

RPG

Written by

Jaime Villarreal

EXT. GROVE - NIGHT (RAUM'S PURGING GROUNDS)

Absolute darkness, save for a soft glow illuminating PETER and DIANE (20s) as they sprint through a dark grove -- so dark that it's difficult to see if the trees have fruit.

Heavy FOOTSTEPS echo behind them. Something large and inhuman draws close.

Glimmers of light flicker in the near distance.

PETER

I can see it! C'mon! We're almost there!

He races forward. Diane trails behind.

DIANE

Peter! Wait up!

Diane stumbles over a mummified corpse. She screams, scrambles to her feet.

DIANE

Peter!

Peter returns for her.

PETER

We can't stop! That's breaking the rules! Let's go!

The thundering footfalls cease. An eerie silence hangs in the air.

Peter and Diane exchange bewildered glances.

DIANE

I don't hear it.

PETER

Maybe -- maybe, it's gone.

WHOOSH!

A scythe blade glints in the pale light.

Peter's head lands next to Diane's feet, mouth agape in a silent scream. His lifeless eyes gaze up at her.

Diane screams. She hurdles over Peter's body and runs off.

The blade whistles passed her head.

The scythe wielder closes in...

Diane sees a break in the woods ahead of her. She flits through the trees and finds herself in a clearing.

EXT. RAUM'S MONASTERY/FRONT GATE - CONTINUOUS

Diane collapses, exhausted and drained.

The silhouette of the scythe wielder stands at the edge of the grove as if barred from pursuing. It unleashes a guttural snarl. Lion-like.

Diane pulls herself to her feet, her eyes fixed on the dark figure.

She turns her back, faces the monastery. Takes one step --

WHOOSH!

The scythe splits her in two. Her torso whips through the air, spewing blood and bowels. Squelches as it lands somewhere in the darkness.

Diane's legs contort and flail on the ground -- a small gaming rulebook falls from her pocket.

The front cover of the booklet displays bold CRIMSON letters:
"R P G."

INT. CANDICE'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

CANDICE ROBIN (20s) gazes at CRIMSON walls. A look of dread spreads on her face.

CANDICE
 (to self)
 This can definitely wait until
 tomorrow.

She stands in the middle of the room, surrounded by paint cans and painting utensils.

CANDICE
 Yeah, I'm sure of it. Tomorrow it
 is --

Her doorbell rings. It plays a melodic tune, instead of a chime.

Candice heads to the door. Peers out the window. A look of glee manifests. She unlocks a series of deadbolts and opens the door...

KEVIN ROBIN (20s) stands outside with a ladder.

CANDICE

Kevin!

KEVIN

Hey, Sis.

Candice shows contempt toward his ladder.

CANDICE

Maybe you didn't hear me. But I said I didn't need any help.

KEVIN

You're welcome.

CANDICE

I don't understand why you think I'm some sort of damsel in distress. I can do things on my own.

KEVIN

Yeah, like the time it took you a week to change the light bulb in your garage.

CANDICE

I don't even use the garage.

KEVIN

Not the point. Putting things off comes easy for you. You're a typical *Gemini*. Intelligent, but unfocused. I bet you're torn between painting today or tomorrow.

CANDICE

(coy)

Nooooo...

Kevin can no longer contain himself. He barges inside, maneuvering around her.

KEVIN

This is gettin' heavy.

He props the ladder against the nearest wall.

Candice lifts a paint roller extender in retaliation to his ladder.

KEVIN
That's cheating.

CANDICE
My feet never come off the ground,
you know that.

KEVIN
There's exceptions to every rule.

CANDICE
Not in my rulebook.

LATER

The walls are wet with a fresh coat of paint in a neutral color.

Kevin intentionally leaves a spot on the ceiling, then climbs down the ladder.

Candice enters the living room from the kitchen with two glasses of lemonade. She notices a small area on the ceiling left unfinished.

CANDICE
You missed a spot.

KEVIN
Hmm. That's unlike me.

He confiscates her paint roller extender.

KEVIN
But I'm sure it's nothin' you can't
handle. You're not some *damsel in
distress*.

Candice sets both glasses of lemonade down, and motions for the extender.

KEVIN
Nah. I don't think so.

Her every attempt to retrieve the extender is unsuccessful.

CANDICE
Hand it over!

KEVIN

It's a teeny weeny spot, Candice.
Swipe, swipe. You're done, one
minute. Two minutes. Tops.

CANDICE

Not gonna happen.

KEVIN

I'll steady the ladder. Nothing'll
happen to you, cross my heart.

Candice fights back what she really wants to say. She regains some composure, takes a deep breath...

CANDICE

Listen, Kev. I appreciate what
you're trying to do. But this isn't
helping. I'm working on getting
there. I am. Someday, I'll get
there. But now is not that time.

A look of remorse washes over Kevin. He hands the roller extender back to Candice.

She pats his arm, smiles appreciatively.

INT. RICHARD'S HOME/YOUNG CANDICE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (DREAM)

YOUNG CANDICE (7) lies in bed with a blanket pulled over her face. She peeks out, frightened.

The tree limbs outside her window cast a man-shaped shadow on the ceiling with outstretched hands -- the shadow's fingers curl like *spider legs*.

She reaches for her toy flashlight and turns it on. Shines it at the shadow -- it vanishes.

The closet door is closed. The sound of squeaking wheels comes from inside.

She shines her flashlight at the door. The squeaky wheels draw closer, getting louder and louder...

Another sound draws her attention. It comes from beneath her room, on the first floor -- the FRONT DOOR slams shut. It's followed by GRUNTS from a MAN'S drunken state.

Tears flow down her cheeks. She reaches for her toy electronic keyboard. Her fingers tremble as she plays a tune to bring herself comfort...

YOUNG CANDICE

(sings softly)

*Don't be afraid, my little one. All
bad things go away in the end.
Don't shed a tear, my little one.
'Cause momma's got your hand.*

The man begins to climb the stairway, heavy boots THUD on each step, growing louder and louder until... there's clamor just outside her bedroom door. The doorknob turns.

The door creaks open.

RICHARD ROBIN (30s) staggers inside her bedroom with a whiskey bottle. He leans against the threshold and takes a swig.

Candice shines her flashlight on him like a spotlight.

RICHARD

Just two beers, Officer. I swear.

He staggers to her bed, attempting to walk a straight line to prove his sobriety -- he fails miserably.

RICHARD

Could've been more. Maybe.

He laughs. The bed post prevents him from falling over -- it CRACKS under his weight.

RICHARD

Hey there, little fly. I visited your mother today. She whispered something in my ear.

YOUNG CANDICE

But -- but mommy's dead.

RICHARD

Stop saying that!

He finishes off his whiskey. Chucks the bottle across the room. It shatters against a wall.

RICHARD

You're making me out to be a liar!
I bet, you think I'm crazy!

YOUNG CANDICE

No, Daddy.

RICHARD

Sure, you do! You want me locked away! They put me away, nobody's gonna care for you! No one! 'Cause nobody cares! Nobody!

She cowers against the headboard, tears soak her cheeks.

RICHARD

Don't be afraid of me, little fly. I don't wanna hurt ya. It's just sometimes, I get a little upset.

(beat)

'Cause I just want things to be perfect again. And I know, I can't have that. I can't. You can't. And Kevin can't...

He rips the flashlight away from her. Shines it in her face.

RICHARD

Stop cryin'! You're bein' a little baby!

YOUNG CANDICE

I'm sorry.

RICHARD

Sorry ain't gonna dig up your momma! Sorry ain't gonna breath air into her lungs!

(beat)

You shoulda listened! She told you not to go near the water! But you went anyway! And now she's gone!

He lunges for her, gripping her throat. She struggles for air, flailing her arms and legs...

INT. CANDICE'S HOUSE/BEDROOM - DAY

Candice shoots out of bed in a panic, gasping for air.

She reaches for the baseball bat propped against the bed post, then realizes she's alone...

Pill bottles sit on her nightstand. She pops a few. Grabs her cell phone. Scrolls through her messages -- a message from PATRICIA reads: "Call me."

Candice dials. It rings. Patricia answers...

PATRICIA (O.S.)
 (filter: cell phone)
 Can-dy.

CANDICE
 Pat-ty.

PATRICIA (O.S.)
 So, I have a very big favor to ask.
 And it's gonna be really hard for
 me to take no for an answer...

CANDICE
 Lay it on me.

PATRICIA (O.S.)
 I was wondering if you would give
 me the honor of playing piano on
 our big day.

CANDICE
 Umm, I've never played in public.

PATRICIA (O.S.)
 Luke's family was willing to fly in
 Maestro Neil Shine. But I told 'em
 I have someone who blows him out of
 the water.

CANDICE
 How long did your nose grow?

PATRICIA (O.S.)
 They're onboard. That's what
 matters. And trust me, when I say
 this: they will make it worth your
 while. You have my word.

CANDICE
 Money isn't an issue, I just --

PATRICIA (O.S.)
 Please, please, please... You can't
 see me right now, but I am
 literally on my knees begging.

Patricia's fiancé LUKE interjects in the background...

LUKE (O.S.)
 Yup! She's on her knees, all right,
 but it's not 'cause she's beggin'.

PATRICIA (O.S.)
Eww! You pig! Don't be gross!

Luke laughs. Patricia transitions back to her normal tone.

PATRICIA (O.S.)
Please, Candice, do this for me.

Candice regards her hand, places it eye level -- it trembles.

CANDICE
Tell ya what, Patricia.

PATRICIA (O.S.)
Uh-oh! You're calling me by my real name. Not good.

CANDICE
Just give me some time to think about it. And I'll get back with you.

PATRICIA (O.S.)
No rush.

CANDICE
Thanks.

PATRICIA (O.S.)
Well, not a huge rush. But kinda.

CANDICE
Later, goof.

PATRICIA (O.S.)
Later.

They hang up.

Candice sets her phone aside. Walks to her bedroom door, unlocks it.

IN THE HALLWAY

She shuffles toward the bathroom. Nightlights are plugged into each hallway outlet.

IN THE BATHROOM

Candice locks the door behind her.

Throughout the shower, she wipes the steam from the transparent curtain, peering out as if expecting to see an unwanted visitor...

INT. THERAPY OFFICE - DAY

Candice sits across from her THERAPIST (female, 40s).

CANDICE
The new medication seems to be
working.

She holds out her hands.

CANDICE
They're not shaking.

THERAPIST
Good.

CANDICE
I'll take it.

THERAPIST
Any side effects?

CANDICE
Nothing unbearable.

THERAPIST
Tell me what you're experiencing.

CANDICE
Dry mouth. Hardly an appetite. I
eat, 'cause I know I have to.

The therapist scribbles notes on a clipboard.

CANDICE
I'm waking up throughout the night.
Sometimes my skin gets itchy, but
it goes away.

THERAPIST
That seems like a lot to bear.

CANDICE
It beats the alternative.

Candice smiles, strained.

THERAPIST
The last time we spoke, you had
mentioned a garden.

CANDICE
I haven't touched it. Too many
spiders.

THERAPIST

Spiders are more afraid of us than we are of them.

CANDICE

Someone needs to tell the spiders that.

They share a chuckle.

