

T H E S H A P E O F F E A R

By

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INT. AUDITION ROOM - DAY

We look at the LCD MONITOR of a small DV camera. It's pointed at a blank wall. A RED DOT on the screen indicates it's recording.

A woman walks into frame. Through the digital screen we can tell she's in her mid thirties and well-dressed. Her warm smile is betrayed by her nervous eyes as she clutches onto a few pages of a FILM SCRIPT.

This is MAYA DUNN.

MAYA

Hi, I'm Maya Dunn. I'm auditioning for the part of Ethel.

A FEW VOICES MURMUR from behind the camera. One woman's voice rises above the rest: THE CASTING DIRECTOR.

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)

Yes, dear, we know. Are you ready?

MAYA

I'm ready.

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)

Great, go ahead.

Maya clears her throat and switches to a hokey Oklahoma accent. Her eyes light up as she performs the lines without reading from the script.

MAYA

You can't stop change, Elmer. Things is always changing. I know our family's been in Oklahoma five generations, and if it were up to you we'd stay a hundred. But the young'uns are coughing up dust and the crops are dead. There's nothing here left for us. California seems like a long shot, but it's a shot we have to take. If our elders never left the old world, we wouldn't be here. Now we need to do the same. We shouldn't be scared of change, Elmer. Because change is the only thing that stays the same

Maya closes her eyes and exhales deeply. She opens them with an anxious smile.

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Very good, thanks so much.

MAYA
How was it? I can make some changes
if--

CASTING DIRECTOR (O.S.)
We'll be in touch, thanks for your
time!

Maya nods and gives a half-hearted wave as she walks out of frame on the LCD monitor.

INT. LAUNDROMAT - NIGHT

Maya sits in a row of empty chairs lined up in front huge dryers. With dark circles under he eyes, she watches her clothes spin with a glazed-over look.

SUPER: 'LOS ANGELES, 2000'

Her hair is pinned up and messy. She's not wearing make-up. She sports an old sweatshirt with splotches of dried paint. Clearly it's laundry day.

The clothes tumble over and over in the dryer. She stares deeper into the spin cycle like it's a hypnotizing her.

THUMP THUMP THUMP. Her heart races. Sweat trickles down her brow. Her breath quickens, fear in her eyes.

DING. Maya snaps back to reality. The cycle's over. She holds her chest and slows her breathing.

CLICK. She opens the dryer and pulls out the clothes into a basket.

INT. APARTMENT KITCHEN - DAY

Maya sits at her kitchen table with a steaming cup of tea in hand. Her apartment is spare and dingy.

Bills are spread out on table. In bold red letters, one of them reads 'RENT 3 MONTHS PAST DUE.'

But she doesn't look at the bills. She only stares ahead in space as her tea steams.

A PHONE RINGS.

Maya snatches the corded phone from the dock on the wall.

MAYA

Hi, it's... OK... I thought I did well, I... Yeah, thanks anyways. Maybe next time.

She hangs up the phone.

INT. DINER - DAY

Maya gazes into the distance with a catatonic look on her face. She wears a classic 1950's waitress uniform and a name-tag.

She holds a pen and pad in her hands like she's about to write something down, but she stands motionless.

THUMP THUMP THUMP. Her heart races.

THE BUSTLING SOUND OF THE DINER RISES TO A CACOPHONY.

MALE DINER (O.S.)

Excuse me... excuse me, ma'am?
Hello!

MAYA SNAPS OUT OF IT. The hectic sound of the diner goes quiet as a voice pierces through it.

She looks down to see a MALE DINER (50's) and his wife seated in the booth in front of her.

MAYA

Oh my god, I'm so sorry.

MALE DINER

It's all right, we'd just like to order. We're getting a little hungry.

We're in a 1950's themed diner complete with neon fixtures and a jukebox playing Christmas music. Holiday decorations hang all over the restaurant, including a Christmas tree in the corner.

Maya looks at the pen and pad in her hands like they're foreign objects. She drops them on the table and storms away.

The diners watch in confusion as their waitress barges out the front door. THE BELL RINGS.

They look out the window to see her walk into the parking lot and disappear into the street without turning to look back.

MALE DINER

I just wanted some fucking
pancakes.

EXT. APARTMENT WALKWAY - DAY

Maya swings open her apartment door and lugs an overstuffed backpack and rolling suitcase through the doorway.

She drops them in the walkway of her open-air apartment complex. Palm trees shade her from the harsh LA sun. She wears a light jacket and jeans.

Maya tapes a piece of paper onto the door that reads: 'SORRY!' Then she tapes her keys next to the sign.

She dons the heavy backpack and drags the suitcase down the empty walkway.

EXT. LA GREYHOUND BUS STATION - DAY

A taxi pulls up to the curb. Maya opens the back door and drags her bags out of the cab as she hops out.

MAYA

Keep the change!

She shuts the door and the taxi pulls away. Maya looks up at the beige, unassuming building in front of her.

The sign reads 'GREYHOUND.'

Maya sighs. She trudges through the front door, bags in tow.

INT. LA GREYHOUND BUS STATION - MINUTES LATER

Maya stands among a line of payphones with a receiver to her ear and bags at her feet. People walk back and forth in front of her in the bustling station.

MAYA

Yeah, I'm at the station now.

MAYA'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Oh honey, I'm just so happy. LA's such a dangerous place.

MAYA

It's not, really. I'm just tired, you know--

MAYA'S MOTHER (V.O.)
Pittsburgh's just a better place to
live, maybe even get married, have
a couple kids...

MAYA
Mom, c'mon. I've got enough going
on right now.

MAYA'S MOTHER (V.O.)
Well I'm glad you finally came to
your senses. Your father can
probably get a you a job with the
Henderson's, they're good people.

MAYA
I know, I already talked to him.

MAYA'S MOTHER (V.O.)
That acting thing wasn't going to
work out, hun, it's not a stable
life path.

MAYA
I know, mom.

MAYA'S MOTHER (V.O.)
All those auditions, all that
rejection.

MAYA
Yeah mom, I know.

MAYA'S MOTHER (V.O.)
You really should come home instead
of living out there by yourself. It
makes me sad thinking about it.

MAYA
Jesus, I know! I'm literally at the
station about to leave, you don't
need to convince me.

MAYA'S MOTHER (V.O.)
I'm sorry, sweetie, I just worry
about you. Call me every chance you
get along the way. I love you!

MAYA
I will. Love you, too.

Maya hangs up the phone and rubs her aching temples.

She looks around the drab, crowded bus station. People wait in line to get their tickets, a man pounds a broken vending machine, a woman coughs her lungs out and a baby cries.

Maya lets out a deep sigh as she sits in a row of seats. She drops her bags and leans back. Eyes closed, she tries to block out the chaos of the station

HEAVY-SET MAN (O.S.)
Mom troubles?

Maya looks to her side to see a HEAVY-SET MAN in his fifties at the end of her row. He holds up a Sports Illustrated magazine yet looks at her instead.

MAYA
Excuse me?

HEAVY-SET MAN
Sorry, I overheard you on the phone a little. Sounded like mom troubles to me.

MAYA
You could say that. Everything troubles, really.

HEAVY-SET MAN
Where you headed?

MAYA
Pennsylvania.

HEAVY-SET MAN
I'm headed the same direction. You going home for the holidays?

MAYA
Forever, actually. Or at least until I can get my head straight.

HEAVY-SET MAN
Looks pretty straight to me.

MAYA
Appearances can be deceiving.

HEAVY-SET MAN
True. That's the story of Los Angeles right there.

MAYA

Exactly. I came out here to be an actress, I thought I'd have this glamorous life by now. But it's not working out.

HEAVY-SET MAN

Why? You're young and beautiful, that means a lot out here.

MAYA

I'm not that young anymore. And there's a million young and beautiful people here who want to act. The problem is you have to be able to act.

HEAVY-SET MAN

And you can't?

MAYA

Not very well, I think. Or else I would've landed something by now. A dog food commercial, anything.

HEAVY-SET MAN

You probably just need that lucky break.

MAYA

I don't know anymore. I just can't get into character like other people can. I've got some friends who get gigs, they can turn it on like a switch.

Maya SNAPS her fingers.

MAYA

Just like that, they're someone else. I've tried to be other people, but I can't. I just feel... trapped inside myself. All I can be is me.

HEAVY-SET MAN

Well, that's not a terrible thing to be.

He shoots her a comforting smile and she smiles back.

MAYA

No, I guess not.

The heavy-set man opens the Sports Illustrated and reads it. Maya settles back in her chair and relaxes.

EXT. LA GREYHOUND BUS STATION - LATER

Maya slides her rolling suitcase into the compartment under the bus next to a pile of other luggage.

She stands in line next to the bus along with a dozen others. They cough and sniff and chat with each other as the TICKET-TAKER (40's), a slim man in a Greyhound uniform, rips their ticket stubs one by one before they climb onboard.

She flips through her packet of tickets, starting in LA and ending in Pittsburgh with a few stops and transfers in-between.

Maya looks at the line behind her, but she doesn't see the heavy-set man. She leans to look back inside the bus station.

The seat in the lounge where he sat is now empty. She shrugs.

She reaches the ticket-taker who examines her packet.

TICKET-TAKER

Are you really going all the way
cross country?

MAYA

Yeah.

TICKET-TAKER

On a Greyhound?

MAYA

Uh... yeah.

He scoffs as he rips her ticket and hands it back to her.

TICKET-TAKER

Good luck.

She reaches the steps of the bus, suddenly nervous and unsure. She looks up the stairs with a new sense of fear.

The BUS DRIVER, a middle aged woman with thick glasses looks down from the driver's seat to see Maya holding up the line.

BUS DRIVER

It's now or never, hun. Get on
board or get out of the way.

Maya musters her courage and climbs up the stairs.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - CONTINUOUS

Clutching her backpack in front of her, Maya walks down the aisle. Others are already settling into their seat and dropping their bags in the chair next to them to keep others out. They gaze at Maya as she passes, sizing her up.

The bus is shabby and grim. Several seats are stained or falling apart and the floor is dirty.

Maya eyes a couple empty seats near the back. She sits down in one and plops her backpack in the other to ward off others.

With everyone on board, the bus driver stands at the front.

BUS DRIVER

Listen up! I'll be your driver for the next few states. A few rules. No drinking, no yelling, no fighting. If you think you're gonna pass out, buckle yourself in. I am not afraid to kick your ass off the bus, capiche? We've got a toilet in the back in case you need it, but I recommend you keep it liquid. Now sit back, relax and enjoy your ride.

The driver shifts the bus into gear.

Maya pulls out a portable CD player from the backpack and puts on a cheap pair of headphones. She hits play.

We hear ACOUSTIC ALTERNATIVE ROCK play from the headphones.

INT./EXT. MONTAGE - VARIOUS

Maya gazes out the window as the bus drives through the heart of LA, through traffic jams and congested highways flanked by palm trees in the sun.

The bus drives through an empty expanse of desert, past cacti and roadkill as the sun sets.

Maya watches through the window as desert becomes grassy plains and thick woods.

At night she watches dark forests zip by with only the dim light of the bus to keep her company. With her head against the vibrating window, she peers out into the moonlit horizon. The black trees blur together as the bus speeds down the highway.

EXT. REST STOP - DAY

The passengers walk off the bus one by one. They stretch and yawn or amble toward the bathrooms in a plain concrete building. Traffic swishes by on the adjacent highway.

Maya talks on the payphone while other passengers mill around behind her, waiting for the bus to open.

MAYA

We just got to Colorado.

MAYA'S MOTHER (V.O.)

That's great sweetie, we can't wait to see you. Is it snowing there?

MAYA

No, it's not that cold.

MAYA'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Did you bring a heavy coat?

MAYA

No, I forgot to buy one.

MAYA MOTHER (V.O.)

Honey! What if you get stuck in a snowstorm?

MAYA

I'll be fine, don't worry.

MAYA MOTHER (V.O.)

Where's your next stop? I want you to call me again.

Maya flips through her packet of tickets.

MAYA

It's... Salina, Kansas. And it's a transfer, actually. I'm switching buses there.

MAYA'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Well stay safe, Maya. We can't wait to see you. Love you, hun.

MAYA

Love you, too. Bye.

Maya hangs up the phone. She turns around to see all the other passengers loitering around waiting for the bus driver. She walks up to a YOUNG WOMAN (20's).

MAYA

Did you see a big guy get on or off
the bus? Dark hair, heavy set
fella?

YOUNG WOMAN

No, I haven't seen him.

MAYA

OK, thanks.

The bus driver walks out of the women's bathroom and hikes up her pants. Maya trots up to her but the driver keeps walking toward the bus.

MAYA

Excuse me, ma'am. Did you see a
heavy guy get on the bus, he had
dark hair? He said he was going the
same way as me but I don't think he
ever got on the bus.

The bus driver barely acknowledges her.

BUS DRIVER

No, haven't seen him.

The driver climbs up on the stairs of the bus and turns to the crowd.

BUS DRIVER

All right everyone, time to go!
Last chance to grab a drink or take
a piss, we leave in two minutes.

The line forms to climb back on board. Maya slides into line and examines all the tired faces of the passengers. She doesn't recognize anyone.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - DAY

The bus zooms down the highway. Maya stares out the window at the snow-capped mountains in the distance. She watches them with a sense of awe and a slight smile.

GENTLE MUSIC plays on her headphones. Her eyes close.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - NIGHT

Maya's head is leaned against the window. She's fast asleep.

The voice of the bus driver jolts her awake.

BUS DRIVER (V.O.)
 (over intercom)
 Attention, passengers. It is now
 midnight Central Standard Time,
 which means it's officially 2001.
 Happy New Year, and a Happy New
 Millennium!

Maya looks around in confusion. There's a few half-hearted cheers from the passengers and a smattering of applause, but most people either sleep or stare into the distance.

Maya turns around to the person sitting behind her, the young woman from before.

MAYA
 Is it really New Year's Eve?

YOUNG WOMAN
 Yeah, you didn't know?

MAYA
 It's been a weird few days. I
 must've forgot.

Maya turns around and sees all the sad faces on the drab bus. No one's in a celebratory mood.

She looks out the window. FIREWORKS EXPLODE on the horizon, showering red and green sparks to the earth below. A twinkle of color lights her eyes.

MAYA
 (under her breath)
 Happy new year, I guess.

EXT. KANSAS BUS STOP - NIGHT

A lone bus stop sits at a crossroad between the highway and a country road. It's a single bench covered by a dinky roofed shelter. It's surrounded by empty fields of harvested corn and a single house nearby.

Down the empty highway a lone light shines. It moves closer and closer.

IT'S THE GREYHOUND BUS. It squeaks to a halt in front of the desolate bus stop.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - SAME TIME

Maya looks out the window to the isolated, eerie bus stop.

BUS DRIVER (V.O.)
 (over intercom)
 We have reached Salina, Kansas. If
 this is your stop or transfer
 point, please depart.

The bus driver pulls a lever and the doors open.

Perplexed, Maya looks around. Surely this can't be the stop.
 No one else stands up.

BUS DRIVER (V.O.)
 (over intercom)
 Last call. Salina, Kansas.

Maya grabs her backpack and shuffles to the front of the bus.

MAYA
 Are you sure this is the stop? This
 has gotta be some kind of mistake.

The bus driver checks her clipboard.

BUS DRIVER
 This is what my itinerary says.

MAYA
 Surely it's got to be an actual bus
 station, not just a stop in the
 middle of nowhere.

The driver eyes the lonely covered bench outside the bus.

BUS DRIVER
 It's odd, but it's what my schedule
 says.

