

THE VORE

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PRE-LAP - A baby fusses and starts to cry.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - DAY

A newborn, swaddled in his mother's arms, bawls, and his mother smiles and comforts him.

Other patients shoot the mother dirty looks or sigh. A woman puts earbuds in.

KEAGAN, 20s, a conventional blonde in a cozy cardigan and shoulder bag, eyes the baby with cool interest.

The mother smiles at her.

MOTHER

Sorry.

KEAGAN

Oh, no, uh, congratulations.

MOTHER

Thank you.

The receptionist walks in with her clipboard.

RECEPTIONIST

Keagan?

Keagan offers the mother a small smile and stands.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY

Keagan lays on the exam bed with her legs in stirrups while the doctor examines her birth canal.

DOCTOR

Everything looks good. Walls are firm, grazes are healing fast. No episiotomy--always good.

The doctor pulls off her gloves and checks her chart.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Weight's good, blood pressure: good, blood sugar: good. You're young and healthy.

KEAGAN

Then what went wrong?

DOCTOR

Not easy to say. Science hasn't quite caught up to this part of God's plan. Think you'll try again?

KEAGAN

I don't know. I don't think so. Not for a while.

DOCTOR

How you doing otherwise? Any thoughts or feelings--concerns?

KEAGAN

Not really. I'm fine.

DOCTOR

You know, many women, after a stillbirth, the hormones alone--

KEAGAN

I'm okay. We weren't exactly trying for a child. It was a surprise.

DOCTOR

I see. If you don't mind me asking, is the father still in the picture?

KEAGAN

Yeah. He just had work today. Couldn't get out of it.

DOCTOR

Okay. Well, just the same, I'd like to give you the number of my friend. Her name's Dr. Weir.

The doctor fishes a card off her desk and offers it.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

She's a bereavement specialist. Even if you're still okay later, you can call her just to chat.

KEAGAN

Thank you.

INT. BUS - DAY

Keagan sits alone in the uncrowded bus.

Two young kids giggle a few seats forward as one plays peek-a-boo with the other over the back rest of his seat.

Keagan rolls her eyes, crushes the doctor's card in her hand, and watches the city pass by.

INT. KEAGAN'S APARTMENT - HALL - DAY

Keagan enters. Michael, 20s, a clean, broad-shouldered man, emerges into the hall from the kitchen and scowls.

KEAGAN

Hi, dear. Something on your mind?

MICHAEL

Coming back from the doctor?

KEAGAN

Yes. No worries, though. Clean bill of health.

She hangs her coat and breezes past him into the kitchen. Stew steams in a pot on the stove.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

Mmm. French Beef?

MICHAEL

I thought the plan was to meet up and go together.

KEAGAN

Eh, I decided it wasn't worth the hassle. Just a check-up.

Keagan tries to sample the hot soup off a wooden spoon. Michael crosses his arms.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

What? It's no big deal. I would have told you if there was something worth mentioning.

MICHAEL

Would you?

Keagan stirs the soup. Michael hugs her from behind.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I wanted to be there. We're supposed to be a team.

Keagan cringes and slides out of his embrace.

KEAGAN

We are a team. Relax. It was just icky girl stuff.

She turns away and stirs some more.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

You don't have to bother yourself with it. In/out, "See you next time," no penis required.

MICHAEL

He was my baby, too.

The spoon stops. Keagan turns with a smile.

KEAGAN

Hey, did you pack my chocolates? Gonna need something to get me through this weekend.

She marches toward the bathroom.

MICHAEL

Keagan.

KEAGAN

Need to fix my makeup, too. Deflect one of my mom's comments, at least.

She enters the bathroom and locks the door.

INT. KEAGAN'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

Keagan looks at herself in the mirror.

KEAGAN

What's the matter with you?

She splashes water on her face. Dries, and stops the water.

A single distant baby cry sounds from nowhere. Kegan glances outside, but the sound fades.

Several watching eyes appear in the last of the water and wink before they drain.

Keagan starts. She peers down the drain, takes a deep breath, and rubs her eyes. No new images appear.

INT. KEAGAN'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Keagan enters, white as a sheet, no makeup.

MICHAEL

You okay?

KEAGAN

Uh, yeah. Just a bit stressed. This whole thing at the cabin: I don't know if I want to do this.

MICHAEL

It'll be good to get away a while. Hey, if your family gives you a hard time, I'll come to the rescue.

He puffs his chest out like Superman.

KEAGAN

Mmm, there are some villains in this world, Michael Carpenter, even heroes dare not face.

She hugs him.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about earlier.

MICHAEL

It's okay. I'll try to find it in my heart to keep loving you.

He winks and kisses her on the forehead.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I've got your back, you know. Always. Let's finish packing.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Their car drives up a winding mountain road flanked by thick, coniferous forest that stretches to the horizon.

Keagan, makeup ready and in a practical hoodie, jeans, and uggs, clutches the big bowl of soup in the passenger seat.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

The car rounds a last bend and rolls into a glade where the lowering sun casts an expansive log cabin's shadow over the adjacent dock and lake.

KEAGAN
I hate this.

Michael grabs Keagan's hand.

MICHAEL
It'll be okay. I'm excited. You
want me to get to know them, right?

KEAGAN
I wouldn't wish that on anyone.

They exit the car, and as they reach the porch steps,
Keagan's mother, AMELIA, 50s, a silver-blond with an air of
guarded elegance, appears in the doorway.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Hi, Mom.

AMELIA
Hello, darling. Mr. Carpenter: good
to see your supervisor didn't make
you work that overtime.

MICHAEL
Overtime?

AMELIA
Keagan said your supervisor needed
you on shift this weekend.

MICHAEL
Oh, uh- uh, right. Yeah, they found
someone else to cover it.

Amelia eyes an abashed Keagan.

AMELIA
Indeed. Is that a dish you've
brought for us?

Keagan hands the bowl over.

KEAGAN
Uh, yeah. It's a French Beef soup.

AMELIA
French Beef. Exquisite. Did you use
a real burgundy wine?

MICHAEL
No, but there's Cognac and a good
Pinot Noir, and the broth was slow-
cooked for a real savory taste.

AMELIA
Hm, sounds delicious. Thank you,
Mr. Carpenter, it must have taken
quite a bit of time.

MICHAEL
Well, actually, we both made it.
And please, call me Michael.

AMELIA
My daughter learned to cook? Ha,
will wonders never cease? I'll put
this right inside.

An engine on the drive gives Amelia pause. An expensive, late
model sedan rounds the trees, and she smiles.

She hands the bowl to Keagan and hurries down to the sedan.

KINGSLEY, 20's, a fit young man in a smart sweater and top-
shelf glasses, exits the car with MADDISON, 20's, his slim,
classy wife, who carries their baby in a carrier.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
Kingsley.

KINGSLEY
Hi, Mom.

AMELIA
Maddison, lovely to see you. And
where's my grandson?

Maddison lifts the carrier, and Amelia tickles the baby.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
Ohh, there's that handsome man.
Ooh. Hand him over.

MADDISON
Be my guest.

Kingsley walks ahead. Maddison hands over the carrier.

KINGSLEY
Ah, this must be the famous
Michael. Hold on, you look very
familiar. Let me guess, Goldman
Sachs? Christmas party last year?

MICHAEL
Ha, no. Not my scene.

KINGSLEY
Just kidding. Mother tells me
you're in sanitation.

MICHAEL
Right.

GRAHAM (O.S.)
Is that Kingsley?

KINGSLEY
Yeah, Dad, fresh off the boat.

GRAHAM, 50's, a fit older gentleman in a smart sweater
similar to Kingsley's, emerges from the cabin.

GRAHAM
Hey, there he is.

He trundles past Keagan and Michael and clasps Kingsley's
hand for a firm shake, then kisses Maddison and his grandson.

Maddison rests her hand on Keagan's shoulder.

MADDISON
Heard about your loss. I can't know
how you're feeling, but I'm here if
you need anything.

KEAGAN
Thanks, Mads.

MICHAEL
We appreciate it.

Graham strides to Keagan and Michael and gives Keagan a side
hug with a small peck on the side of the head

GRAHAM
Hey, Keegs. Glad you were able to
make it this weekend.

He claps Michael on the back a couple of times.

GRAHAM (CONT'D)
Michael. I trust all is well in the
world of sanitation and waste.

MICHAEL
Yes, sir. Very well, actually.

Graham nods, jaw tight.

GRAHAM

Kingsley, let's give everyone time
to finish dinner and have a cigar
in the den, talk business.

The two enter the cabin with the other four in tow.

INT. DINING ROOM - DUSK

Assorted foods ring the dining table with assorted wines.

Michael and Keagan eat across from Kingsley and Maddison with
the parents on the ends. Kingsley stands and taps his glass.

KINGSLEY

I'd like to propose a toast to this
feast, to happiness, to lots of
prosperity, to my healthy baby boy.

A glance at Keagan.

GRAHAM

Ah, hear, hear, my boy. Cheers.

AMELIA

Wonderful, honey. Cheers.

Keagan downs her wine in one gulp and refills her glass.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

So nice to have the family all
together for a change. What's new
in your lives?

KEAGAN

Well, my doctor visit went-

KINGSLEY

My buddy, Chad, has this business
idea I'm super into. He wants to
make an A.I. that companies can use
to identify new markets and
advertise with the push of a
button. No middlemen.

MICHAEL

Sounds like it's going to replace a
lot of people.

KINGSLEY

Yeah, it'll really save the execs a
ton. I'm gonna get in it with him.

MADDISON

After the Alpiste thing? Do we even have any--

KINGSLEY

Maddison's always the cautious one, but I'll get her on board.

He glares at Maddison; she shrinks.

KINGSLEY (CONT'D)

That IPO's gonna shake the market.

AMELIA

I don't know about all that stuff, but it sounds wonderful, honey.

GRAHAM

Sounds like a prime investment, son. Proud of you.

KEAGAN

Can you pass the bowl of horseshi- I mean, hummus, please?

KINGSLEY

I could get you in on the action too, sis.

KEAGAN

Thanks, I'd rather shove a spiny popsicle up my--

GRAHAM

Anything I can do to help get this off the ground, son?

KINGSLEY

Been meaning to talk to you about that, Dad. I could use another--

Keagan slams her hand on the table and stands.

KEAGAN

Are you fucking kidding me?

AMELIA

Keagan.

GRAHAM

Michael, you want get her under control, for God's sake?

Michael stands and puts his arm around Keagan's shoulders.

MICHAEL

It's just the stress. We've been working through the loss--

Keagan ducks under Michael's arm and stands at the foot of the table.

KEAGAN

Fuck that. I've been playacting in this plastic dream for 20 years.

AMELIA

Dear, could you maintain a little--

KEAGAN

Here we go. "Quiet, Keagan. Mind your manners, Keagan. Why can't you be more like your brother, Keagan?"

MICHAEL

Sweetheart--

KEAGAN

I'm sick of being ignored and ostracized while this prim, self-fellating little psycho walks on air because he's in the family business of helping millionaire psychos beat the rap. Sorry that my life doesn't make for polite dinner conversation, but it's still here, whether you like it or not. I'm a social worker. I don't get paid very much, and I spend all day with the little people. My boyfriend is a garbage man. I had a stillbirth. Fucking live with it. I do.

Tense silence. Keagan looks at each person and storms off into the bathroom. Michael follows.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

I want to be alone.

She closes and locks the door.

INT. BATHROOM - DUSK

Keagan turns the faucet on full blast and lets the sink fill. A baby giggling echoes softly behind her ear.

She whips her head around: nothing there. She checks behind the shower curtain. The water spills over the sink.

KEAGAN

Dammit.

She pulls the drain and grabs a towel. A bizarre shape in the puddle startles her, and she falls on her butt.

She throws the towel over the puddle and hurries out.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DUSK

Keagan crosses the room and stops dead. Kingsley towers over Maddison, who's backed against a wall.

KINGSLEY

Butt into my business again, and I
will shut that mouth of yours for--

Kingsley cuts himself off as he notices Keagan.

