

Again, she pulls the sign from the ground and tosses it into the brush.

FINNEGAN

All gone.

TALIA

They probably are, buddy. They probably are.

Finn was talking about the crackers, she was referring to the survivors.

EXT. CROSSROADS - DAY

The pair come to a crossroads. There's a blinking stop sign at each entrance.

The stop signs are all wired to their own solar panels. Talia wipes the dirt from one.

TALIA

I'm surprised these still work.

She looks down each of the roads. The one to her right has three people standing in the middle of it.

They must be 500 yards away. Their features are impossible to make out, but one thing's for sure - They're not moving.

EXT. DOWN THE ROAD - DAY

The zombies don't notice her. Their whitewashed eyes stare up at the sky.

They look like a family. We will refer to the parents as ED and EDNA, 30s. The girl, 12, is EDELE.

Flies buzz in and out of their open mouths. They never blink or make a sound. They don't even breathe. They're listening.

This is what zombies do in this world when they're not hunting.

EXT. CROSSROADS - DAY

Talia inches along the road trying to remain undetected. Finn waves at the distant strangers.

FINNEGAN

Hi.

Talia blocks his view by pulling up her coat. She speaks quietly.

TALIA

I don't think we want to meet them.

She continues until they fall under the cover of brush, then she picks up her pace.

EXT. GRAVEL DRIVEWAY - DAY

They stand at the intersection of a long driveway and the main road.

The rusty mailbox at the end reads "512".

They proceed up the driveway.

In a clearing at the end of the drive is a small cabin. Smoke rises from its chimney.

As she gets closer she stops.

A makeshift trip-wire alarm is at her ankles. Small bells on fishing line.

It extends the entire perimeter of the property.

She steps over it.

An old GMC pickup truck is parked next to the busted picket fence. Rusted out farm equipment peeks out of the overgrown grass.

Talia makes her way towards the cabin.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Talia approaches the cabin with caution, pistol at her side. As she gets to its gate, NORMAN (50s) exits.

He's a grizzly looking man with grey scruff. He carries a double-barrel shotgun in the crook of his arm.

NORMAN

Be on your way. We don't have any extra food.

TALIA

Could we just come in and warm ourselves by your fire? We don't need food.

Norman looks her over. Finn waves at him.

FINNEGAN

Hi.

NORMAN

I'm sorry, ma'am. Down the road about two miles is the Miller's cabin. They ain't there no more and there's plenty of firewood.

MARGARET, (40s) exits the cabin. She puts her hand on Norman's shoulder.

MARGARET

(quietly)

Norman, she has a child.

He turns to address her, lowers his voice.

NORMAN

Exactly. Ain't no way she can keep that kid quiet.

TALIA

I know how to keep my boy quiet. It's how we've survived.

Norman turns, surprised that she heard them.

NORMAN

We have a son, too. You have to understand we're just trying to protect ourselves. Unless you have anything that can help us, you be on your way.

Norman begins to usher Margaret back inside.

TALIA

I hid your signs on the way here. Some of them can read, you know.

Norman stops.

NORMAN

I'm not following you.

TALIA

When's the last time you've spoken to anyone from the outside? Seen the news or even heard a radio broadcast? I don't have any food, but I may have information that can save your lives. Things have changed.

NORMAN
You believe in Christ our savior?

TALIA
I do.

He looks to Margaret, she pleads with her eyes.

NORMAN
Leave your weapons outside.

He waves her in.

INT. CABIN - DAY

It's cramped but practical. A wood burning stove and a fireplace with an old wagon wheel hung above its mantel.

A small wooden table for four sits centered in the kitchen. Pots and pans hang from the walls. Kerosene lamps on the counter.

The adjacent living room area has a rocking chair and a wooden-framed couch. A Springfield rifle hangs on the wall.

No TVs. No outlets. Zero technology except for a radio with dead batteries sitting next to it.

Talia sits on the floor in front of the fire with Finn on her lap. She strips some of his layers of clothes off.

She places a digital thermometer against Finn's forehead and presses a button. The device sounds out with a woman's voice.

VOICE
Your body temperature is 101.3.

Margaret boils some water on the stove.

MARGARET
Is he sick?

TALIA
He's been fighting an ear
infection. We've almost got it
licked.

Talia lets Finn play with the thermometer.

GAVIN, (17), enters from the bedroom wearing only thermal bottoms. He's teenage-thin, pale, hair disheveled from a long sleep.

He freezes as his eyes meet Talia's.

NORMAN
Get some clothes on, Gavin.

He blushes before he retreats into the bedroom.

NORMAN
Good kid, just wished I'd better prepared him for this.

TALIA
Nobody was prepared for this. I'm Talia. Finn is my son's name.

MARGARET
I'm Margaret, pleased to meet you.

NORMAN
Norman. Where are you headed?

TALIA
Catawba Island. I heard they have a sanctuary there.

NORMAN
Where'd you hear that?

TALIA
AM radio station. Forgot which one. We picked up their repeating broadcast on the way up. Before our car died.

Margaret approaches her.

MARGARET
I can wash some of his clothes if you'd like?

TALIA
Please. And may I have some warm water?

MARGARET
Sure, dear.

Talia hands her a pile of Finn's dirty garments. Margaret takes them to the sink.

TALIA
Does that truck run?

NORMAN

Battery's dead. Even if it wasn't,
the quarter tank of stale gas will
get you to the middle of nowhere in
either direction.

Margaret hands Talia a wet rag and a cup of water. She begins
to wash Finn's arms and legs.

Margaret admires Finnegan.

MARGARET

How old is he?

TALIA

Fifteen months.

MARGARET

He's so sweet.

TALIA

Thanks. He's my little man.

NORMAN

The outbreak started five years
ago. What were you thinking
bringing a child into all of this?

MARGARET

Norman.

TALIA

It's okay. It's a legitimate
question. He wasn't planned, but
what were we supposed to do? I
mean, how do we survive if we don't
keep trying, right? It's not easy,
he waves to everyone he sees. Dead
or alive. He's just a happy guy.

She tickles Finn's bare belly. He cackles and squirms in her
arms.

TALIA

That's right. You're just so happy.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Gavin stands in front of a mirror fixing his hair in a
meticulous manner.

He rummages through his closet until he finds his least
wrinkled shirt. He preps as if he's going on a date.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Gavin enters and sits on the couch behind Talia. He watches her take a bottle of white powder, measure it and mix it with the hot water.

She syringes a specific amount of the chalky liquid and feeds it to Finn.

GAVIN

What is that?

TALIA

It's an antibiotic.

GAVIN

How do you know how much to give him?

TALIA

I used to be a pharmacist.

Norman gets up and walks over to the kitchen window. He scans the wood line.

NORMAN

Gavin, you know anything about signs telling people we're here?

Gavin fidgets in his seat, avoids his father's glare.

GAVIN

No.

NORMAN

Really? That's funny. I know I didn't put any out there.

(to Margaret)

Did you?

Margaret shakes her head.

MARGARET

It was an honest mistake, Norman.

NORMAN

An honest mistake can get us killed. That's an advertisement to come take our food. How do you think she found us?

Norman points to Talia as he glowers at Gavin.

GAVIN
I don't know.

NORMAN
You don't know? Are you really
going to lie to my face?

Gavin stands, throws his hands down.

GAVIN
I'm sorry, okay?! All we do is sit
here and we're running out of food.

Norman steps over to Gavin and crowds his space. Gavin tries to look brave, but he's trembling.

NORMAN
We're running out of food and
you're inviting scavengers to come
stay with us?

GAVIN
What if the army's out there
looking for survivors? They'll
never find us.

In spite of the commotion, Finn is slowly drifting off in Talia's arms. She stands between them.

TALIA
If you two can keep quiet for just
a second while I get this kid down,
I can offer a solution.

Norman walks back in to the kitchen. Talia lays Finn down on the couch and covers him with her jacket.

She walks into the kitchen. Gavin follows her.

TALIA
How many signs are out there?

GAVIN
Four.

TALIA
I've already gotten two. Where are
the other two?

GAVIN
I put two south and two north.
About five miles apart.

TALIA

Great. We came from the south so those are gone. We're heading north and can get the other two tomorrow.

NORMAN

You planning on staying the night?

TALIA

I'll do you this favor if you let us stay. Poor kid hasn't slept in a warm bed in almost two weeks.

NORMAN

How do we know you'll even keep your end of the bargain?

TALIA

Honestly, what have you got to lose?

Norman walks back to his window.

MARGARET

Norman?

NORMAN

Fine. Stay.

TALIA

We'll be gone first thing in the morning.

As Talia turns, Gavin mouths the words "thank you". Talia nods.

TALIA

May I use your bathroom to wash up a little?

Margaret points.

MARGARET

It's through the bedroom.

TALIA

Thank you.

Talia exits the room.

BATHROOM

Talia wrings a rag from into a bowl on the sink.

She wipes dirt from her face. She studies herself in the mirror.

She pulls out the neck of her shirt and checks the stench of her own body.

She produces a small bottle of men's cologne from her pocket.

She stares at the bottle of cologne, rubs her thumb over its label.

It means something to her.

She removes the cap and sprays some onto her neck. She rubs it in.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Norman drinks tea, back at his window playing watchdog.

Gavin squats down and studies the mini-fridge Talia rolled in. He undoes the clamps and swings open the door.

Margaret rushes towards him.

MARGARET
Leave it alone.

TALIA (O.S.)
It's okay.

Talia walks in and sits at the table.

TALIA
There's not much to see.