THERAPIST

My mother's been gardening for years. She sprays lemon juice and vinegar all around her garden. Give it a try. In a few days, you'll see less nuisances.

CANDICE

I'd rather see none.

THERAPIST

You don't want that.

CANDICE

You're supposed to be on my team.

THERAPIST

Spiders keep the other pests in check. I'd say that's a *teammate*.

The therapist glances at her clipboard.

THERAPIST

We left off on your recurring dream.

CANDICE

Yeah. I know it's just a dream, but it's so vivid, you know? Sometimes, I feel like it's not a dream. Like, I'm there, reliving it. Watching it unfold and...

Candice's face drains of color. Stares off in deep thought.

The therapist leans forward, showing genuine concern.

THERAPIST

And?

CANDICE

And then *he* comes home.

THERAPIST

What you're describing could be related to dissociative amnesia. Sometimes, when we experience traumatic events during our early years, our minds will try to suppress those instances to protect us. They imbed deep within our subconscious until we're ready to confront it.

Candice looks down, processing this information...

INT. CANDICE'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

A painting of a farmhouse and cornfield hangs on the wall, the bottom corner displays a signature: "*Josephine Robin.*"

We hear the sound of a piano melody.

LUCY (13) plays piano with sheet music in front of her -- it's a grueling composition.

Candice stands behind her student, nodding with approval.

Lucy flubs on a piano key. She winces at her mistake, but recovers.

Candice smiles, impressed.

CANDICE

Very good, Lucy.

Lucy brings the song to a close. Looks up at Candice, guilt-faced.

LUCY

I screwed up --

CANDICE

I didn't point it out, and you shouldn't either.

LUCY

Yes, ma'am.

Candice places a comforting hand on Lucy's shoulder.

CANDICE

You didn't quit. And that's what matters.

Candice glances at a wall clock. Notes the time.

CANDICE
Your mother will be here soon.
Let's start at the beginning.

LUCY
Okay.

She begins to play...

EXT. HOTEL/PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Heavy rain.

A lightning flash shows a parked car. WILLY (20s) sits in the passenger seat, his face aglow from a laptop.

INT. CAR - SAME

Willy applies his headset and watches live video. The laptop screen shows a close up of an elevator button panel.

WILLY
The lady at the front desk is out of our hair. I talked her down to eighty bucks.

KEVIN (O.S.)
(filter: headset)
Willy! I said nothing over fifty!

WILLY
You saw the rack on that chick! I was about to slam down a hundred!

INT. HOTEL/ELEVATOR - SAME

Kevin wears a headset and camera eyeglasses. His eyes are focused on the elevator floor buttons.

The elevator doors close.

KEVIN
Stop letting *little Willy* do the negotiating!

The elevator ascends.

WILLY (O.S.)
Screw the budget, man!

KEVIN
That extra thirty is comin' outta
your pocket!

WILLY (O.S.)
Yeah, yeah.

KEVIN
It's my fault. I should've known
better.

Kevin consults his wristwatch -- it's almost midnight.

KEVIN
Start recording.

WILLY (O.S.)
We're rollin'.

KEVIN
(to channel subscribers)
Hello, you freak maniacs! Welcome
back to another episode of The
Kevin and Willy Show! Tonight,
we're delving deep into another
hellish nightmare!
(mimics a drum roll)
The Elevator Game! That's right!
It's believed that this game will
transport its player into another
world. What will we find in this
whole new world? We're about to
find out.

The elevator reaches the top floor. The doors open.

Kevin glances at the time again -- it's midnight.

KEVIN
All right, maniacs. It's exactly
twelve midnight. Here we go.

He dabs a sequence of floor numbers, commencing the ritual
ELEVATOR GAME.

The doors close.

The elevator descends and stops. The doors open.

What appears to be a female HOUSEKEEPER pushes a cleaning
cart in the distance. Her face is hidden behind broom
bristles.

WILLY (O.S.)
(to self)
Housekeeping? At this hour?

The elevator doors close.

INT. CAR - SAME

Willy's gaze is fixed on his laptop screen. The elevator doors slide open. He sees what appears to be the same housekeeper, only she's much closer.

The doors close. The elevator descends to the next floor.

It reopens, revealing the housekeeper again. Willy's suspicion deepens, his curiosity turns to unease.

WILLY
Tell me you're seeing that.

KEVIN (O.S.)
(static)
Be a little more specific --

WILLY
The cleaning lady.

The elevator doors close.

KEVIN (O.S.)
(static)
What about her -- ?

WILLY
She's on every floor.

KEVIN (O.S.)
We did it, Willy. We've made contact with the spirit world.

WILLY
I'm being serious.

The doors open. The housekeeper is gone.

WILLY
She was right there...

KEVIN (O.S.)
We're just here for subscribers, Willy. I don't need you to go off the deep end.

INT. HOTEL/ELEVATOR - SAME

The elevator doors begin to close. A gnarled hand reaches in. The doors retract.

A thin, frail man in dark robes enters. This is the SICKLY MAN.

WILLY (O.S.)
Whoa! He just came outta nowhere!

The Sickly Man turns toward the doors as they close.

KEVIN
Uhh, what floor, sir?

No reply.

WILLY (O.S.)
He's creeping me out. I wouldn't get too close.

Kevin attempts to get the man's attention.

KEVIN
Sir?

Again, nothing from the Sickly Man. The elevator shuts and advances to the next floor.

The Sickly Man begins to sing a traditional nursery rhyme -- "WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?"

SICKLY MAN
(under his breath)
...Who dug his grave? I, said the Owl, with my little trowel, I dug his grave...

The elevator doors open. The Sickly Man exits, continuing to sing.

The lights flicker. The doors close.

The elevator descends to level "B" -- the basement.

INT. CAR - SAME

Willy continues to watch Kevin, the laptop screen goes black.

WILLY
Kevin? You there?

Lightning flashes, illuminating the contorted ghastly face of the Sickly Man just outside his window. Willy doesn't notice.

WILLY
Can you hear me?!

After another lightning flash, the Sickly Man is gone.

INT. HOTEL/ELEVATOR - SAME

The doors open to the darkness of the basement.

KEVIN
(mutters)
Hello, darkness.

The elevator doors stay ajar. He pushes the "close doors" button. They won't budge.

He jabs it several more times...

Still nothing.

WILLY (O.S.)
Kevin!

KEVIN
You disappeared on me, bruh.

WILLY (O.S.)
I lost visual.

KEVIN
I'm stuck in the basement.

Kevin pokes his head out of the elevator.

Water pipes hiss with pressure.

A dark FIGURE moves about.

KEVIN
Someone's down here with me.

WILLY (O.S.)
Someone?

Kevin steps out of the elevator.

The figure approaches.

Kevin whips out his cell phone. Actuates the flashlight app. The figure closes the distance, materializing in the dim lighting...

It's a MAINTENANCE MAN (40s) carrying a tool box.

MAINTENANCE MAN
No one's allowed down here.

KEVIN
Uhh, sorry. I hit the wrong button.

The maintenance man studies him for a minute, then stares down at Kevin's feet.

MAINTENANCE MAN
I think you dropped something.

Kevin looks down. Sees an old booklet. He picks it up. Inspects it. The lettering resembles dried blood: "**R P G.**"

INT. WILLY'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kevin sits on a couch, flips through the RPG rulebook.

In the background, the television is tuned to the science channel. A physicist explains the theory of The Fixed Timeline:

PHYSICIST (O.S.)
"...The past, present, and the future are already predetermined and unchangeable. According to this theory, any actions taken by time travelers in the past would have already occurred and had an impact on the present and future..."

Willy enters from the kitchen, two beers in hand. Plants one in front of Kevin.

Kevin flips the rulebook over. The back cover depicts incantation symbols.

WILLY
There's something off about the video we shot at the hotel.

Kevin opens his beer. Takes a swig.

WILLY

That cleaning lady, she didn't show up on video. It's like she wasn't even there --

KEVIN

Don't say it. Don't you...

WILLY

She was a ghost.

KEVIN

Easy there, *John Edward*.

WILLY

Well, there's no other way to explain it. We both saw her.

KEVIN

I've seen a lot of things.

WILLY

And a lot of those *things* you can probably explain.

Willy swipes through his cell phone photos. Finds one in particular.

WILLY

And that creepy old guy in the elevator, there's something really off 'bout him. Check this out.

He shows Kevin a close-up of the Sickly Man's feet. Zooms in... closer... closer... Until we see that they're not feet at all, but...

split HOOVES similar to a goat.

KEVIN

Nice special effects. Viewers are gonna eat that up.

He pats Willy on the back. Chugs the rest of his beer.

WILLY

It wasn't me.

KEVIN

Sure.

WILLY

I swear!

Kevin flips to the first page of the RPG rulebook. It reads "DEAD END" followed by role-play gaming instructions.

KEVIN

I'm curious about your plans tonight.

WILLY

You're outta your mind if you think I'm playing that thing.

KEVIN

Oh, come on. Don't be such a wuss.

WILLY

Sorry. You're on your own.

KEVIN

I've never see you so freaked out. You're supposed to be the science guy, not the spiritualist.

WILLY

Something just seems way off. I'm tellin' ya, Kevin. Don't do it.

KEVIN

Come on, *shutterbug*.

WILLY

No way in Hell, man. Sorry.

KEVIN

Hell is right. That's what I tell my viewers. It's perfect. It sells itself. We're almost at one million subscribers. I think this'll launch us over.

WILLY

Before you do anything, you should talk to Dylan about this.

Kevin shakes his head, chortles mirthlessly.

WILLY

This is his sorta thing.

KEVIN

We kicked him off the show. We're the last people he'd wanna help.

WILLY

That was moons ago --

KEVIN

How many moons does it take?

While Willy contemplates the question, Kevin nabs his unopened beer.

WILLY

Hey, that's my last one!

Kevin cracks it open. Chugs it down. Tosses the empty can in the nearest waste basket.

KEVIN

Maybe you should ask *double D* to buy you a case.

In the background, the physicist continues the lecture:

PHYSICIST (O.S.)

"...It challenges the idea of free will and suggests that everything that has happened, is still happening, and will continue to happen. It's set in stone with no room for alteration or deviation..."

EXT. FOREST/DEAD END ROAD - NIGHT

Kevin parks his car. He detaches his video camera from the dashboard. Faces it toward himself. Gestures devil horns toward the lens.

KEVIN

Hello, you freak maniacs! Welcome back to another episode of The Kevin and Willy Show! Tonight, we're delving deep into a hellish nightmare! It's so scary, even Willy chickened out! That's right! I'm on my own for this one!

(beat)

You've watched us demonstrate *light as a feather, stiff as a board -- Bloody Mary -- Sandman -- Tsuji-ura -- The Picture Game*. We even tackled *The Elevator Game*, which we'll post soon, and now we bring you...

He makes a drum roll sound, then holds the RPG rulebook in front of the camera.

KEVIN

R-P-G! To tell you the truth, I don't even know if I should be doin' this alone! And that's what makes it so freakin' fun! Let's get started!

He opens the RPG rulebook to the first page...

EXT. FOREST/DEAD END ROAD - DAY

Willy drives up. Parks next to Kevin's vacant car and steps out. He cautiously approaches the driver's side, notices the shattered window. He peeks inside. Spots a video camera and the RPG rulebook. His attention shifts to the dense woods.