KINGSLEY (CONT'D)

What are you looking at? Get out.

KEAGAN

Or what?

Kingsley clenches his fists. Keagan looks at them and scoffs.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

Yeah, what else is new?

KINGSLEY

Watch it.

KEAGAN

You're just a fucking bully--to me,
to your wife, and soon to a son.

MADDISON

Keagan, please. Don't make it--

KINGSLEY

Shut it. You're on thin ice, sis.

KEAGAN

Do yourself a favor, Maddy, take
your baby and run, fast as you can.

Maddison hangs her head. Kingsley's face and neck burn red.

KINGSLEY

Keep talking, bitch.

KEAGAN

No problem. How about some advice?
Get a life and stop being a shadow
in Dad's shadow.

Kingsley grabs a porcelain statuette off the fireplace mantle and hurls it at Keagan. It shatters on the floor at her feet.

Michael, Amelia, and Graham run into the room.

AMELIA

What's going on in here? Ohh,
Keagan, how could you?

She stoops and picks up a few of the porcelain chunks.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Have you not learned to control
your temper at all? You knew this
was a gift from my grandmother.

KEAGAN

I didn't do it.

GRAHAM

What's gotten into you, Keagan?

KEAGAN

Are you kidding me?

Keagan sighs and gives up. She looks to Maddison for help, and Kingsley threatens Maddison with a glance.

Maddison lowers her eyes. Keagan snorts and exits to her bedroom. Michael follows.

INT. BEDROOM - DUSK

MICHAEL

You okay?

Keagan grabs a wine glass and gulps half of it down.

KEAGAN

Hell no.

MICHAEL

What happened out there?

KEAGAN

Like it even fucking matters.
Coming here was a stupid idea.

MICHAEL

It matters to me. What happened?

KEAGAN

I just-- That asshole-- I can't--
Would you just give me some space?

MICHAEL

I'm just trying to help.

KEGAN

Well, you're being a problem.
You're always smothering me and
pushing me to be more like you. I'm
not like you.

MICHAEL

Where's this coming from?

Tears well in her eyes.

KEAGAN

I'm not fit to be a mother. I only
carried that baby for you because
you were so proud--and my parents
are so conservative--

Keagan sits on the bed and buries her face in her hands.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

I can't live with all of these
expectations. I'll always
disappoint you and disappoint my
parents. I'm not even sure I want
to be in a committed relationship--

She covers her mouth and watches Michael for a reaction.
Michael, heartbroken, avoids eye contact.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

Shit.

She pushes past Michael and flees from the house.

EXT. CABIN - BOAT DOCK - CONTINUOUS

Keagan trudges down the beach and stops at the edge of the
gentle tide. She shivers as tears race down her cheeks.

She steps one foot into the water and sucks air through her
teeth at the bracing cold, but she takes another step.

She catches her breath as she walks. The water reaches her waist and she drops to float on her back.

Keagan floats toward the middle of the lake, sighs, and closes her eyes. She lets herself sink below the surface.

She floats in the darkness for a time.

The whole world turns, and the moonlight turns with it to shine from below her, not above.

Keagan stays under the water until the lack of air makes her shudder. She jerks, and a bubble escapes her mouth.

She opens her eyes and swims for the light, breaks the surface, and runs her hands through her hair.

Where verdant forest once stood, a blasted waste of dry, lifeless clay and tall, bare conifers stretch beyond sight.

Gentle snow falls but melts as it touches the ground.

The dock lies in ruins, and the cabin still stands, but only as a rotten, abandoned husk.

A white sun sits on the horizon in an orange sky.

KEAGAN

Michael? Mom?

She swims to shore, shivers up to the house, and enters.

INT. CABIN - DAY

The worn wallpaper peels onto a grimy floor--furniture tossed, cabinets open and looted, rotted food on the table.

KEAGAN

Hello? Anybody? Michael?

She enters her room and kicks aside clothes on the floor.

The closet stands open and ransacked. Keagan picks up a shirt and gives it a sniff, wrinkles her nose, and tosses it down.

A crash sounds from another room. Something heavy shifts on the floor above. Keagan holds her breath. The ceiling creaks.

She rummages through the room and finds an empty wine bottle under a pile of debris.

The whole house groans. Keagan backs against the wall where something chitters and crawls in the wood.

The front door opens. The floorboard creaks.

Keagan inches toward the hall, grips the neck of the wine bottle with both hands, and peeks out. Empty.

She creeps into the hall. A spill of objects clatter on the floor in the kitchen. She crosses the dining room.

The kitchen door hangs ajar. Something skitters and disturbs objects on the counter.

Keagan places a hand on the door and bursts in. LUCA, 9, his clothes and hair damp, yelps and backs against the counter.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Oh, sorry. It's okay.

She steps forward, and Luca runs to the corner of the room.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
It's okay. It's okay. I'm not gonna hurt you. What's your name?

Luca bolts and slips through Keagan's fingers.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Hey, stop. No, wait. Kid.

Keagan chases and catches a glimpse as Luca exits to the waste. She chases him, and scans around. No sign of him.

EXT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

She checks around the side of the house and sighs, but Luca peeks around a dead tree trunk for just an instant.

KEAGAN
Hey.

Luca runs away from the cabin and through the dusting snow. Keagan chases after him.

EXT. DEAD WASTES - DAY

KEAGAN
Stop. It's alright.

Luca jumps over dead brush and fallen logs.

Keagan gains on him, but he dodges behind a tree. When she rounds the tree, the kid's gone.

Keagan turns and scans. The dead ground and dead vegetation spreads in every direction.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Listen, I'm scared, too- and lost.

Keagan walks and glances underbrush and behind trees.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
I think we could help each other.

She comes across a big tree with a nook at the base. Luca's eyes glisten in the dark.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Hi. Hey. It's okay. I'm not going to hurt you. I'm- I'm just lost.

She sits cross-legged in the dirt.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
I came out of the water and was just... here.

Recognition grows on Luca's face. Keagan glances at the white sun, lower on the horizon.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
My parent's cabin. You saw it. I came up. I don't know what--

ODIE (O.S.)
Miss.

Keagan jumps and brandishes the bottle. ODIE, 30's, a broad man in damp waders, stands next to GISELE, 30s, a woman of super model fit and stature in a bikini and sarong.

ODIE (CONT'D)
Sorry. Didn't mean to scare you.

KEAGAN
Who are you?

ODIE
Don't be afraid. We're in the same boat as you. I need you to be calm. Can you do that?

KEAGAN
Yeah.

ODIE

I'm Odie. This is Gisele. What's your name?

KEAGAN

Keagan.

ODIE

Keagan. Okay, Keagan, where'd you come from?

KEAGAN

My parents' cabin. Everything was normal, then I got in the water--

ODIE

Yeah, par for the course, then. Uh, you got business with that tree?

KEAGAN

There's a boy.

ODIE

A boy?

KEAGAN

Didn't you hear me talking to him?

ODIE

No. We just came around the tree and there you were.

He takes a knee, and Keagan makes room for him in front of the nook. Luca still trembles inside.

ODIE (CONT'D)

's'alright, boy. Come out of there.

Luca cowers.

ODIE (CONT'D)

Ain't no good coming of hiding in a hole. Now let's go.

KEAGAN

It's okay. We just want to help.

Something skitters through the tree. Luca shrinks.

Gisele catches a snowflake that melts on her hand.

ODIE

Dammit, boy. You gonna make me come in after you?

KEAGAN

Hey.

ODIE

He's not gonna like being in there
when the sun sets.

KEAGAN

Alright, just- Let me talk to him?

Odie steps back.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

What's your name?

No answer.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

I'm Keagan. I'm a social worker. I
have a boyfriend, Michael. I like
tacos. I'd like to be your friend.

She sits against the tree.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

I don't know what's going on. I
think we're probably alike in that
way. I might be more lost than you

LUCA (O.S.)

You were in the water?

KEAGAN

Yeah, right before I got here. Why?

LUCA

I was in the water, too.

KEAGAN

Swimming?

No answer.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

Will you tell me your name?

LUCA

Luca.

KEAGAN

Luca, I know this is kind of scary,
but we're all just people out here,
and we're all as confused as you.

Luca appears at the opening.

LUCA
What if you're not alone?

KEAGAN
What do you mean?

LUCA
What if--

Leaves rustle and twigs snap.

TRISTAN, 17, a pale, thin boy with a mop of dark hair, only in shirt and boxers, walks out of the forest in a daze.

ODIE
Hello? Son? Son, you alright?

Blood drizzles down Tristan's hands. He pauses, works his lips, and collapses into the dirt. Keagan rushes to help.

LATER

Odie adds more dry brush to a small fire while Keagan cinches bandages around Tristan's wrists made from Gisele's sarong.

Tristan lies unconscious with Keagan's hoodie covering him.

Luca flinches at every sound. Gisele huddles by the fire.

ODIE (CONT'D)
Those cuts on his wrist. Don't look like he was attacked, do they?

KEAGAN
No.

ODIE
How's he doing?

KEAGAN
He should be fine, but he'll need rest and food. Thank you, Gisele.

Keagan hands the remaining cloth back to Gisele.

GISELE
De rien.

KEAGAN
Is that French?

Gisele nods.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
What brought you to Washington?

GISELE
Washington?

KEAGAN
Yeah, this used to be the forest
around my family's cabin.

GIS LE
Not Washington. I was in Naples.

KEAGAN
Italy?

ODIE
I was in Maryland.

They all look to Luca.

LUCA
Uh, I was in Washington, too.

KEAGAN
How did you all end up here? You
couldn't have walked.

ODIE
I was fishing, fell under the
water, and when I came up,
everything was like this.

KEAGAN
Water again. Luca asked me about
that. Gisele, water?

GIS LE
Yes.

ODIE
Well? What happened?

Gisele hugs herself.

GISELE
It was a shoot.

ODIE
A shoot? Like a movie?

LUCA
Are you an actor?

GISELE
I am a fashion model.

ODIE
That checks out.

KEAGAN
And what happened?

GISELE
I was at the beach. I went into the water. A wave came, and I am here.

ODIE
You too, kid? Under the water?

Luca nods.

ODIE (CONT'D)
In your clothes? Why?

Luca avoids eye contact.

ODIE (CONT'D)
Come on, kid. We're trying to figure this out.

No answer.

ODIE (CONT'D)
What the hell? Come on. Wake up.

KEAGAN
Would you stop? We were all under the water. We don't need specifics.

GISELE
What drove you to the water?

KEAGAN
Just a spur of the moment impulse. Look, point is that there's a pattern. I'm sure he would tell the same story if he were awake.

TRISTAN
I'm awake.

Tristan holds his eyes half open.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)
No prizes for guessing my story.

Keagan rushes over and puts her hand to his cheek.

KEAGAN

Still a little cold. Can you tell me your name?

TRISTAN

Tristan.

She checks the pulse in his wrist.

KEAGAN

Okay, Tristan, can you tell me what day of the week it is?

TRISTAN

Uh, Friday?

ODIE

That can't be good.

TRISTAN

I'm fine. I've never cared what day of the week it is.

KEAGAN

How about where you are?

ODIE

The hell kind of question is that?

KEAGAN

It's just to see how he's doing.

ODIE

But, under the circumstances--

TRISTAN

I know where I am.

KEAGAN

You do?

TRISTAN

The only place you go when you cut your wrists or fall in the water.

Everyone exchanges grave looks.

KEAGAN

No. No, we're not--

TRISTAN

Oh, is this not what it looked like for you last time you died?

LUCA
We're dead?

KEAGAN
We're not dead. Look, there's an
easy way to solve this.

She pulls out her wet phone.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
If this thing still works.

The display comes on, and Keagan smiles. Gisele watches over
Kegan's shoulder. Odie pulls out his phone, too.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
We're just in Washington. Look.

She opens a navigation app, but it only shows a notification
that reads: "NO SATELLITE DATA."

TRISTAN
Funny how life only gives you
enough hope to be disappointed.

