

Tartarus

By

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EXT. ITALIAN WOODS- DAY

FADE IN

We see a gray brick WALL in the middle of a woods. Distant gunfire can be heard as we move right along the wall. ITALIAN SOLDIERS are heard chatting and laughing. A couple walk in front of the wall to the left.

ITALIAN SOLDIER
(O.S., in Italian)
Another one? Damn Americans!

We continue along the wall and come to a stop on an AMERICAN SOLDIER, blindfolded, bound, and lightly roughed up. This is WOODSON.

ITALIAN OFFICER
(O.S., in Italian)
On your feet!

The soldiers are heard getting to their feet and picking up rifles off screen. The chattering has died down, but some quiet chuckling is still heard.

ITALIAN OFFICER
(O.S., in Italian)
Ready!

The laughter stops, replaced by the sounds of rifles being cocked.

ITALIAN OFFICER
(O.S., in Italian)
Aim!

We hear the rifles being aimed. Woodson grimaces, his breathing gets heavier.

ITALIAN OFFICER
(O.S., in Italian)
Fire!

Loud gunshots sound off. A BLOOD SPLOTCH appears on the wall to Woodson's right, speckling his face and disheveled uniform with blood. Woodson flinches.

Beat.

ITALIAN OFFICER
(O.S., in Italian)
Now the other one.

(CONTINUED)

A HAND reaches in from the right and places a cigarette in Woodson's mouth. The soldiers laugh as the hand lights it.

ITALIAN OFFICER
(O.S., in Italian)
This one deserves a slower death.
Take Aim!

We hear the rifles being aimed again. Woodson braces himself.

ITALIAN OFFICER
(O.S., in Italian)
FIRE!

The soldiers shoot Woodson, causing him to contort and shake from the impact of the bullets. Blood pours out of him as he stumbles, then falls forward onto the ground, leaving behind a large blood spot on the gray wall.

CUT TO BLACK

EXT. GRAVEYARD- DAY

Woodson is lying on the ground in a downtrodden CEMETERY. The sky overhead is overcast. There is a small brick CHAPEL beside it and a woods behind the chapel. A fog-laden field can be seen in the background, the wind whistling low and deep.

Woodson sits up and examines his chest- there are bullet holes in his jacket, but no blood, no pain. Woodson stands up and looks around his surroundings. His eyes stop on a YOUNG GIRL, about 10 years old, wearing a white dress standing at the edge of the woods.

WOODSON
Judith? Judy!

JUDY retreats into the woods. Woodson follows her to the edge of the woods, but is stopped by a VOICE.

SAMUEL
You'd better not.

Woodson pauses and looks back to the chapel. He sees an old MYSTIC dressed in black robes sporting a wiry gray beard and black headdress. A silver MEDALLION hangs from his neck.

WOODSON
She's my daughter.

(CONTINUED)

SAMUEL

Where do you think you are?

Woodson looks around, confused.

WOODSON

Not Italy, I'm guessing.

SAMUEL

Mm. Why don't you come inside? I've got some coffee. You like coffee?

Woodson starts to step into the woods.

WOODSON

No.

SAMUEL

Don't-

Woodson steps on a stick. A deep, vaguely feminine screech causes Woodson to stumble and the Mystic to flinch.

MYSTIC

Quick!

Woodson gets back on his feet and runs to the chapel as thunderous trampling can be heard deep in the woods, getting closer and closer to Woodson.

SAMUEL

Get inside!

Woodson scrambles up the stone steps, past the Mystic and into the door being held open by the old man. The mystic heads inside and slams the door closed behind him.

INT. CHAPEL- DAY

The Mystic fastens the wooden door shut behind him as Woodson looks around inside. The chapel's interior is bare and antiquated with meager wooden furnishings and a threadbare red rug in the center of the room.

SAMUEL

Why don't you sit down? I'll get you that coffee.

The mystic moves to the stove.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

What the hell was that?

The Mystic pours COFFEE from an antique-looking pewter coffee pot into two equally-ancient pewter mugs.

SAMUEL

They've been here for ages. Go on, sit, we're safe in here.

Woodson reluctantly sits as the Mystic places one of the mugs in front of him. He sits down across from Woodson as Woodson eyes him warily.

SAMUEL

Go ahead, drink. It won't bite.

Samuel takes a sip of his coffee and gives Woodson a reassuring nod. Woodson looks down at his mug, back up at Samuel, then takes a hesitant sip. He recoils at the taste and sets it back down.

SAMUEL

You get used to it. Not much better around here.

Woodson grimaces, but goes for another painful sip.

SAMUEL

I'm Samuel. I've been living here most of my life. It's not so bad, once you get used to it. You're lucky you ran into me. The Entities out there would've killed you mean and slow.

WOODSON

What are they?

SAMUEL

Hard to explain. Different people say different things. If you find out, don't let me know.

Samuel takes a draw from his mug.

SAMUEL

Actually, don't find out. Just stay out of the woods and out of their way.

Woodson pushes his coffee mug away.

WOODSON

My daughter's in those woods.

Samuel looks at Woodson blankly. He knocks back the last dregs of his coffee and stands up, picking up both mugs and walking them over to a stone wash basin.

SAMUEL

And you've just got to find her,
eh?

Samuel dumps the unfinished coffee down the drain. Woodson stands up.

WOODSON

Are you deaf?

SAMUEL

Take it easy. I warned you about
those woods twice now. Your choice
if you still want to try it.

WOODSON

She's all I have.

Samuel sets down the mugs and approaches Woodson.

SAMUEL

You're making a mistake. But that's
for you to learn. Take this.

Samuel takes off his medallion and places it around Woodson's neck. He flinches from the weight a little.

WOODSON

This is gonna kill my neck...

SAMUEL

You get used to it. Tuck it in.

WOODSON

Right.

Woodson walks to the door as he tucks the MEDALLION into his fatigues.

WOODSON

Thanks for the coffee.

SAMUEL

You want to know the way?

Woodson turns back to him.

(CONTINUED)

SAMUEL

Head straight in. You'll start to see a light. Follow that to a clearing. Don't make any sound or they'll find you.

Woodson gives him a nod and steps out the door.

EXT. GRAVEYARD- DAY

Woodson looks carefully around the graveyard. Seeing nothing, he walks down the stone steps. Samuel steps out with him, staying at the door.

SAMUEL

Don't be a stranger. If you find her, bring her here. Take my bed, I'll sleep on the floor.

WOODSON

I'll keep that in mind, Samuel.

Samuel shuts the door. Woodson is left alone with the howling wind. He looks into the woods and takes a step in, paying close attention to the ground. He takes more steps, further and further in. The howling wind intensifies.

EXT. WOODS- DAY

The woods seems to close in on Woodson as he makes his trek inward. The wind has diminished, subdued to a distant eerie hum. The trees block out the sun, offering Woodson very little ambient light.

A distant SNAP alerts Woodson, who crouches down and pulls out a KNIFE from his belt. We hear a roar in the distance, then nothing. Woodson waits, then continues to walk softly.

A faint blue light can be seen encroaching on Woodson's face. He looks deeper into the woods and sees a blue speck of light. He walks closer to it, but is stopped by another VOICE, this one deep, ethereal, and feminine.

FLORENCE

This way.

A golden light shining on the back of Woodson's head overpowers the dim blue light on his face. He squints and turns around to see that the trees have closed in behind him, and now possess a golden glow and inanimate, ravenous faces.

(CONTINUED)

FLORENCE

Behind the trees. Judith is here.

Woodson looks back and forth between the two sources of light, thinking. He steps closer to the trees.

FLORENCE

Yes, closer. She needs you.

Woodson pauses at the base of a tree. The tree sounds as though it is breathing, deep and heavy, hungry. He turns around and sees he's now surrounded by trees. The blue light has been completely replaced by the golden glow.

The breathing gets louder as a tree root snakes its way towards Woodson's ankles.

FLORENCE

She needs you... And you need her...

Woodson STABS the tree in front of him with his knife, leaving an X carved into its bark. The trees and the voice seem to merge and shriek together.

WOODSON

You stay the hell away from her.

FLORENCE

Judith is MINE! MINE! MINE! MINE!

The voice's shrieking continues and fades with the golden light.

EXT. WOODS CLEARING- DAY

Woodson turns back around and finds himself at a STONE ALTAR with a BLUE ORB emitting a powerful glow resting on top.

WOODSON

(Whispering)

Judith?

A quiet, high-pitched hum resonates from the orb, and JUDITH'S FACE appears on it. Woodson picks it up carefully.

JUDITH

(O.S.)

Papa?

Woodson whips around and sees JUDITH standing behind him. He's almost in tears upon seeing his daughter.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

Baby?

Woodson goes to her, but his ankle gets caught on a snaking TREE ROOT. He trips, flinging the orb out of his hands. It SHATTERS on the ground, exploding in a bright white light and ringing through the woods.

Judith runs deeper into the woods as more SCREECHING begins. Sounds of snapping sticks and trampling ground get closer to Woodson.

WOODSON

Judith!

Woodson runs after her into the thick woods. Screeching and unseen stampeding beasts can be heard from every angle. Woodson deftly ducks and dodges the branches and brambles.

WOODSON

You leave her alone, goddammit!
Give her back!

Woodson runs and runs, finally seeing the light of day through a clump of foliage at the far side. He gets closer to it, only to be tripped again by the snaking tendril of a tree root.

FLORENCE

She's mine, and you'll never see
her again!

Woodson looks back and sees several black, shadowy shapes catching up to him. Using the knife, he begins to SAW through the root as the ethereal voice shrieks some more.

FLORENCE

(Weeping)

I just want us to be happy again!
Why are you doing this?

Woodson ignores the voice and saws harder.

The shadows and the sounds get even closer.

Woodson keeps his concentration on the root, sawing hard and fast, until-

SNAP! The root is cut in two, releasing Woodson, who dashes for the sunlight past the trees and bushes.

(CONTINUED)

FLORENCE
(Wailing)
I'm sorry! Just come back, I'm
sorry!

Woodson breaches the woods just as the shadows catch up to him.

EXT. FOGGY FIELD- DAY

Woodson comes out of the woods on a hill and tumbles down it to come sprawling out onto an expansive field covered with FOG. The shadows follow him down, but dissolve upon touching the fog.

FLORENCE
I HATE you! HATE you! HATE you!

The voice echoes and fades until Woodson is left alone, panting hard and clutching a stitch in his side. The low, whistling wind returns. Woodson looks around while on his knees.

WOODSON
JUDITH!

His head swivels around, but nothing can be seen through the fog.

WOODSON
JUDITH!

Silence. Woodson pounds the ground with his fists, screaming in frustration and confusion. He stares at the ground, at his hands, still in shock.

SIX MEN CARRYING A WOOD COFFIN emerge silently out of the fog to Woodson's side. They are dressed formally in black tuxedos and black top hats with white gloves and spats, a mirror image of Fred Astaire. Without a word, they set the coffin down in front of Woodson and stand by, waiting.

WOODSON
Hey! Hey, where am I?

The FUNERAL PARTY doesn't acknowledge Woodson. He gets up and walks with them.

WOODSON
Please, have you seen a little
girl? She should've come out of the
woods, but--

(CONTINUED)

The party's faces remain stoic, uncaring.

WOODSON
LISTEN TO ME!

Woodson grabs one of the men. The man instantly collapses to the ground. Woodson jumps back in shock.

WOODSON
What--

The men open the lid, lift up their comrade, and gingerly place him inside. They close the lid, hoist it back up, and continue on their way into the thick fog.