WILLY

Kevin!

He ventures

INTO THE WOODS

and searches for any sign of Kevin. Turns up nothing.

WILLY

Kevin!

He returns to Kevin's car. Opens the door. Inspects the video camera. Removes the flash drive.

Takes the RPG rulebook.

INT. WILLY'S APARTMENT/BEDROOM - LATER

In place of furniture and a bed, there's tech gadgets and bundles of wires branching out in every direction.

Willy sits at his computer. Inserts Kevin's flash drive. A video uploads and plays...

ON THE MONITOR: Kevin reads the RPG instructions aloud...

KEVIN

Unlock the doors. Wait for the knock. Do not look out your windows.

He unlocks the car doors as instructed. Waits for the knock...

KEVIN

All right. How long do we have to wait --

Before he finishes his question, there's a loud knock on the driver side window.

KNOCK!

Willy jerks back in his seat, startled.

ON THE MONITOR: The Sickly Man stands outside the driver side door.

A gnarled hand continues to knock on the window.

Kevin stares into the camera with fearful eyes.

KEVIN

It's real! It's real!

His hands shake as he attempts to read the next set of instructions, fumbling over his words...

The driver side window SHATTERS.

A long tentacle slithers into the car.

KEVIN

Aaaaaah! Help me!

SUDDENLY --

The flash drive sparks and POPS like a firecracker.

Willy leaps out of his seat.

WILLY

Aaah!

Smoke plumes from the laptop input and wafts toward the ceiling, sets off a smoke alarm...

INT. MENTAL HEALTH CENTER/REC ROOM - DAY

A man with long hair and ripped jeans DYLAN (30s) carries a bag of fast food. ANGELO (60s) sits at a small table, stares blankly out the window.

DYLAN

Dad, I got your favorite. Double cheeseburger. No pickles.

Angelo continues to gaze out the window, seemingly unaware of someone speaking.

Dylan pulls out the food, lays it out on the table.

DYLAN

Your team won today. Thought you'd wanna know that. They're pretty good this year. Good enough to make the playoffs, I think. We'll see...

His words hang in the air.

DYLAN

I told you about Roger Helm, the rookie from Philadelphia. He blew out his knee on his second game.

(beat)

When that happened to me in the fifth grade, you ran out there and carried me off the field...

Angelo's eyes remain fixed on a world that only he can see.

Dylan places his hand on his father's shoulder.

DYLAN

Love you, dad.

He takes a deep breath, keeps his emotions in check.

INT. DYLAN'S HOUSE/GARAGE - LATER

Dylan strums an electric guitar.

Willy enters through a side door. Dylan spots him and ceases.

WILLY

Hey.

Dylan's glare says it all.

WILLY

I know how you feel about me.

DYLAN

If you did, you wouldn't be here.

WILLY

Look, Dylan. I'm --

Dylan turns up his amp and plucks a tune.

WILLY

I'm sorry for how things went down.
Sorry for letting you go.

Dylan ramps up the volume...

DYLAN

There had to be a good reason why
you did it! And I wanna hear it!

Dylan thrashes his guitar.

DYLAN

Say it, Willy!

WILLY

What's it matter now?! I just want
it to be over! Forgive and forget!

DYLAN

You weren't betrayed by the ones
closest to you! Lemme tell ya
something: it's really hard to
forget something like that. Now say
why you did it!

WILLY

All right! All right!

Willy drops his head, debates what he should say...

WILLY

I was -- I was jealous.

DYLAN

I can't hear you!

WILLY

I said I was jealous!

DYLAN

It kinda sounded like you said you
were *jealous*!

WILLY

Yes! I am pathetically envious!

DYLAN

I'm not sure why!

WILLY

You know why!

DYLAN
Maybe, I do! Maybe, I don't!

WILLY
Because Candice liked you, and it
killed me inside! I knew Kevin
wouldn't stand for it! And I told
him how she felt about you! The
next thing I know, you were out!

Dylan stops playing.

WILLY
I can't say it enough. I'm really
sorry. It was all me. I take all
the blame. All of it.

DYLAN
I hope it still kills ya.

WILLY
Every single day.

DYLAN
Good.

Dylan sets his guitar aside.

DYLAN
So, what do you want?

WILLY
Kevin needs your help.

DYLAN
Nice. He sends his errand boy.

WILLY
He's missing.

Willy digs out the RPG rulebook. Holds it out. Dylan's eyes
widen with shock.

WILLY
He played this game last night.

DYLAN
How'd you get that?

WILLY
Kevin found it.

He hands the RPG rulebook to Dylan.

DYLAN

You don't find something like this.

Dylan flips through the pages.

WILLY

We were recording a segment for our show. The elevator game. And then this booklet shows up --

Something dawns on Dylan...

DYLAN

Ahh, that's how he found you. The elevator game summons Jaenus, keeper of gateways and portals. But that doesn't concern me. The one who left this book behind, that's the one to revere. His name is Raum. He's the god of riddles and puzzles.

(beat)

This rulebook is an invitation...

INT. DYLAN'S HOUSE/BEDROOM - LATER

Dylan walks to his closet. Rummages through a crate of old record albums. Pulls one out. Hands it to Willy.

DYLAN

Local band. Supposedly, they held seances and conversed with Raum. You can see it in the lyrics. From the first song to the last.

The album cover depicts: Peter and Diane, posing in 1970's garb -- the same couple that was slaughtered in the apple grove. Behind them, poses two other band members: DOUG and GALE.

The band's name: "RAUM'S PURGING GROUND."

DYLAN

I'm not sure, but I think I'm related to them on my dad's side. Maybe, distant cousins or something.

(beat)

Anyway, they released this album and vanished. No one heard from them since.

Willy opens the album cover. The inside shows the same incantations as the RPG rulebook.

DYLAN

Read the lyrics to Raum's Game.

Willy glances over the display of lyrics. Finds the song titled "RAUM'S GAME" and reads...

WILLY

*Stay awhile, my friends, yeah,
climb on in/ Come play, retrieve
your kin/ Raum knows you're a
stranger to these doors/
Don't go where you haven't gone
before/ Without redemption, prepare
to stay/Kin redeems kin/ Come play,
come play, come play...*

Willy looks up, dumbfounded.

WILLY

This is all foreign to me, man. I'm more... *X minus Y*. Straightforward.

DYLAN

All right. This game consists of redeemers and captives. Raum left this behind, knowing Kevin would play. Since he didn't have anyone to redeem, he was doomed from the start. Now, he's a captive. There's only one way to get him back. Kin redeems kin. You have to be blood-related to redeem someone that's trapped inside the game.

WILLY

Candice is scared of her own shadow.

DYLAN

That's what makes her the perfect entrée. Raum feeds on despair.

WILLY

We just gotta find a way to get Candice to play.

A contemplative beat.

DYLAN

There's this movie called *Nothing Up My Sleeve*.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

It's about a grumpy old magician.
His brother is dying on a hospital
bed, and he refuses to go see him,
so they kidnap him during one of
his acts --

WILLY

Ahh, hell, nah! We're not doing
that! That's crazy!

DYLAN

It worked.

WILLY

I was thinkin', you could talk to
her. She'll listen if it comes from
you.

DYLAN

If she's smart, she wouldn't.
There's no way around it, Willy.
Not with someone like her.

EXT. CANDICE'S HOUSE - LATER

Willy heads to the front door. A sign nearby reads: "*Please
Do Not Knock. Use doorbell.*" He rings the doorbell...

...the melodic tune sounds.

Candice peeks out a window. Unlocks her door, opens it.

CANDICE

Hi.

WILLY

Hey, Candice. Uhh...

Candice reads his troubled look.

CANDICE

You okay?

WILLY

Uhh, no... I, uhh, need to tell you
something. It's about -- it's about
Kevin.

CANDICE

What's wrong?

WILLY

It's probably best if I show you.

He pulls out the RPG rulebook. Hands it to Candice.

WILLY

Kevin played this game last night. I told him not to, but you know how your brother is, he doesn't listen to anybody. This book has instructions, like a RPG game. It has scenarios with rules, a map. You follow the rules, you're basically safe. You break 'em, and, I dunno, there's consequences...

CANDICE

I don't understand.

WILLY

Kevin's gone.

Willy is hesitant in continuing, but then --

WILLY

Well, I think... he might be trapped. Inside the game.

CANDICE

Is this a joke?

WILLY

I know, I know. It sounds crazy, but it's true. It's all on video. I found his camera in his car this morning. I pulled the flash drive. But then it fried. It went up in smoke right after something grabbed him, whatever this thing was, it broke through his window and took him and then --

CANDICE

Willy, just stop. Please.

WILLY

I'm not lying. I wouldn't do that to you. I know how ridiculous this sounds, believe me. I know.

Candice pulls out her cell phone. Dials Kevin. It goes straight to his voicemail.

WILLY

He's not gonna answer. He's in a different dimension than ours.

WILLY (CONT'D)
Another plane of existence. Beyond
our reality.

Candice takes a moment to gather her thoughts.

CANDICE
You said you saw his car.

WILLY
At Auglaize Forest. Where it comes
to that dead end.

CANDICE
Why didn't you call the police?

WILLY
What would I tell them? Kevin is
locked away in Jumanji? They'd
stick me in a padded room.

He reaches for her hand.

If you wanna see him alive, you're
gonna have to come with me.

Candice pulls away and excuses herself back inside. She
closes the door. Deadbolts all the locks.

WILLY
Candice?! What're you doing?!

He pounds on the door.

WILLY
Candice!

CANDICE (O.S.)
Stop, Willy! You're scaring me!

WILLY
I need you to believe me!

CANDICE (O.S.)
I want you to leave!

WILLY
Candice!

He presses his ear against the door. Hears her on the phone
with the police.

CANDICE (O.S.)
I need you to send someone to 732
Main St., hurry please!

WILLY

Candice! I didn't hurt him! I'm leaving now! I'm going! Please, don't --

He rushes off to his car. Speeds away.

INT. POLICE STATION/INTEROGATION ROOM - LATER

A one-way mirror window reflects Willy's tense posture. He sits across from a DETECTIVE (50s).

DETECTIVE

How do you know Candice Robin?

WILLY

I'm best friends with her brother. We've known each other since grade school.

DETECTIVE

She has reason to believe that something tragic might've happened to him, and suspects that you were involved.

WILLY

I believe something horrible happened to him, yes. But I had nothing to do with it.

DETECTIVE

She told us where we'd find his vehicle. She got that information from you.

(glances at file)

Auglaize Forest. His car was pretty banged up. Significantly.

A contemplative beat.

WILLY

I, uhh, want my lawyer.

BEHIND THE ONE-WAY WINDOW

stands Candice, her face etched with concern. She chews on her fingernails. The CHIEF OF POLICE (60s) stands beside her.

CHIEF OF POLICE

He's absolutely convinced that your brother is trapped inside some game. I must admit, it's quite an unusual story, unlike anything I've ever heard.

(beat)

We dispatched an officer to investigate his apartment and the report confirmed that the flash drive mentioned was destroyed. Unfortunately, any potential evidence it may have contained is now irretrievable. I have a strong feeling he attempted to dispose of incriminating evidence.