Gavin swings open the door. The inside of it is lined with acoustic-foam panels. Other than that, it's empty.

GAVIN
What is this?

TALIA
It's a hide box for Finn. It's soundproof and air tight. If we run into trouble, I lock him in there. They can't smell him or hear him.

Norman turns from his guard post.

NORMAN
Air tight?

TALIA

It has to be.

NORMAN

How long can he last in something like that?

TALIA

About ten minutes.

MARGARET

Oh my, that seems so inhumane.

Talia takes a long, hard look at the hide box. She gets lost in it.

TALIA

If I don't get him out in ten minutes that means I'm dead. He will pass out due to lack of oxygen and die. It's a more humane alternative than him being eaten alive. I can't bear that thought.

GAVIN

That's pretty cool. How'd you come up with that?

TALIA

I used to be an engineer.

Gavin smirks at her, she winks.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

A close up of a drill twisting its way into the frosted bark of a maple tree. It rotates at a slow, staggered pace.

PAULETTE, 60s, works the bit into the wood with an egg-beater style hand drill.

She's dressed in an all white ski suit. A white knit cap covers her grey, frazzled hair.

She carries a pistol in a hip-holster.

She stops to flex her cramping hand then returns to work.

She pulls the drill from the tree and begins to tap a metal spile into the hole with a dead-blow hammer.

She hangs a tin bucket from the spile and covers it with a lid. Sap can be heard striking the bottom of the bucket.

She picks up her other bucket and moves on to another prospect. A twig snaps, catches her attention.

She looks over to see Dane who stands thirty feet away with his hands in the air.

DANE
I'm not armed.

Paulette looks him over, continues on to the next tree without speaking a word.

Dane approaches, careful not to step on another branch. He walks up behind Paulette and watches her work.

Paulette starts the drill into another tree.

DANE
Sorry if I startled you. I didn't think I would find anyone out in these parts.

Paulette grunts as she works in the drill.

You can't tell if she's annoyed with the resistance or the babbling observer behind her.

DANE
It's a little early in the season, isn't it? Doesn't that hurt the tree?

PAULETTE
No.

DANE
How do you know?

PAULETTE
It's still here the next year.

DANE
Yeah. Probably just annoys it. Like mosquitos. We're mosquitos to the tree.

Dane laughs. Paulette jerks the drill from the bark.

PAULETTE

Look, you're dressed like Johnny Cash in a snow covered forest so you stick out like turd stain on a wedding dress. And you're about as subtle as a dump truck full of ball bearings. You're fixing to get yourself dead and I'd prefer not to be around you when that happens.

DANE

I'm sorry. I'll be quiet.

While Paulette taps the spile into the hole, Dane scans all of the visible forest. There's nobody else out there.

Paulette hangs the bucket and puts the lid on. She starts off in the direction she came, following her own foot prints.

Dane shadows her.

EXT. SUGAR SHACK - DAY

It's not much bigger than a tool shed. The exterior is made of well seasoned wood.

Smoke rises from the stove pipe. Steam from the vent in the roof dissipates into the wind.

A cord of firewood is stacked next to its single, tiny window.

Paulette approaches and opens the front door. She waves Dane in.

INT. SUGAR SHACK - DAY

A large wooden work bench stands in the middle. Against the wall a wood burning stove crackles away.

A large stainless steel pot sits on top of it. Steam rises from its mouth and escapes into an overhead hood.

Paulette latches the door shut after Dane enters. He takes in the surroundings.

DANE

World's coming to an end and you're out here making maple syrup.

PAULETTE

What else are we supposed to do?

DANE

Thanks for not shooting me by the way.

PAULETTE

You fire a pistol out here you're likely as dead as what you're shooting.

Paulette walks over to the pot, spoons some of the froth from the top and taps it into a bowl.

DANE

I heard it takes like forty gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup.

PAULETTE

Don't know. Never measure it. I just know it takes a lot to make a little.

Dane walks around the shack and notices a box of single-use HANDWARMERS on the window sill.

DANE

You all alone out here?

PAULETTE

No. I've got my family up at the main house.

DANE

And they have you out here by yourself?

PAULETTE

Nobody has me anywhere. I come out here so my grandbabies can have some sweetness on their pancakes.

Paulette throws another log into the stove. She shuffles them around with an iron poker.

She closes the stove door and places the poker next to it.

PAULETTE

Is there something I can do for you...?

As she lingers on her last word Dane realizes she's asking for his name. He offers his dirty hand.

DANE

I'm sorry. Dane.

Paulette passes on the hand shake.

PAULETTE

Paulette.

Paulette's eyes become fixated on the snow flakes on top of Dane's scalp.

DANE

You okay?

Paulette returns to her boil.

PAULETTE

I'm fine. Sometimes I get lost in my own thoughts.

DANE

Huh. Do you think I could spend the night here? Rest? Maybe meet some of your family? I've been on my own for so long now I forget what it's like to have a conversation.

As Paulette taps the froth from the spoon she unbuttons her holster.

PAULETTE

We don't invite strangers into the house. Sorry.

DANE

I understand. I have some food I can share if that makes any difference?

As Dane starts to open his bag, Paulette pulls her gun. She aims it straight at his forehead.

PAULETTE

Turn around and get down on your knees.

Dane raises his hands.

DANE

What just happened here?

PAULETTE

Do what I say. Now!

DANE

Look, lady, I'll just leave. I didn't mean any harm.

PAULETTE

I'm not letting you leave. Get down.

Dane shakes his head.

DANE

You said it yourself. You fire that gun they'll hear it from miles away.

PAULETTE

I'm willing to take my chances.

DANE

Just tell me why?

PAULETTE

Because you're a trickster. An abomination. If I let you leave you're going to kill a lot of people.

Dane smiles. Somehow his cover's blown. He turns around and gets down on his knees.

Paulette reaches back and grabs the iron poker from the stove.

She lines up her distance to bring the poker down on top of Dane's head.

As she winds up, Dane ducks his head and stands. At this angle she has no clean shot at his head.

PAULETTE

Get back down!

He back peddles into her slamming her against the wall. He grabs the pistol from her hand and rips it out.

She swings the poker but misses as Dane jumps back. He aims the pistol at her and pulls the trigger.

CLICK. It's empty. Dane looks at the gun.

DANE

This fucking thing's empty?

Paulette swings again. Dane catches the poker with his hand and cracks her on the head with the butt of the gun.

Paulette's legs give out.

He places the gun on the table and picks her up. He sits her in a chair by the table.

She stares at him, tries to focus. Blood starts to filter through the knit cap on her head.

Dane pulls the cap from her head and surveys the damage.

DANE

You've got some balls being out here with an unloaded gun.

PAULETTE

Only bullets we've got left are for the gun in the house. You go there without me, I promise, you'll be shot dead.

Dane swings the poker down on to her left knee cap. You can hear it crack.

Paulette struggles to stifle her scream.

DANE

How did you know?

PAULETTE

Snow flakes.

DANE

Snow flakes?

PAULETTE

They tend to melt on a bald man's scalp.

Dane brushes the snow from his head. He takes Paulette's cap and puts it on.

Dane pulls up the sleeve of his left arm. He shows her the bite wound.

DANE

You know why I did this? To help people. I can go where other people can't. The dead don't even notice me. But nobody ever wants my help.

He cracks Paulette on her right knee. She rocks back and forth in pain.

Dane admires her strength as she endures the torment.

DANE

You remind me of my mom. She was a tough old bitch. She would give me impossible tasks to do whenever I wanted something. "Mom, can we have ice cream tonight?", "Sure, just run a nine minute mile for me."

Dane tosses the poker on the floor. He leans against the wall.

DANE

It's not that a nine minute mile is impossible. It was just impossible for me and she knew it. She would laugh as I failed. She would make it seem like it was my fault. She would never give me brain teasers, though.

Dane taps his index finger on his head.

DANE

I was smarter than her and she knew it. It always pissed her off.

Paulette takes a deep breath, swallows the pain. She begins searching through her pants pockets.

DANE

What are you doing?

PAULETTE

Looking for a fuck to give.

She pulls out her empty pocket liners.

PAULETTE

Seems I'm fresh out.

Dane bends down and stares into her eyes, inches from her face.

DANE

You give a fuck about your family, right?

She nods.

DANE

I'll make you a deal. All you have to do is crawl back on your busted knees without making any noise so the dead don't find you. Do that and I promise, I won't go inside.

He pushes her out of the chair. She lands on her knees and screams.

DANE

That's not a good start.

Dane opens the door.

PAULETTE

You're lying to yourself if you think you're helping people.

DANE

But I am. This world doesn't want us anymore. I'm helping people leave it.

Paulette winces as she starts to crawl. She struggles past the doorway.

Dane opens the box of hand warmers and sticks several into his pockets.

EXT. SUGAR SHACK - DAY

Paulette battles through the pain. Determination in her eyes. She tries to stand but slips.

She yelps as her knees impact the frozen ground. She continues on all fours.

INT. SUGAR SHACK - DAY

Dane stares into the boiling pot of sap. He touches the exterior of the cauldron.

His dead flash sizzles and he doesn't feel a thing.

He grabs some oven mitts off of the shelf and puts them on. He picks up the pot and exits the shack.

EXT. SUGAR SHACK - DAY

The shack is almost fifty feet behind her and she's finding a rhythm. She scours through the snow with increasing speed.

She looks back. Still no sign of Dane. With a glimmer of hope in her eyes she continues on.

Dane steps in out of nowhere.

She looks up just in time to see the molten-hot sap rain down on her head.

She belts out a deafening scream. It echoes through the forest.