WOODSON
I didn't mean to-- hurt.. Where are you going? Wait!

Woodson walks towards them into the fog, but they have vanished. Woodson keeps walking, breaking into a run.

WOODSON
Don't leave me here! Please!

EXT. FOG- DAY

Woodson runs until he runs out of stamina. He turns in a 360 degree circle, and sees he has been surrounded by the heavy fog. He digs into his pocket for his COMPASS and opens it, only to find the needle won't move.

WOODSON
The hell-

He shakes it, but to no avail. He stows it back into his pocket and continues to walk.

WOODSON
Hello-o-o? Judith?

Woodson walks through the fog, lost and disoriented. His voice echoes around him until it fades, replaced by the dull hum of silence and thin whispering wind.

EXT. CAMPSITE- DAY

He continues to walk until his walk turns into a stumble. A faint orange flame can be seen just ahead, as well as faint chatter.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

Hey! Hey-y!

The chatter stops. A faint, shadowy figure approaches through the fog. Woodson stops, hand hovering by his knife.

The figure stops as well. After a moment's standoff, the figure walks a step forward, revealing himself to be a BUSINESSMAN wearing a black pinstripe suit and striped brown tie.

JACKSON

Who are you?

WOODSON

I'm looking for my daughter.
Please. Have you seen her?

Jackson hesitates, looking over his shoulder.

JACKSON

N-No, we haven't. Uh, you're a
soldier, right?

Woodson looks down at his fatigues.

WOODSON

I am.

JACKSON

You wouldn't happen to be a medic,
would you?

WOODSON

I've got some training from basic,
sure. Why?

Jackson hesitates again.

JACKSON

Come--Come over here.

Jackson disappears back into the fog. Woodson follows, and a few steps later he finds himself at a meager CAMPSITE. A couple small tents surround a pathetic bonfire. Other PEOPLE IN SUITS are huddled around a body laying on the ground. They look up at Woodson warily.

JACKSON

My name's Jackson. This is Mac,
Floyd, and Calvin on the ground,
there.

FLOYD, wearing a basic black suit, white shirt, and red tie stands up. MAC, wearing a gray suit and blue paisley tie.

FLOYD

Who's he?

JACKSON

Read his shirt, Floyd, he's Woodson. He's gonna help out Calvin.

Woodson walks past Floyd, who looks him up and down, and kneels beside CALVIN, unconscious. Calvin is also in a black suit and white shirt with a black tie. His leg is ripped and bloody.

JACKSON

Christ... What happened to him?

CALVIN

(Whispering)

He used to be my...He used to be my...

MAC

He got attacked...Same thing that got Brent.

JACKSON

It happened last night. Something came and...killed one of us. Brent. Calvin went out looking for it and came back looking like that.

CALVIN

(Whispering)

He used to be my..He used to be my...

FLOYD

You gonna help or what, soldier boy?

Woodson glances up at Floyd in annoyance.

WOODSON

What do I get in return?

JACKSON

We don't have anything. can you just help him? Please?

Woodson looks at Jackson, then down at Calvin.

WOODSON

First thing is to stop the bleeding.

Woodson unties the tie from Calvin's neck and ties it around Calvin's thigh.

WOODSON

Then you dress the wound.

Woodson cuts away the pant leg of the wounded area with his knife. He looks up at Floyd.

WOODSON

Give me your shirt.

Floyd gives an annoyed look, but takes off his suit and tie and hands Woodson his shirt. Woodson wraps it around Calvin's leg. Blood seeps lightly into the shirt.

WOODSON

That's about all I can do without morphine, I'm sorry.

Mac feels Calvin's forehead, then checks his chest for his breathing.

MAC

I think you just saved his life, man.

JACKSON

Thank you. Thank you, sir. Losing Brent was...just awful, but losing Calvin would've been...Jesus Christ, I don't even wanna think about it.

Woodson stands up. He wipes his knife on his pants and sheathes it.

WOODSON

Don't mention it. Now, can you help me find my daughter?

FLOYD

We haven't seen shit.

JACKSON

Floyd, relax, alright?

Floyd holds up his hands. Jackson puts a hand on Woodson's shoulder.

JACKSON

Look, man. We don't know what's going on. We don't know where we are, what's after us, or how we got here. And we haven't seen any girl.

Woodson sighs and rubs his head.

JACKSON

But that doesn't mean we can't look, right? Huh? Let's stick together. We'll be safer that way. You show us how to survive, and we'll try and find her. Sound good?

Jackson holds out his hand. Woodson looks at it, then at Jackson, and shakes it.

WOODSON

Deal.

EXT. EDGE OF WOODS- DAY

A RABBIT hops by the edge of some woods. The fog looms eerily around it. Woodson JUMPS suddenly from above to catch it, but he narrowly misses and the rabbit scatters.

MAC

Tsk! Almost.

Woodson gets up and brushes some dirt off his arm.

WOODSON

How long have you boys been out here?

MAC

Just a couple days. Brent had some donuts in his bag we've been surviving on, but... they went with him.

Woodson crouches down again, scanning the tree line for more prey.

MAC

We're really lucky you came along. We wouldn't have lasted much longer, especially Calvin. Were you in 'Nam?

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

'Nam?

MAC

Yeah, Vietnam.

WOODSON

No, Italy. Wait- I see something...

Another rabbit pokes its head out from the woods. Woodson is motionless as he watches it hop out and sniff out its surroundings.

Woodson pounces on it, this time firmly grabbing it and holding it to the ground. With one free hand, he unsheathes his knife and SLICES the rabbit's neck with it. Blood sprays onto the grass. Mac looks shocked.

MAC

Wow... The army teach you that?

Woodson stands up, holding the rabbit by one leg as blood pours from it.

WOODSON

Nope. I learned that from my pa.

EXT. FOG- EVENING

Mac follows a trail of sticks through the fog as Woodson marches behind him.

MAC

So. What's your story?

WOODSON

Don't really have one.

MAC

You sure? We might be together for a while. We might as well get to know each other.

Beat.

WOODSON

There's not much to say. I grew up on a farm with my ma and pa. Pa left us, I joined the army, now I'm here.

(CONTINUED)

MAC
You said you had a daughter. What
about your wife?

WOODSON
Don't have one.

Mac stops. The trail has ended.

MAC
No... where...?

He squats down as Woodson stops.

MAC
HEY! JACKSON? FLOYD?

Silence.

MAC
JACKSON!

JACKSON
(Distant, OS)
MAC?

MAC
JACKSON! KEEP TALKING, WE'RE COMING
BACK!

Mac begins walking towards the sound of Jackson's voice as he shouts Lewis Carroll's *The Walrus and the Carpenter* in the distance. Woodson follows.

MAC
So, your family?

JACKSON
(Distant, OS)
The time has come, the walrus said,
to talk of many things--

WOODSON
Judy is my daughter. Judith. She's
my little angel. She's got
beautiful black hair, the sweetest
smile...

JACKSON
(Distant, OS)
--Of shoes and ships and sealing
wax, of cabbages and kings--

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

...Hard to believe she could come from such a devil.

MAC

What?

JACKSON

(Distant, OS)

--And why the sea is boiling hot, and whether pigs have wings--

WOODSON

Oh, it-- I was just thinking out loud.

JACKSON

(Distant, OS)

--The time has come, the walrus said, to talk of many things--

WOODSON

Florence, my wife. She was everything to me. Judith came along just after we eloped. We were happy.

JACKSON

(Distant, OS)

--Of shoes and ships and sealing wax--

WOODSON

Then things just...y'know, things fall apart, and she left us.

JACKSON

(Distant, OS)

--Of cabbages and kings--

WOODSON

When I got drafted I sent Judith to my sister in Boise to be looked after.

JACKSON

(OS)

--And why the sea is boiling hot, and whether pigs have wings--

WOODSON

I'm probably just chasin' shadows looking for her here, but...I just miss her so goddamn much.

(CONTINUED)

MAC

She'll turn up eventually. I bet she misses her pops.

Woodson gives a slight smile to Mac.

JACKSON

(OS)

--The time has come, the walrus--
Oh! Over here, guys!

Mac and Woodson snap their attention to the shadow of Jackson waving at them just ahead.

MAC

Oh, thank God!

EXT. CAMPSITE- EVENING

Woodson sits at the fire, COOKING the rabbit from a makeshift spit over a feeble fire. Floyd and Calvin are sleeping in their tents. Mac is huddled alone in his. Jackson is standing watch, his back toward the fire. Woodson sulks into the fire as he lazily turns the rabbit.

Jackson glances back at him. He hesitates, then turns around and sits next to him.

JACKSON

Mac was telling me about your family. About your daughter.

He gives a reassuring pat on Woodson's shoulder.

JACKSON

We'll find her, man. If she's out there, we'll find her.

WOODSON

Thank you.

Woodson turns back to the fire. Jackson takes his wallet out from his coat. He produces from it a PHOTOGRAPH of a young woman in a cream-colored dress and shows it to Woodson.

JACKSON

That's Melissa. My girlfriend. We met at a merger conference in Delaware about a year ago. She moved in with me last month. God, she must be worried sick about me.

(CONTINUED)

Jackson puts the photo back in his wallet, and the wallet back in his coat.

JACKSON

You're not alone. We've all got something to keep fighting for, right? Just gotta stay positive, you know?

Jackson gestures over at Mac.

JACKSON

Mac over there, I don't know if he told you, but he's got a dog, a golden retriever. Maisie's the sweetest thing. I know he wants to get back to her. Let her slobber all over him.

WOODSON

Yeah? What about Floyd, is he a married man?

Jackson shifts uncomfortably.

JACKSON

Not...exactly. Floyd isn't what you'd call a "lady's man".

Jackson emphasizes this with air quotes. Floyd shifts on his blanket.

JACKSON

He's not too open about that kind of stuff, not with us, anyway. But I'm sure he's got someone. At least a house plant.

Jackson chuckles at his joke. Woodson blows air out of his nose.

WOODSON

I think we should leave tomorrow. Go look for Judith, or a way out, or something. At the very least, find someplace to camp that's less open.

JACKSON

We don't know what's out there. We already lost someone, almost lost Calvin--

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

Because you're out in the elements.
No defenses, wide open for attack.
You won't survive.

Jackson considers this. Floyd walks past Woodson and sits beside Jackson.

FLOYD

How's the rabbit coming, army man?

JACKSON

He thinks we should leave camp tomorrow to try and get out of this place.

FLOYD

And?

WOODSON

And find Judith.

FLOYD

There's always an 'and'.

JACKSON

Floyd. What do you think?

FLOYD

Not a bad idea. It's not safe here, just ask Calvin. Finding an exit is more important than sticking around looking for some girl.

WOODSON

I'm not leaving until I find her.

FLOYD

Then it's been nice knowing you.

JACKSON

Floyd! Don't be a dick.

Jackson turns around to Mac's tent.

JACKSON

Mac! Get over here. Bring Calvin with you.

Mac gets up and walks over to Calvin's tent. He helps Calvin up to his feet and guides him over to the fire to sit him down.

(CONTINUED)

CALVIN

What's up?

JACKSON

Uh, Calvin, this is Woodson. He's the guy who saved your leg.

CALVIN

Oh. Thanks.

JACKSON

He's looking for his daughter and wants our help.

CALVIN

Sounds good to me.

FLOYD

Come on, I'm not gonna get killed trying to find some--some kid in the middle of nowhere. We've got a wounded man. You're with me, right, Mac?