Candice's breathing grows uneven as she leans closer to the one-way window. She tries to steady her trembling hands.

CHIEF OF POLICE

I understand this is rough for you, Candice. We're going to do our best to find your brother.

CANDICE

Thank you.

INT. CANDICE'S HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Candice sits at the kitchen table, cradles a cup of tea. Her laptop is open. It displays scattered pics of Kevin.

She takes a shaky sip of her tea, the steam momentarily shrouds her face. The worry lines deepen on her forehead.

The photos capture Kevin's infectious smile, his vibrant personality shines through each snapshot.

She pauses at a childhood photo of her and Kevin standing in front of their mother. Their arms draped over shoulders -- siblings but best buddies.

CANDICE

(under breath)

I need to know you're safe.

The RPG rulebook lies on the kitchen counter. It slides off, lands next to her feet. She picks it up. Gives it a glance. Ponders its existence, then flings it into the wastebasket.

INT. CANDICE'S HOUSE/HALLWAY - LATER

Candice turns off the hallway light. Her nightlights turn on. She heads to her bedroom with her tea...

As she passes the nightlights, they pulsate.

A faint WHISPER calls to her: "*Candice.*"

She spins around.

A nightlight bursts, startling her.

She drops her tea cup. It shatters on the floor.

LATER

The hallway light is on. Candice sweeps up the shards.

There's a faint KNOCK on her front door.

She sets the broom and dust pan aside.

The knocks become urgent.

CANDICE
I'm coming!

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Candice glances out a window. Her vision is skewed from her standpoint. She sees the sideview of SOMEONE in black robes.

The outside light shuts off. Then flickers back on.

Off again, on again...

off.

On.

Off.

CANDICE
(low)
What the...

Candice turns from the window just as the light turns on.

The ghastly face of

THE SICKLY MAN

stares inside, his wicked eyes gaze at her.

The light flickers off.

Candice faces the window just as it flickers back on, but the Sickly Man is nowhere to be seen.

SUDDENLY --

Someone tries to kick the door in.

Candice retreats from the door. Retrieves her cell phone.
Dials 911.

A guttural VOICE answers on the other end.

SICKLY MAN (O.S.)
I'll huff and I'll puff and blow
your house down!

The voice ends with malevolent laughter intermingled with a goat's bleating.

The door continues to shake as the kicks persist.

Candice hurls the phone. The laughter grows with intensity.

CANDICE
Go away! Stop it! Stop it! Stop!

She covers her ears and screams...

SUDDENLY --

Complete silence. Not a single sound except the eerie stillness in the air.

The door bell rings, releasing soothing music into the atmosphere...

She hears a gentle voice at the front door.

DYLAN (O.S.)
Hello?

Candice glances out a window. Sees Dylan.

CANDICE
Why the hell are you pounding on my
door like that?!

DYLAN (O.S.)
I got no clue what you're talking
about.

CANDICE
What do you want?!

DYLAN (O.S.)
I heard about your brother. And I just came by to check on you, to see if you were okay. Figured you might need something. Or someone to talk to, I don't know. I would've called, but I don't have your number.

Candice glances at her cell phone. The screen is shattered.

CANDICE
Well, I'm not okay! I'm far from being okay!

DYLAN (O.S.)
Hey, listen. I'm gonna head out. I can tell you're not up for this right now. I didn't mean to bother you. Guess, I'll see ya 'round.

Candice watches him turn to leave. She gains her composure and unlocks the door. Opens it.

CANDICE
Wait.

Dylan turns around.

DYLAN
I, uhh, know about your house rules that you have in place, and I totally respect that. If you want, we can just chit-chat out here.

CANDICE
It's chilly.

DYLAN
Yeah. It is.

A contemplative beat.

CANDICE
Would you -- would you like to come inside?

Dylan is taken aback by her proposal. Candice reads his face.

CANDICE
Kevin says I should make exceptions
to my rulebook.

She steps aside.

INT. CANDICE'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - SAME

Dylan enters. Regards the decor.

DYLAN
Nice place.

CANDICE
Still needs a lot of work. But it's
getting there.

Dylan glances at the painting of the farmhouse and cornfield.

When he looks away, we see a DARK FIGURE lurking in the
cornfield. It moves.

CANDICE
I have tea. Want some?

DYLAN
Sure. Thanks.

Candice heads to the kitchen. Dylan follows.

IN THE KITCHEN

Candice spots the RPG rulebook on the table. She picks it up,
inspects it. Glances at the wastebasket, confused.

Dylan reads her bewilderment.

CANDICE
I could've sworn I threw this --
Uhh, nevermind.

Dylan watches her toss the RPG rulebook away. His eyes fixate
on the wastebasket.

CANDICE
Sorry about earlier. I didn't mean
to snap like that.

DYLAN
Forget it.

CANDICE

I'm not sure, but I think this new medication I'm taking has me hearing things. Seeing things that aren't there.

She sets the pot for tea.

SUDDENLY --

Dylan covers her mouth with a cloth.

DYLAN

I'm sorry about this.

Candice tries to break free, but he holds his grip until her eyes close. Her body goes limp.

Dylan lies her gently on the floor, then retrieves the RPG rulebook from the trash.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Dylan drives his car. The headlights barely illuminate the road. He pulls up to a dead end and parks. Turns off the engine.

INSIDE DYLAN'S CAR

Candice blinks opens her eyes. She looks around, trying to make sense of what just happened.

Dylan glances at the time on his cell phone -- a few minutes until midnight. The RPG rulebook lies on the dashboard.

Candice half-focuses her eyes. She's drowsy, still under the spell of an inhaled chemical. Her hands and feet are bound with duct tape.

CANDICE

Dylan? W-w-what are you doing?

DYLAN

It's not your medication. The things you're seeing are real. Willy tried to tell you.

CANDICE

Please, don't hurt --

DYLAN

I promise, I'm not going to hurt you.

Dylan consults the time again -- it's midnight. He grabs the RPG rulebook. Skims the instructions. Unlocks his doors.

DYLAN

It'll all make sense in a minute. This is what your brother was doing when he went missing.

Candice tries to shift her body, attempting to free herself from the restraints. Her struggle only intensifies her fear.

CANDICE

Please, Dylan. Just let me go. I won't tell anyone.

DYLAN

We're going to hear a knock. Whatever you do, don't look out the window. It's part of the rules. Okay? There's consequences to every rule we break. Some are more severe than others.

CANDICE

Let me go. Please.

As she speaks, her voice grows stronger...

CANDICE

Dylan, please!

DYLAN

I know you're scared. I didn't want to do this, believe me, but I didn't have any other choice.

Candice gathers strength, squirms in her restraints.

DYLAN

I'll let you go, I promise. But I need you to see something first.

CANDICE

I don't want to see anything!

Dylan glances at his cell phone -- it's midnight.

INT. DYLAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS (RAUM'S PURGING GROUNDS)

There's a KNOCK on the driver side window -- the game has begun.

The accumulation of knocks give off the sound of hail pummeling the car.

Candice lifts her chin --

DYLAN

Don't look! Don't look!

Candice, unable to resist, looks out her window and sees something so hideous, she lets out a gut-wrenching SCREAM...

Her window shatters. Tentacles slither in and attempt to yank her out. Dylan starts the engine. Throws it in reverse. Steps on the gas.

The tentacles release their grip on Candice.

DYLAN

I told you not to look!

CANDICE

What's going on?!

DYLAN

It's the game! Kevin is trapped somewhere inside this place! We're inside Raum's Purging Grounds!

CANDICE

Stop the car! Let me out!

DYLAN

I can't! We're part of the game now!

CANDICE

You and Willy are in on this! What did you do to Kevin?!

DYLAN

Listen to me! If you wanna see him again, you need to trust me! I'm gonna help you find him!

Dylan backs out onto the highway.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Dylan throws his car into drive and speeds away.

DYLAN

Those things broke through the windows, because you broke the rules. We can't afford to do that again.

Dylan holds up the RPG rulebook.

DYLAN

We have to follow these rules or we'll be trapped just like Kevin!

He comes to crossroads and stops.

CANDICE

Untie me! Now! I want out!

Dylan removes the duct tape from around her wrists. She tears off the tape from around her ankles...

EXT. CROSSROADS - SAME

Once her restraints come off, Candice springs out of the car.

DYLAN

Candice, wait!

Candice regards the four crossroad signs: North, South, East, and West. She aimlessly wanders East.

DYLAN

It's not safe out there!

CANDICE

Leave me alone!

Dylan gets out of the car. Chases after her.

DYLAN

Candice! Come back!

CANDICE

Stay away from me!

DYLAN

I'm trying to help you!

CANDICE

Kidnapping me and bringing me to the middle of nowhere?! That's your idea of help?!

DYLAN

Kevin's in danger! He needs you! It was the only thing I could think of to get you here! I'm trying to save him! But I can't do it without you!

CANDICE

You're a deranged lunatic! Just keep the hell away from me!

Dylan refrains from his pursuit. He calls out...

DYLAN

Candice! There's more of those things out there! Worst things!

She continues on...

DYLAN

Candice!

Dylan watches as the darkness envelops her.

EXT. HIGHWAY - LATER

Candice glances over her shoulder. Sees nothing but darkness.

Something approaches...

She hears a squeaky bicycle wheel.

It's followed by a BELL. From the darkness, a hallow VOICE...

THE VENDOR (O.S.)

I just love the smell of warm candy.

The voice is followed by a series of bells.

THE VENDOR, a human-shaped ghoul, enters the light on an old-style ice cream vending bicycle with signage that reads: "ICE CREAM". The ghoul pedals toward Candice.

Candice backs away.

The ghoul stops pedaling. Senses something. Or someone? It slowly turns and faces us.

THE VENDOR

How interesting. It seems, you've brought along some extra eyes.

CANDICE

(stammers)

Who -- who are you?

The ghoul returns its attention to Candice.

THE VENDOR

I am... a vendor. I give and I take away. And I keep things on ice and deliver for the right price. That's all there is to know.

CANDICE

What do you want?

THE VENDOR

Your first inquiry was a freebee. But the second one...

The ghoul climbs off the bicycle. Approaches the rear of the ice box. Opens a hatch. Pulls out a severed arm and leg.

THE VENDOR (CONT'D)

...will cost you an arm and leg.

Candice screams. Falls backward into a ditch. Lands in murky water. She springs up.

The ghoul turns and gazes directly at us. Chucks the bloodied limbs in our direction. After malevolent laughter, it turns its attention to Candice.

CANDICE

Get away from me, you freak!

THE VENDOR

Oh, you have it all wrong, *candy girl*. You came here on your own accord. I never went looking for you.

(beat)

And the same goes for your guests.

The ghoul motions in our direction, then returns its attention to the ice box.

THE VENDOR

You look like you could use some cheering up. I know an upside down smile when I see one.

CANDICE
Leave me alone!

The ghoul opens a second hatch.

THE VENDOR
Ice cream works wonders.

CANDICE
I don't want anything from you!

The ghoul pulls out a hand saw with dried blood. Turns to Candice with a grim smile.

THE VENDOR
(guttural)
I was talking to myself.