Dane tosses the pot into the snow. He strips off his mitts and pulls the cap off his head.

He reaches into his bag and swaps out the cap for a homemade protective helmet. It's a crude looking device.

It resembles the plastic interior frame of a batter's helmet with the shield removed.

Along the outer edges are square pieces of steel plating riveted to the frame.

He puts it on and tightens the chin strap. He grins and starts marching in the direction Paulette was headed.

As Paulette writhes in pain on the ground, a ZOMBIE jumps on top of her and begins to feast.

Then ANOTHER. Her screams intensify for a moment before they disappear altogether.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Candles have been lit throughout the interior of the cabin.

Finn sleeps on the couch next to the crackling fire. Talia sits next to him, runs her fingers through his hair.

Margaret dishes out modest portions of food onto four dishes.

Norman and Gavin sit at the table. The silence is painful.

Margaret sets four plates on the table. This warrants an alarming look from Gavin.

GAVIN

Mom?

MARGARET

It's okay. She's our guest.

(to Talia)

Won't you join us?

Talia tucks Finn in and takes the empty seat at the table. This garners an uneasy stare from the family.

Talia can feel the tension.

TALIA

Did I do something wrong?

GAVIN

Emily used to sit there.

TALIA

Who's Emily?

GAVIN

My sister.

NORMAN

She's gone.

With that said, Norman digs in. Talia knows not to pursue the subject.

Talia hands the plate back to Margaret.

TALIA

Thanks, but I can't take your food.

MARGARET

Please. You're our guest.

TALIA

Well then, can I save my plate for when Finn wakes up and we'll share it?

MARGARET

Sure.

Margaret places the plate on the kitchen counter and takes a seat. The boys dig in.

Their dinner is a modest mix of vegetables. Corn, greens, and some Lima beans.

TALIA

When's the last time you guys have had some meat?

GAVIN

Dad killed all the livestock two winters ago.

NORMAN

Even though the dead don't seem to be interested in animals, the cows and chickens would get spooked whenever they showed up.

GAVIN

He even killed Ches.

TALIA

Who's Ches?

GAVIN

He was my dog.

Gavin eyeballs his father with resentment.

NORMAN

I love dogs. No greater animal on this planet. We just couldn't get him to stop barking.

The three of them eat in silence for a moment.

TALIA

I saw all kinds of livestock roaming free on the way here. What you guys need is a distraction device. I was staying in a gated community in Jacksonville. One of our residents was a lineman for the electric company. He wired up the weather alarm siren about a mile away. Whenever we attracted a flock he would trigger it. The dead would chase after it then wander off when he shut it down.

NORMAN

We don't have anything like that here.

TALIA

What about a windmill?

Norman shakes his head. Talia taps her fingers on the table, wheels churning in her brain.

TALIA

There's got to be something around here we can use to lead them away.

GAVIN

I have a drone. No way to charge it, though.

TALIA

There may be. Do you guys have any old DC motors around?

NORMAN

No.

Talia clicks her fingers.

TALIA

Solar power. I saw some working solar powered signs on the way here. I bet we could wire them to charge the batteries in the drone.

NORMAN

Still won't work. It's too quiet.

Talia looks up at the smoke detector on the ceiling.

TALIA

We use that. Jump it to have it go off the moment the battery's inserted. Tape it to the drone to lead them away.

Norman tosses his silverware onto the empty plate.

NORMAN

There's a funny word you're starting to use. We.

TALIA

Yeah. We. As in what's left of the human race. We're supposed to be helping each other. I need your help and I'm trying to return the favor. I can go by myself. I'll be back in two hours if you guys will watch Finn for me. I just need some tools.

GAVIN

I could go with her and help.

NORMAN
Absolutely not!

MARGARET
Absolutely not!

Gavin sinks back in his chair. Norman stares at Talia.

NORMAN
I'll go.

Talia squirms in her seat a bit, unsure if she's just been joined by a friend or a foe.

TALIA
Great.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Norman performs a weapons check. He pulls the live rounds from both barrels of his shotgun and checks them.

He pulls a magazine from his pistol and inspects it. He holsters it and puts on a camouflage hunting jacket.

Finn sits at the dinner table propped up on some pillows while Margaret feeds him some buttered corn.

Margaret lives for this. Finn laughs as he attempts to grab the spoon, but she's played this game before.

Talia watches in admiration from the other side of the table.

She writes in her journal and closes it. She etches another tally mark on its face. Today is ten.

TALIA
Do you know what the date is?

Margaret walks over to a 2016 calendar that's been marked over five times. She puts another 'X' on February 25th.

MARGARET
It's February 25th. Couldn't tell you what day of the week it is, though.

Talia counts backwards in her mind for a second.

She opens her journal and writes February 16th on top of one of her pages.

Margaret watches her write that particular date down.

MARGARET
What date is that?

TALIA
It's the date that Finn's father
was killed.

She closes the book and puts it in her backpack.

NORMAN
(to Talia)
Ready?

TALIA
Just a sec.

Talia picks Finn up and hugs him like she may never see him again. She kisses the top of his head, whispers in his ear.

TALIA
Momma loves you, buddy. I'm gonna
be right back. This is just a
little test run.

FINNEGAN
D-Daddy!

Talia looks to Margaret and shrugs.

TALIA
He's a work in progress.

She sets him back down in his seat, messes his hair up a bit. She stares at him as if she's about to cry.

Norman opens the door and exits.

MARGARET
You okay?

TALIA
I think this is the first time in
his life I've ever left his side.

MARGARET
He'll be fine.

Talia pulls out her stop watch and winds it. She places it on the table. It has a red piece of tape at the 10 minute mark.

TALIA
If you have any emergencies lock
him in there.

She points to the mini fridge.

TALIA
No more than 10 minutes, got it.

MARGARET
Got it. Let's just hope that's not
necessary.

As Talia walks out the door...

MARGARET
Be careful out there.

Talia nods, exits.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Talia and Norman walk down the desolate road. You get the feeling they've walked for miles without speaking a word.

Norman carries a tool bag in one hand, pistol in the other.

Talia has her gun tucked in her belt. Her mechanical bolt gun hangs by its strap from her neck.

She catches Norman looking at it. She pulls it off her neck and offers it to him.

He holsters his pistol and takes it. He studies it.

NORMAN
Does this actually work?

TALIA
Yeah. It was designed to use
gunpowder cartridges, but my
husband drilled out the guts and
put some stamping springs in it. He
was a machinist.

Norman hands it back to her.

NORMAN
Have to get awful close to use it,
eh?

TALIA
Too close. And you have to be a
weight lifter just to cock it.
That's why I put this motorcycle
peg on it. But, it's quiet.

They walk a little further.

NORMAN

You said some could read?

TALIA

We lived in a gated community, had it pretty well fortified with the others. One day a man shows up asking for refuge. He was extremely intelligent. He knew a lot about farming and solar power. He seemed fine, but he wasn't. He started picking us off one by one. Eating us. When we found him out he opened the gates and fired shots into the air. We were overrun.

NORMAN

Sounds like a bunch of horse shit.

TALIA

Believe it. Or don't. You don't trust anyone anyways so it doesn't affect you. It's the people out here trying to help each other who they pose a danger to.

NORMAN

So, if you and your son were safe in that cabin and me and my family walked up the driveway, you would just take us in?

Talia pauses just long enough for Norman to get a read on her.

TALIA

I would, but not right away. I would-

NORMAN

You wouldn't, period. You'd point your gun at me and tell us to get off your property.

TALIA

You're probably right. I don't know what I'd do.

Norman stops.

NORMAN

That's the first thing out of your mouth that I actually believe. Don't paint me to be a bad guy. Like the people left out here are all helping each other. We take from each other. It's what we've always done and it's worse now than ever.

TALIA

Why'd you come? I didn't ask for your help and you're certainly not one to give it.

NORMAN

I need to make sure we have an understanding. That once we're back and this little project is over, you and your son move on. You're not welcome.

TALIA

You didn't want to kick me out in front of your family?

NORMAN

Damn right. My wife would never throw you and your son out. Gavin hasn't seen a female other than his mother in four years. They don't see the danger you bring.

TALIA

The danger I bring or my son?

NORMAN

You can't keep a kid like that quiet when all hell's banging at your door. Trust me, I know.

Talia radiates hate with every inch of her body. Norman stares her straight in the eyes.

NORMAN

You want to try to take me out?
Could solve all your problems.

Norman positions his hand over his holstered weapon. Talia exhales, calms. She turns and continues walking.

Norman relaxes his stance. They continue their journey in silence.

EXT. CROSSROADS - DAY

The pair approach the intersection. Talia looks down the northbound road. The trio of zombies stand exactly as they were, a quarter mile away.

She turns to Norman and points down the road.

TALIA
We have to work quietly.

Norman takes in the danger, shakes his head.

NORMAN
Were they there before?

TALIA
Yep.

He sets his tool bag down.

NORMAN
You could've mentioned that.

TALIA
And miss out on our bonding sesh?

Norman sighs, begins inspecting the solar panel above the sign.

NORMAN
Only four bolts, probably 5/8 inch.

He quietly fishes through his tool bag and pulls out a wrench.

TALIA
You need help?

Norman points down the road.

NORMAN
Just watch them.

Talia does as she's told. Norman gets one bolt off. He drops the second as it comes loose. It rattles off the ground.

He looks to Talia. She doesn't even turn around.

TALIA
You're good. Keep going.

He gets the last of the bolts off and tries to wiggle the panel. It's stuck.

