

WEALDMOUNT HOUSE

Written by

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INT. AFFLUENT EXHIBIT HALL - NIGHT

The grand opening of a contemporary art show is in full swing. An elegant crowd of art enthusiasts and socialites move about the buzzing hall, engrossed in lively discussions about the mesmerizing artworks adorning the walls, their champagne flutes meticulously refilled by black tie waiters.

The CLINKS of glasses and MURMURS of admiration create a symphony of sophistication.

Amongst the glamour, Joan, early 20s, an unassuming tomboy, stands sheepishly near a cluster of litter bins, deliberately keeping her distance from the fashionable throng. Her eyes are fixed on the main entrance, brimming with anticipation as she awaits someone's arrival.

In a display of arrogance, a YOUNG MAN casually tosses an empty beer bottle into a general rubbish bin, completely disregarding the recycling bin standing right beside it.

Joan's appalled by his disregard. She wants to speak up, but is rendered speechless as he strolls off, oblivious to his actions.

She glances around, ensuring nobody's watching her before subtly reaching inside the bin and rummaging around.

BILLY (O.S.)

What are you doing, Joan?

Joan spins around, relief flooding her face. Billy, early 20s, a charming bohemian with a rebellious spirit and a heart of gold, stands before her.

JOAN

I'm just doing my bit --

She pulls her arm out of the bin, clutching the bottle, and slips it into the recycling.

JOAN (CONT'D)

-- or somebody else's bit in this case.

They embrace.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Where have you been, Billy? I was starting to worry you weren't coming.

BILLY

Sorry. My car's acting up again. It took me a while to get it started.

JOAN

I don't know why you insist on keeping that hunk of junk.

BILLY

It's not junk. It's vintage. And I can't afford a new one right now anyway.

In a swift move, Billy swipes two glasses of champagne from a passing waiter. He hands one to Joan, and takes a swig from the other.

JOAN

So I assume your "vintage ride" is the reason you missed yet another lecture today?

BILLY

Not this time actually. I was occupied with something much more important.

JOAN

Professor Ahuja's going to fail you if you keep missing his classes. You do realize that?

BILLY

No, he won't. I'm far too talented.

He takes another swig of champagne, scanning the hall with a hint of arrogance.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Speaking of talent - where's the masterpiece?

Joan scoffs at his remark.

JOAN

Oh please. It's hardly a masterpiece.

Bashfully, she points towards a specific painting.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I consider myself very fortunate that it's even on display here.

BILLY

Give yourself some credit. You're a talented artist, and your work deserves to be showcased here.

He clinks their glasses together in a toast.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Proud of you.

Billy quickly gulps down his champagne, while Joan takes a more measured sip.

BILLY (CONT'D)

So, is he coming?

Joan pauses, taking a longer sip from her glass.

JOAN

No. Unfortunately he's too busy - as usual.

BILLY

That's a shame. I was hoping to finally be introduced to the man. Oh well, maybe next time.

Joan gives a wry smile as Billy puts a comforting arm around her.

BILLY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I know you really hoped he'd be here for this tonight.

JOAN

It's fine. I'm used to it by now. Work always takes precedence, it's just the way it is - always has been.

Billy sets down his glass and gently takes hold of her hand.

BILLY

Come on. I know just the thing to cheer you up.

With a warm smile, he leads her away.

INT. PUBLIC TOILETS - NIGHT

Billy ushers Joan into a cubicle and swiftly locks the door behind them.

JOAN

What are you doing?

He takes her glass of champagne and carefully places it on the cistern.

BILLY

I want to give you something.

Billy reaches into his pocket and pulls out a shimmering necklace with a star-shaped pendant.

BILLY (CONT'D)

This is why I missed the lecture today. I was busy getting you this.

He clasps it around her neck.

Joan admires the pendant, gently twiddling it between her fingers.

BILLY (CONT'D)

A shining star. Just like you.

JOAN

Thank you. I love it.

Overwhelmed with gratitude, she wraps her arms around Billy and gives him a heartfelt kiss.

BILLY

I know we haven't known each other for long, but in that short time, I've quickly come to realize what an exceptionally talented and beautiful individual you truly are.

He tenderly kisses her, expressing his genuine admiration.

BILLY (CONT'D)

You just need the confidence to believe in yourself --
(whips out a small bag of cocaine.)
-- and this will help.

Joan's instantly reluctant.

JOAN

No, Billy. You know I don't do that sort of thing. My father would be furious if he knew you were even offering it to me.

BILLY

Yeah, but he's not even here, is he? He'll never find out. Come on, half the people out there are doing it. Just try a little - just this once.

He scoops up a small amount of powder on the end of his car key and presents it to her.

Joan hesitates, contemplating the offer.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Trust me - you won't regret it.

His charming smile sways her decision.

JOAN

Okay. What The hell. Just this once.

Joan sniffs the cocaine off the key. She rubs her nose and gags from the taste in the back of her throat.

BILLY

And to wash it down.

He hands Joan her champagne. She takes a sip.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Bottoms up.

He tilts the glass, encouraging Joan to down it. She reluctantly obliges and gulps the remaining champagne.

A merry smile soon spreads across her face.

Billy quickly sniffs a couple of bumps himself.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Okay. Lets go mingle.

He unlocks the door, takes hold of Joan's hand, and confidently leads her out, ready to embrace the social atmosphere of the event.

INT. AFFLUENT EXHIBIT HALL - NIGHT

Billy escorts Joan through the bustling, yammering crowd.

JOAN

Oh no.

She freezes, her eyes fixated on something ahead of them.

BILLY
What is it? What's wrong?

JOAN
Malika Kohli.

BILLY
The critic? Where?

Billy scans the area, trying to spot her among the attendees.

Joan gestures to MALIKA, 60's, a pompous vixen and notorious harsh critic, deeply engrossed in examining Joan's work and discussing it with her handsome young companion.

BILLY (CONT'D)
Quick, let's go over there to hear
what she's saying.

He attempts to lead Joan over, but she resists, pulling back.

JOAN
I don't know if I want to hear.
What if it's bad?

BILLY
Come on, she's probably singing
your praises. Believe in yourself,
remember?

Joan's uncertainty wavers. She yields to Billy's encouragement, takes a deep breath, and they make their way towards Malika.

They subtly position themselves within earshot, their anticipation palpable.

MALIKA
(to companion)
The reason I became a art critic in
the first place, was because I
wanted to be an active participant
in the conversation about budding
contemporary artists - not the
conversation about the rough
daubing's of ill educated amateurs.

Joan's face drops.

MALIKA (CONT'D)

They truly do try to pass anything off as art these days. Even the works of inept shams.

Feeling deeply hurt by her words, Joan storms off, unable to bear the criticism.

BILLY

Joan, wait.

Malika and her companion turn around, startled by the commotion. In an act of defiance, Billy boldly flips them the middle finger.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Fuck you, Kohli.

He hurries after Joan, leaving Malika and her companion in a state of offended disbelief.

EXT. AFFLUENT EXHIBIT HALL - NIGHT

Joan exits the building, teary eyed. She leans against a wall and lights up a cigarette.

Billy comes out soon after. Noticing Joan's distress, he puts a comforting arm around her.

BILLY

Don't listen to that bitch. The only reason she became a critic was because she couldn't make it as an artist herself. Who gives a shit what she thinks?

JOAN

I do. I give a shit!

Feeling overwhelmed by her emotions, she shrugs off Billy's attempt to console her.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I didn't even want to hear what she was saying in the first place. Why did you make me?!

Billy's taken aback, realizing it was a mistake.

BILLY

Look, I'm sorry, okay. I was just trying to help. But try and calm down, okay?

(MORE)

BILLY (CONT'D)

You've had a little coke, and
you're getting yourself all worked
up.

He tries to reach for her hand, but Joan pulls away, her
anger and frustration mounting.

JOAN

No! I wish your crappy car hadn't
started, and you never even showed
up tonight. You ruined it.

Billy's hurt and aggrieved.

BILLY

Yeah? Well at least I cared enough
to show up, because I don't exactly
see anybody else here who gives a
dam - not even your own parents.

Joan glares at him, her eyes filled with scorn. Billy
immediately regrets the hurtful statement.

BILLY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to say
that. I forgot.

She flicks her cigarette away and marches off, determined to
put distance between them.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Joan, wait. Don't leave.

He dashes in front of her, blocking Joan's path, desperate to
make amends.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Please. I'm so sorry. I'm an idiot.
It just slipped out.

JOAN

We're through. You hear me? I never
want to speak to you ever again.

She barges past him and takes off down the street.

BILLY

(calls out)
Joan. I'm sorry.

She ignores him, leaving Billy standing there, crushed and
full of regret.

BILLY (CONT'D)
(to himself)
You idiot.

Dejectedly, he heads off in the opposite direction, filled with remorse.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Joan climbs into the driver's seat, tears streaming down her face. She slams the door shut, starts the engine, and with a mix of anger and sadness, speedily pulls away.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

The car soon becomes stuck in heavy traffic.

Determined to find an alternative route, Joan decides to turn down a quiet side street, completely disregarding the - 'Road Works Ahead' sign.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Joan composes herself, wiping away her tears.

Hoping to find solace, she turns on the stereo, filling the car with CHATTER from a radio station.

She lights up a cigarette while driving, but it fumbles out of her mouth and lands on her lap. Panic sets in as she frantically tries to pat it out, momentarily taking her eyes off the road. Suddenly, she GASPS in fear, clutching the steering wheel tightly with both hands.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Joan's speeding vehicle ploughs straight through an unmanned road works site. The car clips a stack of steel reinforcement rods, causing them to spiral wildly through the air.

One of the rods pierces through the windscreen, shattering the glass.

The out of control vehicle swerves, and slams directly into the side of a parked car, the impact resonating with a loud CRASH.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

A windowless private recovery room. Joan lies unconscious on a hospital bed, connected to various medical devices. Ventilation tubes are inserted up her nose, and a bandage is wrapped around her forehead.

Her eyes flicker open, revealing her groggy state.

Slowly regaining consciousness, she becomes aware of PHILIP, 50s, sitting attentively at her bedside, wearing a highly decorated military uniform. He exudes an aura of stoicism and a stiff upper lip-ness, his expression a mix of concern and unwavering strength.

JOAN

Dad?

He moves in close.

PHILIP

I'm here, Joan.

She looks around her surroundings, her eyes filled with fear and confusion.

JOAN

What? Where am I?

PHILIP

It's okay. You're in a military medical facility.

JOAN

What? Why? What's going on?

PHILIP

Take it easy.

He places a reassuring hand on Joan's shoulder.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Tell me - what's the last thing you remember?

Joan furrows her brow, trying to recall.

JOAN

I was driving home from the exhibition, and then...

She trails off, her memory failing her.

PHILIP

You crashed, Joan. Do you remember?
Can you recall anything about the
accident?

She struggles to recollect and shakes her head in
frustration.

JOAN

What happened?

PHILIP

You drove into a construction zone
and collided with a parked vehicle.
Unfortunately, your airbag failed
to deploy, and you sustained a
serious head injury.

She touches the bandage on her forehead.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

You were rushed to a public
hospital in a critical condition.
It was touch and go there for a
while, but fortunately, you pulled
through. As soon as you were stable
enough, I arranged for your
transfer to this facility, so you
can receive the very best possible
care.

Joan tries to process the information, and then a realization
dawns upon her.

JOAN

The other vehicle. Were there
people inside? Was anyone else hurt
in the accident?

She sits up abruptly, wincing in pain as she clutches her
thigh.

PHILIP

Take it easy. You also have a
significant leg injury. A steel rod
pierced through your windshield and
grazed your thigh. The wound is
healing, but you must be cautious
not to tear the stitches. You were
incredibly lucky it didn't cause
you more harm than it did.

He assists her in reclining back into a comfortable position.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

And to ease your mind, don't worry,
no one else was hurt in the
accident.

(Joan sighs with relief)

But you came very close to losing
your life. I hope you realize just
how fortunate you are to be alive.

Philip authoritatively stands.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

That's why I've made the decision
to take you away for a while, once
you're discharged.

JOAN

Away? Where?

PHILIP

To a place where you can focus on
your recovery, and distance
yourself from your current...
lifestyle choices.

JOAN

Lifestyle choices? What do you
mean?

Philip lets out a SIGH.

PHILIP

I've seen your blood toxicology
report, Joan. I know you were under
the influence of drugs when the
accident occurred.

Joan is rendered speechless, and an awkward silence fills the
room. She begins to MUTTER, but Philip quickly interjects.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

It's okay, you don't have to
explain yourself right now. I'm
just disappointed. I thought We'd
instilled better values in you than
that.

Joan hangs her head in shame.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Now get some rest. I'll inform your
doctor that you're awake.

He exits the room, leaving Joan glumly gazing at the ceiling.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

A pickup truck cruises along a scenic mountainous road, surrounded by lush woodland. The back of the truck is loaded with several boxes and a sturdy painting easel.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Philip sits behind the wheel, wearing casual attire, with an open map spread across his lap.

Joan, now without a bandage, peacefully sleeps in the passenger seat, her head gently leaning against the window with a small stitched wound on her forehead.

Suddenly, the truck hits a pothole, causing a slight jolt that gently bumps Joan's head against the glass. Stirred from her slumber, she sits up and takes in the breath-taking scenery outside.

JOAN

Where are we?

PHILIP

It isn't much farther now. We're almost there.

JOAN

Almost where though? Can you please tell me now? Enough with the secrecy.

PHILIP

You'll find out soon enough.

Joan switches on the stereo, hoping to find some distraction. She tries to tune in to a station, but all she gets is static. Frustrated, she turns it off and flops back in her seat.

JOAN

This is ridiculous. Why have you dragged me all the way out to the middle of nowhere? Your completely overreacting to this whole situation.

PHILIP

Am I?

JOAN

Yes, you are. You're trying to control every aspect of my life.

(MORE)

JOAN (CONT'D)

You won't let me smoke, you've taken my phone, and you haven't allowed me to call or see anyone since the accident. I'm not even sure if anyone from university knows what's happened. Can't you just let me make one call from your phone? I promise it'll be brief.

PHILIP

I didn't bring a phone. It wouldn't be of any use out here. And who do you want to call anyway? One of your new university friends? The one who turned my daughter to drugs and nearly got her killed?

Joan rolls her eyes in disbelief.

JOAN

You're treating me like I'm some kind of junkie. I've already told you - that was literally the first and last time I will ever do it.

PHILIP

Every addict has a first time, Joan. That's how it starts.