Candice notices movement in the water. Tentacles emerge and slither around her legs. She screams, unable to move.

The ghoul positions itself leisurely on the bicycle. Takes up the hand saw.

The tentacles tighten their grip, Candice attempts to pull away -- it's futile.

The ghoul opens its mouth, then pulls out a long stringed bow -- in the same manner a magician would draw out a sword.

THE VENDOR
Consider yourself lucky. Your game begins on the South road. This is the East.
(beat)
Had it been the East road, you would be minced into itty-bitty pieces right now. A new flavor of ice cream. Instead, I'm obligated to send you off.

The ghoul strums the stringed bow along the edge of the saw blade like a violin, producing a haunting melody that echoes into the night sky.

THE VENDOR
Be a doll, would ya? Don't pester me again. And take these *onlookers* with you.

The ghoul glances in our direction.

The tentacles release their grip on Candice and retreat below the water's surface.

Candice crawls out of the ditch and dashes toward the crossroads.

EXT. CROSSROADS - MINUTES LATER

Dylan sits on the hood of his car, in deep thought.

A strange sound interrupts the silence, followed by a faint bicycle bell.

Dylan looks around. Sees nothing...

DYLAN

Candice?

The squeak of a bicycle tire.

The bell sounds a little louder this time.

FOOTFALLS race toward him.

DYLAN

Candice? Is that you?

Candice enters the light.

DYLAN

Candice!

He opens his arms, assuming she'd fall into them. She bypasses him. Leaps into the car. Slams the door shut.

INT. DYLAN'S CAR - LATER

Dylan and Candice eye the contents of the RPG rulebook.

CANDICE

...And so now, Willy's in jail, because of me. There was a part of me that wanted to believe him, but...

DYLAN

You couldn't have known.

CANDICE

It's all my fault.

DYLAN

Hey, don't beat yourself up. I would've done the same thing. This whole thing is bizarre.

CANDICE

There has to be another way to find Kevin. There just has to be.

DYLAN

If I could take your place, I would. In a heartbeat. But only you can bring him back. That's the main rule.

Dylan studies the RPG rulebook, skims a few instructions.

DYLAN

We shouldn't waste any more time. Are you ready to play?

CANDICE

No.

DYLAN

Same here.

Dylan turns the ignition. The engine fires up.

CANDICE

Just so you know, before we go forward. The meds I'm on is the reason I'm not balling up right now. I don't know how soon, but it's gonna wear off.

Dylan reaches over and grabs her hand. He gives her a reassuring nod.

DYLAN

I'll be with you every step of the way.

(beat)

Now let's go get your brother and get the hell outta here.

Dylan skims through an RPG page, then looks at the directional signs. His focus: The South.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Dylan speeds down the highway.

DYLAN

There's something in there about picking up a hitch hiker.

He hands over the RPG rulebook.

Candice reads the instructions to the first scenario...

CANDICE

*Pick up the hitch hiker. Do not
look at his face. Drop him off.*

(beat)

There's nothing else. These rules
are too vague.

DYLAN

The main thing is, we don't look at
whoever or whatever climbs inside.
Just keep your head down.

CANDICE

Okay.

In the distance, they see a HITCH HIKER waving their thumb. A
fedora shrouds the hitch hiker's face. Dylan pulls up and
comes to a stop. The hitch hiker climbs inside, carrying a
guitar case.

THE HITCH HIKER

(gurgling sounds)

Thanks for stoppin'. Didn't think
anyone'd bother this time of night.
Never can be too careful, I get it.
I've been out here for a season and
a half, it seems.

The hitch hiker sounds as if they're choking on their own
blood.

THE HITCH HIKER

Lovely night. Wouldn't you say?

Dylan nods.

THE HITCH HIKER

Headin' South. Me, too.

The hitch hiker laughs.

THE HITCH HIKER

Just like birds flockin' together.
Searching for comfort. Others
searching for love.

Dylan pulls onto the highway.

THE HITCH HIKER

What are y'all searching for?

DYLAN
Nothing. Just out for a drive.

THE HITCH HIKER
Out for a drive. Hmmm.

DYLAN
Yes, sir.

THE HITCH HIKER
I went out for a drive late one
night, and never made it back
home...

Through the rearview mirror, we see a mangled body with
twisted limbs and torn clothes; thus, the garbling voice.

THE HITCH HIKER
I was fixin' to see someone about
showing me a thing or two about
guitars. They weren't there, so I
turned and came back. Y'all know
how to play guitar?

Candice shakes her head.

THE HITCH HIKER
How 'bout you, young man?

DYLAN
A little.

THE HITCH HIKER
Oh, I'd say you know more than
you're lettin' on.

DYLAN
You wouldn't be wrong.

THE HITCH HIKER
Humility has no place in a world
like this. Learn to puff out your
chest a little. Same goes for you,
missy. Take my word for it.

The hitch hiker leans forward, taps Candice on the shoulder.

THE HITCH HIKER
I willin' to bet you got music in
your bones.

CANDICE
(stammers)
I, uhh, play -- play piano.

THE HITCH HIKER

I'm sorry, sweetness. Didn't catch that. Gotta speak up.

CANDICE

I play piano.

THE HITCH HIKER

Ahh, the piano. My grandmother tickled the ivories for many years. And what a sweet soul she was. I never saw her without a smile. Good woman. Good. Very good. Boy, I miss 'er.

(beat)

Now, my grandfather, not so much. Don't miss 'im one bit. He loved the bottle. That was his heart. His joy. His forte... And he passed it onto my father, and I watched my ol' man become a monster. And that monster passed it onto me. Then my poor boy was raised by one. A monster.

(beat)

You know a thing or two about the bottle, don't ya, Candice? A thing or two about... *monsters*.

Dylan glances at Candice. Tears stream down her cheeks. She wipes them away. More tears flow.

DYLAN

Where do you -- Where do you want dropped off?

The hitch hiker leans forward.

A twisted arm reaches over the driver's seat. The hitch hiker grabs Dylan's hair and yanks his head back. The car swerves momentarily.

THE HITCH HIKER

(guttural)

She sheds a few tears and that gives you the guts to play hero!

The hitch hiker releases him.

Candice fights the urge to look at the hitch hiker. Dylan glances at Candice, wags his head, dissuading her. He lips the words: "No. Don't."

THE HITCH HIKER

Yeah! Look at me, Candice! Look and see how the bottle returns its love. Look! A peek won't hurt ya! Look at me, Candice! Look at me!

The hitch hiker's voice is suddenly muffled with gurgles.

THE HITCH HIKER

Can-dissssssss. Can-dissssssss. Can-dissssssss.

The hitch hiker points at a car wrapped around a utility pole. Smoke ascends from a busted radiator.

THE HITCH HIKER

Right there. That's my stop.

Dylan pulls over at the site. The hitch hiker climbs out. Shuts the door. Enters the wreckage and repositions as if he never left the scene of the accident. A horrendous mess.

Candice dabs at her eyes.

DYLAN

You okay?

CANDICE

No. Can we go, please.

Dylan pulls onto the highway.

LATER

Candice opens the RPG rulebook, skims the next set of instructions...

CANDICE

All it says is drive.

DYLAN

We're already driving.

CANDICE

That's all it says.

Candice turns the page.

CANDICE

Wait. Here's something...

(reads)

Fast is not fast enough --

She is cut off by the car stereo. Static at first, then a brief message: *"Let's see what you got, highway star."*

The radio turns off.

After a few miles...

The radio turns back on, begins to surf channels on its own. Each channel repeats the same word: *"FASTER!"*

Then it transitions in reverse: *"RETSAF!"*

Then forward: *"FASTER!"*

Reverse: *"RETSAF!"*

The volume rises. Candice attempts to turn it down -- the more she tries, the louder it becomes...

A CHORAL SYMPHONY accompanies: *"FASTER! RETSAF! FASTER! RETSAF!"*

Dylan steps on it. Candice buckles her safety belt.

FASTER! RETSAF! FASTER! RETSAF!

DYLAN

Candice! Read the page!

FASTER! RETSAF! FASTER! RETSAF!

Candice brings herself to open the RPG rulebook. Reads the next instructions aloud...

CANDICE

Fast is not fast enough! Do not stop! She will stop you!

DYLAN

That's it?!

CANDICE

Yes!

The speedometer begins to climb.

The choral chant continues...

FASTER! RETSAF! FASTER! RETSAF!

They approach trees on both sides. Their eyes are peeled, anticipating anything.

The radio flips off.

After a long while, they grow weary. Nothing out of the ordinary takes place.

DYLAN
There's gotta be something we're
missing.

The radio flips on with another message: "*Fly, birdie, fly!*"

DYLAN
(reiterating to self)
Fast is not fast enough.

He contemplates the words on the page.

DYLAN
We gotta go faster.

He fastens his safety belt and floors it.

In a matter of moments, they're at top speed. Candice closes her eyes, grips the support handles.

The radio: "*Open your eyes, Candice!*"

She squints one eye open.

DYLAN
Follow the rules! Open 'em!

Candice opens her eyes.

SUDDENLY --

A young GIRL (10) bolts out of the woods, scurries across the highway...

Candice SHRIEKS.

Dylan hits the brakes, veers the car to avoid the girl. The tires SCREECH.

The car spins violently out of control, careens through the trees before vanishing

INSIDE A FOREST

where the car comes to a halt. The engine continues to run.

Candice is disoriented. Blood streaks down the side of her face. She faces Dylan. He's motionless, eyes closed.

CANDICE

Dylan?

She shakes him.

Nothing.

She unbuckles her seatbelt. Shakes him again. He groans in pain. His eyes blink open.

CANDICE

You're alive.

DYLAN

I'm not so sure if that's a good thing.

CANDICE

It is for me.

Dylan throws the car in reverse. Presses the gas. The wheels spin, kicking up dirt and sinking deeper into the soil.

DYLAN

Come on, come on!

He shifts it into drive, but the result is the same -- the tires sink.

DYLAN

It's not going anywhere.

They exit. The trees begin to rustle, a sense of unease washes over them.

From the shadows, the young girl emerges. Something unsettling lingers about her demeanor.

She giggles.

DYLAN

Who -- who're you?

The young girl refrains from answering.

In the distance, a deafening ROAR echoes in the night sky. Followed by FOOTFALLS, charging in their direction.

The girl grins malevolently.

DYLAN

Let's go, Candice. We gotta get back to the road.

Dylan winces in pain, struggles to walk. Candice notices his discomfort.

CANDICE
You okay?

DYLAN
I'll manage.

Candice aids him back to the highway.

The young girl follows...

EXT. HIGHWAY/EDGE OF FOREST - MINUTES LATER

Candice and Dylan emerge from the woods. They spot a dark house on a hill. A small dirt path leads up to it.

The trees begin to sway, growing louder... A whooshing sound cuts through the air.

YOUNG GIRL
It's coming for you.

DYLAN
Come on, Candice. We have to go.

Dylan limps up the dirt path.

CANDICE
Wait! The instructions! I left them
in the car!

She rushes back to the car in search of the RPG rulebook.

Meanwhile, the young girl approaches Dylan.