KEAGAN
No. It doesn't mean anything. It
was in the water. It's just broken.

GISELE
It's okay.

KEAGAN
No. I didn't go very far. My cabin
is just back there. I can show you.

Odie and Gisele share a look.

ODIE
Look, we need to start thinking
about survival, find food and
especially water.

KEAGAN
There's water at the lake. The
cabin's even still standing.

GISELE
Maybe we should.

KEAGAN
Why wouldn't we? Something wrong?

GISELE

Non, nothing. Lead the way.

Keagan shuts her screen off, and a reflection of Gisele, overweight and sagging, looks back from the black glass.

Gisele tears her eyes away. Odie squints at her.

KEAGAN

Okay, Tristan, do you think you can do any walking?

TRISTAN

Probably.

Keagan helps Tristan up, stuffs the wine bottle under her arm, and everyone gathers to depart.

KEAGAN

Just be careful. Tell someone if you feel woozy. How are the wrists?

TRISTAN

Sore.

Luca grabs Keagan's hand. He smiles up at her, and she tries to smile back.

A baby's cry startles Keagan, and she shakes her hand free.

ODIE

What's wrong?

KEAGAN

Uh, nothing. I just think we should keep our hands free. Okay, Luca? Easier to walk that way.

Luca frowns.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

Just don't fall behind. Stay by Odie, maybe? Alright. Let's go.

She marches off with the others in tow. Odie pats Luca's shoulder as he passes.

ODIE

Come on, kid. Buck up.

They all trudge through the dead woods on the harsh earth.

LATER

The sun sinks lower, and the trees cast long shadows.

Tristan walks on dirty, bare feet red with small cuts from the rocks and brambles. He steps on another rock and winces.

TRISTAN

Dammit.

KEAGAN

You okay?

TRISTAN

Yeah.

KEAGAN

Want to take a break? Maybe you could borrow Gisele's sandals.

TRISTAN

Nah. If we're going to suffer, there's no sense in resisting it.

KEAGAN

You really think we're dead?

TRISTAN

You know what dreams are? I don't mean how you experience them, I mean where they come from.

KEAGAN

I don't think so.

TRISTAN

When you sleep, your neurons fire randomly, and your brain tries to make sense of it.

KEAGAN

Oh, well that explains some of the dreams I've had.

TRISTAN

Right. They can't tell the future, but they can tell you something about yourself, like where your mind goes when given random info.

KEAGAN

Like clouds, or shadows on a wall.

TRISTAN
Flying or falling: it depends on
your state of mind. I believe death
is the same way.

Gisele peers into the distant forest.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)
When your neurons fire one last
time, no god judges you and sends
you to heaven or hell. Your brain
does, and it crafts your eternity.

KEAGAN
This is your brain punishing you?

TRISTAN
Way my brain works? For sure.

KEAGAN
Then we're all imaginary?

Tristan shrugs.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Well, I hate to break it to you,
but I'm not in your imagination.

She looks back at Gisele.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Wouldn't she be wearing less than
that if she was your creation?

Tristan manages a smile.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Oh, enough blood left to blush.

ODIE
Hey, we've been walking for a
while. Didn't you say this place
wasn't far away?

Keagan stops and scans around.

KEAGAN
Yeah, I- I know this forest by
heart, but it's all so different.

Gisele and Odie share a look. Keagan scans around.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
A clearing. There.

She jogs over. The others follow.

EXT. DRY LAKE - CONTINUOUS

They emerge from the forest into a clearing.

A collection of loose boards sits in a broad, dusty lot next to a sandy beach that slopes into a dry lakebed.

KEAGAN

I don't get it. How? The cabin. The water-- It looks like--

GISELE

Just enough hope to disappoint you.

KEAGAN

What is this? What's going on?

ODIE

Well, honestly, we kind of suspected we'd find nothing.

KEAGAN

I'm telling you, it was here.

ODIE

We believe you. It's just that--

GISELE

We tried to go back, too.

ODIE

My marsh, her ocean, both gone like someone picked 'em up and left. Nothing but sand to the horizon.

GISELE

Ms. Keagan, this place, whatever it is, is not Washington, or Italy, or any place where any of us came from and does not play by the rules.

Luca sits in the shade and pulls his knees to his chest.

ODIE

Whatever's going on, we need a plan of action. The sun is going down.

KEAGAN

Well, what can we do?

ODIE
Survive, get basics: food, water.

GISELE
What food and water? All is this.

She kicks a pile of dust.

ODIE
I don't know, but sitting here's
getting us nothing. We need to get
our bearings.

GISELE
This place changes when we turn
away.

ODIE
Gisele, we have to do something.

GISELE
But wandering in a random direction
will just tire us.

The shadow of the dead limbs of a tree seem to converge on
Luca. He stands and whirls. The tree looks normal.

ODIE
Kid, you agree, right?

TRISTAN
Whatever.

ODIE
Oh, of course. "Whatever." Well,
I'm not going to just lie down.

Luca runs to Keagan and grabs the hem of her shirt.

KEAGAN
What is it, Luca?

She follows his gaze. In the distance, a large hill slopes up
from the surrounding landscape and casts its shadow across
the land under the descending sun.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Was that always there?

ODIE
Hell no it wasn't. Well, looks like
we have our heading.

KEAGAN

What?

GISELE

Wait. This place changes. If there is a hill now, we ask why.

TRISTAN

Maybe something we need to go see.

ODIE

Exactly. I wanted to get my bearings, and God provides.

Gisele rolls her eyes.

ODIE (CONT'D)

Discussion's over. We move out.

EXT. DEAD WASTES - DUSK

Odie and Gisele lead. Keagan walks between Luca and Tristan.

LUCA

Keagan?

KEAGAN

Yeah?

LUCA

I need to go to the bathroom.

KEAGAN

Really?

She scans the dead forest. The trees casts long shadows in the lowering sun.

TRISTAN

I could use a minute to catch my breath, anyway.

KEAGAN

Alright. Just stay in sight, okay?

LUCA

But...

KEAGAN

I know. In normal times I could give you some privacy, but-- Could you just face away from us?

Luca nods.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Okay. Hurry up.

They stop. Luca walks through the falling snow to a nearby tree and looks back at them. Keagan give him a thumbs up.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Hey, we need a minute.

Odie and Gisele stop. Odie sighs and shakes his head.

Tristan leans against a large trunk and closes his eyes.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Can I ask you a question?

TRISTAN
Nirvana.

KEAGAN
What?

TRISTAN
My favorite band: Nirvana.

KEAGAN
No, I was going ask about--

TRISTAN
I know, I know. "What made you want to do that to yourself?" Right?

KEGAN
Well, basically.

TRISTAN
Forget it. You wouldn't understand.

Kegan sits next to him.

KEAGAN
When I was your age, I remember hating everything: school, my parents, my life.

Tristan opens one eye.

TRISTAN
You?

KEAGAN
That so hard to believe?

TRISTAN

You struck me as a class president type, cheerleader, hall monitor.

KEAGAN

More like a skater punk. I made fun of cheerleaders. My parents always wished I was more like my twin brother. I rebelled. Still do.

TRISTAN

You hang out with other skaters?

KEAGAN

Yeah. That gave my mom extra frown lines. Couldn't skate for crap, but mostly we just sat at the park and bitched about our parents.

TRISTAN

Had a better time than I am, then.

KEAGAN

Yeah? How so?

TRISTAN

Don't have any friends. Don't even go to school any more. My dad teaches me all the lessons I need.

He brushes his hair aside and reveals a fresh bruise.

KEAGAN

I'm so sorry. What about your mother? Can't she help?

TRISTAN

She can't do much from the grave.

KEAGAN

Oh.

TRISTAN

Always amusing watching someone realize they don't know real misery. If you did, you wouldn't even have to ask about the cuts.

Luca strides out of the forest.

QUICK VISION - LUCA MORPHS INTO TRISTAN. LOOSE, DIRTY, BLOODY BANDAGES HANG FROM HIS WRISTS

BACK TO SCENE

Keagan gasps, clutches at her chest.

KEAGAN
Jesus, what the hell was that?

LUCA TRISTAN
What? What?

KEAGAN
Nothing, I- sorry. C'mon, let's
keep moving.

Odie and Gisele stand meters away.

ODIE
Hey, ask you a question?

GISELE
Allez.

ODIE
When you were in the water, when
you came here: you see anything?

GISELE
Non. Did you?

ODIE
Well, no. Not really. I thought
maybe I did.

GISELE
What was it?

ODIE
Nothing. Just a... shape.

The white sun dips halfway behind the hill. Luca stops.

LUCA
Keagan, is it just me, or is the
hill getting smaller?

Tristan laughs, shakes his head, and sits down.

KEAGAN
It's not just you. Gisele, Odie.

Odie turns and scowls when he sees Tristan on the ground.

ODIE
Who said you could take a break?

He stomps toward Tristan, but Keagan steps in his path.

KEAGAN
How long've we been walking?

ODIE
Not long enough. Let's go.

KEAGAN
An hour? Maybe two? Look around.

Odie scans the horizon.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
The sun's going down, none of us
have eaten or had any water, we
don't know where the hell we are--

LUCA
And the hill is shrinking.

KEAGAN
And yes, in case you hadn't
noticed, the hill seems to be
getting further away. We need to
find shelter and rest.

The wind picks up, and thunder rumbles. The trees sway and
crack, and fat drops of rain replace the dusting snow.

ODIE
Where's this coming from? Quick,
boy, get twigs as fast as you can.

Luca scurries between trees and takes limbs.

KEAGAN
Oh, you've gotta be kidding me.

Everyone follows her gaze. A rock formation with an opening
large enough to enter stands between the nearby trees.

ODIE
Hallelujah.

KEAGAN
Don't be an idiot.

ODIE
It's shelter.

KEAGAN
A shelter that appeared the same
time as a storm?

ODIE
Exactly. Hallelujah. Come on, kid.

He helps Tristan to his feet.

ODIE (CONT'D)
Want to stay out here? You have
your big, scary wine bottle to
frighten all the monsters away.

The lightning flashes, and the rain pours.

KEAGAN
Dammit.

Gisele and Luca follow Odie under the rocks.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

Tristan takes the sweatshirt off, rolls it into a ball, and
uses it as a pillow. Luca drops the twigs.

LUCA
That good?

ODIE
Well, I was hoping for more, but I
should get something out of it.

Everyone sits while Odie builds a fire.

A curtain of rain falls from the entrance. Keagan holds the
bottle opening against the rocks and collects water.

ODIE (CONT'D)
Trust that?

KEAGAN
Trust this cave?

Keagan hesitates, but takes a swig.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Tastes like water. Want some?

Luca nods.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Here, you can be in charge of
filling it. Can you handle it?

Luca takes the bottle and smiles while he holds it under the
stream. Keagan watches him and smiles to herself.

Odie blows on a spark, and the fire grows. Light fills the space. The wet tinder pops as he adds some.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
You expect us to sleep in here?

LATER

Everyone sleeps. Embers glow in the spent wood.

Tristan stands. Eyes open but not awake. A milky film covers his irises. He mumbles to himself and shuffles from the cave.

EXT. DEAD WASTES - CONTINUOUS

A bolt of lightning strikes a tree next to Tristan and briefly catches fire before the rain extinguishes it.

The sound jolts Keagan and Odie awake, and they walk outside.

ODIE
What in the hell you doin out here?

TRISTAN
The walls are moving. Gonna squeeze
the life out of us.

Keagan touches Tristan's arm.

KEAGAN
He's ice cold.

ODIE
Of course he is. He's standing in
the middle of a downpour.

Keagan gently shakes Tristan.

KEAGAN
Tristan, can you hear me?

Tristan claws at his throat and gasps for air. He coughs and vomits water and bile and collapses to the ground.

Keagan drops to her knees and attempts to comfort him, but Tristan flinches. He screams and writhes in pain.

Odie joins Keagan and tries to restrain him. Gisele and Luca run from the cave.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
He's fine, just a nightmare. Go
back inside. We'll be right there.