MAYA
 You can't just leave me out here at
 night. It's freezing cold, I'm on
 the side of the fucking highway.

BUS DRIVER
 They don't pay me enough to deal
 with this shit. You're welcome to
 keep riding the bus, but we're
 headed north from here. When's your
 ticket say the next bus is coming?

Maya reads her ticket.

MAYA
Two thirty A.M.

BUS DRIVER
Well it's almost one right now. So
if you can hang around for an hour
or so, you'll probably be OK.

Maya looks through the open door to the bus stop outside.

MAYA
Fine. Let me grab my luggage
underneath.

BUS DRIVER
Sure thing.

The bus driver pulls a different lever.

Maya grabs her backpack and walks down the stairs.

EXT. KANSAS BUS STOP - MOMENTS LATER

Maya grabs her rolling suitcase from the compartment in the
bottom of the bus.

She lugs her backpack and suitcase to the bus stop.

BUS DRIVER
Good luck, sugar.

The driver closes the door. The bus SQUEAKS as it shifts into
gear and rolls down the highway.

Maya stands next to the bench and watches the bus disappear
over the dark horizon.

She drops her backpack on the bench, props her suitcase up
and sits down.

She looks at the barren plains around her. It's all dead
amber grass and bare trees in every direction.

Maya looks to the other side of the road to see a lonely
house farther out in the prairie. A two story, light blue
colonial. A gravel driveway leads all the way from the house
to the highway where a mailbox sits. There's no car in the
driveway.

Maya eyes the stop sign nearby where the highway meets the
country road. Above the word 'STOP' someone spray painted
another word: 'DON'T.'

Maya reaches into her backpack and pulls out her headphones and CD player. She hits play. FOLK MUSIC trickles out.

IT STOPS. She looks down at the tiny screen on the CD player which flashes an EMPTY BATTERY SYMBOL. It's dead.

MAYA

Well fuck me.

She stuffs the headphones and player into her backpack.

Maya peers around the highway and plains looking for any sign of life. Nothing.

She gazes up at the night sky filled with stars. A full, bright moon hangs above.

She rubs her hands together to keep warm. Then she stuffs them underneath her armpits and rocks back and forth, the freezing night creeping up on her.

Maya stands up and paces around the bench, her foggy breath visible in the dark.

MAYA

Of course I already miss Los Angeles.

She looks toward the blue house again. Smoke begins to trickle from the chimney. A light turns on inside.

She plops down on the bench and cups her hands over her mouth to warm them up with her breath.

CREEAAK. In the distance, the front door of the lone house opens.

An OLD WOMAN in her eighties shuffles through the door. She grips onto a metal walker with both hands.

Maya can barely make her out from a distance.

CLACK. CLACK. CLACK.

The old woman slowly shuffles down the driveway toward the highway, her walker clanking against the gravel.

CLACK. CLACK. CLACK.

Maya watches as the lady inches closer and closer. She leans in to get a better look.

The old woman sports a short crop of curly white hair, thick brimmed glasses and a genial smile.

She wears a heavy sweater and fur lined slippers. She's hunched over the walker as she struggles to reach the end of the driveway.

The old woman sees Maya standing near the bus stop and waves toward her. Maya waves back.

She finally reaches the mailbox at the edge of the street. Maya watches as the woman opens the mailbox and reaches inside. She feels around and then frowns. It's empty.

Maya grimaces at the sad sight. The woman closes the mailbox and walks back toward the house. CLACK. CLACK. CLACK.

The old lady loses her balance and TIPS OVER.

SLAM. She falls onto the gravel.

MAYA

Oh shit.

Maya hops off the bench and runs across the highway.

She rushes to the old woman splayed out on the gravel, her walker tipped over in the grass.

MAYA

Oh my god! Ma'am, are you all right?

The old lady turns over, clearly embarrassed.

OLD WOMAN

I've had quite the spill, haven't I?

Maya stoops down to help her. The woman grabs Maya's arms as Maya hoists her to her feet.

OLD WOMAN

If I don't have my walker, I'm afraid this tragedy is destined to repeat itself.

Maya struggles to hold up the woman as she tips the walker upright. The woman grabs onto the walker and steadies herself. She sighs in relief as Maya tries to keep her standing.

OLD WOMAN

Well if you aren't my knight in shining armor. What's your name, dearie?

MAYA

I'm Maya.

RUTH

They call me Ruth on my good days,
and a whole lot of other names on
my bad ones. What's a lovely girl
like you doing alone out here in
the dark?

MAYA

Waiting for my bus, unfortunately.

RUTH

Unfortunate for you, remarkably
fortunate for me.

Maya keeps her hands on Ruth's arms, afraid to let go.

MAYA

Are you sure you're OK, do I need
to call someone?

RUTH

I'm fine, nothing a hot bath won't
fix.

Ruth sees Maya shiver in the cold night.

RUTH

Why, dear, you must be freezing.
Come inside and warm up, it's the
least I can do.

Maya looks to her backpack and suitcase at the bench across
the street.

MAYA

I don't know. I don't want to miss
my bus.

RUTH

Well, when's it coming?

MAYA

An hour, I think?

RUTH

Goodness gracious, that's plenty of
time to take the chill off with a
cup of coffee. I may need your help
getting back inside, if that
convinces you.

MAYA

Sure, one cup of coffee. But I really can't miss this bus.

RUTH

I'll make sure of it.

Ruth inches toward the front door on her walker. Maya wraps a hand around her shoulder and keeps her steady.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Maya guides Ruth through the front door into her living room.

It's a stereotypical cozy home of an elderly woman. Plush furniture, doilies everywhere, pictures of family on the walls and a vintage TV in the corner. It's rather dark, only lit by a lamp and the blazing fireplace.

MAYA

You've got a lovely home, Ruth.

RUTH

Why thank you, I've been in this place a long time.

Maya spies a stack of firewood and a hefty axe resting in the corner. The fireplace nearby burns bright.

MAYA

Has that fire been going very long?
It's pretty chilly in here.

RUTH

I forgot to toss a log in 'til I went for my mail.

As she helps Ruth hobble forward, Maya looks at the wall to see a big portrait of a family among other framed photos. She stops to admire it. The portrait has a young woman, her husband and three children dressed in clothing from the 1950's.

MAYA

That's an adorable picture of your family.

RUTH

That photo always brings back warm memories. The kitchen is this way, dear, let me fix you something.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Maya sits at a table surrounded by a few chairs. She looks around the homey dining room. Framed Norman Rockwell paintings hang on the wall, a big doily sits on the table with a bowl of mixed nuts in the middle.

Another family portrait hangs behind Ruth. An old record player sits in the corner atop a side table. The dining room is connected to the living room by a big open archway.

Maya grabs a handful of mixed nuts and eats them. Ruth walks in from the kitchen door holding two steaming cups of coffee. She doesn't have her walker, but she hobbles forward carefully.

RUTH

If you're hungry dear, I can make you up something to eat. I've got some egg salad in the fridge.

MAYA

No thank you, that coffee smells delicious though.

Ruth sets the steaming mug in front of Maya and sits down on the opposite side of the table. Maya cradles the mug with both hands and takes a sip.

MAYA

It's wonderful, Ruth. Thank you.

Ruth takes a sip herself, her hands a bit shaky as she raises the mug.

RUTH

It's the least I can do. The thought of you sitting out there on that cold bench is too much to bear.

MAYA

I can manage, but I appreciate it.

RUTH

Where are you headed, anyways?

MAYA

Pittsburgh.

RUTH

Visiting family?

MAYA

Moving back home, actually. Until I get back on my feet.

RUTH

You been having a hard time, honey?

MAYA

A bit, yeah. I'm sort of in a 'between careers' phase right now.

RUTH

You got something lined up at home?

MAYA

Hopefully.

Maya turns to look at the family portrait behind her.

RUTH

Something on your mind?

MAYA

I see a photo like that, you and your beautiful family. You look so happy, so... stable. I want that. Stability.

While Maya's back is turned, a strange expression grows on Ruth's face. Her eyes open wide and an odd smile spreads ear to ear.

MAYA

It's been ten years of different crappy jobs, different crappy apartments. I think I'm ready for some stability.

Maya turns back around and Ruth snaps back to normal before Maya can notice.

MAYA

I think I want what you have, Ruth. A real place to settle down and start over. Maybe make a family.

RUTH

That's very touching. Would you like to see more?

MAYA

Of what?

RUTH

My family, dear. I've got heaps more photos.

MAYA

I'd love to see them.

RUTH

I'll go grab my album.

Ruth labors to stand up. She scoots out of the dining room through the archway into the dark living room.

TICK. TOCK. TICK. TOCK.

Maya turns to see a Kit-Kat Clock hanging on the wall near the kitchen door. It's a kitschy clock in the shape of a black cat whose tail swings as the seconds tick away.

TICK. TOCK. TICK. TOCK.

A SHADOWY FIGURE RISES in the archway of the dark living room, but Maya stares at the clock. We only see it as a silhouette, its spindly long limbs and crooked figure getting closer and closer to the dining room. We get a glimpse of its beady eyes in the shadow.

The limbs contort in jerky, unnatural motion like a wicked seizure. Its bones SNAP as it changes shape.

The silhouetted abomination EMERGES INTO THE LIGHT AS RUTH, a warm smile on her face and a thick photo album in her hands.

Maya turns to see Ruth and greets her with an equally warm smile as she walks into the dining room.

Ruth sets the photo album down in front of Maya.

RUTH

Oops, I almost forgot! I've got another one downstairs.

MAYA

Don't bother yourself, Ruth. This one will do fine.

RUTH

It's no trouble at all, I'll be right back.

Ruth hobbles back into the living room.

Maya admires the photo album in front of her. It's a big leather-bound tome with fading yellow pages. She feels the smooth cover and opens it.

The first photo is the same as the photo on the wall behind her. She flips a page, and it's the same photo as the one in the living room. She flips another page.

Odd. It's a photo of an entirely different family. Maya grows confused. Maybe they're relatives.

Maya flips another page. Now there's a photo of a black family. A father, mother and kids. She flips the page.

Now it's just a single photo of a mustached man from the early 1900's. She flips again and again.

Each new page is an entirely different family, or a totally different person. All from different eras, wearing different styles of clothes. Some photos are sepia tone, some black and white, some full color.

Maya becomes disturbed as she flips through page after page of seemingly random photos of people across time.

MAYA

What the fuck?

Maya slams the book shut. She looks around the empty dining room. She leans out of her chair to look into the dark living room.

MAYA

Ruth? Hello?

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Maya wanders into the living room, her demeanor a little cautious.

MAYA

Ruth? Are you there?

She walks over to the wall of photos. She leans in close and notices that every picture is of a different family.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Maya walks through an empty hallway flanked by a few doors. She creeps forward as the floor CREAKS beneath her.

MAYA

Ruth, are you all right? Do you need some help?

She stops at an open doorway and peers inside.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Maya sees a small bedroom. The fluffy bed is covered by a salmon colored blanket and an antique desk sits in the corner. The room is nautical themed with a clam-shell alarm clock and sailboat wallpaper.

Something catches Maya's eye. A leather strap sticks out from under the door of a closet.

Maya sneaks closer. She opens the door.

DOZENS OF SUITCASES, BRIEFCASES, SATCHELS AND BAGS POUR OUT OF THE CLOSET.

Maya steps back as they crash to the ground.

MAYA

Jesus Christ.

She stoops low to sift through the pile of luggage. They all come from different time periods. Modern suitcases, faded mid-century briefcases and antique canvas bags.

Maya picks up a leather satchel and dumps out the contents. Out falls an aged Jehovah's Witness Bible and a wallet.

She opens the wallet and pulls out the ID. It's made of paper and has no photo. It has a name: 'JEREMIAH CARTER.' She reads his date of birth: '03/22/1924.'

She digs through the luggage and finds a simple pouch tied with a bit of string. She unties it and pours out several gold and silver coins. She picks one up and examines it.

One side is engraved with a crest symbol, the other side with a crude cross. It seems like a coin from the middle ages.

MAYA

What the hell...

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Maya pokes her head through the doorway and looks down the empty hallway.

MAYA
Is anyone there?

A MUFFLED SOUND emanates from down the hall along with a FLASHING LIGHT. Maya ventures through the corridor.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Maya sneaks into the living room.

The vintage TV illuminates the room with a flashing white light. A classic black and white western plays on the TV, the sounds of horses, gunshots and triumphant music play through the garbled speakers.

A shadowy figure watches Maya from the hallway as she walks up to the TV. She switches it off and turns around.

The figure is gone.

MAYA
Ruth? Hello?

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Maya cracks open the door and peers inside from the dining room. It's a simple kitchen with mint green vintage appliances and a black and white tiled floor.

MAYA
This isn't funny anymore! Hello?

Silence. Maya walks into the kitchen and runs a finger across the vintage oven. It's completely spotless and looks like it's never been used.

She spies a wooden door on the far side of the kitchen. The door is cracked open.

Maya walks over and opens the door fully. It's pitch black on the other side.

She sees a chain in the dark and pulls it. A bare lightbulb flickers on and illuminates a wooden staircase leading down into the basement.

At the bottom of the stairs lies Ruth's walker, tipped over.

MAYA
Are you okay?! Did you fall again?

Silence.

MAYA
Goddammit. Hold on, Ruth. I'm
coming down.

The stairs CREAK as Maya creeps down into the basement.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Maya reaches the walker at the bottom of the stairs. She looks around the basement but sees no one.

It's an unfinished space. It has a concrete floor and bare wood frame ceiling. A few storage boxes and a washer and dryer sit in one corner. A tool bench with a few loose tools sits in the other. A big, frayed rug covers the center of the room.

Maya walks across the basement through the center.

THUD. THUD. THUD. The carpet beneath her sounds wooden and hollow as she walks across it. She stops.

She stomps the rug again. THUD. Yup, definitely hollow.

Maya grabs the edge of the rug and pulls it away to reveal a huge piece of plywood covering the floor.

MAYA
Weird.

She grabs the big square piece of wood and drags it away, revealing--

A GIANT PIT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM.

MAYA
Jesus Christ.

Maya stands on the edge of the giant hole. The jagged concrete edges lead down into pure darkness. She peers into it but sees nothing.

MAYA
What the fuck...

Maya looks around the basement. She spies a flashlight sitting on the tool bench. She grabs it and flicks the switch. It flickers but doesn't turn on. She smacks it a couple times. It finally illuminates.

She walks back to the edge of the pit. She shines the flashlight down into the darkness. It catches something bright white in the black.

A HUMAN SKULL.

She shines it around the pit.

ANOTHER SKULL. MORE BONES. LEG BONES, ARM BONES, SPINAL COLUMNS.

Dozens and dozens of human skeletons are stuck in a dried black sludge. IT'S A PIT OF DEATH.

Pure horror overcomes Maya. She can't believe what she's seeing. Her hands tremble and the flashlight shakes as she backs away from the pit.

MAYA

Fuck fuck fuck fuck...

Maya dashes up the stairs.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Maya bursts through the door and stops dead.

She hears MUSIC. A LUSH 1930's BALLAD comes from the other room. Maya walks up to the kitchen counter and pulls a BIG KNIFE from a knife block.

She sneaks closer and closer to the dining room door, knife in hand.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM/LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Maya cracks open the door and looks inside. Ruth sits at the dining table, a cup of coffee in her hands.

The record player in the corner spins an old vinyl, spitting out the VOICE OF A GENTLE CROONER.

Ruth looks up at Maya with a warm smile. She flips through the photo album in front of her.