Exasperated, Joan slumps in her seat.

JOAN

Mum wouldn't have treated me like this. She would've understood.

PHILIP

But she's not here, is she? It's just you and me now kiddo, and I'm going to do what I believe is best for my daughter, okay?

Joan falls silent, her gaze filled with sorrow as she stares out the window.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Listen. I informed the university all about your situation when I arranged to have your studies deferred, so I'm sure your friends have been told by now. I'm glad you've made some new friends, but it's evident they've been a negative influence on you.

(MORE)

PHILIP (CONT'D)

First the smoking, and then the drugs. That's why I'm taking you far away from them while you recover. It's for your own good.

He notices something up ahead.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

I believe we've reached our destination.

Joan spots a secluded, old house up along the road, nestled amongst the trees.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

The truck pulls up and parks in front of the neglected, large property.

Philip steps out of the vehicle, retrieves a walking stick from the back, and assists Joan in getting out. She moves cautiously, struggling with her injured leg. Philip offers her the walking stick, but she stubbornly refuses.

Joan's eyes land on a weathered plaque mounted on the house, revealing its name - '*Wealdmount House*'.

JOAN

We're not staying here, are we?

PHILIP

This is it.

JOAN

Why did you rent such a rundown place? It looks abandoned.

PHILIP

Because I haven't rented it. I've bought it.

Joan is dumbstruck by the revelation.

JOAN

You bought it? But why?

PHILIP

To fulfil your mother's lifelong dream.

Philip steps in front of her, a wide grin lighting up his face.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

You remember how your mother always dreamed of us moving out of the city one day and living a peaceful life in the mountains after retirement?

JOAN

Yes, I suppose I remember her mentioning something like that a couple of times.

He gently places his hand on her shoulder.

PHILIP

Well, guess what, kiddo?

She ponders for a moment, and then realization hits her.

JOAN

You've taken early retirement?

Philip nods, confirming her guess.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Wait, really? You've left the military? Permanently?

PHILIP

That's right, and I want you to come live with me here. So we can fulfil her dream together.

Joan's flabbergasted by the proposal.

JOAN

Live here? You mean indefinitely?

Philip grins, fully aware of her disbelief. Joan shakes her head in astonishment.

JOAN (CONT'D)

You're unbelievable.

She hobbles back to the truck and climbs in.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Take me back home. Right now.

Joan slams the door and buckles up.

Philip steps up to her window and taps on the glass. Joan lowers it.

PHILIP

Come on, Joan. All I ask is that you consider it.

JOAN

There's nothing to consider. You've clearly lost your mind.

She abruptly unfastens her seat belt.

JOAN (CONT'D)

If you won't drive me back --
 (awkwardly shifts into
 drivers seat)
 -- then I will.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Joan turns the key in the ignition. Philip swiftly opens the door and snatches the key out.

PHILIP

Do you honestly believe I'm going to allow you to get behind the wheel of a vehicle anytime soon? Besides, you've lost your license.

He tucks the key into his pocket, settles into the passenger seat, and shuts the door.

JOAN

So what's the plan then? Hold me prisoner and force me to stay here against my will?

Philip SIGHS, rubbing his forehead.

PHILIP

Listen. I'm not going to force you to do anything, Joan. I only had hopes, not expectations, about you agreeing to live here. I just didn't realize you would be so strongly opposed to the idea.

He places his hand on her shoulder, trying to convey his sincerity

PHILIP (CONT'D)

But you still need some time away to heal and recuperate. I insist on that, at least.

(MORE)

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Once you've fully recovered from your injuries, I'll take you back home. Deal?

She considers the offer.

JOAN

Okay. Deal.

PHILIP

Good.

(opens door)

And who knows, maybe by then you might have changed your mind.

Joan gives him a wry smile.

Philip gets out and walks around to the drivers side.

JOAN

(to herself)

Oh, don't worry. I won't.

Her father opens the door, extends his hand, and helps Joan out of the vehicle.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

The front door, with a single small window, creaks open.

Philip and Joan step inside the dreary house, adorned with rustic furnishings. Philip tries flicking a few light switches, but nothing happens.

PHILIP

Powers off.

He opens the door to an adjacent room, and they both venture in, exploring their new surroundings.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Joan and Philip enter the dimly lit, fully furnished living room. The thick curtains are drawn, veiling the room in darkness.

Philip takes hold of the curtains and pulls them back, illuminating the dusty décor.

PHILIP

So, what do you think?

JOAN

What do I think?

Joan looks around, unimpressed, while Philip appears genuinely delighted.

JOAN (CONT'D)

It's a bit...grim, isn't it? I really doubt this is the kind of place Mum had in mind, you know.

PHILIP

Oh, I don't know. Granted, it could use some sprucing up, but I think it has character.

Joan runs her finger across a dusty cabinet, leaving a trail in its wake.

JOAN

If that's what you want to call it.

She scans the lacklustre room and notices a few empty spots on the walls where picture frames once hung.

An alarm suddenly BEEPS on Joan's wristwatch.

PHILIP

It's time.

She retrieves a label-less bottle of pills from her pocket, opens it, and tips one into the palm of her hand.

JOAN

Is wearing this thing really necessary?

She gestures at her wristwatch.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I think I'm more than capable of remembering to take one pill twice a day without it.

Philip takes a bottle of water out his jacket pocket and hands it to her.

PHILIP

It's just a precaution for now. We don't want you to miss a dose.

JOAN

Why? What are they even for?

She curiously examines the pill in her hand.

PHILIP

I'm not sure. But your doctor prescribed them to you, so I think you better take them, don't you?

JOAN

Alright, alright. I was just asking. I never even met this doctor.

She swallows the pill with a sip of water.

JOAN (CONT'D)

So, what's the deal with this place anyway? Why is all this stuff still here?

(gestures at furnishings)
What happened to the previous owners?

PHILIP

I didn't inquire about that. All I know is that the property was listed on the market as fully furnished, and at a very reasonable price. I can only assume the previous owners either couldn't afford to take everything with them, or they simply no longer had any use for it. Good for us though, right?

JOAN

If you say so.

He CLAPS his hands together.

PHILIP

Right. Why don't you explore the house, choose which room you want while I take care of turning the power on and unloading the truck?

JOAN

Okay.

Philip exits the room, leaving Joan to unenthusiastically survey her drab surroundings.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

Philip opens a door located beneath the staircase.

Steps lead down into darkness.

He spots a torch hung on the back of the door, switches it on, and shines the light down into a gloomy basement.

Suddenly, a heavy THUD resonates from above his head.

Philip looks up, startled.

Joan is standing on the stairs above him, wearing a mischievous smirk.

JOAN

Sorry, I couldn't resist.

PHILIP

Very funny.

She continues to slowly limp up the stairs, while Philip cautiously descends the steps into the basement.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

Philip reaches the bottom of the stairs and shines his flashlight around the dank and dimly lit room. It's filled with a jumble of boxes and various additional furnishings.

The beam of light from the torch lands upon a fuse box mounted on the far wall.

INT. LANDING - DAY

Joan reaches the top of the staircase.

Curious, she opens the first door she comes across, revealing the bathroom.

Joan continues onward, oddly drawn toward a door at the far end of the landing.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

The door opens and Joan enters the furnished room.

Her gaze falls upon several lines marked on the door frame, charting the annual growth of a young child.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

Philip opens the fuse box. He locates the main power switch and flicks it on.

The basement light flickers for a moment before finally illuminating the cluttered space.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

The bulb in a bedside lamp shines brightly, emitting a gentle hum.

Joan switches it off, and steps up to a window overlooking the front of the property. She gazes out, captivated by the stunning view.

She suddenly freezes, her unblinking gaze fixed in the far distance. One of her index fingers subtly starts twitching.

Philip suddenly appears in the doorway - holding a hefty box.

PHILIP

Which room do you want me to put
your things in?

Joan doesn't react, still staring out the window.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Joan?

She snaps out of her reverie and turns around.

JOAN

Sorry. What did you say?

Philip adjusts his grip on the heavy box.

PHILIP

Which room's yours?

She glances back at the view.

JOAN

This one will be fine.

Philip gladly sets the box down.

PHILIP

This is some of the things you
asked me to bring from your room.

JOAN

Thanks.

PHILIP

I'll bring up the rest.

He exits the room.

Joan opens the box and rummages through its contents. She takes out several books and a framed photograph of a middle-aged woman, which she places on the bedside table with care.

INT. BATHROOM - DUSK

Joan enters carrying a folded towel and pyjamas. She sets them down on the counter and turns the shower on.

The pipes in the walls RATTLE and VIBRATE, causing a momentary commotion. Suddenly, water violently spurts out of the shower head, but soon settles down into a steady stream.

Joan undresses with caution, slowly removing her trousers, revealing the nasty stitched gash on her thigh. She tentatively inspects the wound, mindful of the pain.

She turns her attention to the wound on her forehead, examining it in the mirror. As she does so, her fingers twiddle Billy's pendant that hangs around her neck.

The mirror rapidly steams up. The room is filling with a misty haze caused by the hot shower water. Joan attempts to turn it off, but instantly retracts her hand from the scalding water. She quickly wraps the towel around her arm for protection, reaches back into the shower, and turns the tap off.

Pipes REVERBERATE and CLANG as the water flow comes to a halt. Joan unwraps the soggy towel, and tosses it aside.

JOAN

"Character" he says.

She scoffs.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joan is peacefully asleep with an open book on her lap. As her slumber deepens, she becomes increasingly restless, her agitation evident.

The book slips from her grasp and falls onto the floor with a soft thud.

INT. LANDING - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Joan walks along the dimly lit landing. She arrives at the bathroom door, and to her surprise, a bright light shines from beneath it.

She reaches for the handle and slowly opens the door.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Joan cautiously steps into the extremely steamy room, the sound of the roaring shower blasting out boiling-hot water, and the continuous JUDDERING and CLANGING pipework fills the air.

As Joan enters, the door suddenly SLAMS shut behind her, startling her. She approaches the misty mirror, wipes away the condensation, and stares at her reflection.

To her astonishment, her reflection begins to move independently. It calmly raises a finger and writes -- "Evoke Lurking Echoes" backwards upon the fogging glass.

Suddenly, the reflection silently screams and forcefully head-butts the mirror, shattering it into pieces. Joan flinches and backs away, instinctively clutching her own forehead in a protective gesture. She slowly lowers her hand and stares in horror at the blood staining her palm.

Blood gushes from the wound on her forehead, cascading down her face and soaking her clothes. Joan hyperventilates, trembling with fear. Taking in a long, quivering breath, she lets out a bone-chilling SHRIEK of terror.

A sharp FINGER CLICK sound.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joan abruptly wakes, springing forward, her eyes wide open as she stares blankly ahead in a trancelike state.

Suddenly, she snaps out of it and GASPS, immediately touching the wound on her forehead, checking for any sign of blood.

Relief washes over her as she realizes it was just a dream. She takes a moment to compose herself, then glances at her wristwatch to check the time - 3:33 AM.

Feeling reassured, Joan pulls the quilt over herself and settles back down, ready to drift back to sleep.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Joan wakes up to the BEEPING alarm of her wristwatch. She sluggishly sits up in bed, and mutes the annoying sound.

Groggily, Joan reaches for her bottle of pills on the bedside table. She prepares to take one, but it slips from her hand and falls to the ground. She leans over, scanning the floor, but there's no sign of it.

Joan slowly gets out of bed, taking a couple of hobbled steps on her injured leg. She steadies herself and lowers down onto her hands and knees, peering under the bedframe.

She spots the pill between the leg of the bed and the bedside table. Carefully, Joan shifts the table aside, and a small picture frame falls out from behind it.

She retrieves both the pill and the frame, then slides the table back into its original position.

Awkwardly getting back to her feet, Joan gazes at the framed photograph in her hands. It captures a beautiful moment of a man, a woman, and a young boy happily posing outside the house, their smiles filled with joy.

Joan takes the pill, swallowing it with a sip of water, and places the photo into a drawer for safekeeping.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Philip is busy preparing a basic breakfast in the minimally equipped, yet homely kitchen.

Joan enters, still half asleep and hobbling.

PHILIP

Good morning. Breakfast's almost ready.

Joan takes a seat at the dining table and pours herself a cup of coffee.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Did you sleep well?

She takes a sip of coffee before responding.

JOAN

Fine.

Philip serves the bland breakfast and takes his seat at the table.

PHILIP

Did you remember to take your pill
this morning?

Joan wiggles her wrist watch with a smirk.

JOAN

How could I forget?

Philip nods approvingly and hungrily tucks into his food.
Joan opts to stick with her cup of coffee for now.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Joan is seated on the sofa, engrossed in a book, with a stack
of others beside her.

Philip enters the room, dressed in hiking apparel. Joan
briefly glances up, acknowledging his presence.

JOAN

Where are you going?

PHILIP

For a short trek, get the lay of
the land.

JOAN

Oh, I see. And what am I supposed
to do?

PHILIP

You're not supposed to do anything.
You're here to rest and take it
easy, focus on your recovery.

Philip reaches atop the cabinet, collecting a rifle, grabbing
Joan's attention.

JOAN

Where did that come from?

PHILIP

I brought it with us.

JOAN

Why? To do some training exercises?
You've retired, or did you forget?

PHILIP

It's for protection. There are
dangerous, wild animals roaming
these mountains, you know.

He collects ammunition from a drawer and loads the weapon.

JOAN

And if you come across one of these
animals, you're just going to shoot
it, huh? Seems rather barbaric.

PHILIP

What do you take me for? If I
encounter any dangerous animals,
I'll fire a warning shot first. I'm
not a monster. Besides, it's just a
precaution.

Joan continues reading, not giving Philip much attention.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Would you like me to bring you
anything before I leave?

JOAN

Yes, how about a T.V and a pack of
cigarettes? Or at least some books
I've never actually read before?
That'd be nice.

PHILIP

Well, you can forget about the
first two, but I did spot a few
books down in the basement. I'm not
sure what they were, but I can
bring them up if you'd like?

He starts edging toward the door.

JOAN

No, don't worry yourself. I'll just
stick to my own books and try not
to die of boredom in the process.

PHILIP

If you're bored, why don't you
paint? I brought a bunch of your
art equipment from home.

(MORE)

PHILIP (CONT'D)

I thought it would be the first thing you'd want to do here, what with all the scenery.

Joan doesn't look up from her book, remaining disinterested.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

In fact, I think a painting of the house would look great on this wall.

(gestures to blank space)

Really brighten the room up.