MAC

Well, when you put it like that...I don't wanna die either, but...

JACKSON

Maybe we should wait some more? Let Calvin heal, come up with a plan--

Woodson unsheathes his knife and STABS the rabbit on the spit. The sudden action causes the rabble to stop.

WOODSON

You call yourselves men? We made a deal, Jackson. I could leave now and take this rabbit with me. Leave you all to starve.

Woodson unsticks the rabbit and carves off a piece. He stabs into the meat with the knife and raises it to his mouth. Mac looks down.

WOODSON

Calvin's leg? I could just as soon cut it off as I saved it.

Calvin, concerned, clutches his leg wound.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

You need me. And we can cover more ground together. I'll keep you safe the best I can, but I can't leave until I have her.

The men look at each other, concerned. Woodson bites into the cooked rabbit and chews slowly. Floyd looks visibly angry.

JACKSON

Let's do it, then. We'll sleep here tonight, then set out in the morning. Cool?

The group murmurs affirmations except for Floyd, who scoffs.

FLOYD

Whatever.

Woodson shoots Floyd a look and cuts off another bit of rabbit for himself.

WOODSON

There's not a lot here, so make it last. I won't have time to catch another one til tomorrow.

Woodson stands up while the businessmen peel off bits of rabbit from the carcass. They grimace as they chew the gamy meat.

EXT. CAMPSITE- NIGHT

Fog surrounds the campsite as an eerie, rumbling wind blows around the tents. A fire blazes in the middle of the camp as MAC stands guard, meandering around the perimeter. Woodson sleeps soundly. We move closer as he dreams...

INT. DREAM HOUSE- DAY

Woodson walks into an idyllic kitchen in a small country home. The furniture and wallpaper are pleasant, pristine. Fresh flowers are arranged in a vase on the wooden table. Woodson is wearing a helmet and has a rifle slung over his shoulder. His fatigues are unmarked by bullet holes.

JUDITH

(OS)

Papa!

(CONTINUED)

JUDITH, the same girl Woodson saw in the graveyard, stands in front of the kitchen sink, lightly covered with flour. Woodson sets down his rifle and gets down on one knee.

WOODSON
Hey, sweetheart.

Woodson laughs as Judith lunges into his arms for a hug. He holds her tightly and rubs her black hair affectionately. An unseen dog begins to growl menacingly, turning into distorted barking, as Woodson holds Judith tighter.

EXT. CAMPSITE- NIGHT

Woodson wakes up to the sound of a barking dog.

MAC
(OS)
Hey, girl, hey...

Woodson quickly gets up and crawls out of the tent. He sees Mac kneeling down, his back towards Woodson, talking to some unseen animal.

MAC
Ooh, I missed you, yes, I missed
you so much, I did...

Woodson approaches Mac slowly. His hand rests on the hilt of his knife.

WOODSON
Mac?

Mac turns his head, grinning at Woodson. His hands are around a pulsing, vibrating BLACK SHADOWY MASS.

MAC
It's Maisie! I thought I'd never
see her again!

WOODSON
Mac... That ain't Maisie.

Mac's grin falters. He looks at the entity, confused.

MAC
What...

FLOYD
(OS)
MAC! GET AWAY FROM IT!

(CONTINUED)

Floyd runs toward them. The entity growls ethereally, startling Mac, who lets go and stumbles back. The entity LUNGES onto him, pulsating around his arms and wrists as he screams and protects his face. Claw marks appear in his flesh.

FLOYD

MAC!

Floyd tries to pull Mac away.

Woodson unsheathes his knife and SLICES at the shadowy entity.

The knife passes through and nicks Mac's hand. The entity screams and dissipates.

Floyd helps Mac to his feet, who cowers and clutches his scratches. Jackson runs over to them.

JACKSON

What happened?

MAC

Th--They're here...

The wind suddenly stops. Woodson looks around as Calvin limps his way over to the group.

FLORENCE

(OS)

He used to be my--He used to be
my-- He used to be my--He used to
be my--

WOODSON

No...

The wind returns with a vengeance and BLOWS OUT the fire. The fog invades the camp, and the men are consumed in the darkness.

EXT. FOG- NIGHT

JACKSON

Stay together!

Woodson holds his knife out in front of him defensively.

JACKSON

MAC!

(CONTINUED)

The sound of footsteps running off can be heard faintly in the wind, Mac's whimpers growing fainter as he runs away.

JACKSON
Mac, get back here!

Jackson's footsteps get softer as he runs off after Mac.

WOODSON
God dammit, stay where you are!

Woodson steps backwards and TRIPS over Calvin, who is laying huddled on the ground.

CALVIN
H-He used to be...My...

WOODSON
Calvin! Come on, get up!

Woodson puts his knife away and helps him off the ground. He frantically looks around him.

WOODSON
Jackson! Mac!

There is no answer.

WOODSON
Hey!

FLORENCE
(OS)
Will you run? You always run. I
know you too well.

Shrill laughter fills the air as Woodson flinches. Distant, distorted barking can be heard.

FLORENCE
(OS)
That's all you ever did!

FLOYD
(OS)
JACKSON! JACKSON!

Floyd appears suddenly in the dark and bumps into Woodson and Calvin.

FLOYD
Where's Jackson and Mac?

WOODSON
No idea, they ran off somewhere!

FLOYD
Shit! I have to find them!

WOODSON
Stay with us, Floyd! We won't leave
without them!

As the barking gets closer, they move away from the source
of the noise, calling for Mac and Jackson.

FLOYD
There!

A faint shape can be made out in the darkness. The trio move
closer and find MAC standing there, huddling by himself.

WOODSON
Mac!

Mac turns around, shaking.

WOODSON
Mac, where's Jackson?

MAC
I--I don't---He's gone, I don't
know--

FLOYD
Gone? What do you mean, gone?

MAC
He's gone--I'm sorry--I'm sorry--

WOODSON
Come on, we're getting out of here!

Woodson beckons Mac over with his free arm, and he joins
their huddle.

FLOYD
Not without Jackson!

The growling gets closer still.

CALVIN
He used...to be...my...

WOODSON

We can't stay here! We stay here,
we die!

CALVIN

Be my...Be...My...

WOODSON

We're going, NOW!

Woodson runs off through the darkness, leading Mac and Calvin. Floyd is left behind.

FLOYD

DAMMIT!

After a moment's hesitation, Floyd runs after Woodson and catches up to them. As the barking grows still closer, the men sprint as fast as they can.

FLOYD

JACKSON!

The ethereal barking is right behind them.

CALVIN

He..Used..To be...

A deep, hungry growling supplements the barking. Mac screams. CUT TO BLACK.

INT. DREAM HOUSE- DAY

A battle-weary Woodson walks into the same idyllic kitchen as before. His face is dirty, his fatigues worn. The rifle slung over his shoulder seems to weigh a ton as he shambles in.

JUDITH

(OS)

Papa!

Woodson's thousand-yard stare turns into a grateful smile as he props his rifle against the wall and falls to his knee, embracing Judith as she runs to him again.

WOODSON

I'm here, baby.

Woodson holds Judith close to him. They are serene.

(CONTINUED)

Slowly, Woodson lifts his head back. We move back just as slowly to reveal a massive BLOODSTAIN spreading on Judith's back. Judith has gone limp.

Woodson lifts his hand away from the wound, examining it. He looks up and sees a SILHOUETTE of a WOMAN against the bright window above the kitchen sink. He looks fearful.

EXT. FOREST- DAY

Woodson jolts awake on the dirt ground in the middle of a clear forested area. There is no trace of fog.

FLOYD
JACKSON!

Woodson looks around to the others. Floyd is desperately calling for Jackson. Mac is huddled up, holding his head and shaking. Calvin is sitting up against a tree, massaging his leg and looking around in confusion. His eyes meet Woodson's.

FLOYD
JACKSON!

CALVIN
Hey, he's up.

The men turn to Woodson as he stands up and brushes the dirt off his fatigues. Floyd quickly marches over to him.

FLOYD
You abandoned him!

WOODSON
Floyd--

FLOYD
You left Jackson to die!

WOODSON
Floyd, he got--

FLOYD
You son of a bitch!

Floyd GRABS Woodson's collar. Woodson instinctively BREAKS his hold and PUSHES Floyd back. Floyd TACKLES him to the ground. A PHOTOGRAPH slips out of Woodson's pocket and lands by Mac.

(CONTINUED)

CALVIN

Floyd!

Calvin stands up and runs to them. Mac continues to huddle and whimper.

MAC

My fault... My fault...

Mac notices the photograph on the dirt. He picks it up, his eyes wide with shock.

Woodson KICKS Floyd and manages to scramble on top of him instead. He LIFTS his fist in the air, and Floyd flinches.

WOODSON

Jackson got separated. It's a miracle that we only lost him.

Woodson retracts his fist and gets off of Floyd.

WOODSON

I'm sorry.

Floyd scrambles back on his feet indignantly. He scowls at Woodson.

FLOYD

No, you're not. You're using us to find that kid.

CALVIN

Floyd, come on, man--

Mac joins them, holding the photograph for them all to see.

MAC

What is this?

Floyd and Calvin are visibly shocked at the unseen image, looking at Woodson in confusion. Woodson looks at Mac nonchalantly.

WOODSON

That's Judith. I carry a picture of her with me, you got a problem with that?

Floyd and Calvin step back from Woodson.

MAC

This is your daughter?

(CONTINUED)

Woodson, confused, takes the photo from Mac. His eyes, too, open in shock.

The photo is revealed to be of a child's corpse, apparently shot in the abdomen.

WOODSON
Where did you get this from?

FLOYD
Who are you, really?

Woodson steps forward. They step back. He steps forward again and SNATCHES the photograph from Mac.

WOODSON
This is not Judith. It's... It's a
trick.

He crumples up the photograph and tosses it to the ground.

MAC
Who was that--

WOODSON
I don't know. I've never seen that
kid before.

Beat.

WOODSON
Let's keep moving. This place looks
safe enough, but we'll need water.

Woodson walks past them, determined. The trio exchange concerned looks. With some hesitation, Mac follows behind.

Calvin starts to limp towards them, but Floyd stops him.

FLOYD
He's hiding something from us.

CALVIN
...You might be right. But he's our
only chance.

FLOYD
Keep your guard up, Cal. I don't
want to lose you, too.

Calvin nods, and they follow behind Mac.

EXT. FOREST PATH- DAY

The men march in a straight line. Woodson is in the lead, followed by Mac, then Calvin, then Floyd.

MAC
Where are we going?

WOODSON
...I don't know. But I think we'll know when we get there?

MAC
What?

WOODSON
Where do you think we are right now?

MAC
Somewhere in Virginia, I guess. We were driving through when we crashed.

Woodson looks behind at Mac, his interest piqued.

WOODSON
Crashed?

MAC
Yeah. Brent was driving. He swerved into a tree to miss something in the road.

WOODSON
Really? Huh.

Beat.

WOODSON
I got shot in Italy.

Mac nods his head.

MAC
So, we really are dead.

WOODSON
I don't know what any of this means, son, but if we're here that means we can get out of here. It has to.

Beat.

(CONTINUED)

MAC

Do you think it's my fault
Jackson's gone?

WOODSON

We don't know where Jackson is. He
could've gotten away. Might even be
looking for us now.

Floyd's head perks up.

WOODSON

But it's not your fault, no.

EXT. CLIFF FACE- DAY

The party arrives at a sheer rock wall. The path splits in
two before them. They come to a stop.