Maya cautiously steps inside the room. She stares at Ruth, not sure what to expect. She holds the flashlight in one hand and the knife in the other.

RUTH

Hello again, dear.

MAYA

Hi Ruth.

RUTH
Did you enjoy the photos of my
family?

Ruth flips another page.

MAYA
I did.

Maya inches closer and closer toward the living room, never taking her eyes off Ruth.

RUTH
I've got a big family. I've been
collecting them for a long time. A
very long time.

She flips another page.

RUTH
You could join them if you wanted.
I carry them with me everywhere I
go.

Maya backs through the archway.

MAYA
I think I should be leaving...

RUTH
You said you wanted a place to
settle down, to start over, right?
Well why not here? You could stay
here forever.

MAYA
I really have to go...

Maya backs farther into the living room.

RUTH
That's all right, sweetie. I love a
chase.

RUTH FLIPS THE TABLE IN FRONT OF HER. She sprints toward Maya with UNCANNY SPEED. A wicked smile spreads across her face and her eyes bulge.

SHE CACKLES IN GLEE as she dashes forward.

MAYA STICKS OUT THE KNIFE.

SLIIIIICK. Ruth runs into the knife. It pierces her directly in the chest.

She stops cold and rears backward, fear on her face and the knife stuck in her chest. She collapses to the living room floor as blood trickles down her sweater.

MAYA

Oh my god, are you okay?!

May leans down to check on the dying old woman. Ruth looks shocked and deeply in pain. Her shaky hand rests on Maya's shoulder.

RUTH

What have you done, sweet one? What have you done?

MAYA

I'm so sorry, I--

Ruth grabs the handle of the blade and SLOWLY PULLS IT OUT OF HER CHEST. SHE CACKLES TO HERSELF as she examines the bloody knife.

Maya stumbles backward. Ruth rises to her feet with zero effort, almost floating to an upright position. She holds the blade in front of her.

RUTH

My turn!

RUTH SWIPES THE KNIFE BACK AND FORTH AT MAYA. She chuckles as Maya dodges the swings and flounders backward. She stumbles into the lamp which CRASHES to the floor and SHATTERS INTO PIECES.

Maya turns and sprints to the front door.

RUTH

Don't miss that bus, sweetie!

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE/FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Maya bursts onto the porch. She runs farther and farther away from the house, the GLEEFUL CACKLING growing quieter as she sprints.

She turns to look back. There's no one behind her. The front door of the house remains open, only darkness inside.

Maya turns back around and halts completely. She realizes she's not in the prairie.

SHE'S SURROUNDED BY A CONIFEROUS FOREST.

Tall, slender pine trees as far as the eye can see. They envelop her and the house behind her.

MAYA
Jesus Christ...

A TREE SHAKES near Maya. She shudders and rears back.

Ruth's mocking voice descends from above, echoing through the forest.

RUTH (O.S.)
Toto... I have a feeling we're not
in Kansas anymore.

Maya looks upward for the source of the voice but she can only see the tops of trees extending into the starry night.

EXT. FOREST THICKET - MOMENTS LATER

Maya creeps through the pine forest which grows thicker and denser as she moves forward. She's hunched over and tightly wound, expecting something to pop out at any second.

A shadowy figure with spindly limbs silently crawls across the tops of trees, stalking Maya.

Maya flicks the switch on her flashlight, but it doesn't turn on. She smacks it a few times and it finally lights up.

She aims the light at the tree tops above her, but there's nothing visible.

Maya quietly walks deeper into the forest, shining her light forward on the slender trees ahead. Her breath grows heavy and sweat pours from her brow.

A CHILD SCREAMS IN THE DISTANCE.

YOUNG BOY (O.S.)
Mommy! Help!

Maya turns toward the scream. She hustles in its direction.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

Maya walks through a dense collection of trees into a small clearing in the forest.

A YOUNG BOY around seven cowers in the middle of the open patch. He sports a bowl cut and a striped sweater. Tears pour down his cheeks as he huddles low to the forest floor.

YOUNG BOY
Mommy! Please! Where are you?

Maya runs over to the young boy.

MAYA
Holy shit, are you all right? Is
your mom out here?

YOUNG BOY
Mommy!

The boy jumps up and grabs onto Maya's waist.

YOUNG BOY
Where were you, mommy? I was
scared.

Maya puts her hand on his head to comfort him but her face
twists in confusion.

MAYA
I'm not... I'm not your mommy, I...

The kid looks up at her with tears in his eyes.

YOUNG BOY
Save me, mama. Save me, please...

Blood trickles from the corners of his eyes.

MAYA
Jesus Christ, are you--

THE BLOOD GUSHES FROM HIS EYES AND MOUTH. The boy groans and
collapses, his eyes turning back in his head and his skin
going pale.

Maya catches him before he collapses to the ground.

SHE SHRIEKS AS THE CHILD DIES IN HER ARMS.

MAYA
(at the top of her lungs)
Help! Someone help me, please! I
need help!

Maya weeps as she cradles the child's corpse.

A SMALL CHUCKLE.

IT GROWS LOUDER.

The dead boy cackles in her arms. Blood spurts from his lips and his eyes snap open. A wicked smile forms on his face.

Maya drops the boy and backs away. She wipes the tears from her eyes as terror overcomes her.

He lays on the ground, chuckling to himself. His voice changes as he laughs. His upper half SNAPS FORWARD into an upright position, his eyes bulging.

His laughing voice morphs into Ruth's voice as his head turns to look at Maya.

YOUNG BOY

(in Ruth's voice)

What's wrong, mommy? Didn't you want a child? Why not me?

MAYA

What the fuck are you!? Leave me alone!

YOUNG BOY

(in Ruth's voice)

Don't you understand? This is what'll happen to me, mommy. I'll suffer... then I'll die. Just like everyone else. Why would you make me?

The boy weeps in fear and anger.

YOUNG BOY

(in a mix of Ruth's and child's voice)

Why, mommy? Why would you make me?

The crying turns to laughing.

THE BOY HOPS ON ALL FOURS AND SKITTERS UP A TREE.

Maya SCREAMS and runs into the forest ahead.

EXT. FOREST THICKET - MOMENTS LATER

Maya races through the forest, dodging trees and lighting the way with her flashlight. She runs and runs and runs.

She stops to catch her breath. She spins around, looking in every direction. Her panicked breathing and darting eyes betray how lost she is. Where's the road? Is there even a road?

A MANIACAL LAUGH ECHOES THROUGH THE TREES.

Maya turns around and points her flashlight at the source of the sound.

A single pine tree twenty feet away. The laughter grows louder.

RUTH SLOWLY LEANS HER HEAD FROM BEHIND THE TREE.

Maya trains her light on the old woman as she slowly backs away. Ruth's hair is longer and wilder. It hangs low from her tilted head. Her eyes bulge slightly and her grin spreads impossibly wide. Her hands wrap around the sides of the tree, her fingers now thin and long.

With her body still hidden by the tree, Ruth sticks her neck out a little more. Then a little more. THEN A LITTLE MORE.

HER NECK ELONGATES SEVERAL FEET LIKE A SNAKE.

Her head bobs up and down as she gazes at Maya, her neck extending as her head creeps closer and closer.

MAYA

Stay the fuck away from me!

RUTH

Give nana a kiss.

Ruth opens her mouth and a slender black tongue coils out. It grows longer and longer as it glides toward Maya.

Nearly frozen in fear, Maya manages to step backward, but she backs into a tree.

THE TONGUE LICKS MAYA'S CHEEK. Maya winces and trembles as it licks upward, leaving a trail of black saliva. The tip of the tongue wriggles over her closed eyelid then flicks away.

Maya opens her eyes.

RUTH IS GONE.

She shines her light around the empty forest. Nothing.

The black goo gets in her eye and stings her. She closes her eyelid in pain.

MAYA

Fuck!

Maya wipes the black goo from her face with her sleeve.

ZOOOOOOOM. Maya hears a car in the distance. A bit of hope.

She sprints into the forest ahead. Through the gaps in trees, she can see a road in the distance.

EXT. ROADSIDE FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

Maya stumbles out of the forest onto the side of the highway. She watches a car drive over the hill on the horizon.

She bolts in that direction.

INT. POLICE CAR - MOMENTS LATER

A Kansas HIGHWAY PATROLMAN (40's) sips a cup of coffee in his squad car as another vehicle zooms past.

He looks in his rear-view mirror and sees Maya, disheveled and terrified, running along the highway toward him.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN
What the hell?

EXT. SIDE OF HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The patrolman climbs out of his squad car as Maya runs toward him, waving her arms frantically.

MAYA
Help! Please help me!

He jogs up to her and Maya collapses in front of him. He hoists her up as she bawls and tries to form words.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN
What's going on? What happened?

MAYA
She's trying to kill me... it's
trying to kill me, I don't know!
Are we in Kansas?

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN
Yeah, we're in Kansas. Have you
taken any drugs tonight ma'am?

MAYA
No! There was a forest, and and
this house, and an old lady, and
she kept changing and--

Something dawns on Maya. She stares down the officer like he's a threat and backs away.

MAYA

You're... you're not her, are you?

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN

Who?

MAYA

Ruth.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN

...do I look like a 'Ruth?'

Maya cautiously looks him up and down.

MAYA

No. But I was wrong before.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN

Are you sure you're not on drugs?
Are you maybe having an...
'episode?'

MAYA

Just... just drive me back that way
and I'll show you.

EXT. KANSAS BUS STOP - LATER

The squad car slowly rolls down the dark highway as Maya and the officer scan out the windows.

Maya sees the stop sign with the graffiti at the crossroads.

MAYA

Here! Right here!

The car stops and Maya hops out.

She stands at the crossroads and looks around in pure confusion. The cop steps out and looks around, too.

There is no bus stop. There is no gravel driveway. There is no house. There's definitely no forest.

It's just empty plains and a harvested corn field where the house used to be.

MAYA

What the fuck? I swear...

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN

You said you were waiting at a bus stop here?

MAYA

I was.

Maya looks at the place where the bench used to be.

HER BACKPACK AND SUITCASE SIT NEATLY BY THE ROAD.

Maya stoops down and feels them, making sure they're real.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN

I don't remember there ever being a bus stop out here, ma'am. There's a bus station in town, maybe that's where you were supposed to be dropped off. I can drive you there if you want?

Maya looks around the barren crossroads in the moonlight, worrying if it was all a dream.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN

Ma'am?

MAYA

Yeah... sure.

INT. POLICE CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Maya tosses her bags in the backseat and hops inside. The car pulls away.

She turns around to see the stop sign again, lit up red by the tail-lights. It still reads 'DON'T STOP.'

INT. KANSAS BUS STATION - DAY

A SMALL PRINTER BUZZES. It spits out a packet of tickets.

A FRONT DESK WORKER (40's) hands Maya the new packet with a chipper smile.

FRONT DESK WORKER

Sorry about the confusion and missed transfer, the next bus to your location will be here in about fourteen hours!

Maya stares at him, exhausted and angry. His smile fades. She snatches the tickets from his hand and leaves the front desk.

She plops down in a row of chairs in the dingy bus station. Daylight pours in from the windows as she blankly stares forward, bags at her feet.

The soft murmur of other passengers conversing and buying tickets fills the room with gentle early morning noise. But Maya only looks ahead, eyes unfocused, catatonic.

She looks down at her sleeve. It's stained black from when she wiped her face.

She trembles as she stares at the evidence that it wasn't a dream.

INT. KANSAS BUS STATION - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Maya bursts into the dirty women's bathroom. She turns on the faucet and grabs paper towels. She runs her sleeve under the water and frantically tries to scrub out the black stain with the paper towels.

It's no use. Maya tosses the paper towels away in frustration.

She looks up to see her reflection in the mirror.

She notices something. She leans close to the mirror, looking directly at her own eye.

AN INKY BLACK CIRCLE has formed around the iris of the eye that was licked. It's subtle, but the closer Maya looks the more the black circle seems to writhe.

INT. KANSAS BUS STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Maya walks out of the bathroom into the waiting area of the bus station.

Maya gazes at all the people in the station. She goes from face to face, staring at each one of them. Passengers waiting in seats, workers printing out tickets, bus drivers getting coffee from a machine.

Some of them return eye contact with the odd woman staring down the whole room.

A renewed fear rises in Maya. Any one of them could be Ruth.

Maya grabs her bags and finds the most isolated chair in the corner of the station. She puts the bags in front of her, almost like a shield, and huddles up in the chair.

Her eyes dart around, waiting for one of them to change.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - NIGHT

Maya climbs onto the bus and walks down the aisle toward the back with fear in her eyes. She holds her backpack to her chest.

As she walks, she looks at each and every face seated along the bus. People of various ages, ethnicities and genders. Some of them are sleeping, others eating, one of them drinks from a flask. A few match her gaze with a confused look of their own.

Maya sits in the very back. She peers over the seat in front of her to get a glimpse of all the backs of heads.

The bus switches into gear and cruises onto the street.

Maya settles into her chair and looks out the window.

A shaggy street dog trots next to the bus as it speeds up. It's barely visible in the dark of night.

Maya watches as it runs faster and faster to keep up. The bus kicks into next gear and speeds forward.

The sprinting dog turns its head.

IT BEARS RUTH'S FACE. Her gaping smile and beady eyes stare at Maya from under a crop of shaggy fur.

Maya turns to watch the dog disappear in the darkness of the road behind the bus.

MAYA YELPS IN FEAR. She holds her mouth shut.

Several passengers turn around to look at her like she's nuts. She turns away from their glare.

Maya buries her head in her hands and mutters to herself, trying to maintain calm.

MAYA
(under her breath)
It's not real. You're OK, it's not
real...

EXT. BUSY HIGHWAY - DAY

A lone man sits on an overstuffed duffel bag on the side of the highway. He's got his thumb outstretched, trying to hitch a ride as dozens of cars speed past.

He's a handsome man in his early thirties with messy hair and a few days stubble. His clothes are blue collar: plaid shirt and a beige jacket, well-worn boots and jeans.

This is DYLAN.

He stands up and desperately stretches his arm out further.

A rusty pickup truck slows down and pulls over on the shoulder. Dylan grabs his bag and runs up to the passenger side of the truck.

He looks into the window to see a KIND OLD MAN at the wheel.

KIND OLD MAN
Where you headed, son?

DYLAN
Anywhere but here.

KIND OLD MAN
I'm gonna need a more specific destination.

DYLAN
There's a Greyhound station in town, right?

KIND OLD MAN
There is. Hop on board, I'm headed that way.

Dylan tosses his duffel bag in the truck bed and climbs into the passenger seat. The truck pulls off onto the highway and speeds into the distance.

EXT. MISSOURI BUS STATION - LATER

The pickup truck pulls into the parking lot of the Greyhound station. Dylan hops out of the truck and grabs the duffel bag out of the back.

DYLAN
Thanks again, old-timer.

KIND OLD MAN

Thank me by not calling me old-timer.

DYLAN

You got it, stud.

KIND OLD MAN

Now that's more like it! Stay safe out there.

DYLAN

Will do!

Dylan gently bangs on the hood as the truck pulls away. He gives a last friendly wave and walks into the bus station.

INT/EXT. GREYHOUND BUS/MISSOURI BUS STATION - DAY

Maya lays fast asleep against the window. Daylight pours into the bus as it jostles and creaks.

SQUEAAAAAK. The bus comes to a stop.

Maya snaps awake. Anxiously she looks around the cabin at all the sleeping or quiet passengers.

PSSSSST. The door to the bus slides open.

Maya looks outside to see the line of people waiting to get on the bus outside a station.