YOUNG GIRL
Look at you, pretending to be
brave. We're going to get you. Just
like we'll get her. Just like we
got your cousins... *Doug, Gale,
Peter, and Diane.* We get everyone.

DYLAN
Shut up! Get away from me!

The heavy footfalls gain momentum...

DYLAN
Candice! Let's go!

The whooshing sound grows louder and louder...

DYLAN

Come on! Forget the rulebook! Just
leave it! We have to go!

Candice bursts out the woods, the RPG rulebook in hand.

CANDICE

I got it!

She drapes Dylan's arm over her shoulder and aids him up the
path.

The swaying of the trees tapers to dead silence.

YOUNG GIRL

Oh, darn. No bones.

The young girl returns to the forest, disappearing in the
thickness of the trees.

EXT. THE MARWOOD HOME/DIRT PATH - CONTINUOUS

Candice and Dylan head up the trail.

The house is dark. A candle illuminates the front porch.

EXT. THE MARWOOD HOME/FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Candice assists Dylan up the stairs.

They attempt to gaze through the front door window -- it's
pitch black inside.

At the far end of the porch, Dylan peeks through a small
window. Sees the soft glow of an old television set. Across
from the TV sits an elderly COUPLE on a dingy couch, their
silhouettes emanating.

DYLAN

There's people inside there.

Candice glances in the RPG rulebook.

CANDICE

This is the home of Mr. and Mrs.
Marwood.

She reads the current set of rules...

CANDICE

*When they leave, redeemer takes the
key. Don't let the candle burn out.*

Candice knocks on the front door.

A light comes on inside.

MRS. MARWOOD (80s) approaches the front door. Opens it. Peers out. Appears to see nothing.

CANDICE

Uhh, hello.

Mrs. Marwood's **POV**: no one stands outside her door.

MRS. MARWOOD

Is someone there?

CANDICE

Hi. I'm Candice. This is Dylan.

Mrs. Marwood shuts the door in their face.

The inside lights go out.

CANDICE

I don't think she saw us. Maybe, she's blind.

DYLAN

Deaf, too.

CANDICE

Let's try this again.

Candice knocks. The lights come on.

Mrs. Marwood opens the door, peers out.

MRS. MARWOOD

Who's out there?

DYLAN

Hello, Mrs. Marwood --

Mrs. Marwood turns and calls to her husband.

MRS. MARWOOD

It's happening again!

MR. MARWOOD (80s) steps out onto the porch, bypassing Dylan and Candice.

DYLAN

All right. Something is definitely wrong here.

Mr. Marwood looks around, appears to see no one.

MR. MARWOOD
Come on out! Show yourself!

Mr. Marwood reenters the home and reaches for the doorknob to shut the door, but Dylan holds it open.

MR. MARWOOD
This blasted thing!

Mr. Marwood struggles to shut the door.

MR. MARWOOD
It's always getting stuck!

Dylan releases the door. It slams shut.

DYLAN
They can't see us.

CANDICE
Or hear us.

DYLAN
(reiterates the rules)
When they leave, redeemer takes the key.

CANDICE
What do you think it means?

DYLAN
Maybe, we gotta draw them out.

Dylan opens the door and barges in. Candice follows.

INT. THE MARWOOD HOME/DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The house lights flick on.

Candice and Dylan see a dinner table.

Cardboard boxes tower to the ceiling. Piles of miscellaneous items. Stacks of newspapers, magazines, and used PAINT CANS.

In one of the corners, stands an eerie sculptured CLOWN BUST on a plinth. It's EYES continually glare at us.

CANDICE
I hate clowns.

Dylan gives it a quick glance, then moves on...

Candice stumbles over a pile of items, bumps into a column of boxes -- they tumble over.

Mr. and Mrs. Marwood embrace each other, petrified. A look of empathy spreads on Candice's face.

CANDICE

Look how scared they are.

Dylan considers her assumption, then...

DYLAN

That shouldn't matter. They're just characters, playing their part.

CANDICE

You could be wrong.

DYLAN

I'm just trying to stick to the game rules.

He overturns the dinner table. Dishes and utensils crash on the floor. Tears stream down Mrs. Marwood's cheeks -- she clutches a rosary, holding it close to her heart.

A look of guilt washes over Candice.

Dylan pushes over another column of boxes. They tumble onto the floor, contents spill out.

Mr. Marwood comforts Mrs. Marwood with a tight embrace. Their lips quiver in silent prayer.

Their fright triggers something within Candice. She can no longer bare to look at them and exits the house.

EXT. THE MARWOOD HOME/FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Candice wipes her teary eyes.

Dylan steps out.

DYLAN

(soft)

Candice.

She looks at him, choked with emotion.

CANDICE

I can't get over the feeling that they're trapped here. Like, what if this is their personal Hell?

CANDICE (CONT'D)

(beat)

The hitch hiker talked about having a grandfather, a father, even a son. What if they died drinking and driving? And now they have to live with that regret over and over.

DYLAN

That hitch hiker was waiting to kill us. These people could be just as dangerous.

CANDICE

Maybe. I dunno.

DYLAN

I'm here for you and Kevin, so whatever you want me to do, I'm willing to do. But we gotta figure something out soon, 'cause that candle's about to burn out.

Candice glances at the candle, the flame gradually diminishes...

INT. THE MARWOOD HOME/LIVING ROOM - LATER

An old, large television set occupies a spot on a dusty entertainment center. The screen flickers with static, casting an eerie glow.

The Marwood couple sit on the couch, their eyes fixed on the television. On the far wall, hangs a family photo -- a time when they were young and vibrant. The young girl between them is familiar -- she's the same pestering young girl from outside, only she hasn't aged like her parents.

The faint sounds of an old talk show and audience emanates from the television.

Mr. Marwood leans forward, squinting at the screen.

Candice and Dylan stand at the threshold, observing the elderly couple.

DYLAN

(whispers to self)

This is so bizarre.

MRS. MARWOOD

I heard them say something.

The television static worsens.

MR. MARWOOD

I swear! Nothing works around here!

SUDDENLY --

Mr. Marwood's frustration peaks. He lunges at the television set and pounds it with his fist, causing the static to disappear. The screen flickers before displaying an unsettling image: Candice and Dylan are broadcasted on the television.

DYLAN

It's us! Look! We're on the screen!

MR. MARWOOD

Ah, that's better!

MRS. MARWOOD

Oh, how nice. She's a pretty little thing. Not much meat on them bones.

MR. MARWOOD

Oh, but she'll do. Yup. She'll do nicely. Mmm-hmmm...

Mr. Marwood licks his lips.

As the elderly couple watches Candice and Dylan on the screen, the channel abruptly changes...

ON THE T.V., we see the sculptured CLOWN BUST. It's EYES seem to pierce through the screen, locked with Candice and Dylan's terrified expressions.

Candice turns and scans the dining room. Her eyes fixate on the sculptured clown in the corner.

CANDICE

The clown's eyes, they're moving.

The clown turns at its base. It raises an arm. Points directly at us. Its eyes follow us as WE PAN across the room, TRACKING Candice. What we see is also displayed on the television set, viewed by Mr. and Mrs. Marwood.

Something dawns on Candice...

CANDICE

When I was on the East road, there was this thing, I'm not sure what it was. He called himself a vendor. He spoke to me. And said something about extra eyes following me here.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

Like, I somehow brought others with me. He called them: *Onlookers*.

DYLAN

Onlookers?

CANDICE

Yeah. Like, we're being watched. I mean, look at the television. How do you explain that? Look around. I don't see any cameras. Yet, there we are.

A contemplative beat.

DYLAN

When they leave, redeemer takes the key. Maybe "they" is not this couple.

(beat)

What if "they"... are the ones that are watching us.

Candice nods, affirming the theory.

Dylan gazes at the clown sculpture. It's eyes continue to glare at us.

DYLAN

Let's test it out.

Dylan glances at Mr. and Mrs. Marwood as they continue to watch the television.

DYLAN

Go outside. Shut the door behind you.

Candice walks toward the front door.

The clown's eyes stay focused on us as we TRACK Candice.

EXT. THE MARWOOD HOME/FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Candice steps out, closes the door behind her.

SUDDENLY --

Dylan hollers in pain from inside.

Candice attempts to re-enter. The door is now locked. She glances through the door window to see what is transpiring inside...

Dylan tussles with Mr. and Mrs. Marwood.

CANDICE

Dylan!

MR. MARWOOD/MRS. MARWOOD

BONES!!!

They bite and claw at Dylan, tearing flesh off his body.

CANDICE

Dylan! Nooooooooo!

Candice rams her shoulder into the door, attempts to break it down. It won't budge. She injures herself.

Dylan manages to break free from their grip. He darts for the front door. Holds up something -- a large SKELETON KEY.

DYLAN

I got it, Candice! I got the key!

The doorknob won't turn. Dylan attempts to smash through the door window. It's solid.

Mr. and Mrs. Marwood topple him, continuing their actions of rage. Blood splatters on the door window.

CANDICE

Dylan!

Mr. and Mrs. Marwood yank him away from the door. The lights turn off.

CANDICE

Dylan!

She violently pounds on the door window until her own blood streaks down her arm. She's left in tears, hopeless.

CANDICE

(low to self)

We followed the rules, we followed
the rules...

She looks toward the night sky.

CANDICE

We followed the rules!

She crumbles where she stands and buries her face.

The Sickly Man trails up the dirt path, singing a nursery rhyme -- "WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?"

SICKLY MAN

...All the birds of the air fell a-sighing and a-sobbing when they heard the bell toll...

Candice looks up and recoils against the front door.

The Sickly Man approaches the front porch. Plants a split-hooved foot on the first step. His features have noticeably changed -- his skin is fuller.

SICKLY MAN

(ghastly voice)

On the contrary, Candice. He touched the key. He's not the redeemer. You are.

CANDICE

Is he dead?

SICKLY MAN

The dead are no good to me. He's with your brother, but trust me when I say: they wish for death.

His long tongue flicks the air like a snake.

CANDICE

Let them go. Please.

SICKLY MAN

That's not how this game works.

Candice hyperventilates, her entire body trembles. The Sickly Man caresses the air between them with his tongue.

SICKLY MAN

Your pills are giving way. I know you can feel it. Your lovely aroma grows stronger by the minute.

(beat)

I knew you were the one, Candice. You don't disappoint.

He grins ear-to-ear.

SICKLY MAN

The Marwoods have been with me for a while. They came here looking for their tempest who you've met. She's a wild one, but serves her purpose. Believe it or not, her parents managed to make it past the grove. That is great love.

SICKLY MAN (CONT'D)

But it wasn't strong enough to
carry them through the monastery.

(gestures the home)

I'm not too fond of the Marwoods
these days. They reek, if I may be
so bold. They've gotten shopworn.
Stale. I think this home is long
overdue for a new tenant. Someone
like you. A new parasite.

Candice remains quiet.

SICKLY MAN

It's settled then. When you fail, I
will call this place... *The Robin
Home*.

He turns to leave. The darkness engulfs him.

Candice is left alone, her body shaking with fear.

A gust of wind tangles her hair. She drops her head in
defeat.

The candle's flame teeters on the edge, growing dimmer...

EXT. RICHARD'S HOME/BACKYARD - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Young Candice sits with an intricate wooden puzzle in front
of her, focused on solving it.