JOAN

Landscapes aren't really my thing. Which I thought you already knew, but clearly not.

An uncomfortable silence fills the room.

PHILIP

You can paint whatever you like. The house was just a suggestion.

Joan doesn't respond, her head buried in her book.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Okay, then.

He CLAPS his hands, acknowledging the unspoken tension, and heads out.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

I'll be back later. I shouldn't be too long.

Philip leaves the property, the sound of the DOOR CLOSING behind him.

Joan continues reading for a short while, but soon grows frustrated.

She puts the book down with an exasperated SIGH, and sifts through the stack of books beside her, rejecting each and every one.

EXT. BASEMENT - DAY

The light flickers on, illuminating the cluttered space.

Joan cautiously descends the steps and scans the room. Her eyes land on a small pile of books resting on top of a box.

She approaches the stack, hoping to find something of interest, but her disappointment grows as she realizes they're all children's books.

JOAN

Great.

She sets the books aside and inquisitively opens the box. Inside, she finds more children's books and an assortment of toys. Amongst it all, she finds an old portable radio.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

Joan steps out of the basement with the radio. She extends the telescopic aerial and turns it on.

CRACKLING STATIC fills the air as the radio comes to life.

Joan wanders around the entrance hall, twiddling the dial, attempting to tune in a station.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Joan roams about outside, frustration etched on her face as she continuously alters the frequency, only to be met with persistent STATIC.

An idea sparks in her mind, and she looks up to her bedroom window.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Joan places the radio on the window ledge, carefully adjusting the dial.

Finally, the sound of DISTORTED MUSIC breaks through the static.

With excitement, she throws open the window and swivels the aerial toward the sky, searching for a clearer signal.

A CRACKLY SONG plays over the airwaves.

Joan triumphantly pumps her fist in the air.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

CRACKLY MUSIC blares out from Joan's open bedroom window.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Joan lies on her bed, lost in thought, absentmindedly fiddling with the pendant around her neck.

Suddenly, the music cuts out, the sound fading to silence.

Joan's face contorts with disappointment. She gets up and opens the back of the radio, hoping to revive it by adjusting the batteries, but they are completely drained.

JOAN

Great.

She reluctantly turns her attention to the easel and art equipment stored in the corner of the room, begrudgingly considering an alternative source of entertainment.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Joan steps out of the house, carrying a dining chair.

She carefully sets it down in front of the already set-up easel and art equipment, creating a makeshift outdoor studio.

Taking a seat, Joan prepares her paint palette, her focused gaze fixed on the property.

EXT. WOODLAND - DAY

Philip hikes through the mountainous woodland, his mind consumed with thoughts.

A RUSTLING sound in nearby bushes.

Philip freezes, his senses heightened as he anxiously scans the undergrowth.

Through the foliage, he catches sight of a lurking dangerous wild animal.

Philip calmly raises his rifle, aiming it towards the sky, and pulls the trigger, producing a resounding BANG!

Startled by the gunshot, the animal swiftly flees.

Philip lowers his weapon, turns around, and briskly heads back the way he came, maintaining a vigilant watch over his surroundings.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Joan is immersed in her painting, enthusiastically capturing the essence of the house on the canvas. Her gaze shifts back and forth between the painting and her open bedroom window, which she is portraying as shut in her picture.

Suddenly, she freezes, her unblinking eyes locked onto the house in a trancelike state. Her hand twitches momentarily, before it independently resumes painting with rapid and precise brush strokes, as if driven by an invisible muse.

Joan suddenly snaps out of her trance, wincing and rubbing her temple in pain.

Her eyes widen with fright as they fall upon the canvas. Trembling, she takes a step back, her heart pounding in her chest.

Joan has unwittingly painted a detailed young boy in a black hat, standing behind her bedroom window, with one hand pressed up against the glass.

The figure exudes an eerie presence, sending chills down her spine.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

Philip returns to the house, stepping through the front door. He hangs his jacket up and heads into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Philip enters the room, finding Joan engrossed in her book just as he left her. He greets her with a warm smile.

PHILIP

Hey, kiddo. How you feeling?

JOAN

Fine.

She remains focused on her book, not looking up.

JOAN (CONT'D)

You've been gone a while.

PHILIP

Sorry, I lost track of time.

He carefully unloads the rifle, placing the ammunition in the drawer.

Joan notices some dry paint on the back of her hand and swiftly rubs it off while her father's back is turned.

Philip places the rifle back on top of the cabinet, his gaze lingering on Joan with concern, sensing that something's up.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

You sure you feeling okay?

Joan looks up and offers a reassuring smile.

JOAN

Yeah.

PHILIP

You hungry?

JOAN

A little.

PHILIP

I'll make you something. It's important to keep your strength up.

He heads to the kitchen.

JOAN

Oh, do you know if we have any spare batteries anywhere?

Philip pauses in the doorway.

PHILIP

I'm not sure. Why do you ask?

JOAN

Just for a portable radio I found.

PHILIP

I'll take a look around the house. But if I can't find any, I'll get some when I go on a supply run to town in a few days' time.

JOAN

Thanks.

She returns to her book, and Philip leaves the room.

INT. BEDROOM - DUSK

Joan is dressed for bed, ready to settle in for the night. She walks over to the open window and closes it, a sense of apprehension lingering in her eyes.

Her gaze shifts to the painting resting on the easel in the corner of the room. Curiosity tugs at her. She turns back to the window, and softly breathes on the glass where the boy's palm was depicted.

To her relief, there is no handprint left behind. Joan smirks and shakes her head, feeling amusement at her imagination.

Deciding to put it out of her mind, Joan collects a bed sheet and covers the canvas, shielding it from her view.

She climbs into bed with a book in hand, and settles in.

There's a KNOCK, KNOCK at her door. Philip pokes his head inside.

PHILIP

Just wanted to say goodnight.

JOAN

Goodnight.

Philip spots the covered canvas.

PHILIP

What's this? Have you been painting?

He enters the room, approaching the easel. Joan sits up with a sense of urgency.

JOAN

It's not finished yet.

Philip swiftly whips the sheet away, revealing the painting. His eyes widen as he takes a step back to admire the artwork.

PHILIP

It's looking great. I'm glad to see you took my suggestion on board. What made you change your...

His gaze falls upon the boy in the window of the painting.

Realizing his discovery, Joan quickly clambers out of bed, snatches the sheet, and covers the canvas.

JOAN

It's just an idea I had. I only started it in the first place because I was so bored. I'm not sure I'll even bother to finish it.

She climbs back into bed and starts reading her book.

Philip studies her for a moment, his concern evident.

PHILIP

Do as you please. You don't have to finish it if you don't want to.

He heads out of the room.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Goodnight, Joan.

JOAN

Goodnight.

Philip leaves, closing the door behind him.

Joan tries to focus on her book, but her eyes keep apprehensively drifting toward the covered painting.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joan tosses and turns in her sleep, her dreams stirring up restlessness within her. Her movements become more agitated, causing her to kick her duvet off the bed.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)

The nightmare continues where it left off.

Blood gushes from the wound on Joan's forehead, cascading down her face and soaking her clothes. She hyperventilates, trembling with fear. Taking in a long, quivering breath, she lets out a bone-chilling SHRIEK of terror.

A short burst of furious BANGING on the door.

Joan instantly falls silent, anxiously staring at the door.

The BANGING resumes, growing louder and more forceful, now escalating into HEAVY THUDS.

Joan instinctively backs into a corner, arming herself with a shard of broken mirror that cuts into her palm.

Her hands tremble, but she holds the makeshift weapon tightly, ready to defend herself against the unknown threat on the other side of the door.

Her demeanour suddenly shifts, her fear replaced by an eerie calmness as she watches the blood drip from her clenched fist.

The THUDS from outside the door grow more intense, reverberating through the room with a bone-chilling force.

Joan's expression remains unchanged, as if she has entered a state of detached observation. She casually sits beneath the flowing hot shower, peacefully closes her eyes, and swiftly slashes both her wrists with the shard of glass.

She smiles with blissful relief as blood spurts from her sliced arteries, and washes away down the drain.

Suddenly, the door violently BURSTS open.

A sharp FINGER CLICK sound.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joan abruptly wakes, springing forward, her eyes wide open as she stares blankly ahead in a trancelike state.

She snaps out of it and instantly panics, frantically switching on the bedside lamp and checking her wrists.

Relief washes over her as she realizes it was only a dream. She takes a deep breath, trying to calm her racing heart. Glancing at the clock, she sees the time reads 3:33 AM.

Suddenly, a SONG begins to play on the portable radio on the window ledge, coming through loud and crystal-clear.

Perplexed, Joan slips out of bed and approaches the radio. She flicks the power switch back and forth, but nothing happens. She adjusts the dials, attempting to lower the volume or change the frequency, but the song continues to play unabated.

Joan's frustration grows, and she decides to remove the batteries from the device, causing the music to fall silent.

She places the radio back on the window ledge and returns to bed, intentionally leaving the lamp on before covering herself with the duvet.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Joan is awoken by the persistent BEEPING of her alarm. She groggily sits up, rubbing her eyes, and quickly mutes the annoying sound.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Joan ambles in, still half asleep, gingerly limping.

A simple breakfast awaits her on the table, accompanied by a note placed beside it.

It reads - *'Gone for supplies. Back later'*.

JOAN

Great.

Joan crumples the note with mild annoyance and tosses it aside. She takes a seat, and pours herself a generous coffee.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Joan is seated on the sofa, twiddling her pendant, lost in her own thoughts.

Something sparks within her, and she abruptly stands up, determined and focused. With a purposeful limping stride, she exits the living room.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Joan gathers a pen and paper, and sits at the table. She begins to write a letter, starting with - *'Dear Billy,'* and proceeds to pour her heart out onto the page.

Suddenly, she freezes, her gaze fixed on the paper, lost in a trancelike state. Her hand twitches momentarily, then moves independently, continuing to write in a frenzied yet methodical manner.

Joan snaps out of it, wincing in pain as she rubs her temple. Her eyes widen in shock as she gazes at the letter, realizing she has drawn multiple skull and crossbones scattered across the page.

Overwhelmed by the unsettling imagery, she scrunches up the letter and casts it into the bin.

The sound of a TRUCK outside grabs her attention.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Philip exits his truck, collects a large box from the back and heads to the house.

Joan opens the front door as he approaches.

PHILIP
Hey, kiddo.

She steps aside, allowing Philip to enter.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

Joan closes the door behind them. Philip senses something is bothering her.

PHILIP
Everything alright?

JOAN
What? Yeah, I'm fine.

He hangs the truck keys on a hook beside the door.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Why didn't you wait for me this morning? I would have come with you.

PHILIP
But that would've ruined the surprise?

JOAN
Surprise? What surprise?

Philip grins and playfully shakes the box.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Philip sets the box down on the coffee table.

PHILIP
I know you've been bored, so...

He eagerly opens the box, revealing an old portable DVD player. He hands it to Joan, and then reaches back inside.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
There's a whole bunch of DVDs and CDs in here.

(MORE)

PHILIP (CONT'D)

And I even found some books that I thought you might enjoy.

He passes a few examples to Joan.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

I got it all from this little second-hand store in town. The selection was pretty limited, so I just bought the lot.

Joan appreciatively smiles, touched by her father's thoughtfulness.

JOAN

Thanks.

She eagerly rummages through the contents of the box.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Any batteries?

Philip's face falls with a hint of disappointment.

PHILIP

Oh. Sorry, I forgot.

JOAN

Cigarettes?

He gives her a playful yet stern look.

JOAN (CONT'D)

No harm in asking.

She resumes searching through the box.

PHILIP

I thought we could watch a few films together later. Have ourselves a movie night, or whatever they call it. What do you say?

Joan's a little surprised and intrigued by the suggestion.

JOAN

Yeah, okay. I don't think we've ever actually done that together before.

PHILIP

Well, there's a first time for everything.

He enthusiastically CLAPS his hands together.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Right. Why don't you select what we're going to watch, while I get this thing set up.

He takes the player from her.

JOAN

Okay.

Philip gets busy sorting out the player while Joan begins sifting through the random selection of DVDs.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Joan is curled up on the sofa with a blanket, engrossed in the film she's watching. Philip's seated beside her, SNORING.

The movie comes to an end. Joan checks the time, then selects another DVD and swaps the discs over in the player.

Suddenly, she hears a CAR PULLING UP outside. Joan inquisitively steps up to the window, peering through a gap in the curtains.

It's pitch-black outside, and she can't see a thing.

The sound of a CAR DOOR SHUTTING, followed by FOOTSTEPS. In that moment, an outdoor motion sensor light is triggered, illuminating the area. Joan catches a brief glimpse of someone approaching the front door.

KNOCKING on the front door echoes through the house.

Joan wakes Philip, who GRUMBLES at being awoken.

JOAN

There's someone at the door.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK.

Philip checks the time, and reluctantly gets to his feet.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - NIGHT

Philip glances out the little window in the front door, checking who's there before opening it. Joan stands to one side, out of view.

DARREN, mid 30's, a well-educated, mild-mannered gentleman wearing geeky glasses, stands on the doorstep.

PHILIP

Yes, can I help you?

DARREN

I certainly hope so. I apologize for knocking at such a late hour, but I require a room for a couple of nights. I've tried several places in town, but there aren't any rooms available. One of the locals suggested I try the guesthouse at Wealdmount House, so...

Philip interjects.

PHILIP

Sorry, but this isn't a guesthouse anymore. That must have been under the previous owners. You'll have to try somewhere else.

He attempts to shut the door, but Darren places his hand against it, stopping it from closing.

DARREN

I'm sorry, but I've been searching for hours, and it's simply getting too late to try anywhere else. My only other option now is to sleep in my car - and I fear it's going to be a bitterly cold night.

He removes his hand, signalling his plea.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Is there any possible way you could find it in your heart to accommodate me for just one night? I'll pay you, of course.

Philip considers it. He glances at Joan, who shakes her head and mouths the word "No."

PHILIP

I can't in good conscience just turn you away to spend a cold night in your car. Not when we have an empty bedroom upstairs. I'm sure we can put you up for a night or two.

Philip steps aside, inviting Darren to enter.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
Come on in.

Joan glares at Philip in disbelief.

DARREN
Thank you so much.

Darren spots Joan as he enters.

DARREN (CONT'D)
Oh, hello.

She acknowledges him with a polite smile.

Philip closes the door. Darren extends his hand to greet him.

DARREN (CONT'D)
Darren Taylor.

PHILIP
Philip Houghton --
(they shake hands)
-- and this is my daughter, Joan.