She eyes each of the people waiting in line. Her gaze lingers on a handsome young passenger: Dylan. He checks his watch and slicks back his hair, not noticing the woman staring at him.

Maya turns to look at the rest of them outside the window.

Her gaze stops cold. A CREEPY MAN (40's) with dark eyes stares back at her. He's got a buzz cut and puffy jacket. A smirk forms on his face as he stares at her.

Maya quickly averts her gaze.

Dylan walks up the stairs and notices the MALE BUS DRIVER (50's), a pudgy man with a goatee.

DYLAN

Good morning, how's the drive been?

MALE BUS DRIVER

Shit.

DYLAN
 ...good to know.

He ambles through the aisle toward the back.

He notices a strange woman with bags under her eyes and a tense posture. Maya.

Dylan slides into the seat across the aisle from her. Maya stares at him like he may kill her. Her stare makes him uncomfortable so he turns away.

The creepy man saunters down the aisle. He spots Maya in the back and takes the seat in front of her.

PSSSST. The doors close and the bus pulls onto the road.

The creepy man turns around to look at Maya. She flinches.

 CREEPY MAN
 Hey now, sweetie, what's got you so
 scared?

 MAYA
 Please leave me alone.

 CREEPY MAN
 You don't gotta worry about me, I
 wouldn't hurt a fly.

He shoots her a wide, crooked smile. With haunted eyes, Maya leans toward the man and examines him.

 MAYA
 (hushed)
 Ruth? Is that you?

 CREEPY MAN
 Ruth? I ain't Ruth, but I can be. I
 can be whoever you want me to be.

He reaches over the seat and tries to swipe an errant lock of hair behind her ear. Maya flinches and rears back in her seat.

 DYLAN
 Hey! Leave the lady alone, she
 already asked once.

The creepy man turns his crooked smile to Dylan and puts up his hands like he's surrendering.

 CREEPY MAN
 Whatever you say, chief.

The creepy man turns back around in his seat. Dylan leans across the aisle toward Maya, but she rears back from him, too.

DYLAN
Sorry about that.

Maya eyes him up and down like he'll spring at her at any moment.

MAYA
Yeah... okay.

Dylan reads her body language and nods. He leans back in his own seat and sighs deeply.

He looks out his window at the rolling hills and haggard barns that roll by.

Maya looks out her own window. She spies something in the distance. She leans close to the window.

It's a house. A light blue house in a distant field.

RUTH'S HOUSE.

She turns to watch it go by with terrified fascination. It disappears behind the horizon as the bus speeds down the highway. Maya turns back around, fear welling up inside her.

EXT. GAS STATION/BURGER BONANZA - DAY

The bus pulls up to the side of a combination gas station and fast food restaurant. On the side of the building a bright sign reads 'BURGER BONANZA.'

The bus driver waves the passengers off as they climb down one by one.

MALE BUS DRIVER
We've got twenty minutes, people.
We're already running late.

The creepy man hops off, then Dylan and finally Maya slinks down the stairs last.

She looks in both directions, searching for something odd.

The bus driver notices her paranoid glances.

BUS DRIVER
You all right, ma'am?

MAYA

I'm fine.

BUS DRIVER

I hope so, I'm tired of kicking off nutjobs. I've driven through every single state and I've had to kick every kind of wacko.

MAYA

I said I'm fine.

The bus driver nods and motions her into the gas station.

INT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Mays walks into the fluorescent lit gas station. She wanders through a row of chips and candy.

A short old woman carrying a cane hobbles down her aisle.

MAYA PANICS and turns down another row of snacks. She peeks over the top to watch the old woman walk to the register with a bag of popcorn.

Maya sighs in relief. She looks down at all the beef jerky in front of her.

HER STOMACH RUMBLES.

INT. BURGER BONANZA - MINUTES LATER

Maya sits down at an empty booth with a tray of food. She looks down at two cheeseburgers in front of her.

HER STOMACH RUMBLES AGAIN. She picks up a burger and devours it.

Dylan sits in a different booth across the grubby burger chain restaurant. He slowly eats a few fries and turns to see Maya across the white tiled floor, devouring her burger with gusto. He watches in awe.

The creepy man struts up to Maya as he sips his soda.

CREEPY MAN

You've got quite the appetite.

Maya takes a big bite of her burger and ignores him. He leans on the edge of the booth.

CREEPY MAN

I know a lot of ways to work up an
appetite. Maybe I can show you...

Maya turns away and chews.

 CREEPY MAN

Are you deaf? I'm talking to you.

The creep leans forward and waves in her face.

 CREEPY MAN

Hello? Earth to stuck-up bitch.
Hello?

A hand grabs the man's shoulder. He turns around to see Dylan
with a steely-eyed stare.

 DYLAN

You need to fuck off.

The man shakes off Dylan's grip. He gets in Dylan's face with
a shit-eating grin.

 CREEPY MAN

And you're gonna make me?

A HAND GRIPS HIS ANKLE. He turns around to see Maya stoop
behind him.

With uncanny strength, SHE YANKS HIS ANKLE FROM UNDER HIM.

He falls forward and collapses to the tile headfirst. SLAM.

 CREEPY MAN

Jesus fucking Christ!

He turns over as blood pours from his smashed nose. He tries
to cover it, but it trickles onto the floor.

 DYLAN

Holy shit...

Maya stares at her hands like they aren't her own.

The bus driver pops his head over the top of a different
booth.

 MALE DRIVER

What the hell's going on?

DYLAN

This asshole won't leave her alone,
now he slipped and fell and smashed
his goddamn nose.

CREEPY MAN

That's a fucking lie!

The creepy man wails and tries to stand, but slips on his
blood and falls down.

The bus driver walks over and assesses the bleeding man.

BUS DRIVER

That's it, you're off the bus.
Can't have you getting blood all
over it, anyway.

The creepy guy shambles toward the bathroom, clutching his
bleeding nose and his aching back.

CREEPY MAN

Fuck all of you!

Maya sits back down, still in disbelief with a mouth full of
food. Dylan sits down next to her and laughs.

DYLAN

That was fucking awesome!

Maya swallows her last bite. HER STOMACH RUMBLES AGAIN. Loud
enough that Dylan looks down at it.

DYLAN

Still hungry?

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - MINUTES LATER

Maya walks on board carrying another burger which she wolfs
down as she walks to the back of the bus. Dylan follows close
behind her.

DYLAN

You gotta show me how you did that.
He dropped to the floor so fast I
thought he was trying to fuck it.

Maya finishes the burger and crumples its paper.

DYLAN

The look on his face was hilarious,
he had no idea what happened.

MAYA

I was there. Didn't I tell you to
leave me alone?

Maya sits down in her seat and Dylan sits back in his seat
across the aisle. Other passengers shuffle onto the bus and
find their spots.

DYLAN

Yeah... sorry. I've just never seen
anything like that before. I leave
my hometown for the first time
ever, and a few hours later BAM!
Some creep eats shit and slips in
his own blood. I should've left
sooner.

Maya stares out the window, but her interest is piqued. She
shoots him a side eye.

MAYA

You've never been out of your
hometown before?

DYLAN

Nah. My dad's really protective.
When I was young, he didn't let me
out of his sight. Then when I
graduated high school, he got sick.
After that, I never let him out of
my sight.

MAYA

Sick from what?

DYLAN

Lung cancer. And then chemo was a
bitch, so I just kept sticking
around.

MAYA

Is he all right?

DYLAN

He's doing a lot better. That's why
I finally got the courage to pack
my bag and leave. He's probably
worried as hell right now.

MAYA

I get it. My mom acts like I'm
still a teenager... SHIT!

DYLAN

What?

Maya buries her head in her hands.

MAYA

I haven't called her in... a really long time. Not since Colorado. She's probably freaking out.

DYLAN

It's nice knowing we've both got someone to freak out over us.

MAYA

Is your mom a worrier, too?

DYLAN

No, she left when I was young.

MAYA

That's awful...

DYLAN

It's okay, I don't even remember her. It's hard to miss what you never had.

MAYA

I don't know, sometimes those are the things I miss the most. The things I never had, but thought I would.

DYLAN

Like what?

MAYA

Like... I thought I was gonna be this famous actress, or whatever. Or at least I could make a living at it. I built my whole life around it. I moved to LA, I spent so much time... so much money. Acting classes, head-shots, seminars. I read every book I could find, I spent all my time practicing monologues and looking for auditions. And now it's all over. And I'm running back home with my tail between my legs, and like... like...

DYLAN

What?

MAYA

What am I without all that? Who am I if I'm not chasing that dream anymore? Was that even who I was or was that just a lie I was telling myself? Maybe it was just a big ruse to distract me from the truth.

DYLAN

The truth?

MAYA

...that I'm no one. That I'm not even... real. Sometimes I just stare off into space, and suddenly I get this... sinking feeling. Like I'm floating outside myself and seeing who I really am. And there's no one there. Like I've been dreaming I'm a person, and now I'm awake. I start sweating and my heart races. Then I snap out of it. But I know in the back of my mind what I saw was the real me. And the real me is... empty. Do you ever feel that way?

DYLAN

Uhhh... no. Not really.

Silence. Maya turns back to the window and stares outside. Dylan ponders to himself. He turns back to her and extends his hand into the aisle. Maya looks at it hanging there.

DYLAN

Give me your hand.

MAYA

Why?

DYLAN

I'm not being weird, just give me your hand. For one second.

Maya puts her hand in his. He turns it over, inspecting it. He squeezes it lightly.

DYLAN

Feels real to me. Flesh and blood. If you were no one, I'd be holding air right now. Right?

MAYA

I guess.

Dylan lightly SLAPS HER HAND. Maya giggles and pulls her hand away.

MAYA

What the hell!

DYLAN

Had to be sure it was really real.

They make eye contact, their gaze lingering on each other.

DYLAN

I'm Dylan by the way, I don't think we ever exchanged names.

MAYA

I'm Maya. And that's because I was trying to ignore you. Something that I'm failing at pretty hard right now.

PSSSSST. The bus doors close and the whole cabin lurches forward. Maya looks out the window at the isolated gas station they're leaving behind.

MAYA

Finally. The farther away we get from that asshole the better.

DYLAN

I think he's the one who should be scared of you. That was pretty gnarly what you did.

MAYA

Watch out, you're next.

Dylan laughs. He looks to the back of the bus.

DYLAN

How awful do you think that bathroom is?

MAYA

Honestly... worse than Chernobyl.

DYLAN

Well shit. Wish me luck!

He crouches into the aisle and walks toward the back.

Maya watches him with a sly smile. She turns to look down at her hand and her eyes GO WIDE WITH TERROR.

ONE OF HER FINGERS IS LONGER AND THIN. It's wrinkled with a long, black nail.

MAYA
What the fuck...

She clutches her fingers with her other hand and looks around at the other passengers to see if anyone noticed. She hyperventilates in a panic.

She pulls her hand away again to get another look. It's back to normal.

She examines it closely. Nothing out of the ordinary. She holds her chest and catches her breath.

Dylan plops back into his seat, startling Maya.

DYLAN
It's a massacre in there.

He notices her scared expression and labored breathing.

DYLAN
You okay?

MAYA
Yeah, I'm fine. A little motion sick, that's all.

Dylan nods and leans back in his seat. He closes his eyes.

Maya stares out the window at the setting sun on the horizon. Her eyes close as she drifts off to sleep.

LATER.

Maya and Dylan are fast asleep in their seats. It's pitch black outside.

POP. THUD THUD THUD THUD THUD.

The bus jostles and shakes. Maya, Dylan and the rest of the passengers jolt awake.

MALE BUS DRIVER (V.O.)
(through intercom)
Hold tight everyone, we've got a problem.

The driver pulls the bus over.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS/HIGHWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The bus driver kneels down to inspect the back left tire of the bus. It's completely shredded.

MALE BUS DRIVER
Motherfucker.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - MOMENTS LATER

The bus driver shuffles up the stairs of the bus.

MALE BUS DRIVER
Bad news, folks. We've got a busted tire.

DYLAN
Is there a spare? Can we change it out?

MALE BUS DRIVER
There's no spare. Regardless, I'm not certified to change it and neither are you. I'll radio it in and we'll have to wait until a maintenance truck can get out here.

The passengers collectively GROAN.

MALE BUS DRIVER
Them's the breaks, people. You can sit on the bus if you want, but if an eighteen wheeler plows into it you'll really be in the shit.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS/HIGHWAY - MOMENTS LATER

One by one, the passengers hop out of the bus. They walk into a field next to the highway.

A dozen or so of them shiver in the open prairie. They rub their hands for warmth, others pull big jackets out of their bags.

Maya stands there unfazed. Dylan trots up to her from the bus, rubbing his arms to keep warm.

DYLAN
Aren't you freezing?

MAYA
No. I feel pretty good actually.

DYLAN

This is serious. I don't know how long we can last out here.

MAYA

We can always warm up on the bus. Maybe the maintenance truck'll be here soon.

Maya walks around the side of the bus to get a look at the road. Dylan follows her.

Maya stops dead. At the crest of a hill on the highway, a SOLITARY DEER STARES AT HER.

With huge antlers lit by the moon, it's silhouetted against the starry night sky. From a distance it gazes at Maya, it's beady eyes reflecting light at her.

Maya's breath quickens. Dylan notices her shock.

DYLAN

Are you okay?

Maya backs away slowly.

MAYA

Fuck, fuck fuck fuck...

DYLAN

What's going on?

MAYA

I need to get out of here. NOW.

CUT TO:

Maya yanks her suitcase from the bottom compartment of the bus. She grabs its handle and dawns her backpack.

DYLAN

Where are you going? What the hell's happening?

Maya's eyes dart everywhere in a panic.

MAYA

I can't explain. Not right now. But I need to get the fuck out of here.

DYLAN

And where are you planning on going? It's freezing cold. I think you need to calm down--

MAYA

Don't tell me to calm down! You haven't seen what I've seen.

DYLAN

Then please, tell me!

Maya drags her suitcase down the side of the highway as Dylan tags behind her.

MAYA

You wouldn't believe me.

DYLAN

Try me.

Maya spins around and looks back at the top of the hill.

THE DEER IS GONE. Maya turns back and trudges forward again.

DYLAN

What're you afraid of? Is someone after you.

MAYA

Someone. Some thing.

DYLAN

Let me help!

May snaps back around.

MAYA

How? How can you help?

DYLAN

For starters, I got this...

Dylan zips open his duffel bag and reaches inside. HE PULLS OUT A REVOLVER. An old one, worn and scraped.

MAYA

Jesus, have you had that this whole time?

DYLAN

Gotta stay safe out on the road, at least that's what my dad says.

MAYA

It looks ancient.

DYLAN

It was my dad's. He made me take it, just in case.

MAYA

OK, so you have a gun. What do we do now?

DYLAN

We passed a motel a few miles back. We can wait there till the bus gets fixed. At least we won't be freezing to death.

Maya looks down the length of the highway in both directions, empty and dark either way.

MAYA

Fine, we'll go to the motel. I'd kill to sleep in a bed, anyway.

DYLAN

Good. It's a plan. See, I'm pretty good in a pinch.

MAYA

Don't sprain your hand jerking yourself off.

Dylan laughs as they trek down the highway. He sticks the gun back in his bag and zips it up.

MAYA

I hope you know how to use that thing.

DYLAN

Point and shoot. It ain't that hard.

INT. MOTEL FRONT DESK - NIGHT

DING DING DING. Dylan hammers the call bell sitting on the front desk. No one comes.

Maya stands behind him, looking around the dinky motel check-in.