YOUNG KEVIN (10) approaches, leans over her shoulder.

YOUNG KEVIN

Is that the puzzle mom made?

YOUNG CANDICE

Yeah.

YOUNG KEVIN

You're never gonna solve that
thing. There's a trick to it.

Candice looks up at him, annoyed. She returns to the puzzle,
determined to prove him wrong.

YOUNG CANDICE

Don't stare. You're distracting me.

YOUNG KEVIN

Dad's gonna be home soon.

YOUNG CANDICE

Hush!

Kevin retreats to the house.

YOUNG KEVIN

You'll be sorry.

Candice doesn't seem to notice the passage of time, her entire focus consumed by the task at hand.

The puzzle approaches completion...

SUDDENLY --

Richard snatches it away from Candice, startling her. He gives the puzzle a glance.

RICHARD

Oh, I see what's going on here!
You're wasting your damned time
with this stupid thing!

Candice is afraid to look up.

RICHARD

You better have them dishes done,
missy!

YOUNG CANDICE

I -- I forgot.

Richard raises an open hand. Candice flinches, braces herself. Kevin throws himself between his sister and father, fists poised like a boxer.

YOUNG KEVIN

You're not gonna touch her!

RICHARD

Ahh, so you think you're a man now?
Hmm? All right, you wanna be a man.
Well then, I'm gonna treat ya like
a man.

Richard backhands him. Kevin falls back on his butt.

RICHARD

Come on, boy! Get up! You're a man
now! Get up! Let's see what you can
do! Stand up!

Kevin stands to his feet. Richard delivers a harder blow, sending his son to the ground. This time, the boy lies motionless.

Richard stands over him, nudges him with his boot.

YOUNG CANDICE
Stop it! Leave him alone!

RICHARD
The bull gave him the horns.

Kevin stirs, groans in agony.

RICHARD
Well, Kev, you're not quite a man.

Richard turns his attention to the puzzle. Walks over to a bullet-riddled mannequin standing erect at the end of his property. He steadies the puzzle on top of the mannequin's head.

YOUNG CANDICE
Daddy, no!

Richard enters a shed, exits with a shotgun. Loads it.

YOUNG CANDICE
Daddy! Don't! Please! Mommy made that for me!

Richard takes aim. Squeezes the trigger.

The mannequin's head explodes. The gunshot echoes across the sky. The puzzle descends to the ground, still intact -- untouched.

Richard towers over Candice, ruffles her hair.

RICHARD
What have ya learned today, little fly?

His question lingers.

Candice glances at her brother still lying on the ground...

EXT. THE MARWOOD HOME/FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Candice attempts to steady her nerves. She pulls herself to her feet. Takes a calming breath.

CANDICE

I learned... that my brother has my
back. And I got his.

She pounds on the door. The lights come on.

Mrs. Marwood opens the door. Peers out. She turns around and
calls out to her husband...

MRS. MARWOOD

It's happening again!

Candice storms inside the house, determined.

INT. THE MARWOOD HOME/DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Candice rushes toward the sculptured clown. It's eyes remain
fixated on us. Candice notes it. Contemplates a plan...

She scans the room. Spots the PAINT CANS. Pops off the lids.

We see Candice from a different camera angle -- the angle is
duplicated on the television set in the living room.

Candice tracks the clown's eyes. Waits until the gaze locks
on us. It lifts its arm, points. She splashes paint in our
direction... blotches out our view.

BLACK SCREEN.

INT. THE MARWOOD HOME/DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Candice snatches up another can of paint, poised to blacken
our view. The clown's eyes track us. It raises its hand,
targeting us once again.

She heaves the paint, blotches out our view...

BLACK SCREEN.

INT. THE MARWOOD HOME/DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A different angle on Candice.

The sculptured clown lifts its arm. Points in our direction.
Candice grabs another can of paint, blackens our view...

BLACK SCREEN.

EXT. THE MARWOOD HOME/FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Our perspective is from outside the home, with only a view of the front porch. We're not permitted to see what transpires inside.

The candle's flame dances, on the verge of extinction.

We hear the sound of Candice shuffling across the room, followed by the distinct winding and clicking of gears.

Then another sound: a KEY clinks on the floor.

More shuffling...

Candice steps outside. She opens her hand, revealing a skeleton key with an HOURGLASS symbol.

The candle's flame flickers one last time, then goes out.

She opens the RPG rulebook. Reads the instructions: *"Run to the monastery. Do not stop."*

She turns the page to gain additional information -- finds none. She pockets the skeleton key and the RPG rulebook.

She steps off the porch. When she reaches the edge of

THE APPLE GROVE

her hands begin to tremble uncontrollably.

CANDICE

No. Not now. No, no, no...

Winds rustles the trees.

Loud footfalls pound the ground, approaches in strides.

Candice sees a large dark figure in the distance. It begins to take shape as it draws near.

A scythe cuts the air.

Candice backs away from the grove, takes cover

BEHIND A LARGE TREE

with spiny limbs.

The scythe wielder takes shape as it approaches the Marwood property. It narrows its gaze, surveys the yard.

Candice peeks out from her hiding spot, meets eyes with the scythe-wielding ghoul.

The towering entity unleashes a thundering growl, proclaiming its domain, then retreats back into the shadows.

Candice clings to the tree for support. She's unable to catch her breath. Begins to hyperventilate. Sits on the ground, her back against the tree. Hugs her legs, buries her head...

BEGIN DAYDREAM

KEVIN (O.S.)

Hi, Sis.

Candice snaps her head up. Sees Kevin leaning against the tree. He waves and plants himself next to her. Places a comforting hand on her shoulder.

KEVIN

I'm proud of you. For coming this far. It took a lot of guts.

CANDICE

It was the medication. And Dylan.
(beat)
Now, it's just me. I'm not a hero.

KEVIN

I know you're afraid. But if there's one thing I know. You're fast on your feet. I've seen you run. And that's all you need to do right now. Is run. And don't stop.

CANDICE

I don't even know which way to run.

Kevin's eyes trail up the tree, gestures toward the top.

KEVIN

You'll find your answer up there.

CANDICE

You know I can't --

KEVIN

Make an exception to your rulebook.

CANDICE

My hands won't stop shaking. Look!

She holds out her trembling hands.

KEVIN

Hey, remember that time when dad chased us through the woods?

CANDICE

Yeah. We found that tree.

KEVIN

That's right. And I couldn't believe how fast you climbed it.

CANDICE

I didn't fear anything more than him.

KEVIN

Fear can be a great motivator. But so can love.

(beat)

Love you, Sis.

END DAYDREAM

Candice glances at the apple grove, then back at Kevin. He's not there. Never was.

CANDICE

(whispers)

Love you, too.

She musters enough strength to rise to her feet. Regards the size of the tree. Her face reveals a hint of determination. Her hands tremble, refusing to cooperate, but she pushes through, one limb at a time.

When she reaches the top, she spots the MONASTERY beyond the vastness of the grove --

YOUNG GIRL (O.S.)

I'm surprised to see you up here.

The young girl is behind her, creepily perched on a limb.

Startled, Candice loses her footing and tumbles toward the ground. A branch breaks her fall with a hard snap.

She lands hard on the ground. Winces in pain.

The young girl laughs and jeers.

As Candice struggles to get up, the young girl descends head first from the tree, crawling like a SPIDER and singing to the tune of a nursery rhyme -- "Little Miss Muffet."

YOUNG GIRL

Little Miss Clum-sy fell on her bum-sy, eating some dirt and clay...

(voice deepening)

When from above, to her dismay,
crawled down an attercop that
wanted to play...

The young girl plants her hands and feet on the ground,
crawls toward Candice.

YOUNG GIRL (CONT'D)

...With legs like needles, and a
voice like a hiss, a web of malice
spun for the little miss...

Candice hobbles to the edge of the grove.

The young girl holds out her arms -- they appear to stretch.

YOUNG GIRL (CONT'D)

...Little Miss Clumsy was trapped
and scared, inside a realm of
darkness, completely ensnared.

(voice deepens, reaches an
inhuman pitch)

Take heed, little children, look
and listen, for something watches
in the dark with eyes that glisten.

The trees begin to rustle...

EXT. APPLE GROVE - CONTINUOUS

Candice sprints through the trees.

Heavy footfalls strike the ground, drawing closer...

The scythe slices the air.

Candice trips and stumbles over a headless corpse. She bites her fist, stifling her scream to avoid giving away her position.

The ground quakes. The scythe wielder is several yards away, garbling and grumbling.

Candice pulls herself up and continues...

The scythe wielder **POV**: Candice is a mere few feet away. The creature draws back the scythe and swings. It slices through nearby tree branches, barely missing its target.

Candice gains momentum.

As does the creature in pursuit.

Candice sees dim lights through the thickness of the trees -- burning torches.

The scythe wielder takes another swing.

Candice glances over her shoulder and parries in the nick of time. It cuts off a lock of her hair.

She sees a clearing several yards away...

With everything she can muster, she breaks through the gap, exiting the apple grove...

The scythe wielder reaches out, clutches her hair. It yanks her back into the apple grove.

Candice tugs with all her might, tries to break free from the creature's grip. Her scalp begins to tear away. Blood spews...

She hollers in pain as a chunk of her hair rips off with skin still attached. She falls backward. Blood streaks down her face. She turns and crawls out on her stomach.

We see the silhouette of the creature standing in the darkness, the scythe poised to strike.

Candice manages to distance herself, continuing on her belly...

The scythe-wielding ghoul grumbles in defeat, then returns to the shadows.

Candice rises from the ground. Wipes blood from her brow.

EXT. RAUM'S MONASTERY/FRONT GATE - NIGHT

Candice approaches the monastery. Torches illuminate intricate carvings on stone walls, each depicting scenarios from Raum's Purging Grounds -- modernized throughout the centuries.

An iron gate guards the entrance to the monastery's courtyard.

Candice pulls out the RPG rulebook. Reads the instructions to the next scenario: "Who goes there?"

There's a cryptic inscription engraved on the front gate.

CANDICE
 (reads the inscription)
*I am the path to redemption's
 embrace, to pull them from
 darkness, to shine upon their face.*

She contemplates the riddle for several minutes, then the answer dawns on her...

CANDICE
 (whispers to self)
 The redeemer. It's me. I am... the
 redeemer. I'm the redeemer.

She glances at the gate, expecting it to open. To her dismay, nothing occurs.

...And in the dead silence... a loud booming BARK.

Candice flinches. She whirls around and spots the young girl. A dog is nowhere to be seen. Yet, the bark was clearly animalistic.

YOUNG GIRL
 Bark louder. It works for me.

The young girl chortles.

Candice turns toward the gate.

CANDICE
 I am the redeemer!

YOUNG GIRL
Ugh! Pathetic!

Candice knows what she must do. She draws in a deep breath and then:

CANDICE
I AM THE REDEEMER!!!

Her voice carries into the courtyard.

The gate creaks and swings open.

Candice turns to the young girl. Nods appreciatively.

YOUNG GIRL
 Don't think I'm helping you.
 Whenever I enjoy something tasty, I
 dread the last bite. I'd do
 anything to savor it longer.