Luca and Gisele comply.

ODIE
Oh, shit.

Tristan goes rigid and gasps for air as three deep scratch marks form on his stomach.

Faint scars appear on his forearms and legs, and the wounds on his wrists re-open and bleed.

ODIE (CONT'D)
What is that?

KEAGAN
I don't know. They look like--

ODIE
Old wounds.

Tristan blinks, and the milky film fades from his eyes. He shivers and touches the scars.

KEAGAN
Tristan? Sh, sh, sh. It's okay.

TRISTAN
It hurts.

KEAGAN
It's okay. You're gonna be okay.
I'll be right back. Watch him.

Keagan runs into the cave.

INT. CAVE - CONTINUOUS

Gisele huddles with Luca. Keagan enters.

KEAGAN
Gisele, I need your sarong again.

GISELE
For what? What's happening?

Gisele loosens what's left of the sarong tied to her arm.

KEAGAN
I'll tell you later. Help me rip
this into strips.

LUCA
What's going on?

KEAGAN
I can't talk now. Just stay here.
Don't go outside.

Luca stares into the darkness at the mouth of the cave.

EXT. DEAD WASTES - SAME

Tristan kneels in the mud.

TRISTAN
Why? Why, why?

ODIE
Alright, son, I'm gonna need you to
hang in there, okay?

Tristan writhes and groans.

ODIE (CONT'D)
This ain't nothing you can't
handle. Just tough it out. No sense
in bellyachin' over old scars.

Lightning flashes and reveals, for an instant, a spectral
horror perched on Tristan's back. Odie backs away.

TRISTAN
I don't want it to hurt any more. I
think- I think I can walk.

Tristan takes one step and stumbles as his foot sticks in a
puddle of loose muck. The viscous puddle widens.

He pulls one foot out, but the step he takes shoves it even
deeper than before. He sinks up to his knees.

TRISTAN (CONT'D)
I'm so tired.

Keagan emerges from the cave with strips of cloth in hand.

KEAGAN
Okay, everything's gonna be--

Keagan runs to Tristan. Her foot gets stuck in the muck. She
falls backward onto solid ground and pulls her foot loose.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Odie, what's happening?

Odie shakes his head and stares in horror.

Tristan closes his eyes as he sinks past his knees.

TRISTAN

It's cold.

KEAGAN

Odie, get something he can grab.

Keagan tries to break a limb off a dead tree.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

I need your help. Odie, your pants.

ODIE

Huh?

KEAGAN

Your waders, they're like six feet long. It'll reach. Come on.

Odie strips off his overalls and tosses one end to Tristan. Tristan struggles to keep his eyes open and grabs the waders.

Gisele steps out and gasps. Luca peeks out from behind her.

Keagan and Odie pull. The waders slip from Tristan's fingers.

ODIE

Damn it, kid.

They toss it out again. He tries to grab it.

KEAGAN

Slowly. Come on.

The muck sucks as they pull him out a bit.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

It's working. Okay. Okay. Come on. We can't do it without you.

ODIE

Pull, kid. You have to fight.

TRISTAN

I'm so tired. I'm cold.

An authoritative voice sounds. Only Odie reacts to it.

FATHER (O.S.)

Let him go.

The muck sucks Tristan deeper.

FATHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Is it your job to support the weak?

KEAGAN
Odie, what are you doing?

Odie snaps out of it and pulls.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Tristan, pull. We need your help.

TRISTAN
I can't. I can't do this any more.

Tristan sinks to his chest. Gisele hugs Luca and shields him.

ODIE
Dammit, kid. If you can't man up,
then why should we save you?

Keagan's anger flashes at Odie.

Odie looks from her to the muck and goes slack. Tiny hands made of muck pull at Tristan from the viscous whole.

Tristan sobs as he sinks down to his neck and lets go. Odie catches Keagan before she can dive in for him.

ODIE (CONT'D)
No, don't touch it.

KEAGAN
Tristan.

Another, larger hand extends from the muck and rests on Tristan's head. It pets him with a sick affection.

Tristan closes his eyes as he disappears under the muck along with all the hands. The surface of the muck calms.

Keagan wails.

ODIE
Back inside. Everyone back inside.

He scoops Keagan up and rushes into the cave.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

Odie turns on his phone light and illuminates a soggy, ragged Keagan, shivering with her knees to her chest.

KEAGAN

Does someone want to tell me what the hell just happened? You all saw it. Say something.

LUCA

Keagan, can you turn on your phone?

Keagan obliges and sweeps the light over the survivors.

KEAGAN

The ground took him. That was solid ground. The mud, there were hands.

She searches for everyone's avoidant eyes.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

You all saw it, right? There were hands. The ground took him. I feel like I'm going insane.

LUCA

I saw it. I saw it, Keagan. Hands in the mud. I saw.

KEAGAN

I know we don't know each other too well, but we have to start talking.

She pans the light across the faces of the survivors and passes her brother's grinning face peeking out from behind Gisele's head. She snaps the light back, but he's gone.

Gisele checks behind her and moves away from that spot.

GIS LE

What?

KEAGAN

Uh, nothing. I- I just thought--

LUCA

Keagan?

Keagan looks into the kid's bright, curious eyes.

KEAGAN

I saw-- I thought I saw my brother.

GI SELE

Your brother? Why your brother?

KEAGAN
I don't know. It's dumb. I don't--

LUCA
Are you afraid of your brother?

Keagan swallows past a lump in her throat.

LUCA (CONT'D)
Does he bully you?

Keagan nods.

LUCA (CONT'D)
I get bullied, too. Kirk Donaldson:
To get here-- I was only in the
lake because he pushed me.

GISELE
Have you been seeing Kirk?

LUCA
No, but I've seen things.

KEAGAN
Why were you and this Kirk kid at a
lake? Were you on a trip?

LUCA
We stay at the same orphanage.

KEAGAN
Oh. Well, what things did you see?

LUCA
The shadows reach for me.

KEAGAN
Reach for you?

LUCA
Every shadow's like a big mouth.

The girls eye the cave they sit in and shrink.

KEAGAN
So, Kirk Donaldson, my brother--
anyone else? Odie, do you have--

She cuts herself off when Odie glares at her.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Uh, Gisele, you...?

GISELE
No, but, well...

 KEAGAN
Yes?

 GISELE
I don't have a bully, but you could
say I do it to myself.

She looks at them for a reaction and sees none.

 GIS LE
I need to watch my figure, but I
had two croissants with cream
yesterday, and I'm not supposed to
do that, and I was kicking myself
all day. It was stupid. If I eat
like that, then I'll get fat--

Odie glares at her in wordless judgment.

 KEAGAN
Hey, hey, hey. So you had two
croissants. What's the matter?

 GIS LE
Whenever I see my reflection, in
water, on the black screen, an
ugly, fat version of me looks back.

 LUCA
I don't get it.

Keagan and Gisele exchange bashful, knowing looks.

 LUCA (CONT'D)
What's that mean?

 KEAGAN
Some people-- well, you see--

 GIS LE
I'm afraid of looking like that,
mon chou. I'm mean to myself if I
make a mistake.

 LUCA
But why do you have to be afraid of
that? You're so pretty.

Gisele strokes his hair.

GISELE
Merci, Luca.

LUCA
But I don't get it.

GISELE
I pray you never do.

KEAGAN
You know, he's right.

Gisele blushes and squeezes Keagan's hand.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
So, did you ever see anything else
before you came here--in water?

GISELE
I saw the face right before the
wave that took me here washed over
me. Same for you?

KEAGAN
No, it-it wasn't right before I
came here, but that whole day, more
than once I saw--

GISELE
The eyes.

Everyone, including Odie, reacts to the words.

GISELE (CONT'D)
You're talking about the eyes,
watching you.

LUCA
A pile of eyes.

KEAGAN
What is happening here? Why are we
seeing these things?

ODIE
Isn't it obvious? There's something
out there.

KEAGAN
Like what?

ODIE

Don't know, but I know the pattern.
It wears down its prey, and when
it's ready, it strikes.

LUCA

You mean, like, a monster?

ODIE

It took the kid. It'll feed on the
next one when it's ready.

LUCA

Feed?

KEAGAN

Okay, quit. You're just guessing.

ODIE

Really? You telling me you don't
see intent in this? A will?

KEAGAN

What is going on with you?

ODIE

Nothing. I'm focused. We won't
survive if we aren't sharp.

KEAGAN

Sharp? Or callous?

ODIE

Realistic.

KEAGAN

Realistic? Like scary theories
based on nothing?

ODIE

Like preparing for the worst.

KEAGAN

And what exactly does that mean?

ODIE

Shut up, and I'll tell you.

GISELE

Assez. We are all anxious.

Luca yawns and shivers.

GISELE (CONT'D)
And tired. The lights won't last
forever. We should rest.

KEAGAN
Okay. I think someone should stay
awake. I know I'd feel better.

ODIE
I'll do it.

KEAGAN
So, it was my idea--

ODIE
I said I'll do it.

KEAGAN
Fine. Guess I've already proven I
can fall asleep freaked out.

Gisele, Keagan, and Luca curl up on the hard earth.

NIGHTMARE - A SHADOW VISITS KEAGAN, LUCA, AND GISELE

The cave walls swell toward the group and away.

The shadows slither and groan as they down like living
animals and descend on the remaining four.

A shadow finds Luca first. It tousles his hair and hugs him
but squeezes tighter and tighter until his eyes snap open.

The shadow disappears like it was never there. Luca rolls
over and curls up next to Keagan.

The shadow follows and crawls up Kegan's shirt.

KEAGAN
Mmmm, M-Michael.

The wet hands grope her, and she smiles. She sucks air
through her teeth from a hard pinch and coos.

The shadow finds her belly button, tears it open, and burrows
inside. Kegan yelps, flails, and rolls on her back.

The shadow disappears. Luca and Gisele sleep. Odie sits
facing away from her, oblivious.

Keagan fumbles for her phone and shines the flashlight at her
stomach. Her stomach swells and pulses.

Keagan whimpers and pulls Luca close.

The shadow slithers from Keagan, over into Gisele's open mouth and down her throat.

Her eyes snap open and she tries to scream. She coughs, gags, and vomits black water.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

Gisele, Luca, and Keagan groan and twitch in their sleep. Odie drowns in the corner and stares at nothing.

FATHER (O.S.)
Are you just going to sit?

Odie jolts to awareness.

FATHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Get up. You have work to do.

Odie glances at everyone sleeping and meanders outside.

EXT. DEAD WASTES - NIGHT

A moonless, bruised sky hangs over the waste.

FATHER (O.S.)
Still not your own man, eh boy?

A shadow disappears behind a tree, and Odie chases, nothing.

ODIE
Father? Is that you?

FATHER (O.S.)
Father is the word for God in the mouths of little boys in need of a firm hand.

ODIE
Fa-? God? I- I don't--

FATHER (O.S.)
Listen.

A tall silhouette stands at the edge of the copse.

FATHER (CONT'D)
Don't make me speak twice, now.

ODIE

No, sir.

FATHER

Why ain't you leadin' those bunch
of quitters?

ODIE

I'm doing my best--

FATHER

Your best? Barking orders without a
clue. You saw the sign, you charged
the hill, now you hide in a cave?

ODIE

There was rain, sir. We needed
shelter, s-sir.

FATHER

Aww, soggy Odie needed shelter. No
wonder they don't respect you.

Odie tries to approach the shadow.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Don't you dare, boy.

ODIE

I'm working on it. Earning respect--

FATHER

You don't know anything about
respect, boy. You think that know-
it-all bitch respects you?

Odie's shoulders slump.

FATHER (CONT'D)

She questions your every decision.
She laughs at you. You talk about
earning when you should be
dominating. What are you gonna do?

ODIE

Get to the hill.

FATHER

And?

ODIE

Keep them in line.

FATHER
No more excuses.

The father looks up.

FATHER (CONT'D)
Dawn is nearly here and so are you.
You're wasting time. Get to the
hill. Make me proud.