DING DING DING. Dylan hammers it again.

MOTEL CLERK (O.S.)

Hold your horses!

A crotchety HOTEL CLERK (60's) with thin glasses hobbles in from the back room to the front desk. She's got a thick sweater and pinned up gray hair.

MOTEL CLERK
What do ya want?

DYLAN
A room, clearly.

MOTEL CLERK
Don't sass me.

Maya sizes the woman up with her gaze. The clerk notices her stare.

MOTEL CLERK
What's wrong with your friend here?
She looks screwy.

MAYA
There's nothing wrong with me.

MOTEL CLERK
You look screwy to me.

MAYA
You look screwy to me.

DYLAN
Relax. We've had a long night. And
she's got trust issues.

The clerk grabs a key hanging among others on a cork board.

MOTEL CLERK
Who doesn't. It's forty a night. No
checks, I'm sure it'd just bounce.

Dylan turns to Maya with a pleading look.

MAYA
Really?

DYLAN
I spent all my cash on the bus.

MAYA
Fine.

Maya grabs a billfold out of her backpack. She grabs the last couple bills inside and hands them to the clerk. The clerk inspects them.

MAYA
 What? You think they're screwy,
 too?

MOTEL CLERK
 Nope, just you.

She hands the key to Dylan.

EXT. MOTEL - MOMENTS LATER

Maya and Dylan carry their luggage through the parking lot toward the two story open-air motel.

The lot is filled with big rigs and a nearby truck stop. Clearly the crappy motel is a hot spot for truck drivers.

They drag their bags up a flight of stairs and down the balcony. Dylan looks at the tag on his key

DYLAN
 Room twenty four... this one.

They stop at a door and Dylan fumbles with the key.

THUD THUD THUD.

Maya looks down the balcony to see a huge, shadowy figure stomping towards her.

MAYA
 Hurry up.

DYLAN
 What?

MAYA
 Hurry the fuck up, unlock it.

DYLAN
 Relax.

THUD THUD THUD. A BURLY TRUCKER (40's) walks into the light. He's a tall, hefty man with a big beard. He wears a trucker's hat, big boots and a bag slung over his shoulder.

He stops at the door next to them and inserts his key. The trucker looks Maya up and down.

Maya does the same, but with terror in her eyes.

CLICK. Dylan finally opens the door and goes inside.

Both Maya and the trucker walk into their respective rooms and close the door.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

CLACK. Maya quickly locks the deadbolt on the door and fastens the chain lock.

She peeks through the blinds of the motel window to the parking lot outside.

All she can see is the lot filled with big rigs below, empty and quiet.

Maya turns around. It's a dingy room with two beds, stained wallpaper, fraying carpet, an old TV and a tiny bathroom.

Dylan tosses his big duffel bag on a bed and flicks on the bedside lamp. Maya paces back and forth across the room.

DYLAN (O.S.)

Why the hell are you so freaked out?

MAYA

I'm being followed.

DYLAN

By who?

MAYA

I don't know.

DYLAN

How do you not know?

MAYA

Because... because it changes.

DYLAN

It?

MAYA

It's not a person, I don't think.
It's something else.

Maya sits down on the other bed and buries her head in one of her hands. She keeps the other hand hidden inside her jacket sleeve.

DYLAN

What does it look like?

MAYA

It was an old lady. Then it was a little boy. Then it was... a monster. Then I think it was a dog... and then maybe a deer. Right now, I think it's the trucker next door.

Dylan stares at her, dumbfounded. Maya looks up to see his confused face.

MAYA

Oh god, you think I'm nuts.

DYLAN

No no no, it's just... a lot to wrap my head around.

MAYA

That's not even the worst part.

Maya pulls down her jacket sleeve to show him her hand. He rears backward in shock.

DYLAN

Jesus!

HER HAND IS A MAN'S HAND. It has a different skin tone and big, hairy fingers.

Dylan kneels down to look at it. Maya tears up.

DYLAN

What the hell?

MAYA

That... thing... licked me. Now I'm changing, too.

Maya quickly covers her hand and rubs it vigorously. We hear BONES SNAP. She uncovers it. It's back to normal.

DYLAN

That's incredible.

MAYA

No, it's disgusting.

DYLAN

So you're telling the truth then?

Maya nods as tears roll down her cheeks.

DYLAN

So something really is after you.
Oh shit, oh shit...

Now Dylan paces back and forth.

DYLAN

How can you tell someone is it?

MAYA

I don't know.

DYLAN

Is it just hunting you, would it
kill me, too?

MAYA

I don't know.

DYLAN

Can we hurt it, can we kill it?

MAYA

I don't know!

Maya cries and balls up on the bed. Dylan stoops next to her
and grabs her hands.

DYLAN

It's all right, there's two of us
and only one of it... I think. You
don't even know for sure that it's
still following you. We're safe for
now, so let's just get some sleep.

MAYA

We're gonna miss the bus.

DYLAN

Fuck the bus. I'm sure there's
another Greyhound station around.

MAYA

I'm almost out of money.

DYLAN

I'm resourceful. And I'm pretty
sure that asshole at the front desk
is sound asleep at any given time.
Should be easy to get that thirty
back.

Maya wipes away tears and smiles.

MAYA

She is an asshole. And screwy.

DYLAN

Totally screwy.

Maya leans upright on the bed.

MAYA

I'm really glad I found you. I don't know how I'd make it home alone.

DYLAN

You'd manage. I've only known you a day and you're a fighter if I've ever seen one. I'm glad I found you, too.

They stare into each other's eyes. Maya leans in. Then Dylan.

They kiss.

The kiss turns into an embrace. Maya stands up from the bed and leans into Dylan. He grabs onto her tight they both fall backward onto the other bed.

They giggle as they pull off each other's clothes in the dim light of the bedside lamp.

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

We look out over the big lot of trucks. It's eerily quiet.

The highway sits in front of us stretching into the black horizon. It's empty.

Soft light pours out of the windows of the cheap motel, a little oasis perched on the side of the vast road.

In front of the front desk office WIND CHIMES TINKLE IN THE BREEZE.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - SAME TIME

Dylan and Maya lay naked under the covers. They're fast asleep. She's turned toward him, her hand on his chest.

HER STOMACH RUMBLES. Maya leans up.

DYLAN

What is it?

MAYA
I'm starving.

DYLAN
Me too, we'll get some food in the morning.

MAYA
No, I'm fucking starving. I need something now.

DYLAN
I think I saw a vending machine on the first floor.

Maya slides off the bed and throws on her clothes.

DYLAN
Get me something, too.

EXT. MOTEL - MOMENTS LATER

Maya cracks open the door. She pokes her head out and looks both directions down the dark, empty balcony. The coast is clear.

She creeps down the walkway as she pulls on her jacket, then descends down the stairs.

Maya stops in front of two vending machines in a little alcove, one full of junk food and the other full of drinks.

She looks around at all the food. Chips, candy, pretzels. At the bottom, strips of beef jerky. Bingo.

She pulls a few loose dollars from her jacket and stuffs them in the machine. She mashes a couple numbers on the keypad.

One beef jerky falls. Then another. Then more. She empties the entire row of jerky.

Maya grabs the half dozen packets of jerky from the slot and rips one open. She takes a huge bite and turns around.

THE BURLY TRUCKER STANDS AT THE END OF THE WALKWAY.

He's got a wicked smile and stares at Maya. He wears the same outfit as before, a thick jacket and big boots.

Her breath quickens. The jerky packets CRINKLE as she grips them tightly.

MAYA

I know who you fucking are!

Silence. He only stares and smiles.

MAYA

Why won't you leave me alone?!

THUD. He steps one foot closer. Maya flinches.

THUD. He steps another foot closer.

MAYA

Stay the fuck back!

THUD THUD THUD. He sprints toward Maya with incredible speed.

She drops the jerky and hauls ass the other direction.

Maya sprints up the stairway onto the second floor. The trucker follows a few seconds behind, his motions jerky and wooden as he clambers up the stairs.

Maya dashes down the balcony. She sees her door several yards away.

She turns around to see the burly trucker standing far behind her. He doesn't move, he only stands in the darkness and smiles.

MAYA

Dylan! Help! Someone help!

Maya reaches her door and flings it open.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Maya bursts into the room. She locks the door in a panic.

She turns around to see that the room is empty.

MAYA

Dylan! Where the fuck are you!

EXT. MOTEL - SAME TIME

MAYA (O.S.)

(muffled through door)

Help!

The door next to hers opens. The burly trucker steps out of his motel room, but he's different. He's only wearing boxer shorts and socks. He rubs his eyes like he just woke up.

He walks over to Maya's door and BANGS IT WITH HIS FIST.

BURLY TRUCKER

(yelling)

What's going on? Do you need help?
I hear a woman yelling, no one
better be hurting her!

INT. MOTEL ROOM - SAME TIME

BANG BANG BANG. Maya sees the door shake and hears the trucker's MUFFLED YELLS outside.

She jumps over the bed and finds Dylan's duffel bag. She zips it open and rummages through his clothes until she finds it.

THE REVOLVER. She raises it up, feeling the weight and power in her hand. She's nervous just holding it.

BANG BANG BANG. The door shakes.

Maya sneaks to the window and cracks open the blinds. She sees the trucker banging on her door and shouting.

She looks down at the gun in her trembling hands as she hyperventilates. She takes a deep breath and steadies herself.

She squares up in front of the shaking door, the TRUCKER'S SHOUTS still muffled on the other side.

Maya unlocks the door and twists the knob slowly.

SHE KICKS THE DOOR.

EXT. MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

THE DOOR SMASHES INTO THE TRUCKER'S HEAD.

The trucker reels backward, clutching his forehead.

Maya aims the revolver through the door directly at him.

BLAM BLAM BLAM! She fires three shots directly into his chest.

The trucker stares at her in disbelief, a bewildered look in his eyes. Then he looks down at his bleeding chest.

HE FALLS BACKWARD OVER THE RAILING. SLAM!

Maya runs up to the railing and looks over the edge.

The trucker's body lies splayed out on the blacktop below. Blood pours from his chest and pools beneath his head where it smashed into concrete.

His lifeless eyes stare into the distance. HE'S DEAD.

Maya retreats back into her room, hands shaking.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Maya backs up until she hits the bed, almost toppling over it. She looks at the gun in her trembling hands.

Shit sits on the corner of the bed and tries to catch her breath.

THUD THUD THUD. Maya looks up to see Dylan step into the door from the walkway. He sees Maya freaking out on the bed with the gun in her hand.

DYLAN

What's going on? Were those gun shots?

He looks over the railing to the dead trucker below. He stumbles backward into the motel room.

DYLAN

Holy shit! What happened?

Maya drops the gun on the carpet and runs toward him. She embraces him with a hug as tears pour down her cheeks. He hugs her back.

MAYA

It.. it... it was her! It was chasing me, I I I had to...

He holds Maya tight and puts his hand on her head.

DYLAN

It's okay... it's okay, Maya. You did what you had to.

Maya bawls in his arms, shaking and shell-shocked. He rubs her back.

MAYA

I think it's dead. I think it's finally dead.

DYLAN

Are you all right?

MAYA

I think so. I'm free, I'm finally free from it.

DYLAN

It must feel pretty good.

Maya shakes her head in agreement, her head still against his chest and tears rolling down her face.

DYLAN

It feels good to kill an innocent man, doesn't it?

Confused, Maya backs out his hug. She looks up to see a strange smile on his face.

DYLAN

Is that how it feels to murder someone, Maya? Did you get a rush?

Maya backs up further. Fear grows in her eyes.

MAYA

What're you saying, Dylan?

Dylan takes a step closer, his smile growing more wicked. Maya backs away slowly.

DYLAN

You've taken your first life, dearie. I remember my first.

As he walks toward her his body jerks unnaturally. He cracks his neck left and right. It sounds like BONES POPPING every step he takes, his smile only growing wider.

DYLAN

To me, it feels like... ecstasy. Every kill is an orgasm. When I smell the hot scent of their blood, ohohoho I get so wet. When the light leaves their eyes, well I positively gush. How wet did you get?

Maya grabs the revolver from the floor and points it Dylan.

MAYA

What'd you do with Dylan?! Where is he?!

Dylan HOWLS IN LAUGHTER as he creeps closer.

DYLAN

There was no Dylan, sweet one. It was always me. Did you think you finally found a cute boy to settle down with? To start your life over? Someone who could keep you safe, make you feel real? That's what you told me on the bus, right? That you felt like you were no one. A hollow shell with nothing inside.

Dylan's back and arms SNAP AND CONTORT. He twists like a marionette having his strings yanked. Crooked, sharp teeth line his mouth as his VOICE CHANGES TO RUTH.

DYLAN

(in Ruth's voice)

No one's real, dearie. I've eaten enough of you to know there's nothing underneath that meat. All of you put on your faces and pretend you're a person... just like I do. But under that mask of flesh... nothing!

THE CREATURE POUNCES AT MAYA.

BAM! Maya fires the revolver but Dylan falls to all fours and the shot misses.

He swoops upward and grabs Maya by the shoulders and FLINGS HER ACROSS THE ROOM.

She slams into the crappy TV. It SHATTERS when it hits the floor, sparks flying everywhere. She drops the gun.

Maya collapses onto the dirty carpet. She looks forward to see the revolver on the floor between her and the open door. She scrambles toward it.

A HAND GRABS HER ANKLE. She turns to see long fingers and then Dylan's wicked smile as he yanks her backward.

MAYA KICKS HIM IN THE FACE.

He CACKLES as blood pours from his nose. She wrenches her leg free from his grasp and picks up the gun.

She points it at Dylan who rises to his feet, his face bloody and his smile impossibly wide. He circles around her, prowling like a cat.

He slashes one of his long fingered hands toward her. She rears back to avoid it. He slashes at her again as he LAUGHS.

She raises the gun and fires. BAM!

It hits his shoulder but doesn't even faze him.

DYLAN

Nice shot!

He extends his hand and rushes forward.

HE GRABS HER BY HER THROAT AND PUSHES HER THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR.

EXT. MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Dylan thrusts Maya onto the balcony by her neck. He presses her against the railing.

Maya claws at his grasp on her throat with both hands, but it's no use. He leans in close to her face, his gaping mouth spewing hot, putrid breath that makes her wince. She turns her head away.

DYLAN

What's wrong? Romeo doesn't get a kiss?

HE PUSHES MAYA OVER THE RAILING.

She falls to the parking lot below and lands directly on the corpse of the trucker.

SPLAT! The body cushions her fall and BLOOD SPURTS OUT OF HIS MOUTH.

Wozy and gasping for air, Maya gazes up at the balcony to see the creature halfway morphed between Dylan and Ruth with a terrifying smile.

Maya crawls off the corpse and turns to see the dead man she landed on. She looks at his blood on her hands and SCREAMS.

She looks up at the railing again, BUT THE CREATURE IS GONE.

Maya stumbles to her feet and staggers through the lot, looking in every direction for the creature. She sees nothing.

Maya looks at the labyrinth of big rigs parked nearby. She sprints toward them.

MAYA

Help! Someone help me!

EXT. TRUCK LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Maya sprints in between the eighteen wheelers which surround her on all sides.

THUD. Something lands on the metal top of a semi trailer right next to her.

Maya dashes away from it. THUD THUD THUD.

It follows her from atop the truck, hidden from sight.

She weaves between trailers and scrambles to the broadside of one. She leans flat against it, trying to hide.

SLAM! IT LANDS ABOVE HER. Maya dashes down the narrow corridor between trucks.