DARREN
(to Joan)
Pleasure to meet you.

Darren shakes her hand.

DARREN (CONT'D)
I can't thank you both enough for
this. I truly appreciate it. I'd
practically given up any hope of
finding somewhere to stay tonight.

PHILIP
What brings you out here anyway?

DARREN
I'm here to shoot the local
wildlife.

Joan rolls her eyes in disgust.

JOAN
So are you some kind of trophy
hunter, are you?

Darren looks confused.

DARREN

Trophy?

He suddenly realizes the misunderstanding.

DARREN (CONT'D)

No, I don't mean shoot them dead.
I'm a freelance wildlife
photographer. I'm here to shoot
them with my camera. Not kill them.
(gestures outside)
My equipment's in the car.

JOAN

Oh, I see. My mistake.

DARREN

Sorry, I should have made it more
clear.

There's a brief silence.

PHILIP

Right.

Philip CLAPS his hands together.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

(to Darren)
Let me show you to your room.

DARREN

Thank you.

Philip leads him up the staircase. Darren glances back at Joan, briefly admiring her as she heads back into the living room.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joan is fast asleep, the lamp casting a soft glow on her face. She starts to restlessly toss and turn.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Joan is blissfully seated beneath the hot, flowing shower with her eyes shut, and her wrists slashed.

The door violently BURSTS open, and two masked intruders, dressed all in black, storm into the steamy room.

The FIRST INTRUDER forcefully drags Joan out of the shower and pins her down on the ground. She SCREAMS, but her mouth is quickly covered by the person's hand, muffling her cries.

The SECOND INTRUDER stands over her, holding a bloody rag with a small hole in the middle. The intruder kneels beside Joan, folds the rag length-ways, and ties it around her eyes - blindfolding her.

Sharp FINGER CLICK sound.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joan's eyes snap open, and she springs forward in bed, staring blankly in a trancelike state.

She snaps out of it, releasing a breath she didn't realize she was holding, her heart racing.

Slowly, she regains her senses and realizes it was just another haunting dream. She looks around the room, reassuring herself she's safe and sound.

Joan composes herself and checks the time - 3:33 AM.

The same SONG suddenly plays loud and clear on the radio.

Joan's heart skips a beat, and her fearful gaze turns to the radio on the window ledge.

She resolutely springs out of bed and frantically tries to make it stop, pressing every button, and turning every dial, but nothing works. Panic rises within her as she realizes the device doesn't even have any batteries.

In a moment of frustration and terror, Joan lifts the radio above her head, ready to smash it on the ground. But the song abruptly ceases, leaving behind a deafening silence.

She lowers the radio slowly, suspicion filling her eyes. She places it back on the window ledge and cautiously returns to bed.

STATIC fills the room.

With bated breath, Joan turns back, her eyes fixated on the radio. A GARBLED VOICE gradually tunes in, sending chills down her spine.

A CHILD'S VOICE emanates from the radio, filled with fear and desperation.

CHILD (V.O.)
 (on radio)
 Mummy? Help me, Mummy.

Joan's blood runs cold as she listens to the plea for help.

Suddenly, a hand grabs Joan's shoulder from behind, causing her to YELP in fright. She spins around, her eyes wide with fear, only to find Philip standing before her in his pyjamas, half asleep and clutching his chest.

The radio instantly falls silent.

PHILIP
 Damn it, Joan. You nearly gave me a heart attack. What's going on in here? What's all the commotion about?

JOAN
 Did you just hear that?

PHILIP
 Hear what?

JOAN
 The child's voice on the radio. They were calling for help.

They both look at the radio, now silent and innocent.

PHILIP
 I didn't hear anything. Just you stomping around in here. I thought you said it wasn't working anyway.

Joan is agitated and afraid. Philip grows concerned.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
 What's wrong, Joan? What's going on?

Philip's concern deepens as Joan remains reluctant to answer his pressing question.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
 Talk to me.

JOAN
 I know you're going to say I'm crazy, but... I think this house is haunted.

Philip's expression contorts with scepticism.

PHILIP

Haunted? You mean like ghosts?

He scoffs, dismissing the notion as ridiculous.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

There's no such thing, Joan.

JOAN

Listen to me. Just before you came in, I heard a child's voice on the radio. And for the past two nights, at the exact same time, the same song has played, even with no batteries in it.

PHILIP

So, what are you telling me? That the radio's haunted?

Realizing Philip's disbelief, Joan strides over to the covered canvas, and whips the sheet away.

JOAN

That's not all

She points directly at the boy in the window.

JOAN (CONT'D)

You see the kid?

Philip peers closely at the painting.

PHILIP

Yes, I saw it.

JOAN

I didn't paint that. Well, I did, but I wasn't in control. It was as if something took over my hand and painted it against my will. Then, the same thing happened the next day when I was writing a letter in the kitchen, but that time I...

Philip interrupts.

PHILIP

Who were you writing a letter to?

Joan hesitates, her voice filled with unease.

JOAN

What? It doesn't matter who. All that matters is that there's something wrong with this house.

Philip gently places his hand on her shoulder, attempting to comfort her.

PHILIP

It's okay, calm down. I think I know what's going on here.

JOAN

You do?

PHILIP

Yes. It's probably all related to your head injury. Maybe you were discharged from hospital too early. Your road to recovery may take longer than we thought.

Joan's frustration builds.

JOAN

I knew you'd think something like this. That's why I didn't tell you about any of this earlier. It's...

Philip interrupts, his tone gentle yet decisive.

PHILIP

It's late, Joan - and you clearly need to get some rest.

JOAN

But...

PHILIP

We'll talk more about this in the morning. Goodnight.

He exits the room, closing the door behind him. Joan is left alone, feeling scared and vexed.

She covers the painting with the sheet and retreats to her bed, curling up under the duvet.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Joan's BEEPING alarm startles her awake. She groggily rises from bed and reaches for her morning pill, swallowing it with a HEAVY SIGH.

The sound of a CAR BOOT SHUTTING catches her attention. Curious, she moves towards the window and peers outside.

Darren has just collected his sleek camera bag from his parked car. He opens the passenger door, rummages through the glovebox, and retrieves a packet of cigarettes. He lights one up, savouring the first puff before returning the pack to its original place.

Joan's eyes light up.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

Joan hides out of view at the top of the stairs. She waits patiently, her eyes fixated on the entrance below.

Darren enters through the front door, carrying his camera bag. He hangs his car keys on the hook, and proceeds into the living room, unaware of Joan's presence.

With calculated stealth, Joan begins her descent down the staircase, each step carefully placed to minimize any noise.

She reaches the bottom and cautiously surveys the area, making sure the coast is clear. Satisfied, she swiftly snatches Darren's car keys from the hook, and slips out the front door, unnoticed.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Joan briskly limps her way toward Darren's car.

She unlocks the vehicle, opens the door and reaches into the glovebox.

A gleeful smile spreads across her face as she retrieves the packet of cigarettes from within. But her excitement grows even further as she spots something else tucked away at the back.

Joan's anticipation grows as she reaches in again, retrieving a mobile phone. She quickly glances around, ensuring no one is watching, before quietly shutting the car door and ducking down out of sight.

She eagerly turns the phone on, but her excitement is soon dampened as she discovers a pattern lock on the device. Undeterred, she breathes on the screen several times, adjusting its angle to catch the light.

As she breathes, faint fingertip smudge lines appear across the glass.

Joan follows the lines with her finger, attempting various configurations until she successfully draws the correct pattern to unlock the phone.

She punches in a number and tries to make a call, only to be met with disappointment as it won't connect – the signal bar indicating zero.

JOAN

Great.

Frustration briefly washes over her, but an idea sparks in her mind, and she looks up at her bedroom window.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Joan softly closes her bedroom door, steps up to the window, and throws it open.

Holding the phone up to the sky, she moves it around, intently monitoring the signal bar.

A single bar briefly flashes on the screen. Encouraged by this momentary connection, she shifts the radio aside, and awkwardly pulls herself up onto the ledge, her grip firm on the window frame. Balancing carefully, she extends her arm, holding the phone aloft, desperately seeking a stable signal.

A solid bar appears, and without hesitation, Joan hits redial.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

The living room is in disarray, with dirty dishes and empty beer bottles scattered around. Billy, looking dishevelled and still fully dressed, is fast asleep on a sofa.

The muffled sound of a mobile phone RINGING breaks the silence.

Groggily, Billy wakes, his eyes bleary and head pounding. He drowsily searches for the ringing phone, rummaging around the sofa until he finally finds it wedged between the cushions.

The screen displays an "*Unknown number*," causing Billy to GROAN in annoyance.

BILLY

This had better be good.

He answers the call, rubbing his aching temple to soothe the pain.

BILLY (CONT'D)
(on phone)
Hello.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Joan remains perched on the window ledge, leaning a little further out as she holds the phone against her ear, straining to hear.

JOAN
Hello? Billy? It's Joan.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Billy flumps back on the sofa, shutting his tired eyes in irritation.

BILLY
Whoever this is, the reception's
shit. I can barely hear you. I'm
going to hang up now.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Joan adjusts her grip on the window frame, steadying herself.

JOAN
No, wait.

She puts the phone on loudspeaker and raises it towards the sky, attempting to improve the reception.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Can you hear me now?

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Billy's drowsy demeanour transforms into alertness as he sits forward, the signal improving.

BILLY
Joan? Is that you?

He springs to his feet, pacing around the room in an attempt to enhance the reception.

BILLY (CONT'D)

The signal sucks. Where are you?
What's going on? I've been trying
to get hold of you for days.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Joan's outstretched arm aches, but she perseveres, unwilling to lower it for fear of losing the connection.

JOAN

I'm sorry. I wanted to call you but my Father took my phone, and hasn't allowed me to contact anyone since the accident. Then he insisted on taking me to this house he bought out in the middle of nowhere to recuperate.

BILLY (V.O.)

(from phone)

Sorry, did you say accident? What accident?

JOAN

The car crash I was involved in.
You do know about it, right?

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Billy's pacing halts as he processes Joan's revelation.

BILLY

You were in a car crash? When? What happened? Are you okay?

JOAN (V.O.)

(from phone)

Don't worry, I'm fine. But I don't understand. I thought somebody at the university would have inform you about the accident by now.

BILLY

Nobody from the university knows anything about your accident either - trust me. All they know is that you quit.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Joan's expression turns to a puzzled frown.

JOAN

Quit? I haven't quit. My studies have only been deferred until I'm ready to return.

BILLY (V.O.)

(from phone)

That's not what Professor Ahuja was told. He was informed you'd quit - like permanently. Without being given any reason or explanation.

Her scowl deepens, realizing her father lied to her.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

Philip stands at the bottom of the staircase.

PHILIP

(calls out)

Joan, you awake?

There's no reply, so he proceeds up the steps.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Billy plonks back down on the sofa, a mix of concern and relief visible on his face.

BILLY

I thought you'd quit because of that stupid fucking fight we had. I've been going out of my mind wanting to tell you how sorry I am. I really...

Joan interrupts.

JOAN (V.O.)

(from phone)

You have to come and get me - as soon as possible.

Billy is taken aback by Joan's urgent request.

BILLY

Alright. But why? What's going on?

JOAN (V.O.)
(from phone)
My Father's trying to control my
life - that's what's going on. Plus
there's something strange happening
in this house. I'll explain later.
Just come - as quick as you can.

INT. LANDING - DAY

Philip reaches the top of the stairs and proceeds along the
landing towards Joan's bedroom.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Billy springs into action, swiftly finding his shoes and
slipping them on.

BILLY
I'll leave right now.

He grabs his car keys from off the coffee table.

BILLY (CONT'D)
Just tell me where you are.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Joan's face reflects a disheartening realization.

JOAN
I don't exactly know.

BILLY (V.O.)
(from phone)
You don't know where you are?

JOAN
I was asleep for most of the
journey, and my father refused to
tell me where he was taking me. It
was about a four or five-hour drive
north, I think. It's a secluded,
old house in the mountains
somewhere, surrounded by forest.
The property has a name.

She thinks for a moment, trying to recall it.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Wealdmount. The name of the
property is Wealdmount House. My
father recently bought it. See if
you can find anything about the
sale online. Check...

The bedroom door suddenly opens. Philip spots Joan on the
ledge with the phone, interrupting the conversation.

PHILIP
Joan!

Startled, Joan loses her grip on the window frame, and falls
out of the window, knocking the radio out with her.

In a split second, Philip leaps across the room, and manages
to snatch hold of Joan's ankle, just in the nick of time.

Joan YELPS with excruciating agony.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

The radio and mobile phone CRASH and SMASH on the hard ground
below.

Joan dangles precariously out the window, grimacing in pain
and tightly grasping her injured thigh.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Billy presses the phone against his ear, anxiously trying to
reach Joan.

BILLY
Joan, you there? Joan?

He realizes the call has ended. He attempts to ring back, but
the line won't connect.

Billy quickly unearths his laptop from beneath a pile of
dirty clothes. He flips it open and types 'Wealdmount House
Sale' into a search engine.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Philip carefully hauls Joan back inside, her winces and
GROANS revealing her discomfort. He lifts her off the window
ledge and gently sits her down on the bed.

PHILIP

Who were you talking to?

Joan remains silent, glaring at him.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Who, I said?

JOAN

A friend from university.

PHILIP

What did they say? What did they tell you?

JOAN

The truth.

Despite the pain, Joan gets to her feet, pushing away Philip's attempts to help her stand.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I know you didn't defer my studies - you terminated them. You didn't even inform the university about my accident. Nobody knew anything about it. You lied to me.

PHILIP

Look, I understand you must be pretty upset right now, but please, let me explain.

He attempts to place his hand on Joan's shoulder, but she beats it away.

JOAN

There's no need for explanation. I already know why you did it. I just can't believe you actually did. You didn't just hope I'd agree to live here - you were planning on it.

PHILIP

I'm sorry I lied, but I was only doing what I thought was best for you.

JOAN

Do you seriously think tearing me away from my life, and hiding me away in this place is what's best for me?

PHILIP

I did at the time, but you were right, I over reacted. You have to understand, I only did it because I love you, Joan. You're my daughter, and you needed my help. I even took early retirement to do so.

JOAN

I didn't ask you to do that. Besides, why now? Where were you when I really needed you? Where were you after Mum died? That's when I needed your help, but you were never there. You were always too busy with work, leaving me to grieve her all alone.

Philip notices something and points at her leg, concerned.

PHILIP

You're bleeding.