Odie marches back toward the cave.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

The sound of breaking glass jolts Keagan, Gisele, and Luca awake. They rush outside.

EXT. DEAD WASTES - NIGHT

Odie stands with the broken wine bottle in his hand.

ODIE
Knew that would get you up.
Naptime's over. Time to march.

KEAGAN
Are you nuts? That was our only
container for drinking water. We
were already awake.

ODIE
You were sleeping like damn babies.

KEAGAN
No, we weren't. Something was in
here. It was in my--

She puts a hand to her normal stomach and looks to Gisele, who shakes her head.

ODIE
Now's not the time to crack.

He points to the hill shadowed against the clouds.

ODIE (CONT'D)
Still a long way to go.

KEAGAN
You're outta your mind. It's night.

Odie walks away.

ODIE
We have lights.

KEAGAN
They won't last long. We don't even
know what's out here.

Odie rounds on her and brandishes the broken bottle.

ODIE
I will handle it. Your way, we hide
in a cave like trapped rats.

Keagan backs toward the cave.

KEAGAN
I don't know what's going on with
you, but you can't make us follow
you through the dark.

She turns back. A sleeping bear growl issues from the mouth
of the cave. Everyone but Odie gags and covers their mouths.

ODIE
You were saying?

A rumble in the throat of a Bengal tiger threatens from the
cave. It swells and shrinks like it's breathing.

ODIE (CONT'D)
No more questioning. No more
discussing. You follow my lead.

He hands Gisele his phone.

ODIE (CONT'D)
Keep this light in front of me.

Gisele illuminates the nearest trees. Beyond, a void.

Odie marches ahead, and Gisele hurries to keep the light
ahead of him. Luca grabs Keagan's hand.

KEAGAN
I'm nervous, too.

LATER

They march on. Keagan scans the forest with her light. The
battery icon turns red.

ODIE
You should give that thing a rest.

KEAGAN

Give your mouth a rest. What if something's out there?

ODIE

If there is, light won't save you.

KEAGAN

We wouldn't even need light if you hadn't dragged us out here.

ODIE

Well, we're here now. Keep moving, one foot in front of the other.

Keagan cuts her light. Something large hisses.

ODIE (CONT'D)

Keep walking.

Everyone but Odie trembles. Something growls just behind Luca, and he spins around: only a wall of dark.

Gisele turns the light to the wall of dead trees beside them. Odie grabs the back of her neck.

ODIE (CONT'D)

Light forward.

She aims the light ahead.

LUCA

I have a really bad feeling.

KEAGAN

Me too. Luca, listen to me. If something bad happens, I want you to grab Gisele and run, okay?

LUCA

What about you?

KEAGAN

Don't worry about me.

LUCA

Why can't I stay with you?

KEAGAN

You'll be better off with Gisele, okay? I'm-- You can't count on me. Just hide and wait for daylight.

LUCA

Keagan.

ODIE

You see that? Darkness on the horizon. We're getting closer to the hill. Not long now.

KEAGAN

No better sign of hope than a wall of black covering the sky.

A beast beyond sight tromps around in the dark. Each step it takes disturbs brush and earth.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

Odie, why is it so important we go to the hill?

ODIE

I'm done explaining myself to you.

KEAGAN

What do you think we'll find there?

ODIE

Hope, nurse. Illumination? Our next sign? Perhaps a liaison.

KEAGAN

The hell does that mean?

The four-legged beast marches alongside them. Gisele sweats and hyperventilates.

The thing shambles. Its breath comes long and ragged. The light Gisele holds shakes, she slows almost to a stop.

She aims the light at the noise.

A horrific, twisted version of Gisele stands on all fours among the trees, easily as tall as a bear, with gaunt limbs.

Two black eyes watch Gisele from behind hair hung ragged over a distorted skull. Instead of a nose and lips, a circular orifice like a lamprey's toothy mouth gapes in its face.

Its oversized torso hangs with rolls of sagging adipose tissue. A skimpy red bikini cuts into the its skin at the thighs and barely reigns in the bulbous, wrinkled breasts.

Keagan's eyes widen in horror. Gisele's mouth hangs agape, scream caught in her throat.

Keagan covers Luca's eyes. Odie grabs the back of Gisele's neck. The light falls away from the horror.

ODIE
I said "forward."

Gisele squeezes her eyes shut as trembles wrack her.

GISELE
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I didn't--
It's not real. It's not real.

KEAGAN
The hell it isn't. I saw it, too.

ODIE
What are you doing?

KEAGAN
What are you doing?

ODIE
You of all people should know not
to humor this.

KEAGAN
Are you nuts? Did you not see that?

ODIE
I had my eyes forward. Learn to
listen.

KEAGAN
Learn to-- You fff--

ODIE
Want me to see something? Fine,
point the light out there.

Gisele keeps her eyes shut and shakes her head.

A hiss seethes behind Luca. He slowly turns his head to the dark. A shape moves just on the edge of his vision.

ODIE (CONT'D)
What's wrong? Point the light.

GISELE
No. No.

Odie grabs at the phone. Gisele holds it tight to her chest.

ODIE
Point the-- Gimme the damn phone.

KEAGAN
She doesn't want to look again.

ODIE
Shut the hell up.

Luca tugs on Keagan's sleeve.

LUCA
Keagan.

KEAGAN
Just leave her alone.

ODIE
I am sick of all the backtalk
around here. Give me the phone.

Gisele holds the phone in a death grip.

The shape before Luca inches closer.

Impressions of a pair of dead white eyes and a grinning mouth
full of needle teeth resolve in the dark like a horror from
the abyss of the ocean.

Odie rips the phone away from Gisele, shoves her to the
ground, and aims the light into the trees. Nothing there.

ODIE (CONT'D)
There. Was that so hard?

Keagan stomps over and hits Odie on the arm.

KEAGAN
You're an asshole.

ODIE
This is exactly why you need
someone like me. Look at her.

Gisele weeps in the dirt.

KEAGAN
You did that.

Luca stares, frozen, at the featureless eyes and maw, alone.

ODIE
Please. Get her up, so we can move.

KEAGAN
No.

ODIE
What did you say?

KEAGAN
I said "no." I don't know where you
came up with this- this attitude,
but I've had enough.

Luca backs toward Keagan, eyes locked on the face, and tugs
her sleeve. She shakes him off.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
I've let people like you walk over
me my whole life. I'm sick of
people like you.

ODIE
Winners?

KEAGAN
Bullies.

LUCA
Keagan?

KEAGAN
Goddammit, Luca. I cannot baby you
all the time.

Luca shrinks from Keagan, eyes clouded with tears.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.

Luca glances at the hungry grin and bolts into the woods.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Luca, no!

She chases after him. Gisele looks up at Odie. Odie seethes.
Gisele rises from the ground and runs after Keagan and Luca.

ODIE
Hey. Don't-- Get back here!

Odie chases Gisele.

KEAGAN
Luca. Luca, stop!

Luca runs and jumps over brush and fallen logs.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Luca, I'm sorry.

Keagan stumbles over a branch, pauses to catch her breath, and turns on her phone light. No sign of Luca.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Luca. Oh, God.

EXT. DEAD WASTES - GISELE AND ODIE - NIGHT

Odie catches Gisele's wrist.

ODIE
What the hell are you thinking?

GISELE
Let me go.

ODIE
They run off like a bunch of
dumbasses, and you gotta go, too?.

She pulls free and searches the trees with the light.

GISELE
Oh, no. No, no, no no no.

ODIE
Forget 'em. We don't need 'em.

GISELE
What is happening to you?

ODIE
They don't have what it takes. Is
it our job to shepherd the weak?

He holds her by the shoulders.

ODIE (CONT'D)
You and I are different. We can
make it out of this.

Gisele shoves him away. Her tears glisten in the light.

GISELE
When I first met you, I was so
glad. I didn't have to feel so
afraid. Was that handsome smile
always hiding... this?

She runs into the woods. Odie growls and follows.

DEAD WASTES - LUCA - NIGHT

Luca tears through the brittle landscape, and the clawed branches reach for him as he passes.

He trips, hits the ground, and holds his skinned knee. He looks around for an adult. Only the dark branches move.

He scoots toward a tree with a hollow, checks the opening for teeth, and hides inside. He sniffles and cries.

KEAGAN (O.S.)

Luca? Luca.

LUCA

Keagan?

KEAGAN (O.S.)

Luca?

LUCA

Keagan.

He goes to crawl out, and DARK KEAGAN, an exact imitation of Keagan, bends to grin into the hole creepy doll.

DARK KEAGAN

There you are. Didn't I say I don't have time for this?

She reaches for him. Luca presses his back to the wall.

KEAGAN

Do you have to be such a damn burden? Let's go.

Fresh pain and tears sprout on Luca's face.

DARK KEAGAN

Oh, would you give it a rest?

LUCA

I don't wanna go with you. Go away.

DARK KEAGAN

Is this how you always treat the people who care about you?

LUCA

You don't care about me.

Dark Keagan sits cross-legged in front of the hole.

DARK KEAGAN

Okay, let me ask you this: how many friends do you have?

Luca buries his face in his arms.

DARK KEAGAN (CONT'D)

People only touch you to push you. Kirk, your mother, that hag at the orphanage--see a pattern? I'm the only one who cares about you. Come to me. I'll take you home.

Dark Keagan's eyes turn an albino red as she reaches for him.

DARK KEAGAN (CONT'D)

I'll take you home.

DEAD WASTES - KEAGAN - NIGHT

Keagan catches her breath. Nothing but trees and dark on every side. She checks her battery level: "7%."

KEAGAN

Come on. Luca, can you see me?

She waves the light around.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

Look for my light. Luca, please.

She breaks down.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

Please.

KINGSLEY (O.S.)

Keagan?

Keagan stiffens. DARK KINGSLEY, a perfect imitation of Kingsley, kicks through the brush.

DARK KINGSLEY

Keagan, that is you. Thank God. I've been lost in these--

Keagan recoils from his approach.

DARK KINGSLEY (CONT'D)

Geez, I'd think you'd be a little happier to see me. We've been looking for you for hours.

KEAGAN
How did you get here?

DARK KINGSLEY
I don't even know. When we didn't
find you in the woods, I
volunteered to check the lake.

KEAGAN
The water took you?

DARK KINGSLEY
I guess? I came up, and it was
this. What the hell's going on?

KEAGAN
I wish I knew. What about Michael?
What about Mom and Dad?

DARK KINGSLEY
Keagan, Michael left.

KEAGAN
What?

DARK KINGSLEY
Yeah. We didn't even know you were
missing yet. You guys have some
kind of fight? He took off.

Keagan hangs her head and nods. Dark Kingsley chuckles.

KEAGAN
Shut up.

DARK KINGSLEY
At least he suffered you longer--

KEAGAN
I said shut up.

DARK KINGSLEY
Come on. Maybe we can use the lake
to get back.

KEAGAN
No, it's probably not even there.

DARK KINGSLEY
What are you talking about?

KEAGAN

This place, it-- Look, it doesn't matter. I can't leave, anyway. There's this kid: Luca.

DARK KINGSLEY

Hell with that. This place crawls.

KEAGAN

I'm not leaving until I find him.

Kingsley scoffs and descends into laughter.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

Something funny, jerkoff?

DARK KINGSLEY

It's just-- you lost another kid.

Keagan walks away. Kingsley appears in her path.

DARK KINGSLEY (CONT'D)

Leaving? Party's not over.

He steps toward Keagan, and she backs away.

DARK KINGSLEY (CONT'D)

Shouldn't have cared for a child. You know how you let people down.

Keagan bumps into a tree.

DARK KINGSLEY (CONT'D)

You're like a hedgehog: want touch, want warmth, but you poke anyone who dares to try.

A thin, dry, dark vine emerges from the dry ground and snakes up to Keagan. It catches her around the wrist like a shackle.

Keagan screams and pulls, but it holds. Other vines reach from the ground and around the tree.

KEAGAN

What's happening? What is this?