CALVIN

Huh. You guys wanna flip a coin?

FLOYD

Let's split up. Me and Mac'll go
left, you and Woodson go right.
We'll turn around and meet back
here in an hour, decide what to do
from there.

WOODSON

You're awful determined all of a
sudden.

FLOYD

The sooner you find that kid, the
sooner we'll be out of your hair,
right?

Beat. Woodson looks down the right path, then back at Floyd.

WOODSON

...Fine.

FLOYD

Fine.

Woodson squints in doubt at Floyd, then starts walking down
the right path. Calvin follows.

FLOYD

Hold on, Calvin, I think you've got
a tick on your neck. Lemme get it
off for you...

(CONTINUED)

Floyd approaches Calvin and pretends to examine his neck. He leans in and whispers in his ear.

FLOYD
(Whispering)
Be careful around him. Try and find out more about that picture.

Floyd steps back.

FLOYD
Guess I was just seeing things.
Stay safe, guys.

Calvin follows Woodson down the path. Floyd and Mac follow the path to the left.

EXT. FOREST- DAY

High above in the trees, birds take flight amidst the wavering leaves. It is a tranquil sight.

EXT. ROCKY PATH- DAY

Floyd and Mac walk along a dusty, gravelly path amongst a variety of rock outcroppings. Mac is visibly shaken still, and walks at a slower pace than Floyd, kicking up dust as he walks. Floyd glances back at him.

FLOYD
You, uh, you doing alright?

MAC
...No. I'm not.

Floyd nods his head.

FLOYD
Yeah. None of this is alright. We shouldn't be here. Brent and Jackson should be with us. We shouldn't be eating rabbits, and we shouldn't be taking orders from that damn boy scout.

MAC
He's been helpful so far. He helped Calvin. Saved us from starving to death.

(CONTINUED)

FLOYD
He's a killer. The army trained him
for it. You saw that picture.

MAC
...That did raise some questions.

Mac stumbles on the loose gravel. Floyd tries to catch him,
but Mac catches himself.

FLOYD
Careful.

They keep walking

FLOYD
I don't trust him. People like him,
they're quick to turn on you. Once
we outlive our usefulness, he'll
try to kill us.

MAC
You think so?

FLOYD
I know so, buddy. All I'm saying
is, don't let your guard down.
We'll be the ones to strike first.

They come to a steep hill.

FLOYD
Slowly, take it easy here.

They creep down the hill carefully.

FLOYD
I need you on my side. You've got
my back, right?

MAC
Of course.

FLOYD
I knew you would, man. Don't trust
army boy.

MAC
...Right.

They make it to the bottom of the hill and resume normal
pace.

MAC

Floyd... Is it my fault that
Jackson--

FLOYD

No. What? No, it isn't. It's army
boy's fault. He wanted to leave him
behind, remember?

MAC

I guess, yeah, but I still feel
responsible for it.

FLOYD

Well, don't. Maybe...Jackson might
be looking for us. When we get this
dickhead his kid back, we'll look
for him and get outta here.

Mac nods his head. They continue to walk silently.

EXT. FOREST PATH- EVENING

The orange glow of the setting sun floods the forest,
streaming through the bushes on a forested path. A pair of
army boots walks past the bush, followed closely by a pair
of black dress shoes.

Woodson and Calvin walk along a narrow dirt path with grass,
shrubs, and trees surrounding them. Calvin walks with a
slight limp.

CALVIN

Can we stop for a moment? My leg's
killing me.

Woodson stops. Calvin plops down against a tree. Woodson
leans against a tree across from him.

WOODSON

How's it faring?

CALVIN

Still kinda sore. But I'm managing.

Woodson nods. The two fall silent as Woodson examines the
landscape.

WOODSON

What do you remember about last
night?

Calvin looks pensive.

(CONTINUED)

CALVIN

Not a lot. It was...dark. Loud. It was like, I was awake, but I wasn't, y'know?

Woodson nods his head.

WOODSON

Do you remember anything about a voice? Sounded...shrill? Angry?

CALVIN

I...think so. Yeah, I remember a voice, but I don't remember what it said.

Calvin strains to get up.

CALVIN

I think I'm good now.

Woodson helps him up. The men continue to walk down the path.

CALVIN

...Was it someone you know?

WOODSON

Hm?

CALVIN

The monsters, or the voice, or whatever it was. I know they mess with our heads like that.

WOODSON

...Yeah. It was.

Beat.

CALVIN

...Who?

WOODSON

...My wife.

CALVIN

Oh.

Beat.

(CONTINUED)

CALVIN

You don't have to talk about it if
you don't want to.

The silence persists. A bird caws in the far distance.

CALVIN

I mean, unless you want to. I'm
happy to listen.

Woodson inhales, then lets out a deep sigh.

WOODSON

Her name was Florence. We met, we
married, we had Judith, she went
crazy and left me with a kid.
That's all there is to it.

CALVIN

She went crazy?

WOODSON

Having Judith musta changed her.
She just...She was so angry. I had
to take Judith away from her,
protect what was mine. Now she's
back, just to torment me some more.

They turn a corner onto a long stretch of path. At the end
of the path is the same cliff face from before with TWO
FIGURES standing in front.

CALVIN

Huh... Guess it's a dead end.

WOODSON

No...No, we walked straight the
whole time, didn't we? We never
turned around.

CALVIN

What?

WOODSON

Look at the ground.

Calvin looks down. He sees SHOE PRINTS in the ground
approaching him that match the ones following him.

CALVIN

What the hell?

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON
We're being toyed with.

The distant figures wave to them. Woodson and Calvin exchange glances and go to them.

EXT. CLIFF FACE- EVENING

Woodson and Calvin meet back up with Floyd and Mac, who are already at the cliff face.

WOODSON
What are you doing here?

MAC
We followed the path straight, and it took us right back here.

FLOYD
The wood's playing tricks on us. We should head back, try and find another way.

The men walk back the way they came along the path.

Soon enough, they wind up back at the same cliff face.

FLOYD
Dammit... Alright, you three stay here, I'll try again.

WOODSON
It's not gonna work, pal.

Floyd ignores him and walks down the path alone. He shortly reappears from the side.

Floyd looks at them confused, then at the cliff face. He sprints down the path, only to come back to the group again.

FLOYD
Dammit!

Floyd picks up a rock and throws it angrily against the cliff.

CALVIN
Floyd, cool it, man. We'll figure it out.

The leaves in the trees shake in the breeze. A powerful voice rings out, startling the men.

(CONTINUED)

MYSTIC #1

(OS)

Woodson. Your actions have brought forth grave danger. You will come with us. The others may leave.

The men look at Woodson

FLOYD

I knew it... I KNEW it! You're a killer, aren't you? You killed that girl, probably her parents too--

Woodson PUNCHES Floyd clean in the jaw, sending him down to the ground. Mac and Calvin stand in shock.

WOODSON

YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING!

Several OLD FOREST MYSTICS dressed in black robes appear out of thin air and hold Woodson as he struggles. Mac helps Floyd up as Calvin stands in horror. Woodson mouths words that aren't heard as Floyd watches in rage, holding his chin.

Woodson disappears with the mystics, leaving Mac, Calvin, and Floyd alone at the cliff face. They look at each other in fear and confusion.

MAC

I wish I was home.

INT. WOODEN COURT

Woodson re-materializes in a room entirely made out of oak, almost as though it was inside of a tree. It is dark and brown. Two mystics appear beside Woodson, standing guard. Woodson is immobilized.

As he looks around, an ELDERLY MALE MYSTIC JUDGE appears at the pulpit at the front of the room. An assembly of similarly-dressed mystics appear with him, including an ELDERLY FEMALE MYSTIC. They all appear stoic.

JUDGE

Your actions may have doomed us.

WOODSON

I don't understand.

An image of the GLOWING BLUE ORB from the woods appears over the Judge's head.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

That was an accident. I was tripped
by those damn trees.

JUDGE

Florence cannot be controlled. She
is free.

WOODSON

Why is my wife here?

The Judge appears to evaporate for a brief moment, but
reappears.

WOODSON

Why am I here? What is this place?

JUDGE

Extraordinary. Your path has led
you here. In a sense, you have
always been here.

WOODSON

Give me a straight answer. Where am
I, and can I get home?

WOODSON

Your actions have doomed us. You
will stay here.

WOODSON

Give me back my daughter. I want
Judith, I want her NOW!

The courtroom and all the mystics fade from existence,
leaving Woodson alone in a black void.

WOODSON

HEY! HEY-Y-Y!

EXT. FOREST PATH- NIGHT

Floyd, and Mac RUN along the forest path. Calvin HOBBLER
behind them at a steady pace. The forest is BUZZING with the
loud sounds of insects and chirping rodents.

The forest seems to be closing in from all sides as they try
to escape.

MAC

Didn't we already come this way?!

(CONTINUED)

FLOYD
No, that was-- that was another
tree, I think!

Calvin twists his ankle and falls to the ground.

CALVIN
Agh! Shit!

MAC
Cal! Come on!

CALVIN
I--I can't, my ankle--!

Mac and Floyd stop.

FLOYD
Get UP!

CALVIN
I can't! Agh...We've got to find
shelter!

Mac goes to Calvin to help him up.

FLOYD
It's not safe here! Come on, man,
just a little further--

MAC
He's hurt, Floyd, he can't--

CALVIN
No, I--I can try.

Calvin gets up and limps along the path with help from Mac.
Floyd looks desperately for a way out.

The continue to slowly run. The sounds continue to buzz all
around them, hidden in the trees.

Calvin falls down again.

CALVIN
Shit! Agh, no, I--I can't...

Floyd keeps moving without them.

MAC
Floyd! Calvin can't walk, wait up!

Floyd grimaces and turns back.

FLOYD

Alright, alright, We'll--we'll find
someplace to wait this out.

MAC

Here, into the woods--

The noises stop suddenly. The men look around.

FLORENCE

(OS)

I miss you. Please. I just want you
back.

CALVIN

Don't listen to her. Come on, let's
keep going.

FLORENCE

(OS)

Come back. I want you back. Come
back, please?

They enter the treeline. The forest is completely silent.
Florence begins to LAUGH, echoing through the forest. The
forest shakes until it's nothing but a dark green blur.

INT. DREAM HOUSE- DAY

Woodson hugs Judith close to him in the idyllic home. Her
face is buried in Woodson's fatigues.

WOODSON

I'm here, baby.

He lifts his hand away to reveal a BLOODSTAIN oozing on
Judith's back. Judith is limp. Woodson looks up and sees a
WOMAN'S SILHOUETTE above him blocking the sun shining in the
window.

The silhouette bares its white teeth, contrasting the stark
shadowy figure.

Woodson looks down to see that Judith is GONE. He looks back
up at the silhouette.

Its eyes open up, larger than normal eyes, again contrasting
with the dark shadow and black pupils.

The world distorts around it as Woodson watches in terror.

INT. VOID

The house and silhouette melts away around Woodson, leaving him in an empty black void.

WOODSON
LET ME OUT!

Woodson pounds the floor.

WOODSON
I don't...belong here...

Woodson takes a minute, then stands back up. He tilts his head up, addressing no one in particular

WOODSON
I did wrong. I know. I'm not a clean man, but I do my best, dammit, and you can't take that from me. I can still repent, I--I can make up for what I've done, I don't know how, but I'll do it.

Beat.

WOODSON
For the love of God! You can't keep me here! Give me an explanation, something to go off of, give me a chance to--to plead my case, explain myself, please! Don't leave me here!