Joan looks at her injured thigh, seeing blood seeping through her trousers.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Your stitches must have torn.

He attempts to assist her back to the bed.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Sit down. Let me take a look.

JOAN

No!

She shoves him away, asserting her independence.

JOAN (CONT'D)

If you really want to help me, then stop trying to control my life - and get out of my room.

Philip puts up little resistance as Joan forcefully ushers him out the door.

INT. LANDING - DAY

Joan pushes Philip out of her room, and SLAMS the door shut in his face.

PHILIP
 (through door)
 Joan, I'm sorry, but you have to
 let me take a look at your leg. The
 wound may require re-stitching.

Silence.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
 Joan.

He softly KNOCKS on the door.

JOAN (O.S.)
 Leave me alone.

Resigned to the fact that he can't force her to accept his
 help, Philip reluctantly marches off.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Joan sits on the edge of the bed, and carefully pulls her
 trousers down to inspect her thigh. The wound has partially
 reopened, and a steady trickle of blood rolls down her leg.

There's a KNOCK at the door.

JOAN
 I said, leave me alone.

DARREN (O.S.)
 Sorry. It's Darren. The wildlife
 photographer. Your father ask me to
 bring this med-kit up to you.

JOAN
 Oh, okay. Just leave it by the
 door, thanks.

DARREN (O.S.)
 He told me about what just
 happened. Are you all right? He
 said he thinks you might have torn
 some stitches?

JOAN
 Yeah, maybe.

DARREN (O.S.)
 Do you need some assistance? I have
 a little suturing experience.

(MORE)

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

Well, I did one year of veterinary school before dropping out. I'm happy to take a look at it, if you'd like?

Joan anxiously glares at her bloody wound, considering Darren's offer.

JOAN

Yeah, okay.

She modestly covers her bare thighs with the duvet.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Come in.

Darren enters, holding a large med-kit, greeting Joan with a friendly smile. He kneels in front of her, and gestures at her legs.

DARREN

Which one is it?

She uncovers her injured thigh, and Darren inspects the wound.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Okay. You've definitely torn a few stitches. It requires immediate suturing.

He opens the fully equipped military issue med-kit.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Shall I proceed?

Joan agreeably nods, falls back on the bed, and covers her eyes with her forearm.

JOAN

Just get it over with.

Darren preps what he requires to perform the suturing.

JOAN (CONT'D)

So, what did my father actually tell you?

DARREN

Just that you'd recently sustained some injuries in a car accident, and that you may have torn some stitches after nearly falling out of a window, while making a call on what he assumes was my phone - which is now all smashed up.

Joan blushes, feeling embarrassed. She uncovers her eyes and sits up.

JOAN

I'm really sorry about that. I was only borrowing it to make one call. I was planning on putting it straight back. I'll pay you for a new one of course.

DARREN

Don't worry about it. All those years pointlessly paying for insurance is finally going to pay off.

He smiles, putting Joan at ease.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Though I am curious as to how you knew it was in my car in the first place.

JOAN

I didn't. I found it when I was searching for your cigarettes. I saw you lighting one up this morning.

DARREN

You were after the cigarettes. Why didn't you just ask me for one?

JOAN

I didn't want my father to find out. He doesn't approve and is trying to make me quit.

Darren nods understandingly. He's ready to begin suturing.

DARREN

Alright, let's get this taken care of. Brace yourself - this is likely to sting somewhat.

He gently sterilizes the wound with alcohol wipes. Joan tenses up, cringing with pain.

Darren collects the prepared needle and thread.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Ready?

Joan lays back and covers her eyes again.

JOAN

Yes.

With utmost care, Darren pierces the wound with the needle, and proceeds to stitch it back up. Joan winces slightly with each stitch, feeling ill at ease.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Talk to me. Help take my mind off it.

DARREN

Oh, okay. What would you like to talk about?

JOAN

I don't know. Anything.

Darren notices Joan's framed photograph of the middle-aged woman on the bedside table.

DARREN

Who's the woman in the photograph?
She's very beautiful.

Joan peeks out from beneath her arm.

JOAN

My mother.

DARREN

Of course. I can see the resemblance.

He concentrates on stitching, realizing he just unintentionally told Joan he thinks she's beautiful too.

DARREN (CONT'D)

So, where is she? Why's she not here with the two of you?

JOAN

She was killed in a hit and run accident a couple of years ago.

Darren pauses, feeling empathy for Joan's loss.

DARREN

Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to...

JOAN

It's okay, but could we change the subject? I really don't want to talk about it right now.

DARREN

Of course. I'm nearly done here anyway.

He finishes up, cutting off the excess thread with scissors.

DARREN (CONT'D)

There, all done - and a pretty good job if I do say so myself.

Joan inspects the re-stitched wound while Darren packs up the med-kit.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Though I do advise you to take it easy on that leg. My stitching's perfectly adequate, but I'm certainly no expert.

JOAN

Thank you, Darren. I really appreciate it.

DARREN

Anytime.

Joan carefully pulls her trousers back up.

Darren spots the art equipment and covered canvas in the corner of the room, casually stepping over to it.

DARREN (CONT'D)

I see you're something of a painter then, are you?

JOAN

Kind of.

He takes hold of the sheet covering the painting.

DARREN

May I?

Joan hesitantly agrees.

Darren pulls the sheet away and gazes at the picture, taking a closer look at the boy in the window.

DARREN (CONT'D)
So, this is the boy you
involuntarily painted, is it?

She's surprised he knows.

DARREN (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I do have to confess to
overhearing some of your
conversation last night with your
father. It wasn't intentional, I'm
just a very light sleeper - and you
were rather loud.

Joan feels awkward, unsure what to say.

DARREN (CONT'D)
So, you believe something
supernatural caused you to paint
this, do you?

He gestures at the boy in the painting.

JOAN
I don't know - maybe. My father
thinks its complete nonsense. He
reckons its all related to my head
injury, but I'm not so sure.
(stares at the boy)
I think it's the boy who use to
live in this house, and I fear
something bad might of happened to
him here.

Joan senses Darren's scepticism. Her self-doubt grows. She laughs nervously, feeling foolish.

JOAN (CONT'D)
You probably think I'm crazy too.

Her apprehension grows as she questions her sanity.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Maybe I am. Maybe I'm just going
out of my mind.

Darren offers some reassurance, trying to alleviate her anxiety.

DARREN

On the contrary. I've heard about people experiencing these sorts of things before. I'm not saying I believe in the supernatural, and ghosts, and what not, but I certainly don't discount the possibility. It's good to keep an open mind.

They hear a VEHICLE DRIVING AWAY outside.

Joan hurriedly hobbles to the window, peering out to see Philip driving off in his truck. Darren stands beside her.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Where's he going?

JOAN

I don't know.

She HUFFS and carefully plonks herself down on the bed.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I can't believe he's just gone off and left me here with you. No offense, but you could be a psychotic killer for all he knows.

DARREN

Look, if my presence here makes you feel uncomfortable in anyway, I'll leave, right now if you want me to. I more than understand.

He edges toward the door, showing his willingness to respect Joan's feelings.

JOAN

No, it's okay. Don't leave. I'd really rather not be alone here.

DARREN

Okay, then I'll gladly stay and keep you company until your father returns --

He steps away from the door and back over to the canvas.

DARREN (CONT'D)

-- and to put your mind at ease, don't worry, I'm not a psycho killer - not anymore anyway.

Joan smirks, appreciating his attempt at humour.

Darren gazes at the painting.

DARREN (CONT'D)

So, are you going to finish it?

She earnestly shakes her head.

JOAN

No. I'm too scared to even pick up a pen.

DARREN

Well, perhaps that's exactly why you should finish it. You can't live in fear of something that may or may not occur. But if it does, then at least I'll be here to observe what happens this time, which may help you to understand what's actually going on.

Joan's not convinced. Darren steps up to her.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Consider it a form of artistic investigation.

(offers her his hand)

Come on, I'll be right beside you.

She hesitates for a moment, then takes Darren's hand, and he helps her up on her feet.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Joan is sat on a dining chair, completely engrossed in her painting of the house. Her brush moves with a steady, confident hand. The picture is nearly complete.

Darren is sat beside her, patiently observing.

He glances at his watch and stands up to stretch his legs. Joan pauses for a moment, concerned about taking up his time.

JOAN

Sorry, nothing seems to be happening this time. You must be getting pretty bored by now.

DARREN

Not at all. It's fascinating just watching you work. You're extremely talented, you know?

JOAN

Thank you. But aren't I keeping you from your wildlife photographs?

DARREN

I believe it's fair to say you've piqued my interest. Besides, sometimes the most captivating moments aren't found in the wild, but within the human mind.

Darren reaches into his pocket, takes out a packet of cigarettes, and offers one to Joan. Her face lights up with appreciation.

DARREN (CONT'D)

I've been waiting for you to ask for one.

Joan gratefully takes a cigarette.

JOAN

I was waiting for you to offer. After smashing your phone, I thought it would be a bit presumptuous of me to ask.

He lights her cigarette, and then one for himself. Joan takes a long, gratifying first drag.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Thank you so much. I haven't had one for days. Just don't tell my father. For both our sakes.

DARREN

Don't worry. It'll be our little secret.

She continues painting, casually smoking her cigarette. Darren sits and watches on, enjoying the peaceful moment.

Suddenly, Joan freezes up, mid brushstroke, and stares at the canvas in a trancelike state. The lit cigarette falls from her fingertips.

Darren looks at her with concern.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Joan?

Her brush-holding hand suddenly twitches, then independently resumes painting, swiftly flicking the brush back and forth between the palette and canvas, erratically smearing paint all over the picture.

Darren stands and observes, fascinated - but a look of great trepidation soon grows on his face.

Joan snaps out of her trance and winces, intensely rubbing her temple. The instant she looks upon the canvas, she GASPS with fright, leaping out of her chair and falling to the ground.

Darren rushes to her aid.

They both apprehensively stare at the harrowing painting of two hideously burnt, shadowy figures standing amidst a blaze of hellish fire.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Joan eagerly peers out the window, anxiously awaiting Philip's return.

Darren enters from the entrance hall.

DARREN
Any sign of him yet?

JOAN
No.

She limps over to the sofa, and Darren helps her sit.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Where did you put it?

DARREN
Down in the basement - covered up
just like you asked.

JOAN
Thank you.

She anxiously fiddles with her pendant.

Darren sits beside her and gestures at the DVD player.

DARREN

How about we watch some movies?
It'll help take both our minds off
things while we wait for your
father to return.

Joan agreeably nods, appreciating the distraction.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Something light-hearted or a
comedy, I'd say.

Darren sifts through the DVD selection, searching for
something to watch.

EXT. TOWN - DUSK

Philip returns to his parked truck, looking somewhat
preoccupied. He glances at his watch, checking the time, and
then climbs into the driver's seat. The engine roars to life,
and the vehicle slowly pulls away.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Darren is comfortably seated on the sofa with his feet up,
disinterestedly watching a movie. Joan is asleep beside him,
curled up under a cosy blanket.

She stirs in her sleep, adjusting her position, and
unconsciously rests her head on Darren's shoulder.

Being careful not to disturb her peaceful slumber, Darren
gently covers her with the blanket, cherishing the moment as
he gazes upon her serene face.

Suddenly, the sound of a TRUCK PULLING UP outside catches his
attention. He hits pause on the remote and listens intently.
The outdoor security light activates, casting a soft glow
into the living room.

The sound of the FRONT DOOR OPENING and SHUTTING can be
heard, followed by FOOTSTEPS ascending the staircase.

Darren glances at the time, then resumes watching the movie
while Joan sleeps on his shoulder.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Billy sits wearily at a desk, scrolling through yet another
estate agent's website on his laptop.

Fatigued, he continues his search until he stumbles upon a page displaying a picture of the house for sale. His eyes fixate on the weathered house-name-plaque, and he zooms in to read the words "Wealdmount House."

BILLY

Found you.

Billy quickly grabs his mobile phone, opens the maps application, and swiftly types in the address he found. Without wasting a moment, he snatches his keys and dashes out the door.

INT. CAR 2 - NIGHT

Billy climbs into his shabby, old car, sets his mobile phone up as a sat-nav, and turns the key in the ignition. But to his dismay, the engine won't turn over.

BILLY

No, come on. Not now. Work you hunk of junk.

He continues trying to start it, but the car won't comply.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Fuck!

Billy accepts defeat, frustratingly banging the steering wheel with his fist. He takes a deep breath, trying to calm himself, and then decides to take matters into his own hands.

He gets out of the vehicle, opens the bonnet, and begins to inspect the engine.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Darren is fast asleep on the sofa, his head resting gently against Joan's on his shoulder.

The DVD player is in standby mode. The clock display on the screen shows 3:32 AM.

Joan restlessly stirs in her sleep, her dreams seemingly troubled.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Joan's trapped on the ground, pinned down by the first masked intruder in black. Her futile SCREAMS muffled by the hand covering her mouth.

The second intruder kneels beside Joan, cruelly blindfolding her with a bloody rag. She WHIMPERS, trembling with fear, unable to comprehend what's happening.

The two figures WHISPER to each other, conspiring. Suddenly, Joan's demeanour shifts from terror to blazing rage.

The JUDDERING and CLANGING pipes resonate throughout the bathroom, as if responding to Joan's emotions. The water pressure increases, and the temperature rises.

Joan defiantly unleashes a PRIMAL SCREAM and fiercely bites down on the first intruder's hand, gnawing their index finger clean off. The intruder YELLS in excruciating pain, blood gushing from the raw stump.

Joan swiftly sits up, spitting the severed finger out of her mouth, and rips the blindfold off. The second intruder tries to restrain her, but Joan uses all her strength to fiercely headbutt the bridge of the person's nose. The intruder collapses to the floor, clutching their face.

Seizing the opportunity, Joan attempts to escape, but the first intruder suddenly grabs hold of her arm. Joan spots a large shard of broken mirror nearby. She seizes it, lets out a FURIOUS ROAR, and thrusts the razor-sharp glass straight through the person's forearm.

The first intruder CRIES out in agony, releasing their grip, and Joan scrambles free.

The second intruder weakly raises their hand, and sharply CLICKS their fingers.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Joan abruptly wakes, springing forward, and staring blankly in a trancelike state.

Darren rouses and spots Joan.

DARREN
Joan? Are you okay?

She doesn't react, her eyes fixed on something unseen. Darren kneels in front of her, waving his hand in front of her unblinking gaze.

DARREN (CONT'D)
Joan? Can you hear me?