Dark Kingsley looks up into the bruised sky and reaches a hand to the clouds.

DARK KINGSLEY

There's beauty here. The mind of a god reaches for you.

Vines wrap around Keagan's wrists and ankles while others encircle her and hug her to the tree.

KEAGAN
Kingsley. Kingsley, no. This place
gets in your head. You have to
fight it. Help me.

Kingsley looks at her, his eyes albino red.

DARK KINGSLEY
And suffer you even longer?

KEAGAN
Kingsley.

DARK KINGSLEY
Shh. It's a bed for you. Rest now.

He pricks his thumb on a thorn and draws a red streak of blood on her cheek with a caress.

DARK KINGSLEY (CONT'D)
A lifetime of rejection and
frigidity can end.

Keagan sobs and gives the vines a half-hearted jerk.

DARK KINGSLEY (CONT'D)
Luca and Michael reached for warmth
inside you and found only thorns.

A recess forms in the tree, and Keagan sinks inside.

DARK KINGSLEY (CONT'D)
They were tired of being hurt. Can
you blame them?

QUICK FLASHES - KEAGAN REMEMBERS MICHAEL AND LUCA THE WAY
THEY TRULY ARE.

- Keagan and Michael laugh and kiss at a county fair.

DARK KINGSLEY (V.O.)
They don't want you anymore.

- In their apartment, Keagan and Michael sit on the couch.
She's distant, and he tries to comfort her. She pulls away.

DARK KINGSLEY (V.O.)
You see your parents' fickle love
in their eyes.

- Michael frowns, but then whispers in her ear. Keagan fights a smile. Michael tickles her, and she fights, but he keeps it up 'til she's laughing.

DARK KINGSLEY (V.O.)
They dropped you the moment they
saw the real you.

- Luca takes Keagan's hand as they walk through the waste.

DARK KINGSLEY (V.O.)
Why fight only for more isolation?

- Luca takes her hand again on the road.

- Luca sleeps next to her in the cave.

BACK TO SCENE

DARK KINGSLEY
They never loved you, Keagan. You
always knew that.

Keagan grabs a vine in a white-knuckle grip.

KEAGAN
Don't talk about them like that.

The tree stops sucking her in. Tears roll down Keagan's face. She shakes with anger.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
I don't know what you are, but I
know that you're a liar.

She clenches her teeth and strains against the vines. They crackle and snap. Dark Kingsley's face slackens.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
You can't take them from me.

Keagan rips her way out of the vines and stumbles out. Dark Kingsley steps back but regains his smile.

DARK KINGSLEY
You think kidding yourself is goi--

KEAGAN
I said stop. I've let that poison
me long enough.

DARK KINGSLEY
There's no one coming for you.

KEAGAN

I know. I'm going to them, and
you're not going to stop me.

She walks past the shade and jogs into the dark. Dark
Kingsley bares pointed teeth.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

I'm coming, Luca. Help me find you.

EXT. DEAD WASTES - GISELE AND ODIE - NIGHT

Gisele and Odie trudge through the dark.

ODIE

Alright, that's enough. We are
getting farther from the hill.

GISELE

Who cares? It's not important.

ODIE

Who cares? That's always been our
goal. We need to get up there.

GISELE

For what? What's up there? What's
waiting for us?

She narrows her eyes at him.

GISELE (CONT'D)

What told you we needed to go
there? What have you been seeing?

ODIE

It's a good place to see the land.

GISELE

You're mad.

She walks on.

ODIE

No, Gisele, that's it. I am putting
my foot down.

GISELE

Stop your chest-beating. This macho
attitude is... it's...

Gisele faints. Odie catches her.

ODIE
Woah, woah. You okay?

GISELE
It's nothing.

ODIE
When's the last time you ate?

GISELE
I'm fine. I just need a moment.

The footsteps of the twisted Gisele thud in the dark. Gisele snaps to alertness.

ODIE
Get up, come on.

He lifts Gisele to her feet. She aims the light around.

GISELE
It's coming. It's coming for me.

ODIE
Stay calm.

GISELE
It won't let me go.

ODIE
Then you have to face it.

GISELE
No. No.

A tree shudders under some weight.

ODIE
You have to. You can't let it make
you prey.

Gisele finds the tree and follows the trunk up to the twisted Gisele. It hangs off the trunk like a koala and watches her with glassy black eyes.

ODIE (CONT'D)
Mother of God.

The hulk lowers itself off the tree and crawls toward Gisele. Gisele backs away, but Odie blocks her.

ODIE (CONT'D)
You have to face it, Gisele.

GISELE

I can't.

ODIE

You must. It's here only for you.

The monster watches. Gisele weeps and shakes her head.

ODIE (CONT'D)

Go, Gisele. Face it.

GISELE

I can't. No.

Gisele tries to leave.

ODIE

Don't be a coward. You have to.

He shoves her to the ground at the monster's feet. She weeps and stares up into the eyes.

The monster reaches out and caresses Gisele's hair and wipes a tear away with a gaunt, clawed digit.

Gisele squeezes her eyes shut as it lifts her and cradles her against its bosom. She weeps into its sagging flesh.

The monster extends a long tongue and gives the side of her face a broad lick.

Odie watches in mute horror as the monster pulls its too-small bikini top aside to uncover a dark, flaccid nipple.

Gisele's dries her tears, and stares at the sagging breast. A low rumble issues from the monster's throat.

GISELE

I'm hungry.

Gisele closes her eyes and closes her mouth around the nipple. The monster emits a deep coo.

Odie backs against a tree, eyes fixed on the sight. The monster pets Gisele's hair.

Gisele sucks with more gusto. She shifts position and squeezes the breast to get more.

Gisele stops for breath, her eyes delirious, content. Creamy, sallow milk dribbles from her slack jaw.

The monster tilts her chin up, and they share a profane moment before the creature leans in and latches its mouth over Gisele's entire face.

Gisele writhes and pushes back to no effect.

Her muffled screams compete with the sound of the creature's thick, pulsing slurps.

Gisele's soft tissues atrophy in fast-forward as the creature consumes her. She grows weak as her skin sags off her bones.

Odie pales and gags. He flees into the woods, stumbles, and careens through the brush.

EXT. DEAD WASTES - LUCA - NIGHT

Luca still weeps as he crawls from the tree. Dark Keagan, her eyes normal, kneels away from the tree with open arms.

DARK KEAGAN

There you are. Come on. Come to me.

Luca crawls on his hands and knees toward the shade and curls up in its arms. It pets him.

DARK KEAGAN (CONT'D)

There you are, my little worm.

LUCA

You're cold.

DARK KEAGAN

Of course I am. There, there now.
Going to be a good boy?

Luca nods.

DARK KEAGAN (CONT'D)

Good boy. Who cares for you? Tell me, now.

LUCA

You do.

DARK KEAGAN

That's right. You can't leave me.

LUCA

Ow.

A thorn sticks out of Dark Keagan's shirt.

DARK KEAGAN
Oh, sh sh sh. Poor baby.

She gathers him back to her bosom. He flinches as another thorn sticks him.

DARK KEAGAN (CONT'D)
It's alright. You need a home,
don't you? I'll take you.

Luca shakes with sobs. He tries to nuzzle into her neck.

DARK KEAGAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
A cold comfort's the best you can
hope for. I'll take care of you.

KEAGAN (O.S.)
Get away from it, Luca.

Keagan holds a long stick before her like a sword.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
I said get away from it. Quick.

Luca looks up into Dark Keagan's face. It grins with its needle-toothed maw and red eyes, hungry.

Luca screams and scurries away. Dark Keagan stands.

DARK KEAGAN
How are you here?

Keagan steps between Luca and the shade.

KEAGAN
I told you. I'm done with your
poison. That is you, isn't it? That
same foul feeling. What are you?

DARK KEAGAN
Hungry. He's mine.

KEAGAN
Not while I'm here. Leave.

The shade hisses and dissolves into a lazy black fog. Keagan sighs and lowers the stick.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Luca, are you okay?

Luca evades her touch. She catches his hand.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
It's okay. I promise. See? Warm.

She pulls him into a tight hug.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Oh, Luca. I'm so sorry. I didn't
mean what I said.

LUCA
You did.

KEAGAN
No. No.

LUCA
You did.

KEAGAN
No, I-- Oh, I wish I could explain
to you just how stupid adults are.

LUCA
Why are you so mean to me?

KEAGAN
Because I'm afraid of you, Luca.

LUCA
Afraid of me?

KEAGAN
Yeah.

LUCA
Why?

KEAGAN
Because you needed me, and I'm- I'm
a mess. I feel like I've
disappointed everyone my entire
life, and it's just so much
pressure. It was scary, liking you.
You're cool, Luca, and you're
sweet, and what happens if I mess
it up? So, I pushed you away.

LUCA
That's stupid.

Keagan chuckles and strokes his hair.

KEAGAN
I see that now. Forgive me?

Luca jumps on her for a hug.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
I'll never leave you again.

LUCA
What do we do now?

KEAGAN
We have to find Odie and Gisele.

LUCA
How can we do that?

KEAGAN
Well, as much as I hate it, we were headed for the hill. It's the only landmark we know. That's the best place to meet them.

LUCA
I don't want to go up there.

KEAGAN
I'm here. Don't be afraid.

She checks her phone. 5% battery life left.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Won't have much light. What do you think? Protect me on the walk?

LUCA
Yeah.

They hold hands and march toward the hill.

EXT. DEAD WASTES - ODIE - NIGHT

Odie runs and runs until he staggers to a stop, holds his knees, and wretches. He spits and catches his breath.

FATHER O.S.)
Son.

Odie turns around. A giant uprooted tree that wasn't there before lies on its side. Unnatural shadows obscure where the roots snake from the trunk.

FATHER
You aren't meant to die here.

Odie rubs his eyes and shakes his head.

FATHER (CONT'D)
Your future is greater, your blood,
stronger.

ODIE
I know you're not my father. What
are you?

FATHER
Divine.

Lights, like distant stars, wink in the dark. Faint hints of
galactic clouds swirl and churn.

FATHER (CONT'D)
You reach for me, and I reach back.

ODIE
What do you want?

FATHER
Odie, my son. You.

A giant, black wolf snout pokes out of the cosmic void. It's
cold breath fogs in the air, and it oozes constant, steady
drool. It only breathes.

ODIE
I'm afraid.

FATHER
As you should be. You're in the
dark between the stars.

The mouth doesn't move to speak. A tentacle writhes out of
the dark and back in. Odie falls to his knees.

FATHER (CONT'D)
You need not be lost in the void.

ODIE
What must I do?

FATHER
Survive. Seek the advent at the top
of the hill. Bring me an offering.

ODIE
I have none.

The wolf mouth opens wide with a plume of white breath.

FATHER
Bring me the boy.

ODIE

Luca? He's so young. The girl--

The maw snarls and drools.

FATHER

Their fates lie between the stars.
Bring the boy. She will follow.

Odie squeezes his eyes shut. The cosmos in the void darken.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Do you wish for the dark as well?

Odie's nose bleeds.

ODIE

No. Please.

FATHER

Your hands do my work. Do you
deserve salvation?

ODIE

I want to deserve salvation.

FATHER

The dawn approaches. See you. Soon.

The maw retreats, and the cosmos fade into the preternatural dark. Odie stands and paces into the trees like a zombie.

EXT. DEAD WASTES - KEAGAN AND LUCA - NIGHT

Keagan keeps her phone light aimed ahead as they march through the endless wastes.

LUCA

It's quiet.

KEAGAN

Yeah.

She checks the battery level: 1%.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

Luca? The light'll go out soon.

LUCA

What will happen then?

KEAGAN

I don't know, sweetheart.

She checks the phone and takes a deep, shaky breath.

LUCA
Want to sit?

KEAGAN
Maybe that's a good idea.

Keagan and Luca sit by a tree with the light between them.

LUCA
Are you scared?

KEAGAN
No. Maybe a little.

Luca takes her hand.

LUCA
It's okay, Keagan. I'm here.

Keagan smiles. Something disturbs a bush in the dark.