Beat. Woodson shakes his head.

WOODSON
This is evil. What you're doing. What I done, I regret it. I would give anything to take it back, you have to believe that, I just--I want my Judy back.

Woodson slumps to his knees.

WOODSON
And if I can't have that...Then just let me tell her goodbye. Tell her why her papa's not coming back. Just let me see her again. Please.

Beat.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

Please...

An ELDERLY FEMALE MATRIARCH walks in from the side of frame. She is dressed in black robes, barely discernible from the endless stretch of void.

MATRIARCH

Get up.

Woodson looks up, and scrambles to his feet.

WOODSON

Who are you?

MATRIARCH

Make your case.

WOODSON

I did everything I could to be a good father, and a good husband. When Florence, that...witch, when she had Judith, it's like she turned into someone else. I had to take my daughter away from her and keep her safe.

The Matriarch looks blankly at Woodson.

WOODSON

Florence...She would get angry at anything. There were times when she hit my baby. Now my papa would hit me when I deserved it, but with Florence it was...excessive. There were times I had to near about pry her off of Judy.

Woodson ruffles his hand though his hair.

WOODSON

One night I took us--Is it too much to ask for a chair? I still don't understand the rules around here.

Beat. A wooden stool materializes behind Woodson. He sits on it. A cushy armchair appears behind the Matriarch, and she slowly lowers herself into it.

WOODSON

Thanks. I took us away from Florence one night, no word, no note, nothing. She wasn't the woman

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON (cont'd)

I married no more. I took her to my sister's.

Matriarch

And why did you leave?

WOODSON

Well, I had to serve my country. My papa served, so I had to serve, you understand that, right? I left Judith with Claire, and I-

The Matriarch shakes her head. She begins to fade out.

WOODSON

Wait, wait, wait, don't leave, don't--Okay, okay, alright! I--I felt...I felt scared.

The Matriarch fades back in.

WOODSON

I was angry at Florence, at how she changed, how she...how she hurt my daughter.

Matriarch

What else?

WOODSON

I was...angry that Judith was a part of Florence.

The Matriarch nods.

WOODSON

Judy...reminded me too much of her. She started to look like her, even started to sound like her, and I just couldn't take it anymore.

Matriarch

So you left to get away from her.

WOODSON

...Yes. Yes, that's what I did.

Matriarch

Good.

Woodson stands up.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

Will you let me out of here?

MATRIARCH

You asked for an explanation. This is all I can do for you.

WOODSON

That doesn't--You haven't explained anything! I didn't abandon Judy, she's safe with Claire! I wish I hadn't gone, God I wish I had stayed, but if you think that's enough to keep me in this hell--

MATRIARCH

It seems you need more time.

The Matriarch starts to fade again.

WOODSON

No, no! What do you mean? Just tell me--

Suddenly, Woodson yells in agony and clutches his chest just below his neck.

WOODSON

God--Dammit!

The Matriarch fades back in looking surprised. Woodson collapses to his knees as the pain seems to subside. The Matriarch stands up and walks to Woodson.

MATRIARCH

You've met with Samuel.

WOODSON

The fella at the graveyard?

MATRIARCH

Samuel was one of us, ages ago. He was a good friend to me. You have something of his, don't you?

WOODSON

He gave me a necklace when I left--

Woodson pulls the medallion out of his fatigues, only to find that it has turned into a BLOODY DOG TAG with his name on it.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

What is this?

He tries wiping the blood off, but it stays on.

MATRIARCH

Samuel must have seen something in you. This is a blessing, child, though it won't seem like it.

Woodson puts it back in his shirt and stands up.

WOODSON

Stop with the riddles, dammit, tell me what all of this means. I can't do anything if I don't know what this means.

MATRIARCH

It means you are on a journey, that you must undertake a great trial and find the truth. I am sorry. The rest, you'll have to figure out yourself.

WOODSON

So, I can go?

The Matriarch nods.

MATRIARCH

I will take you back. Keep that memento and you'll be safe.

EXT. HOLE- DAY

In an instant, the scenery around Woodson changes to a large dirt hole. He looks above at the MATRIARCH, standing at the top of the pit with a SHOVEL next to a PILE OF DIRT. The sky above is foggy.

MATRIARCH

This is the way.

She digs into the pile with the shovel and tosses it onto Woodson below. He looks away as dirt rains on his head. The Matriarch continues to toss dirt onto him.

Woodson is slowly buried alive. His eyes are wide with fear, his breathing heavy, but he remains stoic.

The Matriarch fills the rest of the gigantic hole with dirt, completely burying Woodson.

INT. DIRT

Woodson crawls and squirms through a dark brown earthen world. He chokes as he moves, unable to breathe. His movements become more panicked, uncertain of where he's going but forward.

Woodson frenzies through the earth, suffocating, clawing his way to an unseen exit.

EXT. FOGGY FIELD- DAY

Mac and Floyd are resting in the middle of another fog-laden field. Calvin is laying flat on his back, his shoe off and his pants leg rolled up to reveal a swollen ankle.

MAC

You think if we head back, we'll--

FLOYD

No.

MAC

I'm just saying, maybe we missed--

FLOYD

I said no, Mac, we aren't going back. Not in those woods. We're staying out in the open until we're out of here.

CALVIN

And what if we don't find a way out? Floyd? We just gonna keep walking til we die?

FLOYD

It's not safe--

MAC

It's not safe anywhere, man! You think it's--

Floyd stands up.

FLOYD

I'm not losing either of you! I can't, I can't keep losing people. Brent, Jackson, I can't.

(CONTINUED)

CALVIN

...Woodson.

FLOYD

To hell with Woodson. He's a murderer, and you're still standing up for him?

Floyd spits.

FLOYD

I'm glad that asshole's gone.

Floyd turns to walk away.

FLOYD

Come on. We've sat around long enough.

Mac looks at Calvin helplessly. He helps him up to his feet and carries him by the shoulder. They follow Floyd through the fog.

EXT. FOGGY WOODS- DAY

We see a thin fog spread through a sparse woods. Thin trees shoot up out of the ground somewhere high above, unseen in the mist. All is quiet save for a lone bird chirping in the distance.

Suddenly, the dirt in a clearing begins to shift. A HAND reaches out of the ground, grasping for something to hold. The arm follows, writhing out of the earth until WOODSON'S HEAD pops out as well.

Woodson gasps for air, coughing and sputtering, pulling himself further out of the ground until he becomes free. He lies on his back, panting and looking up at the sky.

Woodson looks to his left. His COMPASS rests next to his head. He takes it and opens it. The needle stays still. Woodson gives it a shake, and it slowly shifts west.

WOODSON

About time.

EXT. FOGGY WOODS- DAY

Woodson walks between the sparse, narrow trees in the fog, holding the compass. He moves in a brisk, determined manner. He walks past a wider tree, then stops. He turns around and goes back to the tree.

Woodson feels the bark, noticing an X carved into it-- it's the tree he stabbed in the woods earlier. He looks angry. He continues to walk past the tree at the same pace.

He walks several more yards, then stops again, contemplating something.

WOODSON
I know you're here.

Silence. Woodson waits a second, then angrily puts the compass back in his pocket.

WOODSON
Let's talk.

Beat.

FLORENCE
(OS)
Hey, sugar. I missed you.

WOODSON
Not like this. I wanna see you when
I talk to you.

Another pause. A BLACK HORSE trots through the fog towards Woodson, stopping in front of him.

FLORENCE
Happy?

The voice comes from the horse, though it doesn't move its lips.

WOODSON
Close enough. But a snake would've
been better.

FLORENCE
I just want my husband back. I want
to be a family again. I know
I...wasn't the best mother to Judy,
but I can change. Don't you want to
come home?

(CONTINUED)

Woodson leans against a tree opposite from Florence. He folds his arms, looking down at the ground.

WOODSON

Of course I do. I want nothing more than to hold you and Judith in my arms again. I want to come home every day to my wife and daughter, and know that I've done right as a man, and raise my girl in a normal home.

Woodson looks up at Florence.

WOODSON

But I think we both know that can't happen anymore. After the abuse she got from you, after the could shoulder you gave me nights...It wouldn't be the same, Florence. Least of all, Judy wouldn't be happy.

FLORENCE

What do you want, then? If my love isn't enough--

WOODSON

No--

FLORENCE

What do you want, Bill?

Woodson stands upright.

WOODSON

I wanna know my kid is safe. I wanna provide for her, and not have to worry about coming home to bruises and having to explain why her mother hates her.

The horse chuffs.

FLORENCE

I NEVER hated Judy! I loved her more than anything in the world!

WOODSON

Then why'd you hit her so much?

(CONTINUED)

FLORENCE

How DARE you?! You think I WANTED to hurt her? I went too far one time, just ONCE, and you hold it over my head--

WOODSON

For God's sake--

FLORENCE

COMPLETELY forgetting about how you would never let her go outside, never gave her any freedom--

Woodson walks close to the horse, only inches apart from its muzzle.

WOODSON

I had to keep her safe, especially with those boys next door--

FLORENCE

Oh, 'keep her safe, keep her safe', that's all you ever say, but then you go and fight a war and leave her--

WOODSON

And that's worse than slugging your own kid?

FLORENCE

--She needs a family, Bill!

Woodson hesitates.

FLORENCE

She needs us. She needs us to stop fighting and--and just be normal.

Woodson backs away.

WOODSON

I guess we were both crummy parents, huh?

FLORENCE

Judy needs a family.

Woodson looks at Florence for a long while. His face reads of sorrow, pity.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

No.

Woodson pulls the compass out again and opens it.

WOODSON

She needs me.

Woodson continues west, then stops in his tracks.

JUDY stands in the path ahead.

Woodson walks to her slowly.

JUDY

I wanna go home, Papa.

WOODSON

I know, baby. Come on.

Woodson squats down and holds his arms out. Judy starts walking towards him.

Florence SHRIEKS. The horse dissolves into a black vapor. The forest becomes THICK with HEAVY FOG. The ground rumbles beneath them.

WOODSON

Come on, Judy! Come to me!

Judy hesitates, scared. Another SHRIEK is heard, and Judy curls into a ball, crying.

WOODSON

STOP IT!

Woodson rushes toward Judy. A tremor runs through the ground and up a tree. A BRANCH is shaken, its dead wood creaking and snapping.

WOODSON

NO!

Woodson rushes closer, but the forest path stretches ahead of him, and he goes nowhere.

Another tremor shakes the tree. A SNAP is heard, sending a tree branch down above Judy.

Woodson DIVES, pushing Judy out of the way, getting hit with the branch instead.

Cut to black.

EXT. FOGGY FIELD- DAY

Floyd, Mac, and Calvin continue their slow trudge in the middle of an empty field.

Florence's SHRIEKS are heard somewhere in the distance. They stop.

CALVIN

Where's that coming from?

FLOYD

Behind us, I think. Let's keep moving.

They pick up the pace. Calvin audibly winces with every step.

FLOYD

Come on, man, we can't stop. We're too exposed.

MAC

Floyd, we have to stop. We have to. Calvin can't keep walking like this.

CALVIN

N-no, I can--

FLOYD

He's fine, Mac, he says he's fine, so he's fine.

Mac stops walking.

MAC

We're stopping here.

Floyd stops as well and turns back to him.

FLOYD

What?

MAC

Me and Calvin are stopping here and setting up camp.