He replaces the wrench and grabs a hammer from the bag.

NORMAN

Thing's rusted on here pretty good.
I'm going to need you to hold it
while I tap it loose.

She walks over to the back of the sign. Two cables, one from the sign and one from the panel, feed into a junction box.

She unplugs them both.

TALIA

Can you do that quietly?

He nods. He grabs duct tape from his bag and puts a few layers on the face of the hammer giving it a buffer.

Talia grabs the panel and holds on. Norman begins to tap it lightly.

He works around the bolt pattern for a second until it pops loose. Talia pulls it off and sets it down.

TALIA

That was easy. Now we need that
junction box.

Norman inspects the clamp holding it to the pole.

EXT. DOWN THE ROAD - DAY

The zombies remain motionless. Ed starts to turn his head. A flickering light has caught his attention.

It's the reflection of the sun bouncing off of the moving solar panel in Talia's hands.

Without a sound, he sprints directly towards them. Edna and Edele don't even notice him leave.

EXT. CROSSROADS - DAY

Norman has loosened the junction box clamp. He slides it up and off the pole.

He smiles.

NORMAN

Got it.

His grin evaporates as he looks past Talia.

NORMAN

Run.

Talia turns.

Ed is 300 yards and closing with the speed of an Olympic marathon runner. His sights are dead set on them.

TALIA

We can't outrun him.

Norman pulls his pistol and cocks it.

TALIA

If you fire that shot you'll have to fire two more. Then, more will find us.

NORMAN

Do you have a plan?

Ed is 200 yards out.

Talia hands her bolt gun to Norman.

TALIA

Cock it.

She grabs the duct tape and begins wrapping her left forearm.

NORMAN

What are you doing?

TALIA

I'm going to take him out quietly.

Ed is 100 yards out.

Norman shakes as he struggles to cock the bolt gun. Talia continues to spin the roll of tape around her arm.

She rips the tape, hopes it's thick enough. Norman gets the bolt gun primed. He places it in her right hand.

Her other hand is taped over and useless. She pulls back her jacket to reveal her knife.

Ed is 50 yards out.

TALIA

Take it.

NORMAN

I have my gun.

TALIA

I need blood on this. I need him to go straight for it.

She holds up her protected arm. Norman grabs the blade. He looks confused for a moment.

Ed is 25 yards away.

TALIA

Hurry.

Norman cuts open his left hand and smears the blood all over her arm.

Talia turns and readies herself for impact. Norman steps back and aims his pistol at the incoming threat.

10 yards.

5 Yards.

BOOM. He drives through Talia like an NFL linebacker. Their bodies sail through the air.

Ed lands on Talia with a thud. She loses the bolt gun as her hand smacks the concrete.

It bounces twice then lands on its trigger and actuates. Norman scrambles to retrieve it.

Ed tears into Talia's arm like a rabid Pitbull. His gnashing teeth work their way through layers of tape.

The bolt gun slips from Norman's bloody hands as he frantically tries to cock it.

TALIA

Hurry!

He looks at Talia struggling to hold her assailant at bay.

NORMAN

To hell with this.

He walks towards the Ed with his pistol drawn and lines up his shot.

BOOM! He blows a hole straight through Ed's forehead.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Dane walks through thick woods. With his backpack slung over his shoulder, he carries something in a blood soaked towel.

A shot echoes through the forest. He stops, tries to pinpoint its location.

EXT. CROSSROADS - DAY

Talia rolls the body off. They both stare down the road at the remaining two zombies.

TALIA

Don't move.

EXT. DOWN THE ROAD - DAY

Edna and Edele turn their heads, search for the source of noise. Their stiff necks jerk and crack.

They both look past Talia and Norman before they begin to smell it in the air. Fresh blood.

Both of them take off full speed towards the intersection.

EXT. CROSSROADS - DAY

Norman rubs his eyes, gages their distance. They're closing ground.

NORMAN

Now what?

Talia jumps to her feet.

TALIA

Now we run.

She picks up her bolt gun. Norman scrambles to grab the solar panel. Talia pulls him.

TALIA

We'll come back for it.

They begin to race down the road, back the way they came.

Along the road is a drainage ditch.

There's a large sewer pipe that runs underneath a wide gravel driveway. Talia points to it.

TALIA

There!

She jumps down into the ditch. Norman follows. She takes a moment to cock the bolt gun. Norman stares into the pipe.

NORMAN

That's suicide.

TALIA

It's a bottleneck. They have to come at us one at a time, head first.

NORMAN

No way.

TALIA

It'll help muffle the gun shots.

Norman remains hesitant. She pushes him towards it.

TALIA

Then go in first. I'll take them out.

INT. SEWAGE PIPE - DAY

Norman crawls in. The pipe must be three feet in diameter and about thirty feet long.

Norman pushes his way through branches, dirt, and spider webs until he can see the daylight on the other side.

Talia crawls in behind him. They get half way through and stop. They sit and wait, quietly.

SPLASH! Edna lands at the mouth of the pipe. She begins clawing her way towards Talia.

TALIA

You ready in case I miss?

NORMAN

Ready.

Norman has his pistol ready, aimed over Talia's shoulder.

Talia stops Edna's advance with a boot on her shoulder. She lines up her shot.

Edele attacks Norman from behind. He lunges his weight forward pressing Talia's face up against her foe's.

Norman spins and pins Edele against the wall of the pipe with a forearm to her neck.

Talia pushes Edna back and takes her out with the bolt gun. Her head drops face down into muddy waters.

She turns to help Norman. He has Edele in a perfect kill position, but he hesitates.

He gets lost in the child's white eyes, awestruck.

She starts to wiggle free as Norman relaxes his grip.

BANG! Talia blows a hole in Edele's head with her own pistol.

The gunshot is deafening in this confined space. They both grab their ears.

Talia tries to usher Norman out, but he just stares at the child's body.

Talia pulls him by his collar until he finally comes to. He begins to crawl out.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

They both stand at the mouth of the sewer pipe. Norman tries to clean the ringing noise out of his ears with his fingers.

Talia checks herself for bites. She's clean. She looks to Norman who's still in a daze.

TALIA
Are you bit?

NORMAN
Huh?

She checks his hands, forearms and face. He's unscathed.

Talia scans the landscape for movement.

TALIA
We should wait here for a moment.

Norman nods. He rests against the embankment.

NORMAN
I'm sorry, I--

TALIA
Don't worry about it.

NORMAN

It's just... She...

Talia puts a hand on his shoulder.

TALIA

Some look a little more human than others. Especially kids. It's not easy.

Norman stares into the blinding sky. It's as if he's waiting for God to say something.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Norman and Talia march towards home. She carries the solar panel, he has the junction box and his tool bag.

NORMAN

What'd you really used to be? I heard you pulling my son's leg earlier.

Talia keeps scanning the tree line as they walk.

TALIA

I was a vlogger. I made haul videos and try-ons.

NORMAN

You're speaking Chinese to me.

Talia stops and sets down her solar panel. She takes a moment to get into character.

TALIA

Hi all, Talia here with another winter try-on. Just got back from my favorite new store, *Dead People On The Side Of The Road*. Today I scored this fab denim jacket. It has tons of pockets for all of your bullets and knives. It also comes with one gnaw-friendly sleeve.

Talia holds up her duct taped sleeve.

TALIA

It's a little big in the top for a girl like me, but the waist is nice and snug.

Talia spins as she stops her modeling routine. Norman stares at her in a state of confusion.

NORMAN

And you made a living at this?

TALIA

Yep. I had almost a million subscribers.

Norman shakes his head.

NORMAN

No wonder the world is coming to an end.

They continue walking.

TALIA

I actually was going to school for engineering, but then I got into a bad car accident. I had some brain trauma and needed surgery.

She tilts her head over and pulls her hair taught. Norman can see the start of a horseshoe scar on the left of her head.

TALIA

I decided to document my recovery. I basically just wanted support and some people found inspiration in how I fought my way back. One of the side effects was I lost my ability to taste food. I literally had to force myself to eat. I still do. For that reason I dropped a bunch of weight. I used to be about sixty pounds heavier. As I started to buy new clothes that would fit me people would get a thrill from it. It was as if they were living vicariously through me. Losing weight, getting new things. Then companies would send me stuff and ask me to review them. Soon, I was getting paid.

She watches Norman, anticipates his disapproval.

TALIA

Pretty silly, huh?

NORMAN

Not at all. You're a survivor. You were making your way in that world the way you knew how. And now you're making your way in this one.

TALIA

I don't know about that. I've got a long way to go, yet. All the way to Catawba Islands.

Norman grimaces at those words. He takes a breath to muster up some courage.

NORMAN

You know we didn't break twenty degrees last February. When that happens the lake freezes solid.

TALIA

Yeah?

NORMAN

I used to listen to their weekly broadcasts on the transistor. They always had that repeating message that you heard, but they also gave updates once a week. They stopped doing those updates around that time.

TALIA

Are you saying they're not there anymore?

NORMAN

I don't think they are.

Talia nods, seemingly unfazed. They walk a little further before she stops and turns away from Norman.

She sets down the panel and buries her head in her hands.

Norman starts to reach for her shoulder but pulls his hand back.

NORMAN

Look-

Talia spins and drops to her knees. She grabs his hand and pleads.

TALIA

You have to take us in! We're running out of chances. Every day we're out here. Every mile we walk it just gets more dangerous. I can't protect him by myself!

She crumbles at his feet. He gives her a moment and helps her up.

NORMAN

Come on. Just get up.

She takes his assistance for a second before she jerks away.