It jumps between trailers as it runs, a dark figure blurred as it leaps back and forth as it chases her.

THUD THUD THUD. She hears it running along the metal top next to her. Maya looks from the top of one trailer to the other as she sprints, expecting the creature to jump down at any time.

She turns another corner in the maze of eighteen wheelers.

Maya runs and runs and runs, nearly weeping in fear and almost out of breath.

THUD. It follows her.

She turns corner after corner, winding her way through the lot of big rigs.

THUD. IT FOLLOWS HER.

Every turn she takes, every truck she flanks, the monster lands atop it and chases her deeper into the truck lot.

Frantic, crying and wheezing, Maya runs into an open area.

MAYA

Someone help me! Please!

The door of a truck opens nearby. An OLD TRUCKER (60's) with gray hair and a canvas vest steps outside.

OLD TRUCKER
What the hell's going on?

Maya runs to him and nearly collapses in front of his truck.

MAYA
Please help me! It's chasing me, we need to get the fuck out of here!

OLD TRUCKER
Slow down, what exactly is--

TWO GNARLY HANDS GRAB HIS SHOULDERS.

They yank him upward with lightning speed over the top of the big rig.

MAYA SHRIEKS. She scrambles to the side of a nearby trailer and scurries underneath it.

Maya lays flat against the ground. Her breath is shaky as she crawls toward the other end of the trailer on the asphalt.

SLAM! The trucker's body falls onto the ground next to the trailer. Maya clutches her own mouth to stop from screaming.

She looks into his lifeless eyes. BLOOD POURS FROM THE HUGE CHUNK BITTEN OUT OF HIS NECK.

Maya slowly crawls away, still hidden under the trailer.

THUD. The creature lands next to the old trucker's body.

We see the monster's bare feet. An old woman's feet.

CRACK. POP. The creature's legs shake as they SNAP BACKWARD AT THE KNEE.

The monster lowers itself to all fours, the front arms and bent back legs on the ground giving it the silhouette of a wild animal. We see that it's in the form of Ruth, feral with long hair and a stark naked. It doesn't notice Maya hiding under a trailer a few feet away.

Maya watches in terror as the the monster prowls closer to the dead body.

RUTH'S MOUTH OPENS WIDE. WIDER. EVEN WIDER. WIDER STILL.

Her jaw unhinges, her ghastly smile literally stretching from ear to ear. Ruth crawls away, pure terror on her face.

RUTH STARTS SWALLOWING THE BODY WHOLE LIKE A SNAKE.

She crawls forward, her huge mouth and crooked teeth enveloping his legs and then his torso. Her eyes roll back in her head as she forces down her meal and writhes in delight.

Maya watches in absolute horror while crawling toward the other side of the trailer.

SLURP. CRACK. POP. The trucker's bones snap and his blood gushes out of her mouth as Ruth crams him into her gullet.

Ruth slides along the body, devouring it from one end and excreting it from the other.

SHE LEAVES A TRAIL OF BONES AND BLACK GOO OUT OF HER REAR END AS SHE SLITHERS FORWARD.

Maya gets one last glimpse of the creature expelling the skull of the corpse in dark ooze. She crawls from under the trailer and stands up on the other side, out of sight of Ruth.

Maya spies the BRIGHTLY LIT SIGN OF A TRUCK STOP over the top of the big rigs. It reads 'TRUCKER'S OASIS: STOP & SHOP' with neon palm trees decorating the sign.

She sprints toward it with all her might.

INT. TRUCK STOP - MOMENTS LATER

A CASHIER (20's) slouches over the counter, a wall of cigarettes and booze behind him. He's got greasy hair, a thin mustache and he's flipping through a Maxim magazine on the counter in front of him. The gas station is quiet.

DING. The bell on the door chimes.

MAYA BURSTS THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR.

She's sweating, panting and clearly in a panic.

CASHIER

Are you okay, ma'am?

MAYA

Call the police! Something is after me, I need help! Please, it just killed someone.

CASHIER

Oh shit...

The cashier grabs a PISTOL from under the counter.

CASHIER

I'm gonna put some fucking holes in
'em if they come in my fucking
store, don't you worry about that.

He hops over the counter, gun at the ready.

Both him and Maya stare out the big windows into the dark
night outside. Maya cowers behind the cashier.

A dark figure approaches the door.

The cashier raises his gun, ready to shoot.

The figure gets closer. We see its silhouette. It's small.

DING. The bell on the door chimes.

A LITTLE GIRL WALKS INTO THE GAS STATION.

She's six years old with fear in her eyes and blood covering
her mouth and dress.

The cashier immediately lowers his gun.

CASHIER

Jesus Christ, do you need help?

MAYA

No! That's not a little girl!

LITTLE GIRL

I lost my mommy and there's a
monster out there...

The cashier stoops low and walks toward the little girl,
trying not to scare her.

MAYA

Stay the fuck back! She'll fucking
kill you!

CASHIER

Are you nuts, lady? She couldn't
hurt me if she tried.

The cashier places his gun on the counter and inches toward
the girl, hands up to show he's not a threat.

CASHIER

Where'd you see your mommy last...
and where's all that blood from,
are you hurt?

The cashier kneels in front of the little girl. He gently grabs her shoulders to comfort her.

CASHIER

It's okay, I can help.

The little girl CHUCKLES. A wicked smile spreads across her cherub face.

LITTLE GIRL

No you can't.

She grabs the top and bottom of his teeth with both hands and STARTS TO PULL.

THE CASHIER SHRIEKS AS SHE PULLS HIS JAW APART. The sides of his mouth split and bleed as she cracks open his head like a pistachio.

MAYA

NOOOOO!

Maya runs to the counter and grabs the gun. She points it at the little girl.

BAM BAM BAM!

She fires three shots, but the little girl shifts the cashier in front of her and the BULLETS RIP INTO HIS BACK.

HE WAILS IN PAIN. The little girl laughs as she skitters up a wall onto the ceiling.

Maya sprints toward the door.

EXT. TRUCK STOP - CONTINUOUS

Maya bursts through the door and runs toward the dark highway in front of her.

She turns around to see the little girl standing in front of the truck stop. She raises up the top half of the cashier's decapitated head by his hair. HIS TONGUE HANGS FROM HIS EVISCERATED JAW.

LITTLE GIRL
 (in Ruth's voice)
 Mommy told me not to play with my
 food, but I never listen.

Maya dashes through the gas pumps and onto the empty highway. She sprints into the night ahead and turns around to see the gas station like a beacon of light on the dark horizon behind her.

THE LITTLE GIRL CACKLES IN THE DISTANCE.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS/HIGHWAY - SAME TIME

ZZZZZIIIP. An electric impact wrench tightens a lug nut.

The bus driver stands over the MAINTENANCE WORKER (40's) who tightens the last couple lug nuts on the new tire. The shredded tire lays on the side of the road next to the dozen or so passengers huddled together for warmth.

MALE BUS DRIVER
 Is that it?

The maintenance worker loosens the jack holding up the bus. HISSSS. It lowers and the bus CREAKS as it settles down.

MAINTENANCE WORKER
 That's it. You're good to go.

MALE BUS DRIVER
 Took long enough.

The worker loads his gear into the back of a repair truck.

MAINTENANCE WORKER
 Listen, pal, I had to drive across
 half the damn state to get here.
 Count yourself lucky you didn't
 freeze to death.

MALE BUS DRIVER
 If I counted myself lucky I'd also
 have to count myself a liar.

The worker hops in his truck and pulls off into the highway.

MALE BUS DRIVE
 All right, everyone, we're ready to
 go! Board up and let's get the hell
 out of here.

The passengers eagerly load onto the bus one by one.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS/HIGHWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The bus driver plops in his chair and looks over his shoulder at the shivering passengers settling into their seats. His mouth moves like he's counting them.

MALE BUS DRIVER

15..16.. eh, whatever. Everyone ready to go? Don't care. We're off.

HISSS. He closes the bus door and puts it into gear. The bus slowly rolls onto the highway.

He turns to see a dark figure running alongside the bus.

BANG BANG. It knocks on the side of the bus. The bus SQUEAKS to a halt and he opens the door.

Maya stumbles up the bus stairs, terrified and out of breath. She holds the pistol loosely in her hand. The bus driver eyes the insane woman holding a gun.

MALE BUS DRIVER

Whoa whoa whoa, what's going on here?

MAYA

We need to get the hell out of here. Now!

Maya walks up the stairs but the driver steps in front of her. The other passengers see the sweaty, wide eyed woman with a weapon. They peek over their seats and murmur among themselves.

MALE BUS DRIVER

Now hang on, you seem a little shaken up. Why don't you put that gun down?

Maya looks out the windows toward the dark highway behind her, expecting to see something.

MAYA

I don't give a shit, close the fucking doors and let's go!

MALE BUS DRIVER

I'm not going anywhere till you calm down and hand me that gun.

Maya points the gun at him. The passengers GASP and shift in their seats. He holds his hands up.

MAYA

I'm not handing you a damn thing.
Now put this hunk of shit into
drive and get me the fuck out of
here.

MALE BUS DRIVER

Listen here, missy, I'm the driver
of this bus and I'm not--

Maya points the pistol directly at his face.

MAYA

I said 'Now!' Get in your fucking
seat and drive!

The driver climbs into the seat, closes the door and puts the
bus into drive. It rolls slowly down the highway.

MAYA

Faster! Go! Go!

He floors it and the bus flies down the road.

Maya looks out the window at the dark highway behind them,
but she sees nothing.

She walks to the front of the aisle. All of the passengers
stare at her in fear or anger.

She scans their faces one by one, paranoia rising inside her.
She raises her gun toward the crowd. They GASP, many of them
ducking their heads.

MAYA

One of you is... her, aren't you?
She's fucking hiding in here, I
know it! Show yourself so I can
blow your fucking brains out!

The passengers SQUEAL and tremble in their seats as she waves
the gun around. Maya sees a frail old man near her. He
quivers as he closes his eyes, clasps his hands and prays.

Her eyes turn from fear to pity. She looks at the gun in her
hand and then all the terrified, crying faces before her.

MAYA

I'm... I'm so sorry, I... It's been
chasing me for so long, I don't
know who's real anymore. I swear, I
don't want to hurt you, but she's
everywhere, she can be anyone... I
can't trust any of you.

You have to believe me, she'll kill me. She'll kill all of you.

A BEARDED MAN (50's) in a nearby seat slowly stands with his hands up. Maya turns the gun toward him.

BEARDED MAN

This woman you're talking about... is she... you? Are you going to kill us?

MAYA

No, NO! I'm not crazy, I'm not a monster. I'm Maya. Maya Dunn. I'm going home to see my family. I'm going to have a fresh start. I'm a real person I'm not... I'm not her. She's not human, I AM! So sit down! I don't want to hurt you!

The man lowers back into his seat.

Maya looks at her hand holding the gun. HER FOREFINGER IS LONG AND DARK. She panics and rubs the finger until it goes back to normal.

She sits in the frontmost seat of the bus and leans against the window. She turns to the side so she can see everyone and keep the gun raised.

MAYA

(to the bus driver)

Drive until we hit Pennsylvania. Don't stop anywhere. Anywhere! Got it?

BUS DRIVER

Got it.

She looks over the passengers who mumble to each other and lower their heads from her sight.

MAYA

Everyone stay calm. It's going to be OK. As long as we keep driving, we'll be fine. She can't get me and she can't get you.

She rubs her temple.

MAYA
 (under her breath)
 As long as I get home, I'll be OK.
 I'll be OK.

CUT TO:

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - DAY

Maya's eyes flutter. Her hand holding the gun droops. She's leaning back against the window and dozing off. Daylight pours into the bus as it rolls down the road.

The passengers all watch her like a hawk, many leaning forward in anticipation.

The bearded man sits on the edge of his seat, ready to strike. The bus driver eyes Maya in the rearview mirror.

HER EYES SHUT COMPLETELY. Her breathing becomes long and heavy. She's asleep.

The bus driver turns his head around and makes eye contact with the bearded man. He gestures with his eyes.

The bearded man nods and quietly slips out of his seat. He sneaks down the aisle toward Maya. The other passengers hold their breath and share worried glances.

The bearded man inches closer and closer as the bus rumbles. He crouches low as he creeps up to Maya.

He reaches for the gun hanging loosely in her hand.

THUMP. The bus rolls over something and SHAKES.

MAYA SNAPS AWAKE. She sees the man crouched in front of her and she panics. SHE KICKS HIM AWAY. The man falls back into the aisle.

MAYA
 Jesus Christ!

She juts up from her seat and points the gun at the man.

MAYA
 What're you doing?!

She waves the gun toward the other passengers who SHRIEK and shrink back in their seats.

MAYA

What the hell are you all doing?! I
told you, I'm not a monster. I
don't want to hurt you!

The bearded man leaps forward and PUNCHES HER IN THE GUT.

Maya doubles over and drops the gun. IT SLIDES DOWN THE
AISLE.

A young woman grabs it and points it toward Maya. The
passengers all jump from their seats with fury in their eyes.

MAYA

No, wait! I had to do it, I had to!
She's after me, I swear! Listen to
me, please!

The bearded man grabs Maya and yanks her out of the seat.

EXT. OHIO HIGHWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The bus SCREECHES TO A HALT as it pulls off onto the shoulder
of the highway. HISS. The doors open.

Two of the passengers FLING MAYA THROUGH THE DOOR.

She crashes to the pavement and turns over. She looks back
inside to see the young woman pointing the gun down at her as
the bearded man and others stand behind her in support.

MAYA

Can you at least tell me where the
fuck I am?

MALE BUS DRIVER

Welcome to Ohio, bitch.

HISS. He closes the bus doors and shifts into gear.

Maya scrambles to her feet. She dusts herself off as she
watches the bus drive down the highway. It disappears over
the horizon.

She looks around her, getting the lay of the land. Rolling
hills and empty fields in every direction along the desolate
highway. Not a soul in sight except the occasional pick-up
truck or big rig.

Maya treks down the side of the road, head low and hair
messy. She turns around and sticks her thumb up.

The passing cars ignore the frazzled woman walking down the highway with nothing to her name.

She walks. And walks. And walks. Her scuffed shoes scrape against the pavement as she trudges forward.

She walks past harvested fields, derelict barns and herds of cows. The sun begins to set.

Maya spies the top of a sign which looms closer as she walks forward. It reads 'STARSHINE DINER.'

She finally sees the building. A classic mid-century greasy spoon on the side of the highway.

HER STOMACH RUMBLES.

MAYA

Calm down.

INT. STARSHINE DINER - NIGHT

DING. The entrance bell rings as Maya walks through the front door. The diner is 1950's themed, much like the diner she worked at in LA. She looks around the completely empty restaurant, the lights on and jukebox playing DOO-WOP MUSIC in the corner.

The double doors to the kitchen swing open. A WAITRESS (50's) walks out with a pen and pad in hand.

WAITRESS

Sit anywhere you like, sugar.

She sits down at a booth next to the big windows looking outside. The waitress walks up to her table with a mug and a pot of coffee.

WAITRESS

Evening, hun.

The waitress sets the cup down and fills it up. She eyes the frazzled woman. Maya notices her curiosity.

WAITRESS

You need a minute?

MAYA

No. You got breakfast sausages?

WAITRESS

Of course. Links or patties?

MAYA
Which is bigger?

WAITRESS.
Patties, for sure.

MAYA
Five patties then. No... ten
patties.

WAITRESS
Coming right up.

The waitress walks away as Maya turns to look out the big windows.

The empty parking lot and highway lay before her. Across the road, empty fields and old barns sit in the dark.