CALVIN

Mac-

(CONTINUED)

MAC

If you really cared about us, you'd let us rest. You're scared, I know, we all are, but--But you're letting it get yo you.

Mac hesitates. Mac looks at him in the eye, determined. Calvin looks at Floyd, then his view shifts down to the ground.

FLOYD

Fine. Fine, we'll just sit here and wait to be killed.

CALVIN

Thank you.

Floyd sits on the ground. Mac sets Calvin down across from Floyd.

MAC

I still have some energy. I'm--I'm gonna go and hunt. Find another rabbit.

FLOYD

You think you're that soldier all of a sudden?

MAC

He showed me how.

FLOYD

I thought I was your friend. Not some kiddie-killer.

Mac sighs.

MAC

I'll be back.

Mac walks out into the fog.

CALVIN

Floyd--

FLOYD

Oh what, are you turning against me, too?

CALVIN

No one's turning against you, Floyd.

(CONTINUED)

Calvin picks at the grass.

CALVIN
You're just being an asshole.

Floyd looks up at the sky, saying nothing.

CALVIN
We know what Jackson meant to you--

Floyd looks sharply back at Calvin.

CALVIN
And I'm sorry. I'm sorry he's--

FLOYD
Don't you say it. Don't say another
word, Cal.

Silence. The men look away from one another awkwardly.

CALVIN
That voice we keep hearing, it's
his wife.

Floyd looks at him.

CALVIN
The soldier's wife, I mean.

FLOYD
You think they're working together?

CALVIN
I don't think so. He's in this as
much as we are.

FLOYD
Huh.

Floyd lays on his back.

FLOYD
I still hate him.

Calvin props himself up with one arm, relaxing.

CALVIN
I know.

INT. DREAM HOUSE- DAY

Woodson looks up at the silhouetted figure. Her bright white eyes and teeth are enlarged on the darkened shape of her face.

He looks back down. A DEAD CHILD, similar to Judy, lays across his knee. A BULLET-HOLE in her back oozes blood.

Woodson stands up, suddenly holding his rifle again. He drops it, his hands covered with blood. The silhouette growls. releasing fog from between its bared teeth.

EXT. FOGGY WOODS- EVENING

Woodson wakes up underneath of the branch in the twilight-illuminated woods. The fog has lessened. He groans as he lifts the branch off of him.

WOODSON

JUDY?

No response. He stands up.

WOODSON

JUDY!

Woodson's voice echoes. Still no response. Woodson sighs. He looks to the ground and sees his COMPASS. He picks it up and flips it open. The needle points due west.

WOODSON

Right.

Woodson flips it closed and begins walking west.

EXT. EDGE OF WOODS- EVENING

Mac sits by the edge of the woods some distance from the treeline. He is restless, tired.

MAC

Come on...

A RABBIT hops out of the treeline. Mac sits up, then creeps closer to it.

Mac POUNCES on the rabbit, but misses. The rabbit runs off.

(CONTINUED)

MAC

Dammit!

Mac sighs, then pounds the ground in anger.

MAC

We're gonna die...

Mac buries his head in the ground, depressed. He looks up.

WOODSON is standing at the treeline, looking down at Mac.

Mac scrambles up to his feet.

MAC

You--How? Where were you?

WOODSON

Some other hell. You trying to
catch rabbits without me?

Woodson cracks a small smile.

EXT. FOGGY FIELD- EVENING

Floyd and Calvin lay on the grass in the field. The faint orange form the setting sun cuts through the fog to create a tranquil atmosphere.

JACKSON

(OS)

HEY!

No answer.

JACKSON

(OS)

HEY-Y!

Floyd bolts upright, looking in the direction of the call. Calvin follows, confused.

FLOYD

JACKSON?

Floyd jumps to his feet and jogs towards the call. Calvin looks deeper into the fog, following Floyd with his eyes. A SILHOUETTE stands in the mist, waving his arms.

CALVIN

Huh?

EXT. FOG- EVENING

Floyd runs through the fog. The silhouette clears as he approaches it.

It's Jackson.

Floyd stops in front of him. He hesitates, then wraps his arms around him.

FLOYD
Holy shit, man, we thought--I
thought you were dead, I wanted to
stay and find you, but--

JACKSON
It's okay, Floyd, I get it.

Floyd steps back from him.

JACKSON
Is Woodson still with you?

EXT. FOGGY FIELD- EVENING

Calvin tries to peer through the fog at the two silhouettes, one of them being Floyd.

JACKSON
(OS)
Calvin?

Calvin whips his head around.

Jackson stands behind him, looking worse for wear.

CALVIN
What the hell!?

Calvin breaks into a grin and painfully stands up.

CALVIN
We thought you died, dude,
what--Where'd you go?

EXT. FOG- EVENING

Jackson and Floyd sit on the ground together.

(CONTINUED)

JACKSON

I survived in the woods for a little while. Tried looking for you guys, but I think I kept going in circles.

FLOYD

How'd you find us?

JACKSON

It wasn't easy. I saw the forest sort of shake last night, figured it was bound to be you guys. Or some other troublemakers.

Jackson nudges Floyd. Floyd smirks and looks at his feet.

EXT. FOGGY FIELD- EVENING

Calvin and Jackson stand in front of one another, Calvin slightly unsteady.

JACKSON

So, I walked towards what I assumed was you and I guess I've been slightly behind you guys since. I can't tell you how glad I am to have caught up with ya, this place bites.

Calvin chuckles.

CALVIN

Yeah, it does.

JACKSON

Is Woodson still with you guys?

CALVIN

No... He--

EXT. FOG- EVENING

Floyd paces as Jackson sits.

FLOYD

Abandoned us. Like I said.

JACKSON

I don't understand.

(CONTINUED)

FLOYD

Yeah, me neither. I mean first we find out he's a child murderer, then I hear he's been talking to his dead wife--

JACKSON

Dead wife?

FLOYD

--Or something like that, whatever.

JACKSON

Alright, but where did he go?

Floyd stops pacing.

FLOYD

Why does that matter?

EXT. FOGGY FIELD- EVENING

Calvin is now sitting, looking up at Jackson as Jackson paces.

JACKSON

Don't you think we should find him? He was pretty useful. You should've stuck together.

CALVIN

I wanted to. Mac wanted to. Floyd...Well, you know him. He just up and vanished. I don't even know if he's alive.

JACKSON

What if he is?

CALVIN

I dunno... He'd be great to have around, but he'd just keep fighting with Floyd. And I gotta choose Floyd over someone I just met.

JACKSON

Yeah, I mean, he's been doing a good job, I guess, but Woodson--

CALVIN

A good job? What??

Calvin squints his eyes at Jackson. Jackson freezes.

EXT. FOG- EVENING

Both men are now standing facing one another. Floyd looks confused.

FLOYD
What do you mean?

JACKSON
I--I just meant that you're the better leader, and--

FLOYD
How would you know?

JACKSON
I mean, it's obvious, isn't it? You're the one holding the guys together, Floyd.

Floyd furrows his brow. He steps toward Jackson, looking conflicted. Jackson looks nervous.

FLOYD
You're not Jackson.

EXT. FOGGY FIELD- EVENING

Calvin stands back up.

JACKSON
Hold on, you're being-- Of course I'm me, look!

Jackson beats his chest.

JACKSON
Flesh and blood!

CALVIN
Prove it.

Calvin wobbles and falls over. He grunts in pain.

CALVIN
Dammit...! I gotta know for sure. Prove you're Jackson.

Jackson looks nervous as he looks down at Calvin.

Then he breaks into a smirk.

(CONTINUED)

JACKSON

Or what?

EXT. FOG- EVENING

Floyd and Jackson stand a few feet apart from one another, Floyd eyeing Jackson suspiciously, Jackson looking defensive.

JACKSON

Floyd, you're making a mistake,
buddy--

FLOYD

I should've known.

Jackson backs up.

JACKSON

Floyd, come on man, it's me, who
else--

Floyd walks towards him.

FLOYD

Should've known right away. You're
not gonna fuck with me.

JACKSON

Floyd--!

Floyd SLUGS Jackson with a closed fist. Jackson recoils from the hit, sending him down on one knee, his head facing away from Floyd. Floyd stares him down, furious.

Jackson slowly turns his head back toward Floyd. A BLACK MARK has appeared on his cheek from where Floyd hit him. He gives Floyd a smug grin.

JACKSON

Damn. Almost had ya.

Jackson EVAPORATES in a black cloud. Floyd watches the smoke go up.

He hears a SCREAM. Floyd turns his head sharply towards the direction.

FLOYD

MAC?!

Floyd runs back towards Mac.

EXT. EDGE OF WOODS- EVENING

Woodson and Mac walk along the treeline.

MAC

Okay, I remember I turned right at
this tree, so if we walk straight
forward, we'll--

Calvin SCREAMS in the near distance.

MAC

No...

Mac bolts towards the sound. Woodson takes off with him.

WOODSON

Wait!

EXT. FOGGY FIELD- DAY

Jackson is EATING Calvin's face as Calvin's body twitches.
Jackson's face and suit are smeared with BLOOD as he
ravenously tears into meat and skull.

Floyd runs up and looks in horror.

Jackson looks up at Floyd.

JACKSON

What?

Floyd's look of horror twists into pure rage.

JACKSON

He was just slowing you down. You
know he was. I'm doing you a favor,
buddy.

Floyd yells in primal rage and lunges at Jackson. He tackles
him off of Calvin's body and pounds his face into the
ground.

After only a few blows, Jackson EVAPORATES into a black
cloud like before, and Floyd continues to pound the ground,
screaming incoherently.

He gives it up, his knuckles bloody, panting from the
emotional and physical exhaustion. He looks up.

MAC and WOODSON watch him from a distance.

(CONTINUED)

MAC

Cal?

Mac rushes forward, kneeling by the corpse. His voice breaks.

MAC

Cal?

Woodson steps forward, but stops when he notices Floyd looking at him angrily.

FLOYD

You.

He walks towards Woodson. Woodson stands his ground.

WOODSON

Floyd, wait--

FLOYD

Go to Hell.

WOODSON

I'm not gonna fight you again, pal.

FLOYD

You're not--

MAC

Floyd! It's him!

Floyd stops and looks at Mac. He looks defeated, crying.

MAC

It's him. I'd already be--

Mac looks back at Calvin, traumatized. Floyd looks back at Woodson.

WOODSON

I'm sorry.

Floyd walks up to Woodson and weakly pounds his chest. His emotions have caught up to him, and his voice breaks as he talks. Tears form at the edge of his eyes.

FLOYD

No you're not. No, you're not.

Woodson places a hand on Floyd's shoulder, gently.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

Floyd.

FLOYD

How do I know...that you're you?

Woodson pauses, thinking.

WOODSON

You know that picture you saw? Of that kid?

Floyd looks up at him.

WOODSON

I don't know where it came from. Honest Injun. But it feels familiar. I don't think I killed a kid, but I do think there's a connection.

Woodson removes his hand.

WOODSON

Can you trust me now?

Floyd raises a shaky finger pointed at Woodson.

FLOYD

If you leave again...I'll kill you. I swear to God, I will.

Woodson nods his head. He walks towards Calvin's body and kneels by Mac.

WOODSON

Jesus.

Mac ignores him.

WOODSON

Calvin was a good soul. He, uh, didn't deserve this.

Still no response. Mac looks solemnly at Calvin.

WOODSON

I'm sorry, I'm no good at this--

MAC

It's fine.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

No. No it isn't. Nothing here is fine.

Mac wipes away his tears with his sleeve.