LUCA (CONT'D)
Keagan?

She gathers him up close.

KEAGAN
Just stay close to me.

The light goes out. All is silence under the bruised sky.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
It's okay. It's okay.

Another rustle. A twig snaps. Heavy footsteps approach.
Keagan tightens her hug.

A silhouette lumbers out of the trees and past them.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Odie?

Odie pauses in the shadows. Keagan stands and positions herself between him and Luca.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Odie? Are you okay?

Odie surveys the sky, his eyes vacant.

ODIE

We need to go. The hill is finally within reach.

KEAGAN

Wait. Can we just talk about this?

ODIE

What is there left to talk about--

Odie recoils in pain from a sudden explosive migraine and covers his ears.

FATHER (V.O.)

Weak. You still negotiate with her?

KEAGAN

Odie?

ODIE

Do you want to be saved or not?

KEAGAN

What's that supposed to mean?

FATHER (V.O.)

You don't negotiate with chaff.
Hurt her. Take the boy.

ODIE

I can handle it, Daddy.

KEAGAN

What-- Are you hearing something?

ODIE

Don't you ever stop talking? We're running out of time.

KEAGAN

It's talking to you, isn't it?

Luca tugs at Keagan's shirt.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

Odie, you have to listen to me. You were right, there's something here.

Odie scowls at Keagan and bends down to eye level with Luca.

ODIE

Do you want to get out of here? We won't survive another night.

KEAGAN

Odie, it uses our pasts against us,
and it can look like anyone.

ODIE

I don't have time for your shit.
That hill is our only salvation,
but it's clear you'd rather--

KEAGAN

I can't help if you don't tell me
what's happening with you.

Luca tugs at Keagan again.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

What is it, Luca?

LUCA

Gisele: Where is she?

The blood drains from Keagan's face.

ODIE

Sorry, son. She didn't have what it
takes.

KEAGAN

What did you do?

ODIE

Nothing. She wasn't strong enough,
just like the kid. Let's go, before
the same happens to you.

Keagan shields Luca.

KEAGAN

I think we'll manage on our own.

ODIE

Fine. Go your own way, but the kid
comes with me.

KEAGAN

Over my dead body.

FATHER (V.O.)

Hurt her. Hurt her. Take the boy.

ODIE

I can work with that.

Keagan follows his gaze, fixated on Luca.

KEAGAN

Luca, run.

Odie lunges at Luca. Keagan shoulders Odie, but Odie grabs Luca's shirt before the boy can flee.

Keagan jumps on Odie's back. Odie backs and slams her into a tree. Luca, dragged along, wails.

Keagan fights for breath and lets go. Odie shoves her. She loses her balance and claws at the tree for support but falls, and her head lands on rock.

Her head seeps. She probes around, delirious.

Luca flails as Odie throws him over his shoulder while Keagan struggles to breathe. Her eyes flutter closed.

Odie gives her a disdainful glance and marches to the hill.

ODIE

See you soon, father.

Odie's eyes widen on the horizon as dawn breaks. A red sun ascends through the morning fog with unnatural speed.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

The red sun hovers at the sky's peak like a great eye. Shadows shrink to nothing.

Heatwaves ripple through the air as Odie marches up the hillside. Sweat beads on his skin, every breath an effort.

Unintelligible whispers permeate. Odie shakes his head, wipes the sweat, and swipes at nothing near his ear.

He stops, kneels, and lays Luca on the rugged slope.

LUCA

Odie.

ODIE

It's gonna be okay, kid.

FATHER (V.O.)

To me. Bring him to me.

Odie tries to swat the voice away.

LUCA

Please, no more. Please?

ODIE
Sorry, kid. Not everyone was meant
to survive. Get up. Walk.

LUCA
No, please.

ODIE
I said, "walk."

Odie yanks Luca up by his shirt.

ODIE (CONT'D)
Salvation is for those who save
themselves.

He trudges on and drags Luca like a sack.

ODIE (CONT'D)
Not far now.

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

They crest the hill to a small patch of barren, cracked earth
devoid even of dead foliage.

Odie, out of it, drags Luca and tosses him to the ground.
Luca skins his hand on the ground and cries.

ODIE
Stop that whining.

Odie's glazed eyes blink the fog away, and he tilts his head
to an unseen speaker.

ODIE (CONT'D)
Do I have to? Good kid... hurt
nobody. Little... fucking leech.

Luca watches as Odie paces on limp legs like a dementia
patient, eyes on nothing.

ODIE (CONT'D)
Must breathe. Must go home.

He kneels and pets Luca's hair.

ODIE (CONT'D)
It's gonna be okay. I don't think
it will hurt.

Odie pulls Luca up and embraces the boy from behind.

ODIE (CONT'D)
Shhh, it's okay. No, shh. You don't
have to struggle anymore.

He looks up into the red sun overhead.

EXT. DEAD WASTES - DAY

Keagan wakes, sweating, and touches the blood on her head.

KEAGAN
Luca? Luca? Oh, god.

She crawls over the brambles and cracked earth. She sobs.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Luca. Where? Where?

Her eyes follow the hill up to the red sun overhead.

A darkness grows at the center of the red orb - a pinpoint at first, but it swells and undulates like a growing cloud.

EXT. HILLTOP - SAME

Odie and Luca watch as the red hue of the world darkens.

The shadow grows until it resolves into a perfect eclipse with only the shining, red corona on its edges.

And the new rimmed, black sun, descends as one.

EXT. DEAD WASTES - SAME

Keagan stands, speechless. A tear rolls down her cheek.

DARK KEAGAN
Well, well, well.

Dark Keagan lounges on a low branch like the Cheshire cat.

DARK KEAGAN (CONT'D)
First the baby and now the kid. How
does it feel, failing everyone?

KEAGAN
Who are you? What are you?

DARK KEAGAN

Why, I'm you - that dark, anxious
thought that makes you want to
scream every time you're alone.

KEAGAN

Go away.

DARK KEAGAN

Oh, you'd like that, wouldn't you?
If the darkness would just go away.

KEAGAN

You're not me.

DARK KEAGAN

Still you wonder, "How could
someone so frigid ever deserve
love?" But, you know the answer.
The answer is you simply don't.

KEAGAN

You're wasting your time. I know
what you're trying to do.

DARK KEAGAN

Brave words. Wonder if they'll have
any meaning at the end.

Dark Keagan gazes up the hill.

DARK KEAGAN (CONT'D)

What, oh what, will happen to Luca
without you? What will you do after
that last failure? I think I know.

Dark Keagan laughs and throws herself off the branch. The
body stops short as a noose around her neck snaps tight.

Keagan lingers as the hanging body's head lolls, the skin
pales, and its blank, staring eyes turn red with hypoxia.

Keagan looks up the hill and runs for it. Sweat sprouts on
her skin in the heat. At the bottom of the hill, she
hesitates, but starts the march up the daunting slope.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Keagan trudges up the hill. Heatwaves ripple through the air.

AMELIA (V.O.)

You tried your best.

KINGSLEY (V.O.)
You just fell short again.

GRAHAM (V.O.)
Can't you be more like your twin?

Keagan whimpers and falls to her hands and knees on the slope, eyes closed, breathing through clenched teeth.

KINGSLEY (V.O.)
Can't you finish anything?

Keagan opens her eyes and finds herself, still on her hands and knees, in a wide, cracked desert under a broad blue sky.

A vast nothing stretches in all directions. Kingsley, Amelia, and Graham's laughter echoes around her.

DARK KEAGAN (V.O.)
You're all alone.

KEAGAN
No.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
I've got your back, you know.

Keagan squeezes her eyes shut and wails.

KEAGAN
Michael.

FLASHBACK - A TENDER MOMENT

Keagan samples cake batter in their kitchen, and Michael dances into the room.

Keagan gives him a dour look, but Michael hip-hops over and grabs her by the hips.

He gyrates against her, and she tries to stay mad, but a smile grows on her face.

Keagan starts to wiggle a little, and they share a giggle.

BACK TO SCENE

Keagan smiles, and it morphs into resolve. She clenches a fist, punches the ground, and forces her body to move.

DARK KEAGAN (V.O.)
The void calls.

KEAGAN

Quiet. You tell me the lies I tell myself. I see them now. I see you.

LUCA (V.O.)

Don't worry, Keagan. I'm here.

KEAGAN

Luca. I know that now.

Keagan forces herself to her feet. She takes a blind step up, and her foot lands on the slope lit red by the bloody corona.

She walks up the hill by faith, eyes closed.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

I'm coming. I'm coming.

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

Odie restrains Luca while they both stare at the red-rimmed void. It grows larger and larger as it descends toward them.

Luca struggles to no avail. Sweat runs down Odie's face.

The curious sun grows from a distant disk to ten meters wide in the sky and grows no further.

Instead, it slides down the horizon and settles into the hilltop, a wide, flat door into the void.

Something growls, deep, in the dark. Odie shivers in the heat. A hissing voice calls from the portal.

EIDOKOMA (O.S.)

Bring him.

ODIE

I-I did.

EIDOKOMA (O.S.)

To me. You want to live. Offer.
Into. The void.

Odie's head shudders.

ODIE

I want to live.

He picks Luca up and staggers forward. The faintest outline of the wolf maw appears in the dark.

ODIE (CONT'D)
Sorry. We're not all meant to live.

KEAGAN (O.S.)
Odie.

Keagan crests the hill, eyes still squeezed shut. The maw in the dark seethes frosty air.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
You don't want to hurt him, Odie.

ODIE
It's him or me.

KEAGAN
No. That's just what it wants you to think, and it only tells you what will hurt you the most.

She opens her eyes.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
You were right. It's a predator, but it's weak, so it does all it can: it preys on our hearts.

She steps past Odie and points into the dark.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
That thing breaks us down until we're disgusted with ourselves, and we don't resist it anymore. I'm afraid I'll always disappoint the people I love, so I push them away and only get lonelier.

Tears well in Odie's eyes.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Luca's afraid he'll be abused and unwanted forever, never able to trust an adult. We all have weaknesses, Odie. What's yours?

ODIE
I'm not weak.

KEAGAN
You have to own up to it. You're not alone. It'll be okay.

ODIE

I'm not weak. I don't get to be a little pussy. I have to win.

KEAGAN

Your father's words? I know what that's like, inheriting more than genes from your parents. Don't do this. You know it's wrong. You have nothing to prove.

ODIE

I have family. I have to get back.

KEAGAN

We will, Odie. We'll all get back, but not if you give into this.

FATHER

Odie, Don't you think for one second about listening to this bleeding-heart's yapping, boy.

They all peer into the dark. The maw drools.

FATHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You got a family to get home to. Gonna let them down for strangers?

KEAGAN

Odie, wanting to be there for your family isn't weakness. That's not what it's preying on because that's not what you're afraid of.

She inches toward Odie. Her eyes stray down the hill.

Beyond the void, in the valley, her parents' cabin sits next to the lake, filled with water and surrounded by trees.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

There's a reason it wants you to give it Luca. He gets abandoned, I fail, and you're responsible.

She puts a hand on Odie's chest.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

You're not afraid of your father. You're afraid of being just like him. Don't let him control you. Please. Let Luca go.

Odie struggles to breathe. He clenches his jaw, chokes, and gasps. A thin puff of icy condensation clings to the air.

The wolf maw emerges further from the dark. Its sopping snout terminates in an eyeless cranium covered in dark, matted fur.

Slick brown tentacles probe out of the dark and feel along the cracked earth. Odie and Eidokoma breathe in concert-heavy, urgent, hungry. Each breath steams.

Odie shuts his eyes and squeezes a tear loose as he takes halting steps toward the maw with Luca.

EIDOKOMA

That's it.

KEAGAN

Odie, open your eyes. Look at what you're doing. Think about your family. What kind of man is going back to them? You? Or your dad?

Odie stops. His body shakes with the effort.

FATHER

Just a little further, son.

The maw snarls. Odie opens his eyes. Luca stares up at him.

ODIE

I'm coming, sir.