He moves in closer, searching for any sign of recognition or response. Joan's vacant eyes convey a sense of detachment from reality.

Suddenly, Joan snaps out of her trance, fear evident in her eyes. Without thinking, she strikes Darren's face and frantically clatters away.

Darren falls to the floor, clutching his jaw in pain.

Joan soon realizes what she just did.

JOAN

I'm so sorry, Darren. Are you all right?

DARREN

I'm okay.

He gingerly gets to his feet, more concerned about Joan's well-being.

DARREN (CONT'D)

But what about you? Are you okay?
What just happened?

Joan's suddenly distracted, sniffing the air.

JOAN

Do you smell that?

Darren inhales.

DARREN

No. What?

JOAN

Burning.

The SONG suddenly plays out from the DVD player. Joan's eyes fill with dread.

DARREN

What is it? What's wrong?

She points to the player. The screen is still in standby mode. The clock shows - 3:33 AM.

JOAN

It's the song.

Darren glares at the silent player, confused.

DARREN

What song?

Only Joan can hear it. The SONG digitally distorts and morphs into a SOBBING CHILD.

CHILD (V.O.)

(on player)

Mummy? Help me, Mummy.

Joan is fear stricken.

DARREN

What is it? What do you hear?

JOAN

The boy.

The SOBBING abruptly turns into a blood-curdling SHRIEK of excruciating agony.

JOAN (CONT'D)

He's in so much pain.

She covers her nose with her trembling hand.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I can smell him burning.

Joan looks to Darren for help, her eyes full of anguish.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Make it stop. Please, make it stop.

Darren grabs the DVD player, unsure what to do with it.

Joan desperately covers her ears, hopelessly trying to block out the relentless, intensifying SHRIEK.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Make it stop!

In a surge of emotion, she snatches the player from Darren's hands and hurls it against the wall, SMASHING it to pieces.

The shrieking instantly stops.

Joan breaks down and SOBS. Darren stands motionless, shell-shocked.

Philip bursts into the room. Joan immediately falls into his arms and WEEPS. He holds his daughter close and gives Darren a scathing look.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Philip helps Joan into bed. She's calm, but clearly shaken.

JOAN

You believe me now, don't you?
Something's wrong with this house.
Just take a look at the painting
down in the basement.

Her father tucks her in.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I think something terrible happened
to the family who use to live here.

Philip places his hand on her shoulder, offering comfort.

PHILIP

Get some rest, Joan. We'll discuss
it all in the morning.

He turns to leave, but Joan reaches out and grabs his hand

JOAN

Could you stay? I don't want to be
alone.

Philip hesitates for a moment, then nods.

PHILIP

Yes. Of course.

He fetches a blanket, pulls up a chair, and sits by her
bedside.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

I'll be right here. Now try and get
some sleep.

Joan rests her head and closes her eyes. Philip covers
himself with the blanket, switches off the lamp, and settles
in to keep watch over her.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - NIGHT

The dark house is peaceful and still. Silence fills the
entrance hall.

Suddenly, a dim light emanates from the kitchen, casting
shadows on the walls.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joan is peacefully asleep. Slowly, she rouses, opens her eyes, and instinctively looks to the chair at her bedside.

But Philip is gone.

Alert, she sits up and switches on the lamp. A feeling of vulnerability washes over her. She clambers out of bed, and hobbles toward the door.

INT. LANDING - NIGHT

Joan stands before Philip's bedroom door. She hesitates for a moment before slightly pushing it open.

FAINT MURMURING VOICE can be heard coming from downstairs, catching Joan's attention.

Apprehensively, she limps towards the staircase, peering down the steps. The soft glow of light emanates from the kitchen, accompanied by the sound of Philip's HUSHED VOICE.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - NIGHT

Joan cautiously descends the staircase, her footsteps soft and deliberate, as she makes her way toward the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Joan remains hidden in the shadows, positioned close to the entrance of the kitchen. She intently listens to the conversation happening inside.

PHILIP (O.S.)
But will it work?

DARREN (O.S.)
You have to understand, this whole thing is unprecedented. But in theory, yes - I believe it should.

PHILIP (O.S.)
And if it doesn't?

DARREN (O.S.)
Then we'll have no other choice but to reverse it.

Joan edges even closer, trying to hear more clearly.

PHILIP (O.S.)

It can be undone?

DARREN (O.S.)

Of course. There's just never been the need to before.

PHILIP (O.S.)

And if it is undone, what then? How would we proceed from there?

DARREN (O.S.)

We'll cross that bridge, if and when we come to it. For now, we just do what I've suggested - and hope it works.

Philip lets out a GRUMBLY SIGH and takes a step closer to Joan's position, unknowingly moving in her direction. She slinks back into the shadows, careful not to make a sound.

PHILIP (O.S.)

Even if it does work - she's eventually going to want to leave, and I don't know how I'm going to convince her otherwise.

DARREN (O.S.)

Like I said, there are ways to change her mind - though I'd certainly prefer not to go down that road if it can be avoided. But for now, whatever happens - we mustn't allow her to leave this place.

Joan fretfully frowns as she struggles with the implications of what she's just overheard.

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

Now come on, it'll be morning soon, and you look like you could do with some rest yourself.

The kitchen light is switched off, plunging the room into darkness. Joan urgently and quietly bolts, her heart racing with fear of being discovered.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - NIGHT

Joan agonizingly hobbles up the staircase as quickly and silently as she possibly can, the urgency in her movements evident.

She reaches the landing, panting softly, and hurriedly hides herself from view just before Philip and Darren step into the entrance hall.

INT. LANDING - NIGHT

Joan struggles along the landing, grimacing and clutching her thigh in pain. She's about to enter her room but suddenly realizes she left Philip's bedroom door ajar.

LIGHT FOOTSTEPS are heard ascending the stairs. Joan apprehensively hastens back to Philip's door and quietly closes it, trying to maintain her composure.

Just in the nick of time, she darts into her room and softly closes her door, her breath catching as she hides herself from view.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joan hurries under her duvet, feigning sleep, but her breath betrays her anxious state. She does her utmost to control her panting breath.

The door handle slowly turns, and Joan's heart skips a beat, realizing she's forgotten something. In a quick motion, she sits up, switches off the lamp, and then lays back down, trying to maintain the façade of being asleep.

The door opens, and Philip creeps into the room, moving with stealth. He slides back into the chair, covering himself with the blanket, and closes his eyes.

Joan stares into the darkness, her mind racing with uncertainty.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

The BEEPING alarm awakens Joan. As she stirs, she sees that Philip is already up and dressed, sitting patiently in the chair, waiting for her to wake.

PHILIP
Good morning.

She sits up and mutes the alarm.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
How are you feeling?

JOAN

Fine.

PHILIP

And your thigh? How's that?

Joan adjusts her leg into a more comfortable position.

JOAN

A little sore, but it's okay.

Philip leans in and lovingly takes hold of her hand, his concern and care evident in his gesture.

PHILIP

First of all, I'd like to apologize again. Terminating your studies and dragging you all the way out here was wrong of me. I had no right to interfere in your life like that. I overreacted, and I'm sorry. But I only did it because I love you - remember that.

He sits on the edge of the bed, still holding her hand.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

That's why I went into town yesterday and called the university. I explained everything that's happened, and got you re-enrolled.

JOAN

Really?

PHILIP

They're expecting you back at the start of the next semester.

He awaits a response, but Joan doesn't react.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Good news, right?

JOAN

Yes. Great. Thank you.

She subtly removes her hand from his, pretending she needs to adjust her leg's position.

PHILIP

That's not all. I also called your doctor, and told him all about the things you've been experiencing since we arrived here - and apparently, it's fairly common for head trauma patients to exhibit all the symptoms you described - to varying degrees. But he said there's no need to worry --

He collects her pills from the bedside table.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

-- because that's exactly what your medication's for.

Philip opens the bottle and takes two pills out, gently offering them to Joan.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Simply doubling the dose should resolve the issue, and make it all go away.

He hands her the medication and a bottle of water. Joan silently stares at the pills in her palm

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Go on then. What are you waiting for?

She pops them in her mouth, and takes a sip of water.

Philip momentarily looks away, putting the bottle of pills back in the drawer. Unbeknownst to him, Joan subtly spits the pills out and slips them beneath her pillow.

Philip CLAPS his hands together.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Right. Darren has kindly offered to make us breakfast. Would you care to join us in the kitchen, or would you prefer me to bring it up to you?

JOAN

I think I should just get some more rest for now - if that's okay?

She lays down, covering herself with the duvet.

PHILIP

Of course. Just give me a shout if you need anything.

JOAN

Okay.

Philip leaves the room, closing the door behind him. Joan immediately slips out of bed, quietly limps up to the door, and intently listens to Philip's FOOTSTEPS walking away.

INT. LANDING - DAY

Philip descends the staircase, his FOOTSTEPS echoing through the house.

Joan, seizing the opportunity, slightly opens her door and peeks out. Satisfied that the coast is clear, she quietly creeps along the landing and slips into Darren's room.

INT. BEDROOM 2 - DAY

Joan tiptoes into the room, her eyes darting around as she searches for something. Her attention falls on a wardrobe, and she opens it.

Among the belongings inside, she spots Darren's camera bag. But that's not all - stashed at the back are her painting and the un-crumpled letter she wrote to Billy.

With a sense of urgency, Joan unzips the camera bag. But to her surprise, there's no photography equipment inside - just a small case. She cautiously opens it. Inside, she finds a hypodermic needle and several vials of mysterious liquid.

Fear grips Joan. She carefully puts everything back in its place, ensuring not to leave a trace of her presence, and hastily exits the room.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Joan gently shuts the bedroom door, leaning against it with a troubled expression, lost in contemplation of her next move.

With determination in her eyes, she makes her way over to the window, and gazes out at the two vehicles parked in the driveway.

EXT. MECHANICS - DAY

Billy emerges from the auto repair shop, and purposefully strides towards his fixed vehicle parked on the forecourt.

Sliding into the driver's seat, Billy sets up his sat-nav. He starts the engine, the familiar PURR bringing a smile to his face, and without wasting a second, he swiftly pulls away.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

Joan creeps down the stairs, her movements cautious and calculated. She peeks around to ensure no one is watching before hurrying towards the front door.

In a rush, she puts on her shoes, her hand reaching for the truck keys hanging on a hook nearby. Just as her fingers graze the keys, the sound of Darren's voice startles her.

DARREN (O.S.)

Going somewhere?

Joan jumps in fright, her hand retracting as if scalded, and she quickly spins around to face Darren standing before her.

DARREN (CONT'D)

My apologies, I didn't mean to startle you. I'm sure that's the last thing you need right now.

JOAN

It's fine. You just surprised me.

An uncomfortable silence hangs in the air.

DARREN

I was just on my way up to check in on you, before I head out to take some photographs. Where are you going?

Joan hesitates, searching for a plausible answer. Her eyes catch sight of one of her books on a console table nearby.

JOAN

I'm looking for one of my books. I thought it might be in the truck - but you know what?

(scoffs at herself)

Here it is.

She picks up the book from the table, trying to hide her nerves, and then removes her shoes.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Okay then. I'm just going to take this back up to my room to read.

Joan attempts to step past Darren, but he subtly blocks her path.

DARREN

How you feeling after last night?
It was pretty intense, wasn't it?

JOAN

Yes, it was - but I'm fine now, thanks.

DARREN

Your father told me what your Doctor said. It must be a relief to finally understand why all this has been happening to you - and to know that it's treatable.

JOAN

Yes. It's a relief.

Darren waits for her to elaborate, sensing there's more she's not saying, but Joan keeps her emotions in check.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Anyway. Good luck with your photographs. Excuse me.

She manages to move past Darren as he steps aside, but his suspicions seem aroused.

DARREN

Okay. I'll see you later then.

Joan gives him a faint smile, trying to mask her unease, and ascends the staircase.

Once she's out of view, Darren looks to the keys hanging on the hook, his mind swirling with sceptical thoughts.

EXT. TOWN - DUSK

Billy's car rolls into the small town, and parks up at the side of the road.

INT. CAR 2 - DUSK

Billy's sat-nav chimes, announcing, 'You have reached your destination.' He looks out of the car window, doubt evident on his face as he surveys the surrounding buildings. Wealdmount House is nowhere in sight.

Billy spots a local pedestrian passing by. He rolls his window down and leans out to address the passer-by.

BILLY
 (to local)
 Hey buddy. I don't suppose you can tell me where Wealdmount House is by any chance?

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

The shower runs at full blast, gradually filling the room with steam. Joan stands before the misting mirror, fully dressed, her gaze fixed on her reflection.

A KNOCK sounds at the door.

PHILIP (O.S.)
 Joan?

JOAN
 I'm in the shower.

PHILIP (O.S.)
 I've brought you up some dinner.

JOAN
 Just leave it in my room, thanks.

PHILIP (O.S.)
 How are you feeling? Everything all right? You've been in your room all day.

JOAN
 I'm fine.

PHILIP (O.S.)
 Did you take your second dose of medication earlier?

JOAN
 Yes.

PHILIP (O.S.)
 Two pills?

Joan stares at two pills she's holding in the palm of her hand. With purpose, she drops them down the sink drain.

JOAN

Uh-huh.

PHILIP (O.S.)

Good.

(pause)

I'll leave you to it then.

JOAN

Okay.

The sound of FOOTSTEPS leads away, and Joan lets out a SIGH of relief.

She retrieves the bottle of pills from her pocket and, without hesitation, tips the entire contents down the drain.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

Billy's clapped-out car chugs along the winding mountainous road, surrounded by dense woodland. The engine's struggles are evident as it SPUTTERS and GROANS under the strain.

The engine cuts out, and the vehicle comes to a gradual, juddering stop. Puffs of smoke emerge from under its bonnet.

Billy steps out of the car and lifts the hood, only to be greeted by a wave of smoke billowing straight into his face. He COUGHS and SPLUTTERS, attempting to fan it away, but the futility of the gesture soon becomes apparent. With a resigned expression, he slams the hood shut.

Deciding to continue his journey on foot, Billy gathers his phone from the car and sets off along the dark road.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joan lays awake in bed, her eyes fixated on the ceiling. She glances at the clock, which shows it's just past 3 AM.

She climbs out of bed, fully dressed, and creeps out of her room.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - NIGHT

Joan sneaks down the staircase, trying not to make a sound.

Reaching the front door, she puts on her shoes and jacket, ready to make her escape. But as she reaches for the keys hanging on the hook, panic sets in when she realizes both sets are missing.