She scans the horizon for any kind of danger.

CLUNK. The waitress slides a plate full of breakfast sausages in front of her.

Maya grabs one with her hand and stuffs it in her mouth. The waitress watches her devour it like an animal.

WAITRESS
Anything else?

MAYA
(mouthful of food)
I'm good.

Maya stuffs another couple sausages in her mouth. She looks up to see the waitress still staring at her.

WAITRESS
I'll, uh... leave you to it.

MAYA
(mouthful of food)
Thanks.

SEVERAL MINUTES LATER.

One more patty sits on the greasy plate. Maya picks up the sausage and eyes it.

HER STOMACH RUMBLES. She looks down at it with shock.

MAYA
Really?

The waitress slides the bill in front of her. Maya lays the patty on the plate.

MAYA

Here's the thing. I don't actually,
uh... have any money.

Maya tears up and her voice cracks. The waitress watches her with pity in her eyes.

MAYA

I'm just trying to get home, and...
I got kicked off my bus, and I lost
all my luggage and I had to spend
the last of my money on a motel
room and...

Maya breaks down and sobs. The waitress pulls the bill away.

WAITRESS

I figured that might be the case,
hun. Don't worry. I got you
covered.

MAYA

Really?

WAITRESS

It's on me, honey.

MAYA

Are you sure?

WAITRESS

Absolutely. This places is off the
highway, so a lot of lost souls
come wandering in here. They need a
hot meal and a place to rest their
bones. Since I've been here, I've
tried to accommodate them. Somebody
has to.

Maya wipes away her tears.

MAYA

Thanks... that means a lot. It
really does. I haven't been feeling
myself, lately. I'm not really sure
who I am or where I belong anymore.

The waitress sits in the seat across from Maya. She places her hand on top of Maya's, which startles her but she doesn't pull it away.

WAITRESS
Honey, who the hell does?

They both laugh a little.

WAITRESS
We take it one step at a time.
Maybe that leads us to where we're
supposed to be, maybe it doesn't.
And if it doesn't, then we just
keep moving.

The waitress stares out the window with a wistful look in her eyes.

WAITRESS
Maybe there's no grand plan for us.
Maybe that perfect version of
ourselves that we dream about isn't
real. Maybe we're just meant to
wander forever, sailors on an
endless sea.

She turns to Maya with a fiery look in her eye.

WAITRESS
But we don't stop. Ever. Even if
we're walking into the mouth of
hell. We don't stop. You got that?

Maya shakes her head in fear, but also understanding.

The waitress turns to look out the window again.

WAITRESS
Life's a bitch. So be a bitch back.

Maya turns to look out the same window.

RUTH'S HOUSE SITS ACROSS THE HIGHWAY. Where the empty field
once stood, now a gravel driveway leads to the blue colonial.

Maya GASPS. She turns back to the waitress.

SHE'S GONE. Completely vanished.

She looks around the restaurant. The lights are off and the
place suddenly looks dilapidated. The jukebox is broken and
plays no music. The entire building looks like it's been
abandoned for years.

With wide eyes Maya surveys the ghostly diner.

She looks back at her plate, still clean and white with a single sausage patty sitting in the middle.

Maya grabs her fork and stabs it. She shovels the patty into her mouth and stands up, confidence in her eyes.

She storms through the front door. From the big windows, we watch her trudge through the empty parking lot and onto the highway.

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Maya trudges up the gravel driveway leading from the road to Ruth's home. She turns around to see the diner.

It's run-down and falling apart. The sign is no longer lit and weeds have grown around it. Maya smirks and turns back around.

She walks right up the front door.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

No answer.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Silence.

MAYA BANGS ON THE DOOR.

MAYA

Is anyone fucking home?! Isn't this what you wanted? I'm right fucking here, bitch. You want me, you got me. Now open the fuck up!

MAYA SLAMS ON THE DOOR WITH HER FISTS.

No response. Maya backs away from the door.

She scoffs and turns around. She marches back toward the road and stuffs her hands in her jacket pockets.

CREEEEEAAAAK. The door slowly opens. Maya turns back around.

She peers inside. Nothing but darkness.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Maya peeks her head through the door. The living room looks exactly the same as before, except there's no fire in the fireplace.

The vintage TV plays a black and white ROMANCE FILM. Sweeping, lush MUSIC plays over the scene of two lovers kissing.

Maya creeps through the living room. She passes the lamp she shattered previously, except it's whole again and dimly lighting the room. Maya gently runs her hand over it.

She spies the pile of firewood and hefty axe lying in the corner.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Maya sneaks through the archway toward the dining table. She stops.

RUTH SITS AT THE TABLE. She looks exactly the same as the beginning. Short white hair, thick rimmed glasses and a comfy sweater. She grips a steaming cup of coffee and stares out the window with a contented smile. The big photo albums sits in front of her.

She takes a sip of coffee and turns to Maya.

RUTH

How nice of you to visit again,
dearie.

Maya cautiously pulls out a chair and sits down at the table.

MAYA

Your house is lovely as ever, Ruth.
It seems to be following me.

Ruth looks around her house in admiration.

RUTH

It changes as it needs to, like me.
It was built in the space between
the hours, in the time between the
miles. Forever at the crossroads. I
don't know which came first, me or
it. But I'm thankful for it,
because it always brings me new
visitors. How are you, sweetie?

MAYA

I've had a string of bad luck,
unfortunately. How about you, Ruth?

RUTH

Better. I've been better.

MAYA

You seem like you've had your fill.

RUTH

I have, but the hunger never goes
away. At the end of the day,
nothing satisfies us truly. We're
all a void that can never be
filled. A deep chasm with no
bottom.

MAYA

Speak for yourself.

RUTH

Why? Have you ever really felt
satisfied? You fled to the end of
the world seeking a dream, and that
didn't fulfill you. So now you flee
home looking for a new start.
You're hoping a husband, kids, a
stable job will fill the dark hole
inside you. But it's just a cycle
repeating itself. Soon you'll learn
they won't fill the void and you'll
be right back here again.

MAYA

I'd rather be anywhere in the world
than here with you.

RUTH

And yet here you are. Because you
don't desire things, you desire
desire. And you'll be chasing your
own tail until you die, endlessly
craving and consuming and
destroying to make you feel whole.
To make you feel real. People think
that God made them special, and
that gives them the right to devour
the world. I harbor no such
illusion. No God made me. I devour
because it is the law of
everything. I don't need to lie to
myself so I can eat. But you...

you need to distract yourself with dreams and desire. Because you know the dark truth underneath your carnival of lies.

MAYA

And what's that?

RUTH

When we first met at that bus station in Los Angeles, you told me you failed as an actress because you couldn't be someone else. You could only be you. But there is no you.

Ruth cracks open the photo album and flips through the pages, admiring the photos of different people.

RUTH

When they wandered into my web, all of them were so sure they were people. But they were wrong. You're flesh and sinew and blood like all the other animals. And when you slide through my gut there's no soul that comes out the other end. Just bones. I have a basement full of proof. You're only dreaming you're a person. I was like you, a very long time ago. I had a name and a single face. I had dreams and desires. But then I woke up, and I forgot.

MAYA

Forgot what?

RUTH

That I was a person.

Ruth sniffs the air and eyes Maya with curiosity. THUMP THUMP THUMP. Maya's heart races

RUTH

I can smell the sweat seeping through your pores. I can hear your heart racing. This has happened to you before, hasn't it? You're forgetting you're a person. You're waking up. You're becoming like me.

Maya jumps out of her chair, knocking it over. She throws the steaming cup of coffee against the wall and it SHATTERS.

MAYA

I'd kill myself if I turned into something like you!

RUTH

No you wouldn't. We're cursed with the same drive to keep living, no matter how many new horrors come our way.

MAYA

Why do you even want me to be like you? Are you lonely? You need a friend? Because that's not fucking happening.

Ruth laughs hysterically to the point of tears. She wipes them away.

RUTH

A friend? No no no, dearie. I've been stalking and feeding for so many years I've completely lost count. I've eaten every kind of creature that walks this world. Except one... myself. And there's never been another 'me.' I'm an anomaly, a singular abomination. Until now. I'm getting tired of eating people. Their meat is bland and their fear makes them chewy. I'd love to try something exotic like me. Who knows, maybe I've been a delicacy this whole time.

MAYA

You did all this for a treat? All this terror just for a new snack?

RUTH

That's rich, coming from a human. You've built a world of horror just to get some new treats.

MAYA

Maybe I'll eat you, instead. I can see how you taste.

RUTH

That's a new experience, too. A theme park ride through your gullet. I've already been inside you once, let's go for a second round.

Maya grits her teeth and fury rises inside her. She pushes the table with UNCANNY STRENGTH. The end of it slams into Ruth and pins her against the wall.

BLOOD SPURTS FROM RUTH'S MOUTH. She smiles at Maya as she grips the edge of the table crushing her.

RUTH

Did I hit a sore spot? Sorry I
couldn't stay your lover boy.

RUTH FLIPS THE TABLE. It smacks Maya who falls backward as the table breaks in half.

The creature rises over the top of the broken table. But it's no longer Ruth. IT'S A COPY OF THE DEAD TRUCKER, wearing nothing but boxers, socks and bullet holes in his chest. He grins a wicked smile at Maya.

DEAD TRUCKER

(In Ruth's voice)

Have you forgotten the consequences
of your actions so quickly?

The dead trucker trudges through the splintered table and broken ceramics on the floor which CRUNCH. Maya scrambles backward as the huge man lurches closer, fear overtaking her once more as her victim looms above her.

DEAD TRUCKER

(in Ruth's voice)

You killed this poor man and shot
another in the back. You say you'd
kill yourself before turning into
me, but it's too late. You are me.

The dead trucker lunges at Maya as she crawls toward the living room. It grabs onto her legs, but Maya kicks him away as she stumbles to her feet.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Maya sprints to the pile of firewood in the corner of the room. She snatches up the hefty axe next to it and spins around.

The dead trucker prowls around her. Maya raises up the axe, ready to strike.

DEAD TRUCKER

(in Ruth's voice)

We've been through this before.

You can bury that deep in my chest,
but I'll still keep hunting. And
hunting. And hunting.

Maya swings the axe back and forth, trying to ward off the creature. But the dead trucker eagerly dodges each swing.

DEAD TRUCKER
(in Ruth's voice)
There's no getting rid of me
because there is no me. I'm no one,
which means I can be anyone.

CRACK. POP. The dead trucker's arms contort. His legs bend at unnatural angles and his head SNAPS to his side. A wicked grin of crooked teeth spreads on his face as blood pours from his eyes.

MAYA SHRIEKS at the transformation and runs for the front door.

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE/WINTER FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Maya bursts through the door and stops dead. Ruth's house is surrounded by a coniferous forest again, except now it's SNOWING HEAVILY and pitch black outside.

Several inches of snow coat the ground and hang on the trees. She looks up to see big snowflakes gently falling. One lands on her nose.

Maya turns around. THE HOUSE IS GONE.

MAYA
Fuck.

She plods through the thick snow toward the trees ahead, axe in both hands.

It's EERILY QUIET. She's surrounded by the winter wonderland, seemingly alone.

EXT. WINTER FOREST THICKET - MOMENTS LATER

Maya lumbers through the snow, pine trees enveloping her on all sides.

A LITTLE GIRL CACKLES.

Maya turns to catch a glimpse of the little girl skittering up a tree. She raises the axe.

Maya wanders deeper into the forest, eyes trained on the tree tops and expecting the monster at any second.

RUTH (O.S.)

What a fool you've been. You want a life free from turmoil, but life is turmoil. You can't escape it. You can't escape me.

CRUNCH. CRUNCH. CRUNCH. Footsteps in the snow.

Maya turns around to see Dylan walking from behind a tree.

DYLAN

You thought I could keep you safe.
That I could bring you peace.

He walks behind another tree. CRUNCH. CRUNCH.

SCHLUUURP. A strange sound behind the tree.

He walks out from the other side, now THE YOUNG BOY.

YOUNG BOY

You thought I could give you a purpose. Something to care for.

He walks behind another tree. Maya turns to keep her eyes on the monster, her axe still raised. SCHLUUURP. The creature walks out again, now in the shape of Ruth.

RUTH

You thought I could help you live a better life. One full of meaning.

Ruth disappears behind another tree. SCHLUUURP. She walks out again, but this time she's in the form of MAYA HERSELF.

FALSE MAYA

But there is no meaning. There is no you.

The false Maya strides toward the real Maya. The real Maya raises her axe, but her eyes betray her shock and fear as herself creeps closer.

FALSE MAYA

We eat. We shit. We fuck. We suffer. We die. We make more of ourselves hoping they'll break the cycle and make this world worth living in. But they won't.

We only doom them to another
pointless fantasy and even more
useless agony.

The creature struts closer and closer. Her eyes turn dark and her fingers grow longer. Her teeth sharpen in her mouth. Maya backs farther away, axe raised and terror on her face.

FALSE MAYA

I've seen the fate of everything in
this world. And for every ounce of
joy there's a pound of pain.
Here... let me show you.

THE CREATURE POUNCES TOWARD MAYA, ARMS OUTSTRETCHED.

Maya swings the axe and CHOPS OFF THE MONSTER'S ARM.

Blood spills from the stump on the white snow below. The creature SHRIEKS IN AGONY. But those shrieks turn to LAUGHTER.

FALSE MAYA

Yes! Make me feel it! Pain, deliver
me more pain!

It pounces at her again. Maya SWINGS THE AXE WILDLY, slicing through the false Maya's ribs. More blood pours out.

FALSE MAYA

More! More! Make me feel sweet pain
again!

Maya swings again, CHOPPING OFF THE CREATURE'S LEG.

The false Maya rolls around in the snow, blood spewing everywhere as she CACKLES IN DELIGHT.

SNAP. CRACK. The monster wrenches and slithers on the ground, its face buried in the snow.

A HAND JUTS OUT FROM HER ARM STUMP. A FOOT GROWS FROM HER SEVERED LEG.

Her head snaps up. HER FACE IS BACK TO THE MONSTROUS VERSION OF RUTH. A wicked smile of crooked teeth, long dark hair and pale skin.

AN ARM SHOOTS OUT OF HER SIDE. THEN A LEG. SEVERAL MORE LIMBS SPROUT FROM HER LIKE A HUMAN SPIDER.

Maya watches the birth of this new horrific form in complete dread, the color draining from her face.

The creature skitters up a tree again using its many limbs and LAUGHING ALL THE WAY.

Maya dashes away from the abomination.

EXT. WINTER FOREST CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

Maya sprints through the trees into a huge clearing and stops. Snow blankets the open field as far as the eye can see.

Maya peers into the distance. A MOUNTAIN RANGE RESTS ON THE HORIZON.

MAYA

Where the fuck am I?

Maya plods forward. She sees a dark figure laying in the snow ahead.

She creeps toward it, unsure what to expect. She walks closer and stoops down.

IT'S A BODY. Laying still with blood seeping into the snow around it. Maya turns it over.

IT'S THE MALE BUS DRIVER. His eyes are lifeless and his throat is slit. Maya GASPS and rears backward.

She looks ahead of her. A DOZEN FIGURES DOT THE SNOW.

She turns another over. IT'S THE BEARDED MAN. His eyes have been torn from his skull.

MAYA

Jesus Christ...

She follows the line of bodies, all of them her fellow passengers. She trembles and tears roll down her eyes as she spots the YOUNG WOMAN laying face up, her body TORN IN HALF.

Maya gazes into the distance. A LIGHT FLASHES RHYTHMICALLY.