TALIA

You weren't even going to tell us.

Talia picks up the panel, continues on. Norman sighs, catches up to her.

NORMAN

You can stay. But there's a few things you need to know about me first.

TALIA

What?

NORMAN

I'll show you when we get there.

He nods his head in the direction of home. They continue on.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Dane watches them from the cover of brush. He follows.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Talia and Norman stand in front of a makeshift grave site. Rocks piled at the base of a cross made of two-by-fours.

The wooden planks are fastened together by a few yards of twine.

The cabin is 200 yards away down the hill.

Norman takes a knee and pulls some of the invading weeds from between the rocks.

The letters carved into the horizontal plank of wood read
"Emily Larson November 19th 1999 - October 12th 2019"

NORMAN

Emily was Gavin's older sister. She was special needs. She was going to be with us the rest of her life and we were okay with that. She would occasionally have these fits. She would just start screaming for no reason. It sometimes took half an hour or more to calm her down. One night I heard the bells jingle on our property. A small group of infected, maybe six or seven, were chasing something. Emily started having one of her fits. They were banging on the walls, the doors. The more noise they made the louder she screamed. It was just a matter of time before they got in. I put a pillow over her face to muffle her screams. She fought me, I pressed harder. I held it there too long. By the time the banging had stopped she was dead.

Norman stands and looks to Talia.

NORMAN

Ever since that moment, Margaret has been a shell of her former self. My own son hates me. I have killed everything I love in this world just trying to stay in it. I don't think I have any more fight left in me.

TALIA

I'm sorry. I imagine that pain everyday. That somewhere along the way I'll make a poor decision that will get my son killed. I have nightmares about it. I don't think I could continue on, but that's because he's all I've got. Your actions saved your wife and your son. A son who's not ready to be on his own and you know it. You still have to fight.

NORMAN

You still want to stay with us?
Have your son share a roof with a
monster who killed his own
daughter?

TALIA

I do. You're a good person, Norman.
I can tell by the way your heart
aches.

Norman nods, wipes his watery eyes.

NORMAN

Alright then.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Norman and Talia approach the front door. She unholsters her
revolver and offers it to him

TALIA

Want me to leave this outside?

NORMAN

You go ahead and hang on to it.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Norman and Talia enter. Margaret rushes to shush them and
points to a sleeping Finn on the couch.

Talia nods and sets the panel down gently. She crouches over
Finn and smiles. She kisses the top of his forehead.

TALIA

Was he good for you?

MARGARET

He was an angel.

Margaret pulls off Norman's dirty jacket.

MARGARET

Are you guys okay?

NORMAN

We're fine. We just had to hide in
a ditch for a bit.

Margaret hugs him tightly. He kisses the top of her head.

MARGARET

I was getting worried.

Talia scans the rest of the room. Her mini-fridge is missing.

TALIA

Where's my little fridge?

Gavin stands in the bedroom doorway.

GAVIN

I moved it in here. It was getting crowded.

TALIA

Thanks.

She gets up and enters the bedroom.

BEDROOM

Talia squats down and opens the mini-fridge. She places the revolver and bolt gun inside. She clamps it shut.

Gavin looks at her adoringly.

GAVIN

I was getting ready to come look for you guys.

TALIA

We ran into a little trouble.

GAVIN

Well, I'm really glad you're okay.

TALIA

Thanks.

She gets up and exits.

BATHROOM

Talia enters. She removes her dirty jacket and places it in the bath tub.

She pulls the bottle of cologne from it and places it next to the bowl of water on a shelf by the mirror.

She washes her face and arms with a wet rag. She spritzes herself with cologne when she's done.

The BELLS outside jingle. She steps out.

KITCHEN

Margaret stands at the window. Norman grabs his shotgun as Talia takes a look outside.

DANE stands on the gravel driveway.

NORMAN
You know that man?

TALIA
No. I've never seen him before.

Norman checks the barrels of the shotgun and closes it shut.

NORMAN
Let's go see what he wants.

Norman exits. Talia grabs the digital thermometer from the table and follows him out.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Norman exits the cabin. Talia follows closely behind.

Dane steps towards them.

NORMAN
Just hold it right there.

Dane points to the chimney.

DANE
I saw your smoke. I have food. I'm
willing to share.

He sets down his backpack and unzips it. It's full of canned goods. He opens the bloody cloth to reveal large cuts of meat. They look poorly butchered.

DANE
Deer meat. I just killed it
yesterday but my matches got wet.
There's plenty more a couple miles
back. I could take you to it.

NORMAN
You alone?

DANE
Yes, sir. Been on my own a few weeks now.

Norman studies the wood line. All is quiet.

NORMAN
Got any weapons?

DANE
I don't.

TALIA
How'd you gut that deer?

Dane pulls a hunting knife from his belt.

DANE
Well, I have this. You can take it if it makes you more comfortable.

NORMAN
You'll have to leave it outside.

Dane spikes the knife into one of the fence posts so it stands on its own.

DANE
I'll leave it here.

NORMAN
I'll have to check your pockets.

DANE
Fair enough.

Dane raises his arms, Norman gives him a quick pat down. After he comes up empty, he stands and looks him in the eyes.

NORMAN
We'll help you cook the meat and you give us a few cans of food. Then you be on your way.

DANE
A reasonable offer from a reasonable man.

Talia pulls out the digital thermometer.

TALIA
Check him first.

She hands the thermometer to Norman. He sighs, turns to Dane.

NORMAN

You mind?

DANE

Not at all.

Dane pulls up his knit cap exposing his forehead. Norman presses the thermometer against his forehead and triggers it.

VOICE (V.O.)

Your body temperature is 97.1
Degrees.

Norman steps back, satisfied. Talia offers her knife.

TALIA

See if he bleeds.

DANE

Now, I'm not gonna let you cut me.
An open wound out here easily gets
infected.

Norman turns to Talia.

NORMAN

I'm trying to have some faith in
our fellow man here. Now he's on
the outside looking in. You're not
going to let him in?

Talia recoils her knife. Norman waves him in. Dane nods as he walks past them into the house.

DANE

Thank you, kindly.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Dane steps inside. He sets down his bag and hands the meat to Margaret. He removes his hat.

DANE

I apologize, Ma'am. I got most of
the hindquarters, but it's a bit
messy. I'm no surgeon.

MARGARET

It's okay. I can make a fine stew
out of this.

DANE

That sounds lovely.

Talia and Norman enter. Norman locks the door behind them. Talia slides her knife back into its sheath.

Dane sets his hat down on the kitchen counter and takes a seat at the table. Norman sits across from him.

DANE

Sure does feel good to sit down.

NORMAN

Where you from?

DANE

P.A., Harmonsburg. It's a little town just north of Conneaut.

Margaret stokes the fire in the stove, preps for a meal.

NORMAN

Where are you headed?

DANE

Honestly, I have no idea. I'm just trying to stay alive out here.

Gavin rummages through Dane's bag, pulls out a can of marshmallow frosting.

GAVIN

Is this any good?

DANE

It's good on the sweet potatoes. There should be a can in there.

Dane points to the bag. Gavin searches for it.

Talia stands in the kitchen, arms crossed. She watches Dane like a hawk. He can feel it.

NORMAN

Where'd you get all that food?

DANE

Abandoned camp site in the woods. I just assumed they were all dead because they left everything. I'm sorry, it was such a tense meeting outside that I forgot to introduce myself. My name's Dane.

He offers his blood-stained hand. Norman politely declines.

NORMAN

Norman.

Dane looks around at everyone.

DANE

This is a fine family you have,
Norman. I truly appreciate you
letting me in. It's difficult to
trust anyone these days.

NORMAN

Apparently you can't even trust the
dead anymore according to her
theory.

Norman points to Talia. Dane looks at her.

DANE

She's absolutely right. You were
smart to check me.

Dane taps his index finger on his forehead.

NORMAN

So it's true?

DANE

Well, I've not seen one myself, but
I've heard they exist.

Margaret hands Talia a Bic lighter and points to some candles
on the shelf.

MARGARET

Would you mind lighting some of
those? It's going to be dark soon.

TALIA

Sure.

Talia starts to pull some candles down and sets them on the
kitchen counter.

DANE

There was a shortwave radio
broadcaster I listened to until my
batteries went dead. He called
himself the dead echo.

Talia lights the candles while she listens to Dane speak.

DANE

He said they found that people with an IQ higher than 150 or so were retaining brain function for up to a month after being infected. They military called them cacosavants or cacoes for short.

As Talia lights her last candle, she sees Dane's hat on the counter. She looks inside of it.

A single-use hand warmer is stapled into the front brim.

DANE

Less than one percent of people are actually that smart. And even less became cacoes because you have to just get nicked. Most people get their brains devoured.

Dane pauses and looks at Gavin.

DANE

Sorry if that spooks you, kid.

GAVIN

I'm fine.

DANE

Anyway, it makes some sense. You see, there's actually a physical difference in the brain of a genius versus most of us. There's more fatty insulation around the neurotransmitters. It takes longer for the virus to penetrate. So they still have an insatiable lust for flesh, but they can think and use weapons.

Talia ignites her lighter and turns it upside down. She uses the flame to heat the metal guard and flint wheel.

GAVIN

You sound pretty smart. What'd you use to be?

DANE

Oh, I'm just repeating what I've heard. I was a high school janitor, but I read a lot of books.

NORMAN

You talk like this is science. Like it can be cured. I've seen a man with his chest blown wide open, missing every organ a man needs to live, running around like a mad dog. Ain't no doctor or scientist that can explain that. This isn't a virus, this is the rapture. And if the smartest people on earth are hunting the rest of us it's because God needs to finish off those who can hide.