A look of utter dismay falls across her face. She desperately searches around the vicinity for the keys, but they seem to have vanished without a trace.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Joan quietly searches the room. Every shelf, drawer, and cupboard a potential hiding spot for the missing keys.

She pulls a chair up to check the top of the cabinet, hoping the keys might be there. But the only thing she sees is the rifle resting on top.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Joan continues her meticulous search. She checks every possible place, opening cupboards and drawers with growing desperation, but the keys remain elusive.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - NIGHT

Joan stands at the bottom of the staircase, her eyes filled with unease as she stares up the steps. With a hint of apprehension, she removes her shoes, ensuring not to make any noise, and ascends the stairs.

INT. BEDROOM 3 - NIGHT

Philip lies fast asleep, emitting loud SNORES. The door creaks open, and Joan slinks into the room. She surveys the darkened space until her eyes catch Philip's neatly folded clothes resting on a chair beside the bed.

Stealthily, Joan approaches the clothes and lightly pats the trousers, discovering the keys nestled inside the pocket. With delicate precision, she retrieves them, but as she does, the keys emit a soft JINGLE, causing Philip to stir.

Joan freezes, and anxiously watches Philip. He MUMBLES something incoherent in his sleep but soon resumes SNORING. She tightens her grip on the keys and carefully makes her way out of the room.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Joan steps out the front door, and the security light above activates. In her haste, she leaves the door slightly ajar and hurries towards Philip's parked truck.

She unlocks the vehicle and is just about to open the driver's door when her eyes catch sight of something on the ground. Curiosity mixed with fear, she awkwardly kneels down to take a closer look at the kids' beanie hat, featuring a menacing skull and crossbones motif.

The truck stereo suddenly comes to life, playing the SONG. Joan freezes, her eyes widening with dread. A quick glance at the time reveals an ominous 3:33 AM. She slowly rises, her heart pounding, and cautiously peers through the driver's window.

Out of nowhere, a child's palm unexpectedly SLAPS against the glass from inside the truck, causing Joan to jump in terror.

Startled, she loses her balance and stumbles, landing awkwardly on her injured leg. An agonizing YELP escapes her lips as she clutches her bleeding thigh, still glancing warily at the car window. To her dismay, the hand and the beanie hat have vanished, but the SONG persists.

In the dimly lit area just beyond the reach of the security light, Joan discerns movement in the shadows. Two indistinct dark figures step into view, their gaze fixed directly on her. The sensor light times out, plunging Joan into darkness.

The music abruptly stops, and rapid SCURRYING FOOTSTEPS close in on her. Joan frantically scrambles to her feet, wincing from the pain in her leg, and hobbles back toward the safety of the house.

Just as the security light activates again, Joan flounders, dropping to her knees in distress. The rushing FOOTSTEPS draw nearer, amplifying her fear. Desperately, she clammers toward the front door.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - NIGHT

Joan tumbles through the open door, managing to swiftly slam it shut as she collapses to the ground. In the oppressive silence, her fearful panting echoes through the hall. She lies there motionless, her gaze fixated on the small window.

As the security light times out, a sudden ferocious POUNDING shakes the front door. Joan springs into action, painfully lumbering into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Joan retreats, fear etched on her face, stumbling back until she bumps into the chair beside the cabinet. The incessant POUNDING intensifies.

Mustering all her strength, Joan heaves herself up on the chair, reaching for the rifle resting atop the cabinet. Her hands tremble as she grabs the weapon.

In a flurry of nerves, she opens the drawer, hastily collects the ammunition, and clumsily loads the rifle.

Abruptly, the pounding on the door ceases, leaving the room engulfed in an eerie silence.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - NIGHT

Joan hobbles cautiously toward the front door, her injured leg causing her discomfort. She raises the rifle, aiming it at the little window in the door. She pauses, her senses on high alert as she listens intently for any sign of danger.

The security light flicks on, illuminating the outside. A moment later, there's a KNOCKING at the door.

Reacting instinctively, Joan pulls the trigger, and a deafening BANG echoes throughout the house. The bullet pierces straight through the glass of the window, shattering it into a spiderweb of cracks.

INT. LANDING - NIGHT

Philip and Darren burst out of their respective rooms, their faces filled with concern.

DARREN

Was that a gunshot?

Philip, feeling the urgency, quickly checks inside Joan's bedroom to find it empty. Without wasting a moment, he darts towards the staircase, with Darren closely following behind.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - NIGHT

Joan remains steadfastly aiming the rifle at the door. Philip and Darren hasten down the stairs.

PHILIP

Joan! What are you doing?

Startled by their sudden appearance, Joan spins around, and points the rifle at Philip.

JOAN
Stay back!

Philip and Darren both freeze on the steps. Joan skittishly switches her aim between her father and the door.

PHILIP
Take it easy, Joan.

With measured steps, Philip continues to descend the stairs, maintaining a calm demeanour. He stretches out his hand towards Joan, trying to convey reassurance and hoping to diffuse the tense standoff.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
Everything's going to be all right.
Just hand me the rifle - okay?

Joan's fear and anxiety intensifies, and she aggressively points the rifle directly in his face.

JOAN
I said stay back!

Philip complies with her demand, immediately backing off. He keeps his hands raised in a non-threatening manner, still trying to maintain a sense of calm.

JOAN (CONT'D)
What's happening? What are those things outside?

PHILIP
What things? I honestly don't know what your talking about.

JOAN
Stop lying to me! I overheard the conversation the two of you had in the kitchen last night. I know you know what's going on. Now tell me what they are!

Suddenly, Joan spots the two shadowy, dark figures standing at the top of the staircase, staring down at her. Her eyes widen in terror as she realizes what they are - a hideously burnt man and woman, their entire bodies gruesomely charred.

Joan SCREAMS, raising the rifle in terror, and shoots at one of the figures - BANG.

The recoil knocks her off balance, and she stumbles back, hitting against the front door before dropping to the ground.

Philip YELPS, feeling the impact of the bullet, and falls to his knees, clutching the top of his injured shoulder. Darren rushes to his aid.

PHILIP

(to Darren)

I'm okay. It's just a flesh wound.

Joan, still in a state of panic, frantically sits up against the door and points the rifle at the unfazed figures that only she can see, silently standing at the top of the stairs.

JOAN

What are they? What do they want?!

Philip and Darren exchange worried glances, unsure of what Joan is seeing. They look to where she's aiming, but there's nothing there.

DARREN

(to Philip)

She's starting to see things as well now. It's exponentially advanced. I don't understand. The double dose should have at least helped - unless...

(it dawns upon him)

...she stopped taking her medication entirely.

Darren approaches Joan cautiously, trying to reach her in her distressed state.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Joan. Listen to me.

She switches her aim to Darren, causing him to submissively halt.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Whatever you're seeing - it isn't real. It can't hurt you.

Suddenly, Joan hears a CHILD'S VOICE.

BOY (O.S.)

(whimpering)

Mummy?

She switches her aim to the darkness of the living room entrance.

BOY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Help me, Mummy.

A boy, wearing the skull and crossbones beanie, steps out of the shadows. Joan lowers the rifle, her unblinking gaze fixed upon the child.

DARREN
(to Joan)
What is it, Joan? What do you see?

The boy stands before Joan, staring at her.

BOY
Help me!

He swiftly raises his palm, and to Joan's horror, he spontaneously bursts into flames, SHRIEKING in excruciating agony. Joan can only watch, terrified, as the boy burns before her eyes.

Joan SHRILLS in terror.

DARREN
(to Philip)
It has to be undone. We've no other choice now.

PHILIP
Do it.

Darren kneels beside Joan, cupping his hands to his mouth to amplify his voice over her SCREAMS.

DARREN
(to Joan)
Evoke lurking echoes!

He sharply CLICKS his fingers.

Joan's shrills abruptly cease, and she instantly falls silent, her head drooping as she passes out.

INT. CAR - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Joan is unconscious in the driver's seat of her crashed car, her head resting on the deployed airbag. A steel rod juts through the cracked windshield. The SONG is playing on the car stereo.

Gradually, Joan stirs, groggily regaining consciousness. She sits up, disoriented, and looks around, taking in the unsettling scene. There's no visible wound on her forehead, but her leg draws her attention.

Her face contorts in pain as she cringes, realizing the rod has grievously grazed her thigh, leaving a bloody and nasty wound. Joan musters all her strength, unbuckles her seat belt, and tries to exit the car, but she finds herself trapped. The rod impales her trousers, rendering her immobile.

Joan tears at the material with her hands, freeing herself from the impalement, but leaving behind a skewered, bloody rag with a hole in the middle.

The pain is evident on Joan's face, but she grits her teeth, summoning the strength to extricate herself from the wreckage.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Joan uses the door to painstakingly pull herself up and out of the vehicle. As she emerges, a lit cigarette falls on the ground beside her, unnoticed in the chaos.

Peering over her crushed bonnet, she GASPS in horror, cupping her hand over her mouth at the devastating sight before her.

A MAN and WOMAN, both in their late 30s, are slumped in the front seats of the car she collided with. The man's lifeless body is flopped over the steering wheel, blood dripping from his ear, while the woman is semi-conscious in the passenger seat, her head hanging forward.

A WHIMPERING VOICE calls out.

BOY (O.S.)

Mummy?

Urgently leaning over the door, Joan spots the boy with the skull beanie sitting behind the driver's seat.

BOY (CONT'D)

Help me, Mummy.

Unseen by Joan, petrol leaking from the family's car trickles towards the lit cigarette, creating a dangerous trail.

JOAN

(to boy)

I'm coming.

Determination fills Joan, and she clambers around the back of her car, using it for support despite her injured leg.

However, she falters, dropping to her knees from the pain. With sheer willpower, she gets back to her feet, maintaining eye contact with the terrified boy, who presses his palm against the window, seeking her help.

BOY
 (to Joan)
 Help me.

The trail of petrol hits the cigarette and ignites. The parked car EXPLODES in a devastating burst of flames.

The force of the explosion throws Joan to the ground, and she smacks her forehead against the unforgiving tarmac. The family's car is engulfed in flames, and for a moment, the boy's SHRIEKS of agony fill the air before silence descends.

Concussed and dazed, Joan lies flat on her face, her twitching eyes fixed upon the smouldering remains of the boy's beanie hat lying beside her.

Flashing emergency service lights illuminate the area. Joan's eyes flutter shut, and she falls unconscious.

INT. HOSPITAL 2 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Joan awakens in a different hospital room - not the one in the military facility. Medical monitoring equipment surrounds her, and she has a blood-stained bandage strapped around her head.

To her surprise, Philip, dressed in civilian clothing, is dozing in a chair beside her. She calls out to him.

JOAN
 Dad?

He instantly wakes, concern etched on his face, and comfortingly holds her hand.

PHILIP
 I'm here, kiddo.

Confused and disoriented, Joan tries to make sense of her surroundings.

JOAN
 Where am I? What...

Suddenly, her memory of the accident floods back, and her eyes fill with despair.

JOAN (CONT'D)

The crash. I killed them. They're all dead - and it's all my fault.

Philip hushes her, worried her confession might be overheard.

PHILIP

Shh, it's okay, Joan. Don't worry about that right now.

Overwhelmed with guilt and grief, Joan breaks down, and uncontrollably sobs. Philip embraces her, trying to offer the comfort she so desperately needs.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Everything's going to be all right - I promise. We'll get through this together.

INT. HOSPITAL 2 - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Joan is seated up in bed, fresh, clean bandages adorning her wounds. Philip stands authoritatively over her, his voice hushed but firm.

PHILIP

(whispering)

It was an accident. A tragic accident. I will not allow you to throw your entire life away because of it.

JOAN

No - I won't do it. You can't make me. I'll just tell the truth. It was my fault. I'm to blame - and I deserve to be punished.

PHILIP

(whispering)

Keep your voice down. It's too late anyway. I've already taken care of it. It doesn't matter what you say now. The investigation has been closed. It's over.

JOAN

It's not over. It can't be. I'll be getting away with murder. Just like them. Just like whoever killed Mum.

PHILIP

Never compare yourself to them. Do you hear me? Never!

Feeling overwhelmed with emotions, Joan turns her back to Philip, closing her eyes as tears roll down her cheeks.

JOAN

Whenever I close my eyes, all I see is that poor little boy, pressing his hand up against the glass. The look on his face. It was if he knew what was about to happen to him.

She cringes, reliving the painful memory.

JOAN (CONT'D)

And the screams. I'll never forget his screams. He was in so much pain.

Joan opens her eyes and turns to face Philip, seeking understanding amidst the turmoil of her emotions.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I can't bare it.

Philip comforts her, gently placing a hand on her shoulder.

PHILIP

It's going to be okay, Joan. I'm going to get you the very best professional treatment there is. I know this Doctor who I believe will be able to help you through this.

A NURSE enters the room. Joan quickly composes herself, wiping away her tears. Philip steps aside to allow the nurse to proceed with their routine checks, examining Joan's injuries and dressings.

Philip's mobile phone suddenly RINGS. He glances at the caller ID.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

(to Joan)

I have to take this.

He leaves the room to answer the call, walking off along the hallway.

Alone with the nurse, Joan's gaze drifts to the window, her thoughts still troubled.

As the nurse leans over the bed, conducting their medical checks, Joan notices a bottle of prescription pills peeking out from their pocket.

INT. HOSPITAL 2 EN SUITE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The shower is on full blast, filling the room with steam. Joan stands before the misty mirror, wiping condensation away to reveal her reflection.

She tips the last remaining contents of the bottle of pills into her hand, contemplating her decision for a moment. With resolve, she swallows them down with a glass of water.

Joan steps into the shower, allowing the hot, flowing water to envelop her. She sits down, closes her eyes, and blissfully smiles, the soothing water cascading over her.

INT. HOSPITAL 2 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Philip enters the room, immediately noticing that Joan is not in her bed. The sound of RUNNING WATER emanates from the en suite, catching his attention.

INT. HOSPITAL 2 EN SUITE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Joan is slumped over in the shower, her strength fading away, drifting in and out of consciousness.

There's a KNOCK on the door.

PHILIP (O.S.)
Joan? You in the shower?

She doesn't react.

PHILIP (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Joan? Answer me.
(no response)
That's it, I'm coming in.

Philip tries the handle, but the door is locked. His concern escalating, he pounds on the door.

PHILIP (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Open this door - right now!

With urgency, he kicks the door in with a single hefty BOOT, bursting into the en suite.

Inside, Philip freezes, his heart sinking at the sight of Joan slumped in the shower.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
 (calls out)
 I need a doctor in here!