She sprints toward it, axe in hand.

Maya runs up to see the Greyhound Bus, nearly tipped over and halfway buried in snow. THE EMERGENCY BLINKERS FLASH ON AND OFF. Maya circles the bus in confusion.

MAYA

What the fuck...

She walks up to the open doors and looks inside.

MAYA
Hello? Anyone there?

Maya climbs up the stairs.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS/WINTER FOREST CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

She walks into the bus with the axe raised.

MAYA
Anyone still alive?

Maya walks through the aisle. Blood stains the seats and several severed hands and legs lay about the bus.

She walks to her old seat in the back. DYLAN'S ANTIQUE REVOLVER sits in the seat. Maya picks it up.

THUD. Something lands on the roof of the bus.

Maya panics and hides behind one of the seats.

THUD. THUD. THUD. The creature bangs the roof as it CACKLES.

SLAM! One of its hands bangs a window. SLAM! Then another. SLAM! Then a foot.

Suddenly dozens of its hands and feet knock against the bus windows.

Maya looks around at all the windows being slapped by the creature's grotesque limbs. They claw at the glass, smearing blood everywhere.

RUTH (O.S.)
No more hiding, sweetie.

Maya ducks out of her seat and sneaks toward the front of the bus.

THE HANDS AND FEET PULL UP AND DISAPPEAR.

Maya stops.

Silence.

SLAM! In a dark blur, the creature jumps from atop the bus to the snow below.

Maya peeks through a window to catch a glimpse the multi-limbed abomination crawling to the bus doors.

The creature slowly climbs up the stairs using its spider-like limbs to pull it forward.

Maya peeks out from behind a seat. She can see the mass of flesh and limbs with Ruth's head in the middle crawling down the aisle, her long dark hair hanging over her face but not obscuring her wicked smile.

Maya looks at the revolver in her hand but her hand has shifted. IT HAS LONG FINGERS AND PALE SKIN.

The creature stops and inhales deeply. SNIIIIFFFFFF.

RUTH

I can smell you changing. Shifting.
Turning into something new. It
smells... delicious.

One of the creature's hands clasps the top of a seat. Then another. Then more. It uses its limbs to climb over all the chairs toward the back of the bus, its body twisting and writhing as it prowls forward, but its head always stays steady in the middle of its mass.

MAYA'S STOMACH RUMBLES. Ruth turns toward the direction of the sound.

RUTH

You hunger like me. Come out and
let's see who eats who. Maybe we
can feast on each other. Devour one
another until nothing's left. Two
black holes colliding.

Maya slides out from her seat into the aisle. She raises up the revolver and points it directly at Ruth's head.

Ruth stops.

RUTH

You found my little toy.

CLICK CLICK CLICK. Maya pulls the trigger several times, but the chamber is empty. Ruth CACKLES.

RUTH

You should've kept the axe.

RUTH'S NECK ELONGATES. Her head bobbles forward as her neck extends longer and longer toward Maya.

MAYA THROWS THE GUN but Ruth's head dodges it as it creeps closer. Maya runs to the back of the bus where an emergency exit hatch rests on the ceiling.

Maya grabs the lever of the hatch and pulls with all her might, but IT WON'T BUDGE. She yanks at it desperately, gritting her teeth.

She looks down to see Ruth's head getting closer and closer as her neck writhes like a snake.

Ruth's jaws open up. ROWS OF TEETH EXTEND DOWN HER MOUTH AND THROUGH HER THROAT.

Maya retreats to the very back wall of the bus, BUT SHE'S TRAPPED. The gaping maw floats closer and closer.

Maya winces and cowers on the aisle floor. The head hovers right in front of her, wicked satisfaction on Ruth's abominable face.

RUTH

It's almost over, this awful charade. You won't have to pretend anymore. You can be what you were always meant to be. Absolutely nothing.

HER MOUTH OPENS WIDE, A CARNIVOROUS SLIT FROM EAR TO EAR.

Maya snaps out of her fake cowering. She reaches under the seat next to her and PULLS OUT THE AXE.

MAYA SWINGS IT DOWN ON RUTH'S NECK.

SLIIIIICE.

It completely severs her long neck and Ruth's head falls to the floor, BLACK BLOOD POURING OUT OF HER DECAPITATED HEAD.

RUTH'S HEAD SHRIEKS IN AGONY AS IT ROLLS AROUND THE AISLE.

Her long neck and mangled body flap around like a fish, breaking windows and tearing into seats as it dies.

Maya takes cover behind a chair as she watches the creature's death throes. It finally stops thrashing and collapses onto the floor. Maya creeps out from behind the seat and walks over to Ruth's head.

Ruth looks up at Maya with a pitiful look in her eyes.

RUTH

What a strange world where even the darkness can die.

HER HEAD MELTS INTO BLACK GOO. It spills out into a puddle. Maya grimaces at the disgusting sight.

She steps over the goo, axe still in hand and stained black.

The mass of flesh and limbs that was once Ruth's body also collapses into dark goo.

Maya climbs over the seats to avoid the mess. She jumps down at the front of the bus and walks toward the stairs.

She stops. She hears HEAVY BREATHING.

Maya turns around to look at the pile of black slime. A HUMAN FIGURE LIES IN THE GOO. Maya stands over it and peers closer.

She can see a small, feminine silhouette in the goo.

MAYA

Ugh... fine.

Maya tosses the axe down the stairs into the snow below. She reaches into the goo and grabs the figure by her feet.

SHE DRAGS THE PERSON OUT OF THE GOO.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS/WINTER FOREST CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Maya pulls the person down the stairs, the black goo still clinging to her body.

SCHLIIIIICK. The person slides out of the goo and into the snow below, completely clean and free of the ooze.

Maya stoops low to look at the STRANGE WOMAN (30's) softly breathing with her eyes closed.

She has blonde hair and a gentle smile on her face. She wears a white dress... a very old white dress. It's simple, almost pagan with ancient embroidery.

HER EYES FLUTTER. They open slowly. She leans forward, confusion on her face.

Maya rears back at the strange young woman waking before her. The woman looks around at the bus and snowy field, then finally at Maya.

STRANGE WOMAN

Who are you?

MAYA

I'm Maya... I think. Who are you?

STRANGE WOMAN

I don't know. I think I forgot.

The woman climbs to her feet and wipes the snow from her dress as she looks at the mountains in the distance.

STRANGE WOMAN

Strange. I don't feel cold.

MAYA

Me neither.

The woman trudges through the snow toward a thick patch of forest ahead.

MAYA

Wait! Where are you going?

The woman turns around to look Maya in the eye.

STRANGE WOMAN

I don't know. What about you?

MAYA

No clue.

The strange woman waves 'goodbye' at Maya. She waves back.

The woman turns back around and walks into the dark forest ahead, snow falling all around.

Maya watches her disappear into the trees.

Maya falls to her knees, surrounded by snow, the half-buried bus and the strewn about corpses in every direction.

She catches her breath and inhales deeply. She looks at the huge mountain range in the distance with a slight smile.

EXT. WINTER CROSSROADS - NIGHT

Maya wanders out of the dense pine forest. She stops.

A crossroads stands before her. Covered in fresh snow, a lonely bus stop sits next to the road.

She eyes the bus stop cautiously as she crosses the highway.

Through the heavy, quiet snowfall she can see the lit up sign of A GAS STATION on the horizon.

INT. SECLUDED GAS STATION - MINUTES LATER

Maya walks through the front door of the gas station. AN ELDERLY CASHIER (70's) sweeps the floor of the aging but well-kept convenience store.

He looks up to see the strange woman with blood and black goo on her clothes, her hair messy and her eyes wild.

MAYA

Where am I?

ELDERLY CASHIER

You're off the interstate. A-2.

MAYA

But, like... where?

ELDERLY CASHIER

Bout a hundred miles from Fairbanks.

MAYA

I mean, like... what state am I in?

The cashier looks at her like she's insane.

ELDERLY CASHIER

Honey, you're in Alaska.

Maya leans against the wall and holds her forehead, smirking at the absurdity of it all.

ELDERLY CASHIER

Do you need help? You look like you might need some help.

MAYA

An ambulance would be nice.

The cashier leans his broom against the counter.

ELDERLY CASHIER

I'll call you an ambulance.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - VARIOUS

Maya lays in a hospital bed wearing the typical white gown. Doctors and nurses fuss over her. They examine her eyes and the bruises along her body. Sunlight pours in the window. She stares forward, almost in a stupor.

WE FADE FORWARD IN TIME.

A couple cops and a detective surround her bed. They ask her questions as the detective writes in a notepad. Maya answers the questions but doesn't stop staring ahead, a blank look on her face. The golden hue of sunset lights the room.

WE FADE FORWARD IN TIME.

Maya lays in bed all alone, still staring forward. Moonlight dimly illuminates the room.

Maya looks out the window. Pine forests and mountain ranges fill the horizon.

INT. HOSPITAL PHONE BANK - NIGHT

Maya stands at a long row of payphones, receiver to her ear. She's still wearing the hospital gown.

MAYA'S MOTHER (V.O.)
Alaska?! How the hell did you get
to Alaska?

MAYA
It's a... long story.

MAYA'S MOTHER (V.O.)
You can tell it to me and your
father when you get home. We've
been worried to death about you,
you haven't called us in days.
We're going to book you a flight
home right now

MAYA
Actually... I think I'm gonna stay.

MAYA'S MOTHER (V.O.)
Are you insane!? You're not going
to stay in fucking Alaska, pardon
my language. What's going on with
you? You sound different. What
happened to you?

MAYA
Nothing, mom. I wanted a fresh
start, and I think this is the
place. I think I'm meant to be
here.

MAYA'S MOTHER (V.O.)
Like hell you are! You're meant to
come home! Your father's going to
book you--

MAYA
I gotta go, mom.

MAYA'S MOTHER (V.O.)
Don't you dare hang up on me! What
the hell is the matter with--

CLUNK. Maya hangs up the phone.

She strolls down the long, sterile hallway of the hospital as a nurse pushes a man in a wheelchair. Maya passes an old woman hobbling forward on her walker.

Maya and the old woman share eye contact and a warm smile.

Maya keeps moving.

EXT. SPRING FOREST - DAY

The green forest floor lays before us. Coniferous trees span out into the distance. There's no snow now. It's springtime.

THE SNOOUT OF A DOG hovers over ground and sniffs. It catches a scent and strides forward.

TWO BIG BOOTS stop on the same patch of ground. We pull up to see--

A HUNTER (50's). He carries a shotgun at his side and sports camo clothing with an orange hat. He's got a thick, graying beard. He hikes forward.

A German Shorthaired Pointer dog walks in front of him.

They weave between trees, looking at the forest floor for small game.

The hunter stops and pulls out a canteen. He twists open the cap and takes a long swig of water.

THE DOG BARKS.

HUNTER
What is it, girl?

THE DOG BARKS LOUDER. It sprints forward, deep into the forest.

HUNTER
Hey! Get the hell back here!

The hunter BLOWS A WHISTLE.

HUNTER
Get back here, now!

THE DOG BARKS IN THE DISTANCE. The hunter peers at the trees ahead, but doesn't see her.

HUNTER
Sonuvabitch...

He trudges forward.

EXT. SPRING FOREST THICKET - MOMENTS LATER

The dog points its snout down a small hill and barks.

The hunter hustles toward his dog.

HUNTER
What's gotten into you...

He stops. He stares at the bottom of the small hill, flanked by huge trees.

HUNTER
Well Jesus fucking Christ...

AN INTACT DEER SKELETON PROTRUDES FROM A PUDDLE OF BLACK GOO.

The hunter stoops low to examine the oddity. He runs his hand along the big antlers of the pristine buck skeleton lodged in viscous dark ooze on the forest floor.

The dog behind him WHINES. He reaches back and pets her.

HUNTER
I know, girl. I don't like it either.

We pull up from the deer skeleton enveloped in goop. We move up through the trees until we finally reach the treetops. We glide over the tall pine trees, a mountain range looming on the horizon.

In the vast forest below, a single plume of smoke rises into the sky. Chimney smoke.

INT. COZY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

We float through a cozy, inviting home. A fire CRACKLES in the fireplace. A book case filled with dozens of books rests next to a leather chair in the corner.

A small stereo plays WARM ACOUSTIC MUSIC on the coffee table. It seems familiar, but also completely different.

The front door CREAKS open. A dark figure stands in the doorway, silhouetted by the bright sunlight outside.

The figure closes the door and walks to a nearby lamp. She FLICKS IT ON.

IT'S MAYA. Blood covers her mouth, neck and the top of her jacket. She looks unfazed, even a little content.

She peers around her comfortable living room. She hangs the bloody jacket on a coat rack.

INT. COZY HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Maya turns on the faucet and grabs the bar of soap next to it. She rubs soap on her bloody hands, cups them and splashes water over her face and neck. She scrubs to wash all the blood off of her.

She grabs a towel hanging on the oven handle.

MAYA

It's getting warm out there. I think it's finally spring.

She walks through the archway to the living room as she dries her face with the towel.

SCHLUUUURP.

INT. COZY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

ETHEL (30's), a haggard farmer woman from the great depression, walks into the living room still drying her face with the towel. She wears an old-timey gingham dress.

ETHEL

God made the seasons to teach us all a lesson. That this dusty old world here is always changing, always shifting. Isn't that right, Elmer.

Ethel walks through a door into a different room.

SCHLUUUURP.

INT. COZY HOUSE - LAUNDRY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

ELMER (40's), a wrinkled dust bowl farmer wearing a wide hat and denim overalls, walks into the meager laundry room carrying the towel.

ELMER

I reckon I don't care much for change. Sometimes I wish I could dip this whole world in molasses and slow it down. Slow myself down. But I just keep changing along with it.

Elmer tosses the towel in a laundry basket and walks toward the door.

ELMER

What do you think, Mr. President?

SCHLUUUURP.

INT. COZY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

ABRAHAM LINCOLN (50's) ducks through the laundry room door and strolls into the comfy living room. With his hands behind his back and wearing his typical black suit and stovepipe hat, he glides gracefully across the room toward the bookcase.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Well this great nation of ours was built on change. If I didn't have the courage to push forward and change the world, we'd still be stuck in the barbarity of the past.

On the bookcase rests a book already pulled from the rest and laying horizontal. Franz Kafka's 'THE METAMORPHOSIS.'

SCHLUUUURP.

The wrinkled hand of an old woman grabs the book.

RUTH (O.S.)

We're scared of the world changing because we're scared of ourselves changing.

Ruth eases into the leather chair, shaky and strained. She looks like she did in the beginning: a sweet old lady. She rests the book in her lap.

RUTH

If we change like the seasons and
shift like the tide, does that mean
we're not a single person at all?
Maybe we're just another bit of
stormy weather.

Ruth turns to look out a nearby window. A vast forest
spreading to the horizon and a mountain range looming above
it all.

RUTH

What do you think, Maya?

SCHLUUUURP. A young woman's hand lays the book on the coffee
table. We pull back to see it's Maya, shifted back to her
original form.

She strolls up to the window and gazes outside.

MAYA

I don't think it matters. We just
have to keep moving.

EXT. COZY HOUSE/SPRING FOREST - CONTINUOUS

We see Maya looking through the window. We pull back to get a
full view of the oddly familiar house.

It's a two story, light blue colonial. RUTH'S OLD HOUSE. We
pull back further to see the house is nestled in the middle
of the dark, vast forest. A plume of smoke rises from the
chimney.

We pull back further and further.

A single highway runs next to the massive forest.

A lone Greyhound bus rolls down the road.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.