DANE

I'm not disagreeing with you. That's just what I've heard.

Talia approaches their table with a candle.

TALIA

Excuse my reach.

Dane leans back giving her room. She places the candle down with one hand.

With her other hand she reaches under the table and presses the hot metal of the lighter against the thin skin on top of Dane's right hand.

The metal sears into his flesh. He doesn't flinch. As she stands he sniffs the air around her.

DANE

What's that smell?

TALIA

Excuse me?

DANE

That fragrance. What are you wearing?

TALIA

Oh, that's cologne. Finn's father used to wear it. I think it reminds him of his dad.

Talia looks to the couch. Dane follows her gaze. His eyes widen.

DANE

You have a baby?

Talia nods.

DANE

Amazing.

Talia places another candle on an end table in the living room. She checks on Finn before sneaking into the bedroom.

She gently closes the door behind her.

Margaret approaches with a tea kettle and a cup.

MARGARET

Would you like some tea?

DANE

You still have some?

Margaret nods. Dane smiles.

DANE

Of course. I haven't had tea in almost two years.

She pours hot tea into his cup. As he reaches for it he notices the burn mark on his hand.

The guard and roller pins of the lighter singed a black smiley face into his flesh.

He pulls his hand back and searches for Talia.

BEDROOM

Talia has her mini-fridge open. She goes through the painstaking process of cocking the bolt gun.

After it's primed she hangs it around her neck.

She checks the cylinder of her revolver and removes three spent cartridges. She spins up a live round.

She stands and takes a deep breath. She opens the door.

KITCHEN

Talia walks out, gun in hand. She freezes.

Dane is pacing back in forth with a sleepy Finn in his arms.

Talia tries to hide the gun behind her back.

TALIA
What are you doing?

DANE
I'm sorry, the little guy was
stirring.

MARGARET
I told him it wasn't a good idea.

Dane stares at Talia as he takes his seat back at the table.
He holds up his hand with the burn mark.

He knows that she knows. Talia slips the gun into the back of
her pants.

DANE
(to Finn)
What's mommy doing with that thing
hanging around her neck?

Finn smiles, grabs Dane's bottom lip and pulls it.

Norman can sense the distress in Talia.

NORMAN
What's going on?

TALIA
He's one of them.

CHOP! Margaret just cut through a chunk of bone with a meat
cleaver. She looks up from her meal prep.

Gavin stands, backs away from the table.

Dane continues to talk to Finn.

DANE
Your mommy's a smart one.

Norman starts to slide his chair back.

DANE
I wouldn't do that. All it takes is
one little nick.

He grabs Finn's fingers with his teeth and lets go. He
repeats, Finn giggles.

DANE
I wonder if the young ones taste
different to us. Like veal. Do you
know what veal is?

He wiggles Finn so his head shakes no.

DANE

Of course you don't. That's just one of the awful things people do to animals.

TALIA

Let him go.

Dane ignores her. He turns Finn around and sets him on his lap. He looks at Gavin.

DANE

Do me a favor, son. Reach in the side compartment of my bag and take out that contraption in there.

Gavin looks to Norman for approval.

NORMAN

Go ahead.

Gavin unzips the bag. He pulls out Dane's make-shift helmet.

DANE

Slide that on top of my head, would you?

Gavin puts it on Dane's head and steps back.

DANE

You know, Norman, I envy you. You're a simple man with a simple family. You believe God's going to take care of you. That this is all part of his plan. You just have to keep your faith. But this is a culling. Mother nature has stripped us down to our basic instincts to control the human population. If you took one hundred of the most civilized people on earth and set them adrift on a boat with no food they would eventually eat each other. Cannibalism is in our DNA. It just had to be switched on.

NORMAN

What do you want?

Dane nods towards Talia.

DANE
She's not family, is she?

NORMAN
No. She's not.

DANE
But, you both love your boys, don't you?

Talia nods. So does Norman.

DANE
That's nice. It really is. I never knew my dad, but I hated my mother. I hated her so much I tried to inflict the most profound pain on her a parent could ever endure. The loss of a child. So I washed down every pill in our medicine cabinet with some chocolate milk. When I woke up at the hospital with her by my side she was disgusted. Disgusted at me because I failed. So, what I want to see is the pain she should've felt had she really loved me. What real parents feel when their son dies. The question is... Which one?

Dane smiles as he takes one hand off Finn to tighten his chin strap.

NORMAN
I'm not going to let that happen.

Gavin looks at Talia, her soul being sucked out. He looks to Finn who's arms are reaching out for him.

He starts to lean forward. Margaret tries to pull him back by his shirt.

MARGARET
(quietly)
No.

Gavin lunges and grabs Finn. He rips the child from Dane's arms.

Dane grabs Gavin's arm. Gavin tries to push him away. Dane bites down on his hand and rips a chunk of flesh out.

Gavin screams.

MARGARET
No!

NORMAN
God dammit!

Gavin falls to the floor. He drops Finn. Talia pulls Finn out of the line of fire.

Norman races for his shotgun. Dane reaches under the table and pulls up his pant leg. He has a gun in an ankle holster.

Norman pulls the shotgun off the counter and points it at Dane. A SHOT rips through Norman's knee from under the table.

Norman stumbles, fires both barrels into the ceiling. Debris rains down on Dane.

Margaret pulls Gavin up onto the kitchen counter. She grabs her meat cleaver and puts his hand on the cutting board.

She chops away at his wrist. It takes three blows to sever his hand off. Gavin SCREAMS. Blood spatters on Margaret's face.

Talia hides Finn behind a wall. She stands and pulls her pistol.

She aims at Dane's head. He aims at her. They both fire. Dane misses. Talia's bullet strikes his helmet.

His head snaps back from the impact. He falls over in his chair, slams into the wall behind him.

He flips onto his knees and puts his gun hand on the table to pull himself up.

Talia kicks the table and pins his hand against the wall. She shoots the gun from his grip.

Dane looks at his hand, two of his fingers are gone including his trigger finger.

DANE
You fucking bitch!

He picks the entire table up and throws it at Talia. She ducks, struggles to get a clean shot.

Dane picks up his pistol with his other hand.

CLICK. Dane looks to his left. Norman has just closed his shotgun with two fresh rounds loaded.

He aims at Dane. Dane runs for the door as Norman fires.

BOOM! Norman hits mostly wall, but he nicks Dane's shoulder. Dane gets the door unlocked and dives outside before Talia can get close.

Talia races over and locks the door. She steps to the side just as Dane fires two shots through the door.

There's a long pause while everyone catches their breath.

DANE (O.S.)
Did I get ya?

Talia debates answering him for a minute, but anger gets the best of her.

TALIA
Still here.

DANE (O.S.)
That's alright. I will. And when I do I'm going to string you up and make you watch as I pull your son apart with my teeth.

Talia positions the barrel of her gun into one of the bullet holes in the door.

She takes a quick peek outside through the other hole.

Dane walks away. As he does he plucks his hunting knife from the fence post outside.

TALIA
He's gone.

She races over to help Norman. He pushes her away.

NORMAN
Help them.

He points to Gavin then takes a seat at the table.

Talia pulls off her belt and wraps it around Gavin's bicep. She pulls it tight making a tourniquet.

Margaret grabs a clean cloth and puts pressure on his severed limb.

Gavin stares at his mom for hope.

GAVIN
I don't want to die.

MARGARET

We're not going to let that happen.

Finn crawls in and reaches for his mom, tears in his eyes. She picks him up and hands him to Norman.

TALIA

Can you hold him for a minute?

Norman nods. Talia runs into the bedroom and returns with her stopwatch. She starts it, places it on the table.

NORMAN

How much time until we know?

TALIA

Fifteen minutes give or take. None of it will matter if we don't stop the bleeding.

GAVIN

Fifteen minutes until what? Until I turn into one of them?

Talia checks the wound. The bleeding has slowed considerably.

TALIA

Let's get him in a chair. We need to keep his arm elevated.

Margaret and Talia sit Gavin in a chair and put his arm on the kitchen counter.

GAVIN

Why won't someone answer me?

TALIA

Blood flows slowest in the extremities. There's a good chance she cut it out in time.

Margaret keeps pressure on. Talia goes to check on Norman. She pulls her knife and cuts open hit pantleg.

She studies the injury.

TALIA

I think it's just a flesh wound. Got any clean rags?

MARGARET

There's some clean towels under the bathroom sink.

Talia exits to retrieve one.

GAVIN

Maybe I'm smart enough. You always said I was smart like a fox. Maybe I'll come back. I can protect you guys.

MARGARET

You're not going to die, baby.
You're not going to die.

She hugs him from behind. Talia returns and wraps the towel around Norman's leg. She pulls it taut. He winces.

TALIA

Sorry.

NORMAN

It's fine.

She takes Finn and looks him over. He's clean. She kisses his forehead and hugs him tight.

NORMAN

You think he's coming back?

TALIA

Yeah. He's made us his pet project now.

Norman adjusts his leg.

NORMAN

Well he definitely took round one.

TALIA

Do you have a hunting rifle?
Anything high powered to get
through that head gear?

NORMAN

High powered rifles are illegal to
hunt with here. I just have
buckshot and birdshot for the 12
gauge. And my pistol.

Talia nods. She paces back and forth with Finn. She checks her stop watch. Eight minutes have passed.

She slowly walks into the bedroom.

BEDROOM

She opens the mini-fridge and sets Finn inside. He starts to object.