He rushes to Joan's aid, dropping to his knees and holding her limp body in his arms. His eyes quickly catch sight of the empty bottle of pills lying on the floor.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
 (calls out)
 Somebody help me!

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Joan lies unconscious in the windowless, private room within the military facility. Fresh bandages cover her wounds, and she's hooked up to a ventilation machine with tubes running to her nose.

Her eyes slowly flicker open, and she finds Philip standing beside her, dressed in his military uniform.

Joan's expression turns despondent as she starts to piece together what must have happened.

JOAN
 No, no. Why didn't you just let me die?

Her gaze drifts around the unfamiliar surroundings, feeling puzzled and disoriented.

JOAN (CONT'D)
 Where am I?

PHILIP
 You're in a military medical facility.

JOAN
 Why?

PHILIP
 So you can get the help you so urgently need.

Philip then gestures for someone to come forward. Darren steps into view, dressed in a suit and tie, and introduces himself.

DARREN

Hello, Joan. My name's Doctor Taylor. I'm a psychiatrist who specializes in the treatment of patients suffering from PTSD. Your father has informed me all about your situation - and I believe I can help you.

He pulls up a chair and sits beside her.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Over the past couple of years, I've been conducting clinical trials on a ground-breaking new treatment, which doesn't merely just help patients cope with their traumatic memories - it takes them away entirely.

Joan stares at him, her expression stony and guarded.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Using a combination of hypnosis and a follow-up course of medication, I have successfully isolated and blocked the traumatic memories of every single test subject I've treated. Radically improving the lives of each and every one of them.

Joan looks at Philip with scepticism.

PHILIP

It's true, Joan. I've seen it for myself. You can still lead a normal and happy life.

Darren interjects.

DARREN

Although, things are a little more complicated in your case.

Philip sits on the edge of the bed, ready to listen to the details.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Usually after treatment, the patient is still aware of the events that befell them - they just simply can't recall it. But for you, that isn't an option.

(MORE)

DARREN (CONT'D)

Not only do your memories of the event need to be blocked, but also everything you've experienced since - including this very conversation. In order for your treatment to succeed, you must never learn of what truly happened.

Philip reaches out, taking hold of her hand.

PHILIP

(to Joan)

We'll go away somewhere together. Far removed from anything that could possibly remind you of the accident.

He gazes at her, his eyes filled with compassion.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

It's a chance to start a new life, Joan. One that's free from the crippling pain of your own memories.

Joan removes her hand from his, rejecting the idea.

JOAN

I don't deserve a chance at a new life. I'm a murderer. I deserve to die. Now get out, both of you.

She turns her back on them, struggling with her emotions. Darren stands, understanding the difficulty of the situation.

PHILIP

Joan, please. You have to do this - it's the only way.

JOAN

I said get out!

Darren gently encourages Philip to leave the room with him. As they exit, Joan curls up, tears streaming down her face as she wrestles with her inner turmoil.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Joan is asleep in the dark room.

PHILIP (O.S.)

(whispering)

What are you waiting for? Do it.

Joan's eyes flutter open, and she sees the wall clock showing 3:33 AM. Philip and Darren stand on either side of the bed, unaware that she has awoken.

DARREN

(whispering)

But it's totally unethical.
Hypnosis is meant to be consensual -
not involuntarily drug-induced.
It's a complete violation.

PHILIP

(whispering)

There's no other choice. It's the
only way to save her life.

JOAN

What's happening?

Philip and Darren are taken aback by her sudden awakening. Joan notices the hypodermic needle in Darren's hand.

JOAN (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

She urgently tries to sit up, but Philip restrains her.

PHILIP

Just stay calm. It'll all be over
soon.

JOAN

No. You can't do this.

She struggles to break free, but Philip tightens his hold, pinning her down.

JOAN (CONT'D)

(calls out)

No! Somebody help me!

Philip covers her mouth with his hand, muffling her CRIES.

PHILIP

(to Darren)

Do it.

Darren hesitates, clearly conflicted.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Now, Doctor. That's an order.

Reluctantly, Darren seizes hold of Joan's forearm and injects the needle into her vein.

Joan soon turns docile, staring blankly in a trancelike state. Philip relinquishes his hold.

Darren stares deeply into her glazed eyes, scrutinizing her condition.

DARREN

Okay, Joan. I want you to concentrate on the sound of my voice. After I count down from three, you're going to fall into a deep sleep. And in three, two, one.

He sharply CLICKS his fingers.

Joan's eyes instantly shut, and her head droops as she falls into a deep hypnotic sleep.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Joan remains slumped against the front door, unconscious. Only a few seconds have passed since Darren uttered the phrase to break her hypnosis.

Darren cautiously reaches for the rifle still clutched in her hand. Just as he's about to retrieve it, Joan suddenly jerks awake, aiming the weapon directly at him.

Darren takes a step back, visibly apprehensive. Philip, still nursing his injured shoulder, manages to rise to his feet.

PHILIP

Easy now, Joan.

Joan's intense gaze pierces through Philip as a single tear rolls down her cheek.

JOAN

I remember everything now.

She swiftly redirects the rifle, placing the barrel beneath her chin.

PHILIP

No!

Joan pulls the trigger, but only a faint CLICK resonates - the weapon's chamber is empty.

Philip angrily snatches the rifle from her trembling hands and hurls it aside.

Joan collapses, breaking down into uncontrollable SOBS. Philip, struggling with his own emotions, tries to comfort her.

JOAN
Don't touch me!

He backs off, giving her space.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Why didn't you just let me die?

PHILIP
Because you're my daughter, and I love you.

JOAN
If you love me, then kill me.

Joan pleads with desperation in her eyes.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Please, I'm begging you. Let me die.

Philip reaches out to place his hand on her shoulder. She clings to him, WAILING in anguish.

PHILIP
I'm so sorry, kiddo. But I can't. I won't lose you too.

She MOANS, overcome with despair.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
Joan, listen to me. Darren can still help you. You just have to agree to the treatment. It has to be done by your own free will. That's why it didn't work properly the first time.
(looks to Darren for confirmation)
Right?

DARREN
In theory, yes.

Darren kneels beside them.

DARREN (CONT'D)

I believe your resistance to the hypnosis was the fundamental cause of all the sensory manifestations you've been experiencing. It's as if your subconscious mind has been forcing you to remember memories you didn't want to forget.

Philip urges Joan to agree.

PHILIP

(to Joan)

All you have to do, is say yes - and then all this pain and guilt will be gone.

Joan considers the offer.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

So, what do you say? Do you agree?

She composes herself.

JOAN

You said to me before that there's no such thing as ghosts, but there is. They're my ghosts - and they haunt me. But I can bear them no longer. So yes - I agree.

A glimmer of hope appears on Philip's face, and he CLAPS his hands together.

PHILIP

Right. Then let's do it.

He gives Darren an acknowledging nod, then gently takes hold of Joan's hands and helps her stand

DARREN

Look.

Darren gestures to a pool of blood seeping beneath the front door.

PHILIP

(to Joan)

Are you okay? Are you hurt?

He fretfully checks her for injuries.

JOAN

It's not my blood.

Darren opens the front door, and the security light activates, revealing a horrifying scene.

Billy's lifeless body lies on the doorstep, blood oozing from a fatal bullet wound on his forehead.

JOAN (CONT'D)

No!

Joan collapses to her knees, cradling Billy's head in her lap.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Billy. No, no, no. What have I done?!

Darren is dumbfounded, struggling to comprehend the situation.

DARREN

(to Philip)

Where did...how...who is this?

Philip remains composed, despite the grim scene.

PHILIP

It's the friend she called. He came for her.

Joan WAILS inconsolably, stroking Billy's hair with a trembling hand.

Darren is flustered, realizing they need to take action.

DARREN

We need to call the authorities.
I'll have to drive to the nearest town.

(patting his empty pockets)

I need my keys.

He moves towards the stairs, but Philip quickly seizes his arm, halting Darren's movements

PHILIP

You're not calling anybody.

DARREN

What are you talking about? There's a dead body on the doorstep. We have to.

He tries to free his arm, but Philip tightens his hold.

PHILIP

And what do you think will happen
if you do? This is murder, Doctor -
and you're complicit.

Darren manages to pull his arm free from Philip's grip, but
hesitates to proceed up the staircase, deeply contemplating
the weight of Philip's words.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Think about it. If any of this ever
gets out, it'll bring a certain end
to your clinical trials - most
probably your entire career.

Darren's internal conflict becomes apparent.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

And what about Joan? Think about
what will happen to her?

Darren gazes empathetically at Joan, who is WHIMPERING with
grief and guilt.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

One way or another, without your
help, her life is over.

Joan's eyes shift toward the rifle on the ground.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Now please, for all our sakes,
finish what you started - and help
me save my daughter's life.

Joan suddenly seizes the rifle and makes a frantic hobbling
dash for the ammo in the living room. But Philip swiftly
reacts, disarming and restraining her.

JOAN

No! Let me go! I just want to die!

She struggles to break free, but Philip's grip remains firm.

PHILIP

(to Darren)

Go! Get your kit. We'll just have
to do it like before.

Darren is hesitant.

DARREN

But it won't work without her
consent.

PHILIP

We don't know that for sure, do we?
Doubling the dose may still work,
right? Now go!

Reluctantly, Darren bolts up the staircase.

INT. BEDROOM 2 - NIGHT

The bedroom door flings open, and Darren rushes in. He heads straight for the wardrobe, quickly grabbing the camera bag. Without wasting a moment, he retrieves the case from inside and bolts back out of the room.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - NIGHT

Philip's unwavering grip keeps Joan restrained, overpowering her waning attempts to break free.

Darren hastens down the stairs, carrying the open case. He carefully fills the hypodermic needle with one of the vials, his hands steady despite the urgency of the situation.

Once ready, he approaches Joan, who is fraught with fear and resistance.

JOAN

No! Keep away!

With a burst of strength, Joan musters all her might and kicks Darren away. He stumbles back, nearly dropping the hypodermic needle. In her agony, Joan lets out a piercing YELP, having further damaged her thigh.

DARREN

(to Philip)

You have to hold her steady.

Philip eases Joan down to the ground, never loosening his resolute hold. Darren kneels beside them, firmly seizing Joan's forearm, and lines up the needle.

JOAN

(to Darren)

No. Please, not again. I'm begging you. Kill me. Please, just kill me!

DARREN

I'm so sorry. Please forgive me.

With a heavy heart, he injects the needle into her vein. Joan's resistance slowly fades away, and she enters a trancelike, docile state, staring blankly.

Philip releases his hold as Darren carefully assesses her condition, staring deeply into her submissive eyes.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Okay, Joan. I want you to concentrate on the sound of my voice. After I count down from three, you're going to fall into a deep sleep. And in three, two, one.

He sharply CLICKS his fingers.

Joan's eyes instantly shut, as she succumbs to the hypnotic suggestion, entering a deep sleep.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Joan slowly awakens, finding herself in the passenger seat of the moving vehicle, her head resting against the window.

Philip is driving, with an open map on his lap. Both of them are wearing the exact same clothes they had on the day they first arrived at the house.

She sits up and looks out at the picturesque landscape.

JOAN

Where are we?

PHILIP

We're almost there.

JOAN

Almost where? Can't you tell me now?

PHILIP

You'll see soon enough.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a fresh packet of cigarettes and a box of matches.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

Here.

(hands them to Joan)

I made a stop in the last town while you were sleeping to pick up a few extra supplies.

Joan's surprised.

JOAN

I thought you were trying to force me to quit.

PHILIP

You're an adult. If you want to slowly kill yourself, then that's your choice. I'm not going to force you into doing anything.

JOAN

You forced me into coming here.

PHILIP

That's only because I love you. I know you probably think I'm overreacting, maybe I am - but I wasn't there for you after your mother died, when you needed me the most. So I'm making sure I'm here for you now.

Joan is taken aback by the admission.

Her wristwatch BEEPS.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

It's time.

Joan takes a replenished bottle of pills out of her pocket, pops it open, and tips one out.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

You need to take two.

JOAN

Two? But I was only taking one in the hospital.

PHILIP

Shortly before you were discharged, your doctor informed me that you have to take two at a time from now on.

Curiously, Joan looks at the pill in her palm.

JOAN

What are they even for?

PHILIP

Something to do with preventing any potential symptoms related to head injury such as yours.

JOAN

Symptoms? Like What?

PHILIP

I'm not sure. Just be certain to take them when you're meant to, and everything should be fine.

Joan takes out a second pill and swallows them both with a bottle of water.

Philip gestures ahead.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

We've arrived.

She looks out the window and sees Wealdmount House up along the road.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

The truck pulls up in front of the property. The little window in the front door is boarded up, and the house name plaque has been removed.

Philip steps out of the vehicle, and retrieves the walking stick from the back, but there's no sign of the easel.

He opens the passenger door to help Joan out. She takes a step on her injured leg and winces, clutching her thigh.

JOAN

It feels much worse than it did this morning.

PHILIP

It's probably just from being sat in the truck for so long. You'll walk it off. Here.

He offers Joan the walking stick, and she accepts it, glaring at the house unimpressed.

JOAN

We're not staying here, are we?

PHILIP

This is it.

JOAN

Why did you choose to rent an old place like this? It looks abandoned.

PHILIP

It's not abandoned --

The front door opens, and Darren steps out, dressed in a more rugged style of clothing.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

-- it's a guesthouse.

JOAN

(whispering)

A guesthouse? You got to be kidding me. Why would you...

Philip SHUSHES her.

DARREN

Hello. Mr Houghton, I presume?

PHILIP

That's correct.

Darren extends his hand.

DARREN

Darren Taylor. We spoke on the phone.

PHILIP

Right, yes - of course.

They shake hands, but Philip grimaces, feeling discomfort in his injured shoulder.

JOAN

(to Philip)

What just happened? Are you okay?

PHILIP

I'm fine. It's just a twinge.

He nonchalantly rubs his shoulder.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

(to Darren)

This is my daughter, Joan.

Darren shakes her hand.

DARREN

It's a pleasure to meet you both.

Joan politely smiles.

DARREN (CONT'D)

Well, come on in. Your rooms are
all prepared for your stay.

He leads them toward the house. Joan hobbles along behind,
using her walking stick.

JOAN

(to Darren)

Is there going to be anybody else
staying here?

DARREN

Only me. Don't worry --

He holds the front door open, welcoming them inside.

DARREN (CONT'D)

-- nobody's going to be disturbing
you here.

They enter the house, and Darren shuts the door behind them.

THE END