He urges Luca forward. Keagan falls to her knees.

ODIE (CONT'D)

I'm coming to give you...

His right hand clenches.

ODIE (CONT'D)

...what I should have given you...

The eyeless maw widens toward Luca. Luca whines.

ODIE (CONT'D)

...years ago.

Odie hits the maw with a punch that rocks the eldritch horror. Lightning flashes in the void.

He shoves Luca behind him. The maw roars at him, and he cracks it in the mouth again.

KEAGAN

Odie.

ODIE

Get Luca out of here.

KEAGAN

What about you?

ODIE

I'll catch up. Got more to take care of here: unfinished business.

LUCA

What's happening?

KEAGAN

Don't be an idiot. We can go. I can see the cabin.

ODIE

Go. I won't let him move it again.

One of Eidokoma's tentacles lashes out, grabs Keagan by the ankle, and drags her toward the portal.

Luca grabs Keagan's hands and tries to pull her back. Odie pins the tentacle with a stomp. The monster bellows.

ODIE (CONT'D)

You made a mistake. Inherit his voice. Inherit his beating.

He punches it again.

ODIE (CONT'D)

You're not strong. You never were.

The tentacle loosens, and Keagan wriggles free.

ODIE (CONT'D)

Just a sad old man doing to his son what his dad did to him.

Left hook.

ODIE (CONT'D)

It ends with me.

A tentacle catches Odie's wrist.

KEAGAN

Odie.

ODIE

Get going.

KEAGAN

Come on, Luca.

Keagan picks Luca up and runs to the hillside. Another tentacle wraps around Odie's ankle.

Keagan looks back from the crest of the hill.

Odie strains against the tentacles and braces his free hand against the wet snout in the dark.

ODIE

I'm sorry, girls. Dad did his best.

He decks the maw one more time, and they both tumble into the dark. Keagan runs down the hill and sets Luca down.

KEAGAN

Run to the cabin.

The maw roars and emerges from the portal. Odie's hand reaches out, hooks it by the cheek, and pulls it back in.

EXT. DEAD WASTES - DAY

Keagan and Luca catch their breath as they walk.

LUCA

What's going to happen to Odie?

KEAGAN

I'm sorry, baby. I don't know.

LUCA

What if it comes after us again?

KEAGAN

It won't. Odie promised us.

LUCA

He was a bad man.

Keagan puts an arm around his shoulder and holds him close.

KEAGAN

No. No, Luca. You'll find as you get older that some people just carry a weight with them. It can be hard to be strong.

The trees break ahead, and the two step into the open.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

The wide lake turns black in the red light.

Keagan and Luca stroll past the abandoned cabin and down the beach alongside the ruined dock.

They stop at the edge of the still water. Faint lights swim around under the surface like koi.

LUCA
What is that?

KEAGAN
I don't know.

LUCA
Do we really have to go in there?

Keagan takes his hand.

KEAGAN
We have to. We'll stay together.
Don't let go of my hand, okay?

LUCA
It's dark.

Keagan steps forward.

KEAGAN
It'll be okay. If it doesn't work,
we just come right back up, okay?

Luca follows. He sucks air as his foot sinks into the water.

LUCA
It's cold.

KEAGAN
It'll be okay. Don't let go.

They sink.

LUCA
Keagan.

KEAGAN
It's okay. We'll do it together.

She picks him up and steps deeper.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
Take some deep breaths. It'll be
okay. Don't let go.

They take deep breaths and plunge under to depths more vast
than the size of the lake suggest.

Light from above illuminates them but doesn't touch the dark.

They float, hand in hand, while the little lights in the
water drift and wriggle.

An invisible force tugs on Luca. Keagan tries to pull him
close and get her other hand on him.

The force pulls again and stretches their arms to their
length. Luca's scream bubbles away from the light.

Keagan clings to Luca's hand, but it slips.

They lock eyes, afraid, sorry. They lose their grip. Luca
screams as he's dragged into the dark.

Keagan wails. The bubbles float toward the light. She claps a
hand over her mouth and kicks for the surface.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

Keagan breaks the surface and gasps for breath. The moon
hangs close in a starry sky. A wall of conifers surround, and
the lights inside the cabin reflect on the lake.

MICHAEL (O.S.)
Keagan?

Michael sprints toward the lake. Keagan swims for the shore
and falls into his arms on the beach.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Why'd you go in the water like
that? You're freezing.

KEAGAN
I lost him. I lost him.

MICHAEL
Who? Who are you talking about?

Kingsley, Maddison, and their parents trudge down the slope.

KINGSLEY
There she is. We've been looking
everywhere for you.

Keagan looks into Michael's eyes and strokes his face.

KEAGAN
Is this real?

MICHAEL
Keagan, you're scaring me. How long
were you under the water?

AMELIA
I'm sorry about her. She'd pull
stunts like this all the time when
she was a teenager.

GRAHAM
Had to be the center of attention.

Keagan levels a dark look at her parents.

MICHAEL
Ohhkay. Why don't we get you up?
Can you do that?

Michael helps Keagan stand.

KEAGAN
I want to go home.

MICHAEL
Okay. No problem. Let's just get
you warmed up.

KEAGAN
No, now.

KINGSLEY
Alright. Calm down, princess.

MICHAEL
Shut up--

KEAGAN
Shut up, Kingsley.

GRAHAM
Watch it. Have a little more
respect for your brother.

KEAGAN
Oh, because he's your special
little boy? He's bankrupt, Dad, in
more ways than one.

KINGSLEY
You shut your damn mouth.

KEAGAN
Or what? We'll take a trip down
memory lane with your open hand?

GRAHAM
What's she talking about, son?

KINGSLEY
Nothing, Dad.

KEAGAN
I must be the only one in my family
with eyes and ears.

She goes to Maddison.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
You should run, Mads, before their
sickness hurts you or your kid.

Maddison almost speaks but ponders her shoes instead.

KINGSLEY
You're gonna regret--

KEAGAN
Michael, can we go?

Kingsley grabs Keagan's arm.

KINGSLEY
I'm not done talking--

Michael grabs Kingsley by his shirt and holds him like a toy.

MICHAEL
You don't want to do that, buddy.

Keagan gives Michael's free arm and affectionate embrace.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
You wanna go? What about our stuff?

KEAGAN
I don't care.

Michael wraps his jacket around Keagan's shoulders.

KINGSLEY

Typical. Runs from her problems but always finds time to meddle in everyone else's.

Keagan shrugs Michael off and faces her family.

KEAGAN

You know, I always loved, all of you, you no matter how mean you were. And I used to care that it was never reciprocated.

GRAHAM

Being a bit dramatic, aren't we?

KEAGAN

I'm done. Maddi, when you're ready to leave the bedlam behind, my doors are always open to you.

Keagan turns to leave but hesitates.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

Kingsley, why don't you explain to mom and dad why your business partner shares the name of your childhood imaginary friend.

Graham and Amelia's mouths drop. Maddison glares at Kingsley. Keagan pulls Michael to their car, and they drive off.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Keagan shakes.

MICHAEL

You must be freezing. Here, give it just a minute.

He turns the heater on full blast.

KEAGAN

Chill isn't from the water.

MICHAEL

You okay? What happened to you?

Keagan wipes water and tears from her face.

KEAGAN

Something. Nothing. I'm not sure.

She kisses his hand and stares into the dark outside.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)
What do you think death is like?

MICHAEL
What?

KEAGAN
In the last, mad seconds of our
lives, are we punished by nothing
more than our own choking minds?

MICHAEL
Keagan, you're scaring me.

KEAGAN
I'm so tired. Been running so long.

MICHAEL
Yeah, get some sleep. I think
that's a good idea.

Keagan curls up in the seat and closes her eyes.

DREAM - KEAGAN IN THE DEAD WASTES

Keagan's eyes pop open. She stands amid the barren trees.

KEAGAN
No. No, no.

Luca calls from far away.

LUCA (O.S.)
Keagan.

Keagan sprints toward the sound. Brittle tree branches smack her in the face, and one breaks the skin on her cheek.

LUCA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Keagan? How could you leave me?

KEAGAN
Where are you?

The ground rumbles. Luca's cry echoes somewhere far away.

DARK KEAGAN (O.S.)
Oh, you know where he is.

Keagan stops dead.

DARK KEAGAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
He's right where you left him.

KEAGAN
No. Luca, I'm here. I came back.

Keagan runs and trips over a dead branch. Her hands land wrist-deep in dark water.

The lake stretches ahead of her where it didn't exist before, the ruined cabin nearby.

Rain falls from a cloudless sky and grows to a downpour.

The lake rises and reaches from its bed. Keagan dives into the water and scans the dark. Nothing.

She swims to the surface, takes a breath, and dives again. She kicks her legs and probes the murk with her hands.

A small, pale corpse bumps her from behind. She spins in the water. Luca's rotted body bobs in the meager light.

Keagan shrieks.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Michael shakes Keagan.

MICHAEL
Keagan.

Keagan jolts awake and hyperventilates. They still drive down an empty, two-lane road flanked by forest.

KEAGAN
What happened?

MICHAEL
You hardly closed your eyes when you started crying.

A truckstop and diner appears around the bend like a beacon.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Let's take a break here.

KEAGAN
I'm fine.

MICHAEL
Car needs gas, anyway. We'll just stop for a minute.

EXT. TRUCK STOP - CONTINUOUS

Michael pulls up to a pump and hops out. Keagan stares out the window. People go in and out of the diner.

Michael starts the pump and peeks in the open door.

MICHAEL

I really need you to talk to me.
Tell me what's going on with you.

KEAGAN

I'm still not sure if this is real.

MICHAEL

Keagan, do you know how long you
were under the lake?

Keagan stares into space. Michael grabs her hand.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

How long were you under the water?

KEAGAN

I'm not sure.

She smiles and holds his hand to her cheek.

KEAGAN (CONT'D)

I'm so lucky.

MICHAEL

I think we should go to a hospital.

Keagan just gives him a warm, knowing smile and turns away.

KEAGAN

Hey, are you hungry?

INT. DINER - DAY

Keagan and Michael sit at a small table while Keagan tears into a burger and fries.

KEAGAN

Amazing what you start to miss.

MICHAEL

Surprised you're so hungry. We just
ate just a little while ago.

KEAGAN

Did we? I feel like so much has happened since then.

MICHAEL

I'm really concerned. Please. Did something happen to you under the water? Did you see something?

KEAGAN

I saw-- Yeah. I saw so much.

A bus with the words "EVERGREEN CHILDREN'S HOME" on the side pulls into the parking lot.

MICHAEL

Please, without the riddles. Can you be straight with me?

KEAGAN

The whole thing was a riddle, Michael. I don't think I could explain. What if I'm still dreaming? What if Luca...

MICHAEL

Luca? Who is Luca?

KEAGAN

You ever read a book, and love a character, and miss them when they're gone?

A dozen kids step off the bus and run for the diner.

KEAGAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

They can stay with you your whole life. Can you fail them? Even if they aren't real?

Their caretaker follows and shouts.

CARETAKER (M.O.S.)

Behave yourselves inside.

MICHAEL

Keagan, I'm gonna make a call. Don't move, okay?

KEAGAN

Would you ever want to get married?

Michael freezes, voice caught in his throat.

The kids stream into the diner and giggle and laugh as they queue up at the counter or find seats.

MICHAEL
Just don't run off, okay?

Keagan draws swirls in her ketchup as Michael steps outside.

Luca enters the diner at the end of the line of children, despondent and still quite wet. The caretaker enters last.

CARETAKER
No, don't get in line. Get seats.
You're all getting the same meal.
We aren't made of money.

She grabs Luca and pulls him into a chair.

CARETAKER (CONT'D)
You sit. I'll have no more
horseplay and none of your stories.
Be quiet. Try not to get much wet.

The caretaker walks up to the counter.

Keagan looks up from her ketchup, and her face goes slack.

Luca mopes in his chair. Slowly, he raises his head and stares across the room. Recognition lights in his eyes.

THE END