TALIA

Just for a few minutes, baby. I promise I'll be right back.

She cranks her lantern for a few seconds and turns it on. She sets it in there with a small blanket for Finn to hold.

She locks it shut.

KITCHEN

Talia returns. Gavin is pale, sweating. Talia grabs the duct tape from Norman's tool bag.

TALIA

We have to take precautions.

She walks over to Gavin.

TALIA

Gavin, I'm going to tape your ankles to the legs of the chair for the next few minutes, okay? Do you understand why?

He nods. Talia tapes his ankles to the legs of the chair. She pulls off her bolt gun and sets in on the table.

Norman stands. He limps over and takes the bolt gun.

NORMAN

If it has to be done, I'll do it.

He pulls a chair over in front of Gavin and sits. He takes his son's hand.

GAVIN

I'm scared, dad.

NORMAN

I know. It's okay. You're not going to die today. Not today. Not by that man. I know you don't always think I'm in your corner, but I am. I always have been. I love you.

GAVIN

I love you too, dad.

Norman pulls him close. They rest their heads against one another.

NORMAN
Stay with us. Stay with us.

Talia checks the stop watch. Fourteen minutes have passed. She grabs her digital thermometer.

TALIA
Norman, you should probably back up.

Norman leans back. Gavin looks weary, but he's still conscious. Talia squats down next to him.

TALIA
How do you feel?

GAVIN
I'm just cold.

She scans his forehead with the thermometer.

VOICE
Your body temperature is 97.3 degrees Fahrenheit.

She walks back and checks her stopwatch. It's passing 15 minutes.

She takes the bolt gun from Norman. She pulls the trigger and rifles the rod. He looks at her.

TALIA
He's not infected.

Norman smiles. Margaret hugs Gavin and kisses his cheek. Talia leaves the room to retrieve Finn.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

The darkness has settled in. The windows are illuminated by candles.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Gavin lies on the couch. His head rests on his mother's lap. They're both sound asleep.

Norman paces from window to window using his shotgun as a cane. Finn sleeps in Talia's arms as she sits at the table.

NORMAN
You going to let go of that boy
tonight?

TALIA
Probably not.

Norman takes a seat.

NORMAN
I have to rest.

TALIA
You should elevate that leg.

Talia grabs a pillow and puts it on the table. She grabs Norman's pant leg and helps him lift his ankle on top of it.

He shrugs off the pain. She takes a seat across from him. She doesn't look at him, just stares at her sleeping child.

TALIA
Something Dane said got me
thinking. You know why Ebola never
kills as many people as the flu
even though its mortality rate is
so much higher?

NORMAN
No.

TALIA
Because it makes the host so sick
they die before they can walk
around and spread it. It's its own
worst enemy.

NORMAN
You're comparing this to that?

TALIA

Sort of. I know you think this is God's wrath, but just say for a moment that this is actually a virus. Viruses evolve as they work their way through the population. They mutate. Same thing has happened with this. In the beginning it took less than a minute for someone with a bite to turn and it's grown to almost fifteen. The infected have also taken to devouring their victims' entirely instead of just wounding them. We've noticed these changes over the years.

NORMAN

Wounded, devoured, what difference does it make?

TALIA

A huge difference because they're no longer multiplying their numbers. They destroy everyone they attack instead of leaving a body that can reanimate. It's like the virus is imploding on itself.

NORMAN

So you think this is going to end naturally?

TALIA

If there's still people out there, armies, we could push back. I think there might be a light at the end of the tunnel.

NORMAN

Well, for our sake, I hope you're right.

A vibrato sound echoes through the forest outside. It revs up and slows down. It repeats.

NORMAN

What the hell is that?

Talia stands and walks over to the window.

TALIA

It's him.

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Dane stands at the top of the hill. Emily's grave has been desecrated. The two-by-four cross is now splintered crumbs.

Dane twirls a ten inch plank of wood with the twine from the cross. He's fashioned a bullroarer.

He spins it in a circle speeding up and slowing down. He stares at the cabin while he does. He never blinks.

His eyes carry the intensity of a madman.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Norman staggers to his feet and joins Talia at the window.

NORMAN
What's he doing?

TALIA
He's building an army.

Norman looks at his wife and son, they continue to sleep.

NORMAN
How long can he keep that up?

TALIA
All night. That's the thing about the dead. They don't breathe air or get tired. They can run until their legs break or their muscles tear.

Norman walks over to a cabinet and pulls out a bottle of bourbon. He grabs two glasses and sits at the table.

He pours two stiff shots and slides one across the table. Talia sits in front of it.

Norman raises his glass and acknowledges those who sleep.

NORMAN
To their last hours of peace on earth.

Norman downs his shot, pours another. Talia refuses hers.

TALIA
There has to be a way out of this.

NORMAN

There is. For you. Take your son and sneak out the side window. Stay along the tree line and he'll never see you leave. We'll hold him off for as long as we can.

TALIA

I'm not leaving you guys.

NORMAN

Why not? I'm spent. Gavin's lost too much blood. We're all Margaret has. We'll go down together.

TALIA

No.

NORMAN

Yes. It's time to learn from me. Be selfish and save your son's life. I'd leave you in a heartbeat and you know it.

Talia walks over to the couch and lies Finn next to Margaret and Gavin. She covers him with a blanket.

She returns to Norman who's pouring another shot. She takes his glass and the bottle. She places them in the sink.

NORMAN

You're going to deny a man his last request? To get good and squiffy before he dies?

She places the junction box from the sign on the table.

TALIA

Yeah. I need your head clear. I'm not sure how to do this on my own.

She pulls a screwdriver from Norman's tool bag and starts to open the junction box.

NORMAN

Even if we get this to work, it would take hours of daylight to charge that drone.

TALIA

We'll just have to hope he waits long enough.

NORMAN

And then what? Even if you lead them all away he'll just stand up there and call them back. That thing doesn't fly for more than 30 minutes on a full charge.

TALIA

I'll just need five. Lead them away and I'll go up there and kill him.

She starts to pull the lid off the junction box. He slams it back down.

NORMAN

It's not going to work! Gavin's the only one who can fly it and look at him now.

Talia drops her screwdriver on the table.

TALIA

You're right. It won't.

NORMAN

Take Finn and go.

Talia shakes her head. She walks over to the kitchen counter and pulls down two cast iron skilletts.

She puts the medium sized skillet inside the larger one and tapes them together by their handles.

TALIA

You have a whistle?

Norman points to a drawer next to Talia. She fishes though it and finds the whistle.

NORMAN

What's your plan now?

She places the whistle in the skillet.

TALIA

To sit with my son until he comes.

Talia picks up her son and sits in the corner of the room. She hums gently while she rocks him.

Norman stares at the crucifix hanging on the kitchen wall. He mouths something unintelligible towards it.

He closes his eyes and leans his head back.

LATER

Everyone is asleep except for Talia. She remains in the corner of the room with Finn.

A break of sunlight starts to fill the windows. The bullroarer outside stops.

Talia walks to the window. Norman wakes as she passes him. She looks outside. She closes her eyes and shakes her head.

NORMAN

How many?

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Dane stands in the center of at least thirty zombies. All of them are motionless.

Some stare into the sky, others into nothing. They wait for the next sound in an eerily quiet wilderness.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Talia opens the mini-fridge. She places Finn inside of it. He squirms a bit as she puts a blanket over him.

He finds a comfortable position and quickly falls back to sleep. She admires her sleeping son.

She kisses her finger tips and presses her kiss into his forehead.

TALIA

You know they don't remember anything from this age. I don't even have a picture to leave him with.

After a beat she closes the mini-fridge and locks it. She starts the stopwatch and hands it to Norman.

She puts on her jacket and cocks the bolt gun.

TALIA

If I fail you have to promise me something.

NORMAN

What?

TALIA
You leave him in there.

She looks over at the mini-fridge. So does Norman.

TALIA
Don't let him die a horrific death.

NORMAN
I won't.

Talia hangs the bolt gun around her neck. She grabs her journal and marks one more tally mark on it.

Today is eleven.

She places it in her backpack and slings it over her shoulder. She grabs her pistol and checks the chamber.

Only one live round left. She removes the two spent cartridges and spins up her single bullet.

She tucks the gun in her belt. She looks over at Gavin and Margaret. They're still asleep.

She walks over to Norman and offers her hand.

TALIA
It was an honor to know you,
Norman.

Norman, puzzled, reaches out and shakes her hand. His eyes widen.

He stares at the palm of his hand as she pulls hers away.

She grabs the skillets and whistle from the counter and heads to the door.

TALIA
Better lock this behind me.

Norman nods while he continues to stare at his hand.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Talia walks out and shuts the door. She walks a few steps before her knees buckle.

She falls to the ground and buries her head into her hands.

She wails and convulses as a sickening sadness overwhelms her. She knows she's held her son for the last time.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Dane steps forwards from his army as he sees Talia exit. He points to her and SCREAMS.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Talia stands. She can hear Dane's distant scream. She walks out onto the pathway and looks up the hill.

The infected are already racing towards her. She walks straight for them.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Norman stumbles over to his window and watches in awe.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Dane watches as his army of madness descends upon its solitary target, a trail of dust in its wake.

His smile fades. Talia stares straight at him. She pays no mind to her impending doom.

He realizes something isn't right.

EXT. PATH - DAY

Talia keeps her eyes on Dane.

The dead close in on her.

One hundred feet...

Fifty feet...

Ten feet...

Talia closes her eyes as they run straight past her. The wind from their wake whips her hair into the air.