MAC

Yeah.

WOODSON

We've got to keep moving. Stay one step ahead of her, if we can.

Mac looks at Woodson.

MAC

Her?

WOODSON

My wife. I'll tell you what I know on the way. But we gotta go.

MAC

Right. You're right. Let me just...
Let me just do something real quick.

EXT. FOGGY FIELD- SUNSET

Woodson, Floyd, and Mac walk through the fog until they disappear entirely. Mac is not wearing his suit jacket. Slowly, Calvin's body is revealed, with Mac's jacket resting over top of his upper torso.

EXT. FOGGY WOODS- NIGHT

Woodson, Floyd, and Mac huddle around a campfire in the middle of the woods. There is a fog hanging in the air. A RABBIT is cooking on a crudely-made spit roast, which Woodson turns lazily. The men look tired, gaunt, dirty.

Woodson lifts the rabbit off of the fire. He takes a bite out of it, grease dribbling down his mouth and chin. He passes it to Mac, who also takes a bite. Mac passes it to Floyd, who bites it, grimaces, and passes it back to Woodson.

FADE TO: Woodson and Mac sleep beside the fire as Floyd keeps watch.

FADE TO: Mac keeps watch as the others sleep. He pokes at the fire with a stick.

(CONTINUED)

FADE TO: Woodson slowly paces around the camp while Mac and Floyd sleep by the fire. He rubs his head. Woodson looks down at the men on the ground in their dirty suits. He looks back up at the sky.

FADE TO: The roaring fire. THE MATRIARCH's face appears faintly in the flames.

FADE TO:

EXT. WOODS- DAY

The fire has died overnight, leaving ashes and burnt twigs.

Woodson sleeps beside it. He is still at first, then becomes restless. He WAKES UP and LASHES OUT with his knife, swinging at air. He comes to and looks up at Mac and Floyd

FLOYD

C'mon. We might've found a way out.

Woodson furrows his brow and gets up.

FLOYD

Bad dream?

WOODSON

You could say that.

MAC

Look.

Mac points towards the distance. In the cleared up forest, we can see a sheer wall of nothingness cutting off the forest in the distance.

MAC

We haven't seen anything like that
the whole time we've been here.
It's like... the end of the world.

WOODSON

Huh.

Woodson brushes off the dirt from his fatigues.

WOODSON

Let's go take a look.

The three men start walking.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

Are we all agreeing on something
for once?

Mac cracks a small smile.

MAC

I guess we are.

Floyd flashes a brief smirk. He gives Woodson a small nod.
Woodson returns it.

EXT. DEEP WOODS- DAY

The trio trudge through the woods towards the white void
barely visible through the brush and trees.

MAC

Are you gonna go back to working in
the office when we get out of here,
Floyd?

FLOYD

...Dunno. Haven't given it much
thought.

MAC

I don't think I could. I've got a
whole new lease on life now. I
wanna travel, see more of the
country, maybe dig into my savings
and...backpack across Europe. I
don't know if I could go back to
paper-pushing.

Mac turns his head to Woodson.

MAC

How about you?

Woodson glances at Mac, then looks ahead at nothing.

WOODSON

Mac, I don't wanna... Bring your
hopes down, but we don't know
what's past these woods. We don't
know if we even can leave.

Mac nods his head solemnly, then looks ahead. A heavy,
awkward silence hangs in the air.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

I wanna get Judy back, then raise a farm.

Mac smiles wistfully.

WOODSON

Get Judy a puppy dog she can play with while I tend to the crops and chickens.

MAC

That sounds nice.

WOODSON

Yeah. Something to look forward to, I guess.

They continue to walk in silence, broken only by the crunching of leaves and sticks under their feet.

FLOYD

Wait. Look.

Floyd gestures to the treeline beside them.

CALVIN, mangled beyond recognition save for his clothes, has appeared.

CALVIN

You boys leaving without me?

Floyd flares with anger, but starts walking again, ignoring him. The others follow suit.

CALVIN

Aw, c'mon, I'm feeling much better, look!

Calvin walks along the treeline, keeping pace with them.

CALVIN

My leg's all better!

They continue to ignore Calvin.

CALVIN

Hey! HEY!

The men walk on without him. Calvin stops walking.

(CONTINUED)

CALVIN
You're no fun.

Calvin vanishes in a foggy flourish.

EXT. VOID WALL- EVENING

The men, tired from walking, reach the wall. There is a faint ringing coming from the void beyond. The dirt path, the grass, and the trees are all sharply cut off by the void.

FLOYD
Let's take a moment...I can't go
another step.

They all sit down, backs against trees, all looking into the void.

MAC
I can't believe we made it. We
never would've made it this far if
we didn't run into you, Woodson.
Even if--

Mac hesitates and looks down.

MAC
Even if we did lose people...But
we're still here, that's--that's
the important thing, right, Floyd?

FLOYD
Mm.

MAC
Yeah. Yeah, we just gotta...Gotta
look up, look to the future.

Woodson nods.

WOODSON
You're good men. All of you. I hope
you two get to wherever it is
you're going to.

Floyd turns his attention to Woodson.

FLOYD
What do you mean? Aren't you coming
with us?

All eyes are on Woodson.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

I told you when we first met. I'm here to find Judy. And...I dunno, seems like there's more to it than just that. But I can't leave yet. You boys understand.

Floyd nods his head. Mac sighs. They sit in silence a moment longer.

Floyd stands up.

FLOYD

Alright, well, let's get going, Mac. Find out where this takes us.

Mac stands up, then Woodson. Mac moves to Woodson and shakes his hand.

MAC

Thank you. I hope you find her.

Woodson claps Mac on the shoulder.

WOODSON

Godspeed, boys.

Woodson looks at Floyd, who gives Woodson a nod of approval. Woodson gives a two-finger salute.

Mac and Floyd walk together towards the void. They pause in front of it.

FLOYD

See you on the other side.

They walk into the void and VANISH. Woodson waits, looking at the infinite stretch of white for any sign of them, but they're GONE.

Woodson lets out a deep sigh, then turns back around.

SAMUEL stands there, waiting as Woodson turns, startling him.

SAMUEL

You did pretty well.

WOODSON

Jesus--! How long have you been here?

(CONTINUED)

SAMUEL

Depends on who you ask. Come on,
let's talk.

Samuel turns around and walks back along the path. Woodson hesitates, looks back at the void wall once more, then follows him.

EXT. DEEP WOODS- EVENING

Samuel leads Woodson down the forested path.

SAMUEL

Sorry about the run-in with my
sister and her friends. They can be
slow on the up-take.

WOODSON

That was your sister?

Samuel nods.

SAMUEL

I had a falling out with them, ages
ago. Difference of opinion, that
kind of thing. But they mean well.
Still, you've got a debt to repay,
and a great deal to learn. I'm
about to speed up the process for
you, try and get you home.

Woodson looks at him.

WOODSON

What do you mean?

SAMUEL

I gave you a choice some time ago.
You could've been done with all
this much, much earlier, but you
declined my offer. I suppose
there's some greater wisdom in
learning the hard way.

Samuel beckons ahead. The PALLBEARERS have appeared on the path in front of them, standing still on either sides of their wooden casket on the ground. The casket is open.

SAMUEL

I told you not to go in those
woods, Woodson. Heh. That's what
started all this business, really.
You've got some fixing to do.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON
I'm not going in there.

SAMUEL
Relax, you're already dead. What's
the worst that can happen?

Samuel strokes his beard.

SAMUEL
Other than total oblivion, I guess.
But you'll be fine. They're just
going to take you somewhere. Think
of them like a sort of taxi.

Woodson looks at Samuel.

WOODSON
Where?

SAMUEL
You'll see.

Woodson looks towards the casket. He walks to it, then
carefully climbs inside.

The pallbearers gingerly place the lid on top of Woodson,
obscuring him in total darkness. We hear the pallbearers
LIFT him up and carry him, until the sounds fade. Woodson
begins to FLOAT in the void.

INT. VOID

Woodson lays flat on his back in the middle of the dark
void.

FLORENCE
(OS)
She needs to be a kid, Bill, go let
her play with her friend.

WOODSON
(OS)
If you think I'm gonna let that
brat anywhere near Judy, you got
another think coming.

FLORENCE
(OS)
Bill--

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

(OS)

They're at that age when they get curious, Flo, I'm not gonna let anything happen to her.

FLORENCE

(OS)

So you're gonna keep her cooped up in her room the whole time then, that it?

WOODSON

(OS)

If that's what it takes.

This line echoes and reverberates around Woodson as the black turns into a grainy light pink hue. Woodson looks terrified. The sound of a child crying can be heard.

WOODSON

(OS)

God dammit, I told you this would happen!

FLORENCE

(OS)

Oh, so it's my fault? She sneaks out because you don't let her play, and it's my fault?

WOODSON

(OS)

Cut the bullshit, you let her! You were supposed to be watching her, and--and she--

FLORENCE

(OS)

Don't you put that on me, you son of a bitch! Don't you dare, Bill!

WOODSON

(OS)

I'll KILL that kid if I ever see him again...

Woodson looks frustrated as the pink turns into a loud, pulsating, bubbling red.

JUDITH

(OS)

Does Papa hate me?

(CONTINUED)

FLORENCE

(OS)

No, no sweetheart, he loves you
very much, he just--He's afraid.

JUDITH

(OS)

Can I go out to play

FLORENCE

(OS)

No, you have to stay inside.

JUDITH

(OS)

But I wanna play! Pleeese? Murphy
told me he had--

The sound of a SLAP is heard.

FLORENCE

(OS)

I said--No. Listen to your father.

Woodson grimaces and begins to tear up. The RED turns to
dark purple. An odd spike of WHITE appears intermittently. A
child sniffing and sobbing can be heard.

WOODSON

(OS)

What the hell is this?

FLORENCE

(OS)

She...Spoke back to me.

WOODSON

(OS)

Jesus, Flo! Look at that mark!

FLORENCE

(OS)

I'm just--Bill, I'm trying, okay? I
don't know what to do. I'm trying
to keep her safe, same as you.

WOODSON

(OS)

How does this help? Go on, tell me.

FLORENCE

(OS)

I just...did what you would've
done.

(CONTINUED)

The purple turns into a cold, dark blue. The white spikes turn into white blobs.

JUDITH
(OS)
Where are we going?

WOODSON
(OS)
We're gonna stay with your Aunt
Claire for a while.

JUDITH
(OS)
Is Mama coming?

WOODSON
(OS)
Mama's been acting scary, hon, this
is gonna be a trip just for us.

JUDITH
(OS)
I don't wanna go!

WOODSON
(OS)
I don't care, we're not staying
here anymore.

JUDITH
(OS)
NO!

Judith's 'no' reverberates all around Woodson, repeating, getting louder with each echo until it fades. As it fades, the color of the void turns to pure white, with no distinguishing features.

JUDITH
(OS)
Please don't go, papa!

WOODSON
Aunt Claire'll take care of you.
Just listen to what she says, and
I'll be home in--

JUDITH
(OS)
I don't want you to go!

WOODSON

(OS)

I've...There's a war on, hon, and
I've got to go fight it, just like
grampa did.

JUDITH

(OS)

Why?

WOODSON

(OS)

It's something that I just... Have
to do, hon.

JUDITH

(OS)

...I hate you.

Total silence. Woodson has his eyes tightly shut, still
laying in the void. The sounds of nature slowly fill in- a
gentle wind blowing, leaves shaking, etc.

EXT. DREAM HOUSE- DAY

Woodson opens his eyes and discovers he's back in his
unmarked fatigues, wearing an army helmet and carrying a
rifle, standing outside of a peaceful-looking countryside
home. Cautiously, he approaches the door and walks inside.

INT. DREAM HOUSE- DAY

Woodson carefully walks through the doorway into the home.
He sees a WOMAN with an olive complexion standing in front
of a sink. She turns around slowly, scared.

WOMAN

(In Italian)

What do you want?

Woodson shakes his head, confused.

WOODSON

Flo?

WOMAN

(In Italian)

Please, I don't have anything,
please leave.

Woodson raises his rifle.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON
Sh-Shut up!

The woman becomes angrier.

WOMAN
(In Italian)
You have no right to be here, in my
home, in my country--

Woodson aims his rifle at her.

WOODSON
I Said shut your mouth!

WOMAN
(In Italian)
You Americans, you come in, and you
kill us, you kill everyone--

Woodson grits his teeth and looks down the barrel of the
rifle.

WOMAN
(In Italian)
That's all you know how to do! Get
out of my home!

The Woman becomes angrier and more frantic, and begins
speaking English.

WOMAN
I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!
I hate--

Woodson OPENS FIRE on the Woman, riddling her chest with
bullet holes. She falls back to the sink, and slumps to the
floor, DEAD.

A CHILD, about the same age as Judith and bearing an uncanny
resemblance to her but with olive skin, cautiously walks
towards the corpse.

CHILD
Mama?

Woodson, horrified, aims the rifle down, staring in shock at
the scene. The Child looks at him with large, bright,
terrified eyes.

WOODSON
No--

The Child BOLTS past him out the doorway.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

NO--!

Woodson runs after her.

EXT. DREAM HOUSE- DAY

Woodson exits the house, looking for the child. She is running in a beeline from the house, screaming for help.

Woodson shakily lifts his rifle and takes aim.

We hear Judith saying "I Hate You" reverberating all around Woodson. Woodson shakes his head and lowers the rifle.

CHILD

(In Italian)

HELP! HELP!

Woodson lifts up the rifle again, tears in his eyes. "I Hate You" continues to echo.

WOODSON

I'm sorry.

POW- Woodson fires a shot. The Child falls over onto the dirt. All is silent again.

Woodson breathes heavily and lowers his rifle, looking in disbelief.

ITALIAN SOLDIER

(In Italian)

Over here! They came from this way.

Woodson drops his rifle to the ground. He unlatches his helmet and drops that as well.

ITALIAN SOLDIER

(In Italian)

Here! Grab him!

A hand grabs Woodson's fatigues and yanks him out of frame. The sounds of him getting beaten by Italian soldiers can be heard off screen.

CUT TO

EXT. WOODS CLEARING- DAY

Woodson is back in his usual attire at the STONE ALTAR in the woods, now devoid of any blue light. He looks around in confusion.

JUDITH appears from behind a tree in front of him. Woodson sinks to his knees, and she comes running into his arms.

WOODSON
You're not Judith.

JUDITH
No.

WOODSON
I want to hold you one last time,
just the same.

The two lock in their embrace.

WOODSON
Is she safe?

JUDITH
She's with Claire. She'll take care
of her.

Woodson lets her go, holding her by the shoulders.

WOODSON
Thank you.

Judith smiles at Woodson, then fades away into oblivion. Woodson hangs his head down.

After a pause, he stands back up.

WOODSON
All that's left is you.

Woodson turns around, coming face to face with FLORENCE. She looks similar to the woman Woodson shot, but with paler skin. She has a blank expression on her face, her arms folded.

WOODSON
Hey there, Flo.

FLORENCE
Bill.

There's a tense pause.

(CONTINUED)

WOODSON

I shouldn't have... I dunno,
there's a lot I shouldn't have
done. A lot I did. without
thinking.

No response.

WOODSON

I wish I'd tried and...worked
things out instead of taking off,
fighting all the time. I'm sorry,
hon.

Florence unfolds her arms.

FLORENCE

I made mistakes myself. I'd be a
fool to not admit wrongdoing on my
part.

Woodson smiles.

WOODSON

You're not her either, are you?

Florence smiles shyly.

FLORENCE

No.

Woodson nods his head.

WOODSON

Yeah, didn't think so. It's all the
same, though, huh?

FLORENCE

It is. What do you want to do?

Florence gestures to Woodson's hand. He looks down, and sees
his knife has appeared suddenly in his hand, dripping with
blood. He looks back at Florence and drops it.

WOODSON

Nothing. We're done, Flo.

Woodson steps closer to Florence.

WOODSON

I wish things had turned out
differently. But I can't hold on to
that.

(CONTINUED)

He takes another step. Florence looks uncomfortable.

WOODSON

Neither can you. Or, neither can
Flo, I guess, wherever she is.

Woodson comes to a stop in front of her.

WOODSON

There's a part of me that'll always
love you, hon. I've got something
for ya.

Woodson removes the blood-stained dog tag from his neck and puts it around Florence's. Florence looks at Woodson with a wide-eyed stare. She begins to glow with a blue aura.

FLORENCE

Goodbye.

Florence vanishes, leaving behind a BLUE ORB. Woodson picks it up and places it back on the stone pedestal. Once back in its place, the orb glows brighter, and a deep, serene hum vibrates through the woods.

The MYSTICS appear out of thin air by the stone altar. They march around the pedestal, chanting in some forgotten language. Woodson watches, his expression blank.

THE MATRIARCH re-appears in front of him.

MATRIARCH

You've done very well. Not everyone
sees the end, and fewer survive the
climb.

WOODSON

What comes next?

MATRIARCH

Peace.

The Mystics finish their chant and vanish again. The orb returns to a dimmer glow, the hum becomes more subtle, fading in with the sounds of the woods.

WOODSON

Will you take me home?

MATRIARCH

You are home.

The Matriarch places a wrinkled hand on Woodson's chest, on his heart. She holds her hand there, then slowly vanishes.

Woodson pauses, taking a look around. He takes out his compass and flips it open. It works again. Woodson follows it down the path, back through the thick woods.

EXT. GRAVEYARD- DAY

Woodson climbs out of the treeline, finding himself back in the graveyard he woke up in outside of the chapel.

SAMUEL stands by the open doorway at the top of the steps of the chapel, holding a pewter mug of COFFEE.

SAMUEL

Well, look who's back. Did you have a good time?

Woodson laughs.

WOODSON

I had the worst time, Samuel. Your sister can never give a straight answer.

SAMUEL

Imagine what it was like living with her. Every day with that, oy. Here, come on up here.

Woodson walks towards the steps.

WOODSON

I've come this far. What now?

SAMUEL

Well, nothing, I suppose. This is the end, Woodson. You've done all you can.

WOODSON

Bill.

Samuel smiles.

SAMUEL

You really did come a ways.

Woodson looks towards the graveyard.

WOODSON

So I'm stuck here, then. All of that, I'm stuck here.

(CONTINUED)

SAMUEL

Peace of the soul isn't enough for
you?

Samuel sets down the mug and walks down the stairs,
approaching Woodson.

SAMUEL

That's all people really desire, in
the end, I find. Peace of mind,
freedom from fear and wanting.
Surely you noticed how serene this
place became once you let go of
Florence.

Silence.

SAMUEL

You've got all you need here. Look.
Land, freedom, peace. This is what
you've worked towards. You want a
home, you can live with me. I don't
get a lot of company out this way.

Beat. Woodson puts his hands in his pockets. Woodson turns
to face Samuel.

WOODSON

I only wanted one thing here,
Samuel.

Samuel nods his head.

SAMUEL

Of course. But she has to stay with
Claire. You wouldn't want her to
come here.

WOODSON

Yeah. Yeah.

Silence. The two men look out over the graveyard.

SAMUEL

I like you, Bill. Really, I do. You
made me proud. They didn't think
you'd make it--hell, I didn't think
you would. But look, look how fare
you've come.

Woodson gives him a bleak, empty smile. Samuel sighs,
stroking his beard.

(CONTINUED)

SAMUEL

Tell you what. You wait here, I'll be back.

Samuel hurries back into his chapel. Woodson watches him, then turns his attention back to the rows of graves.

One of the tombstones catches his eyes. He walks towards it and kneels down to read the inscription. Woodson runs his hand across the engraved lettering. It reads

WILLIAM WOODSON

1912-1943

BELOVED HUSBAND & FATHER

Samuel walks up behind him holding a shovel.

SAMUEL

I see you found it. Well, that's step one.

Samuel hands him the shovel.

SAMUEL

Here's step two.

Woodson takes it.

WOODSON

You want me to dig?

SAMUEL

Yes, right here.

Woodson laughs.

WOODSON

Buddy, if you think after all I've gone through, all this distance I've covered, I wanna--

SAMUEL

It will be well-worth the effort, I promise. But you have to work for it.

Woodson looks at him, then back down at the grave.

WOODSON

If you say so.

(CONTINUED)

Woodson begins to dig. Samuel sits on a neighboring headstone and watches.

Woodson digs deeper and deeper, working up a sweat. He plants the shovel in the ground and takes off his fatigues, leaving him in a white t-shirt. He throws the fatigues onto a nearby headstone. Samuel watches it land.

Woodson continues to dig, sweating and straining.

EXT. GRAVEYARD- EVENING

The sun has begun to set in the fog-less sky, bathing the graveyard and chapel in an amber glow. Woodson has dug a sizable hole. Panting, he thrusts the shovel into the earth and calls up at Samuel, who is sitting on the ledge of the hole.

WOODSON
How much further?

SAMUEL
You'll know.

Woodson takes a brief rest, then picks up the shovel and gets back to work. Samuel smiles.

Woodson continues to push through the earth. he digs through the crumbling soil until a ray of light pokes out through the other side. Woodson puts down the shovel and uses hands to claw through the dirt.

On the other side of the ground is a pristine-looking house, surrounded by a white picket fence and rows of green hedges and brightly-colored flowers.

EXT. HOME- DAY

Woodson steps through the earth, walking slowly towards the house. Serene suburban sounds of birds chirping and wind rustling through leaves can be heard.

Woodson looks behind him, but the hole he came out of has disappeared, seeing only a house mirroring his on the other side of a street.

The front door opens. Woodson snaps his head back towards the door.

JUDITH comes outside.

(CONTINUED)

JUDITH

Papa!

Judith runs toward Woodson as he falls to his knees, at a loss for words. Judith runs into his arms and HUGS him. Woodson hugs back tightly.

WOODSON

Hey there, hon.

JUDITH

I missed you, papa!

Woodson squints as tears begin to well up in his eyes.

WOODSON

I missed you too.

Judith lets go.

JUDITH

Aunt Carol's let me help make supper!

Woodson stands up.

WOODSON

Oh yeah? What's cookin'?

Woodson walks with Judith back towards the house as she speaks, holding her hand.

JUDITH

We've got chicken, and green beans, and potatoes, and carrots, and--

WOODSON

You got anything for dessert?

JUDITH

Aunt Carol says it's a surprise!

Woodson laughs.

WOODSON

I don't like surprises.

Woodson and Judith walk through the doorway and close the door behind him. We move further away from the house to reveal SAMUEL standing at a distance, watching. He is SMILING.

(CONTINUED)

Samuel waits a moment longer, then walks out of frame. Fog slowly fills the atmosphere, gradually obscuring the suburban paradise. Quiet, distant gunfire faintly fills in the space around the chirping birds.

FADE TO BLACK

END