It reveals an old bite wound on the back of her neck. Eleven days old to be exact.

The dead race past her and come to a stop. As if they were chasing a mirage that just vanished.

Talia opens her eyes, her rage focused on Dane.

She begins to run up the hill.

Dane shakes his head in disbelief. He pulls his pistol.

DANE

Fuck.

He fires a shot at her and misses.

Talia raises the cast iron over her head, holds it tight with both hands. She runs at him blind.

She uses the pathway below her to guide her way up the hill. She picks up speed. She runs with everything she has.

Fifty feet to go.

Dane fires again, misses again. His aim untrue while he attempts to use his one good hand.

He steadies himself and uses the gun sights. He fires. He hits the skillet dead center.

It rocks in her hands but the bullet doesn't penetrate.

Twenty five feet to go.

Dane panics. He empties his clip on her. Bullets hit the pan, her gut, the dirt. She doesn't stop.

Ten feet.

Dane pitches his gun and pulls his knife.

Talia tosses the pan and fires with her revolver. She hits Dane in his left knee. He buckles to the ground.

Talia ditches her gun and pulls the bolt gun off of her neck as she jumps on him.

They fall to the ground. She gets her legs wrapped around his neck and right arm.

He slashes at her thigh. Talia places the bolt gun against the top of his head.

It fits right between the webbing of his head gear.

Dane stops, throws his hands in the air.

DANE

Wait! Just wait a sec-

CLANK! Talia didn't hesitate. The bolt slams home. Dane's eyes roll off in different directions. He's dead.

She kicks his body off of her. She stands and pulls the whistle from her pocket.

She blows the whistle. The dead turn towards her. She continues, they begin to follow the beacon.

She backs up, leads them to the hill top. Before she disappears from view she stops and stares at the cabin.

Norman is at the window. Her eyes beg forgiveness. There is an unspoken understanding. Norman nods and she disappears.

FADE OUT.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

An overcast sky rains down on the cabin. The snow melts. Laughter is heard from inside.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Margaret hums as she preps a meal in the kitchen.

Norman sits at the table, sips his tea. He smiles as he watches Gavin entertain Finn.

Gavin and Finn sit on the floor next to the fireplace. Gavin pulls a blanket over his head.

GAVIN

Where's Finn? Finn? Where'd you go?

Finn pulls the blanket off Gavin's head.

GAVIN

There he is!

Finn chuckles. Gavin repeats their little game.

Norman stands and limps over to the sink. He places his cup down in it and stares out the window.

Talia stands on the other side of the gravel drive. She has a garbage bag in her hands. She's soaked from the rain.

Norman steps over to the door. He grabs his shotgun and checks the barrels. Margaret notices.

MARGARET
What are you doing?

Norman points for Finn.

NORMAN
Don't let him see her.

He puts a jacket on and steps outside. Gavin peeks out the window.

MARGARET
Keep him occupied, Gavin.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Norman steps out onto the porch. He stays under the overhang.

NORMAN
I can't let you in.

Talia drops the garbage bag.

TALIA
I know. There's some antibiotics in there. Some pain meds and some baby formula. I spent the last two days scouring the nearby towns.

NORMAN
Nearest town is 30 miles.

TALIA
I don't sleep. I don't get tired. How is he?

NORMAN
He cries a lot more than I remember. He's missing you, but he's okay. Kids are resilient.

Talia fakes a smile.

TALIA
That's good.

NORMAN
Look, he's your son. If you want to take him with you I'm not going to try to stop you.

TALIA
Do you want me to take him?

NORMAN

No.

TALIA

Then he's right where he should be.

Norman looks around at the landscape.

NORMAN

You going to hang around here?

TALIA

For a bit.

NORMAN

Sooner or later you'll become a problem.

TALIA

I know. When my time's almost up I'll take care of it.

NORMAN

Do you want to see him?

TALIA

No.

That answer was far more gut-wrenching than she ever expected. She almost breaks down.

NORMAN

Okay.

TALIA

I lied. The man who attacked our community. We killed him before he ever got the gates open. They're all still there. But I got bitten. They told me I couldn't stay and that I couldn't take my son with me. I wasn't ready to say goodbye so I took him. I wanted more time with him. My selfishness almost got him killed. If I hold him now I won't be able to let go. I just have to hope that this isn't all we get. Tell me this isn't all we get.

NORMAN

In my heart, I truly believe there's more.

Talia thanks him with a nod. She points to the bag.

TALIA

Don't let that get too wet.

She turns and saunters off into the woods. Norman walks out into the rain and picks up the bag.

He stands there for an unnecessary amount of time. Margaret finally opens the door.

MARGARET

Norman?

Her voice breaks his reverie. He turns and walks into the house. He checks the perimeter one more time before he shuts the door.

EXT. CABIN - TIME LAPSE

The snow melts. The grass grows green and tall. The trees sprout with leaves. The sun evaporates the clouds.

A couple of cows and a goat roam the hillside. Some chickens flutter about in a pen built onto the back of the cabin.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Three camouflage Humvees drive down the road. Each one has a GUNNER on its turret.

They're followed by a yellow school bus. The first Humvee darts up a familiar gravel driveway.

The other two drive past. The school bus parks next to the rusty mailbox of 512 Cedar Ridge Lane.

INT. HUMVEE - DAY

The SOLDIER in the passenger's seat sleeps with his head against the window.

He isn't dressed in normal tactical gear. He wears a black chainmail type uniform.

The garment extends all the way to his helmet. This bite resistant fatigue has the Marine Corps emblem on its breast.

The insignia identifies him as a Lance Corporal.

The SERGEANT drives the humvee. He's dressed in identical protective wear.

He gives his passenger a nudge.

SERGEANT

You're up.

The lance corporal reaches up under his sunglasses and rubs his eyes. The GUNNER kneels down into the humvee.

He points up towards the cabin.

GUNNER

Hey, we got smoke up ahead.

The other soldiers notice the smoke that bellows from the chimney. The sergeant slows his approach. He grabs his CB handle.

SERGEANT

Everyone hold your positions. Looks like we've got smoke coming from the chimney here.

The gunner returns to his turret.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

The Humvee comes to a rest in front of the cabin. The engine stops. The gunner remains at his station while the other two exit and look around.

Their heads are on a swivel, fingers on the triggers of assault rifles.

Norman exits with his shotgun pointed to the ground. The lance corporal takes aim at him.

The sergeant tries to ease the tension.

SERGEANT

Can you put down the weapon, sir?

Norman points to the lance corporal.

NORMAN

If he can lower his.

The lance corporal looks to his superior who nods. He does as Norman asks. Norman places his shotgun on the ground.

SERGEANT

How many are you?

NORMAN

Four.

SERGEANT

Does anyone need medical attention?

NORMAN

We all do.

Margaret exits the cabin with Finn in her arms. Gavin follows her out.

MARGARET

Is it over?

SERGEANT

Not yet, Ma'am, but we're taking ground back. We have a medical tent about ten miles back. From there we can transport you to the safe zone.

NORMAN

Do we have a choice?

SERGEANT

It's not a mandate, sir. You can stay here if you want. We're just trying to help survivors.

Norman looks over his battered, weary family.

MARGARET

I think we should go, don't you?

Norman nods.

NORMAN

Okay.

SERGEANT

We will escort you down the driveway to the bus. You can bring some personal belongings. One bag per person.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

A POV from the woods as the soldiers escort the four of them down the long gravel drive to the bus.

EXT. GRAVEL DRIVEWAY - DAY

Margaret clings on to Finn who looks back over her shoulder. He stares into the woods while she walks towards the bus.

Norman walks next to the sergeant. The lance corporal watches their flank.

SERGEANT

You guys are the first survivors we've found in fifty miles. We pushed some herds through here a few weeks back. You must have a guardian angel on your shoulder.

NORMAN

Yeah.

They reach the entry to the bus. Finn remains entranced by the woods.

FINNEGAN

Bye mommy. Bye-bye mommy.

They all turn and look into the woods. There's nothing there. Norman sets down his bag.

NORMAN

I need to check on something.

Norman limps off towards the woods.

SERGEANT

Sir, we need you to get on the bus.

Norman keeps walking. Their commands mean nothing.

SERGEANT

Sir!

The lance corporal looks to the sergeant, awaits a command.

SERGEANT

He gets five. Then we go.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Norman enters under the canopy of green leaves. The fractured sunlight illuminates dozens of corpses.

Many of them have a visible puncture in their forehead. Most seem to have been dragged in, arms over their heads.

Norman stops in front of a large oak tree. A familiar leather bound journal lies next to the blood-stained bolt gun.

A FIGURE runs straight at him, knocks him off his feet.

He crawls out of its reach. He turns.

It's Talia. Her mind succumbed to infection. She's tied herself to a smaller tree by her ankle.

A thick nylon strap has been looped around the back of her head and across her open mouth.

Tightened with a winch at the back of her skull, the strap makes it impossible for her to bite down.

She's rendered herself harmless. She stares at Norman with intense, dead eyes.

He stands, shakes his head at her state of decay: sunken eyes, skeletal hands, missing hair.

He picks up the journal. It must have sixty tally marks carved into its face.

He opens the cover. The first page reads "For Finn".

He closes it and tucks it under his arm. He picks up the bolt gun which has already been cocked.

NORMAN

He made it, you know. We all did.
I'll make sure he gets this when
he's old enough.

He approaches her. He places the butt of the gun against her forehead.

She makes no attempt to avoid it. She just stares at him.

NORMAN

Thank you.

Norman closes his eyes. He pulls the trigger.

CUT TO BLACK.