Candice ponders the young girl's statement, then realizes its underlining meaning: "*The young girl relishes her suffering.*"

With this dreadful realization, Candice steps away from the young girl and walks through the open gate.

EXT. RAUM'S MONASTERY/COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

An enigmatic figure JAENUS (80s) stands in the center of a mystical landscape. Clad in tattered robes, he carries a lantern, its soft glow casting an ethereal light around him.

JAENUS

Redeemer. Welcome to Raum's
Monastery. I am Jaenus.

Jaenus points at the monastery's front entrance.

JAENUS

You must run a gauntlet of
chambers. Each one will test your
will. If you face them all with
success, you'll find your brother.

CANDICE

What about Dylan?

JAENUS

You're not his redeemer.

CANDICE

Then who is?

JAENUS

His father.

Jaenus steps aside.

JAENUS

If you fail, you will join your
brother, and you shall remain here
in this world forever. For you are
the last of your kin.

Candice makes her way to the entrance.

INT. RAUM'S MONASTERY - CONTINUOUS

Candice steps into a corridor lined with burning candles.

At the far end of the corridor, stands a red door with no doorknob. Its surface bares incantations resembling the ones found on the back cover of the RPG rulebook.

She inches closer to the door. Pulls out the RPG rulebook. Searches through the pages. Finds one that reveals: a dark red handprint centered on a red door.

Blood streaks down her face from her wound. A single droplet splatters onto the page. It dawns on Candice that blood could be the key.

She swipes her hand across her face, smearing blood on her palm. Her hand, now covered in blood, trembles as she presses it firmly against the center of the door. It unlocks.

The door swings open, leading into darkness.

INT. RAUM'S MONASTERY/THE WHITE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Candice enters.

The red door shuts behind her and locks.

Lights turn on.

On the opposite side of the room, stands an orange door with no doorknob.

Black curtains are draped around a window frame. There is no window, just the frame.

A ladder is propped against one of the walls.

In a corner, a statue of a CROW stands erect with its beak spread open. Its throat is a black abyss, large enough for someone's arm to fit.

In another corner, lies a large cardboard BOX.

Candice references the RPG rulebook. It states the rules of the white room: "*Feed the crow.*" She pockets the rulebook.

She looks over at the box.

It jerks...

Then begins to shake violently...

Something appears to be trapped inside, attempting to escape.

Candice recoils, retreating to the far end of the room.

Malevolent laughter echoes off the walls.

Candice scans the room. There's no sign of the Sickly Man.

The box sits motionless.

SICKLY MAN (O.S.)
It won't hurt to take a peek.

Candice proceeds with caution, inching toward the box. She lifts one flap at a time and peers inside...

Her eyes widen in shock.

A colossal SPIDER lunges passed her head. She screams.

The spider scurries up the nearest wall.

Candice grabs the box and trusts it toward the spider, in an attempt to crush it. The spider dodges the attack and scuttles toward an upper corner, where it cowers...

CANDICE
(low to self)
It's more afraid of me than I am of
it. It's more afraid of me than I
am of it...

She studies the spider for a minute.

CANDICE (CONT'D)
...It's more afraid of me than I am
of it. It's more afraid of me than
I am of it.

She approaches the upper corner. The spider is too high for her to reach. She scans the room. Notices the ladder. Retrieves it.

Her hands continue to tremble, she fights against it.

She stands at the base of the ladder.

CANDICE
You climbed a tree. You can do
this.

She steadily scales the ladder, each rung creaks underneath her weight. As she approaches the top, the ladder begins to sway. She loses her footing, catches herself. Freezes.

Then continues...

She reaches the top rung. The spider is at arms length. It's poised to lunge at her. A faint hiss.

CANDICE

We're on the same team, you and me.

The tips of her fingers make contact. She winces in disgust. Grips the spider's abdomen. Pulls it away from the corner.

The spider squirms and flails in her hand.

Candice groans with detest. Descends the ladder. Walks the spider over to the crow. Stuffs it down its throat.

The orange door unlocks. It swings open.

Candice heads toward the door, panting.

The Sickly Man stands behind Candice. She's unaware of his presence.

She exits.

INT. RAUM'S MONASTERY/THE MANNEQUIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Candice enters. The orange door slams behind her.

Bullet-riddled MANNEQUINS line the walls.

A single beam of light cuts through the darkness, illuminating a pedestal at the center of the room.

Candice approaches the pedestal.

A mannequin swivels on its base, tracking her.

As she gets closer to the pedestal, she finds a wooden puzzle resting on top -- it's an exact replica of the one crafted by her mother.

Candice glances at the RPG rulebook. The rules state one word: "Complete."

In the background, we see the silhouette of a mannequin step off its base. It inches forward, undetected.

Faint FOOTSTEPS clack behind her.

Candice spins around.

The mannequin is motionless, but undeniably closer.

She returns her attention to the puzzle. Removes it from the pedestal. As she studies the pieces, deciphering the correct arrangement, the mannequin continues its advance, creeping closer to her.

Clack. Clack. Clack.

Feeling a growing sense of unease, Candice darts her eyes at the mannequins. Their stillness is unsettling.

Candice's hands tremble as she fumbles with the puzzle. It slips through her fingers. Falls to the floor.

The mannequins begin to chortle at her clumsiness.

She snatches the puzzle off the floor, continues to solve it.

In the background, we see each mannequin step off its base. They begin to close in on her as she approaches the puzzle's completion.

CLACK! CLACK! CLACK!

They swarm her, mere inches from enacting fatal violence.

She twists the last arrangement of the puzzle, completing it. Holds it out as proof. The beam of light illuminates her hand.

The ceiling lights turn on. The mannequins hold their position.

Silence...

A yellow door is now visible. It unlocks and swings open, inviting Candice into darkness.

She slips between the maze of mannequins -- they give off the sense that they could attack her at any moment.

She reaches the yellow door.

Exits.

INT. RAUM'S MONASTERY/AUDITORIUM STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Candice enters. The yellow door shuts behind her. Locks.

An old upright piano with cracked paint is illuminated in the center of the stage.

A green door stands on the opposite end.

Heavy curtains begin to draw back, revealing an AUDIENCE, concealed in shadows.

The spotlight shifts to Candice. She's blinded by the light.

A good-looking young MAN (30s) in a suit holds a microphone to his mouth. His unmistakable voice echoes through the auditorium:

SICKLY MAN

And now what you've all been waiting for. Put your hands together and give a warm welcome to our weary little owl, Candice Robin!

The audience applauds.

The Sickly Man beckons Candice over, his smile appearing genuine and welcoming -- an odd and rare moment.

Candice is unable to move a muscle, stage fright sets in.

Murmurs and complaints stir from the audience.

SICKLY MAN

Come on, Candice. Everyone is patiently waiting...
(long beat)
...even Kevin.

The mention of her brother pulls her back. She plants one shaky foot in front of the other. Makes her way to the piano.

SICKLY MAN

That's a girl. Come. Play.

The Sickly Man turns to the audience.

SICKLY MAN

Another round of applause, if you please.

The audience obliges.

Candice hesitantly takes her seat at the piano. She notices a name carved into the cabinet's front panel: "Josephine Robin."

CANDICE

Mom.

The lights dim. The spotlight brightens.

Candice pulls out the RPG rulebook. Flips through the pages. Comes across the current scenario. She reads the rules: "*Feed them.*"

The Sickly Man reads her confusion.

SICKLY MAN

Your heart and soul. That is what they require. So, feed them.

The Sickly Man approaches Candice, his smile now gone. He removes a music sheet from his inner coat. Sets it on the piano.

The title of the song: "The Crimson Waltz."

Candice shakes her head incredulously.

CANDICE

You know it can't be done.

SICKLY MAN

What a shame.

CANDICE

This is unfair.

SICKLY MAN

Perhaps --

CANDICE

It's unfair!

In a fit of rage, Candice's fists crash down on the piano keys, releasing an unholy discordant of notes -- a symphony of anguish.

SICKLY MAN

Perhaps, I may lend a hand, my precious little owl.

The Sickly Man places his gnarled hands over the keys. His fingernails are black and elongated.

SICKLY MAN

Let us begin.

Candice eyes the sheet music. Her trembling hands hover over the piano keys. She grunts with agitation.

SICKLY MAN

One, and two, and three, and four...

A sinister alliance forms, a blurred line between salvation and damnation. As the Sickly Man's influence intertwines with Candice's own talent, the notes gradually transform into a haunting melody.

The audience is captivated.

SICKLY MAN
They're hungry for more, Candice.

CANDICE
I want this to end! I want my
brother!

SICKLY MAN
Do you wish to save him?! Or join
him?!

Candice refrains from answering...

SICKLY MAN
Save him?! Or join him?!

The answer is obvious, Candice hollers out of frustration.

CANDICE
SAVE HIM!

SICKLY MAN
Then you must satisfy their hunger!

The progression of notes build to a climax.

SICKLY MAN
It ends when they're on their feet!

Candice hammers the keys. The melody intensifies.

As the music swells, her fingers begin to bleed, staining the ivory keys with drops of blood...

The Sickly Man observes with wicked delight.

SICKLY MAN
Show us the depths of your love!

Candice's playing reaches a crescendo, her fingers dancing across the keys with raw, almost reckless, energy. Each note she plays carries the weight of her love for her brother, pushing her beyond her limitations...

The Sickly Man struggles to keep up with her sharp and precise pace. He has no choice but to leave the performance.

He's taken aback by Candice's defiance, recovers with a chilling smile.

Candice's fingers, now red with her own blood, continue to dance upon the keys. And then, in a climatic moment, she strikes the final chord. The haunting melody comes to an abrupt halt, leaving a lingering silence to hang heavy in the air.

The audience grants her a standing ovation.

After the last clap...

Silence...

Several minutes pass and then:

SICKLY MAN

(whispers)

Bravo, Candice. Bravo. You have fed us well.

The green door unlocks. Swings open.

Candice is lethargic, spent. She steps away from the piano, leaving a trail of blood.

CANDICE

Is this over?

SICKLY MAN

Your brother is near.

The Sickly Man holds out his hand.

SICKLY MAN

The book, if you will.

Candice pulls out the RPG rulebook. Places it in his hand.

CANDICE

Who are you?

SICKLY MAN

I am... the author.

CANDICE

You're Raum.

The Sickly Man disregards her assumption. He merely walks toward the green door. Candice follows.

SICKLY MAN

No one has ever come this far.

He pushes the green door open and motions her to enter.

INT. RAUM'S MONASTERY/HOTEL CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Candice steps into a hotel corridor -- it resembles the same hotel where Kevin and Willy played the elevator game.

The green door slams shut.

A housekeeping CLEANING CART stands abandoned.

Candice approaches the cart and spots an envelope with her name on it. She opens it. A note reads: *"Anyone who seeks will find. You'll find your little sparrow just beyond the blue door. It would be wise to bring the cart. Sparrows are messy creatures."*

At the end of the corridor, there's an elevator.

Candice leans into the cleaning cart, pushes it forward. The wheels squeak.

As she advances, the elevator doors begin to open and close in intervals...

Open.

Close.

Open.

Close...

Candice approaches an intersecting corridor near the elevator.

At the end of the intersecting corridor, she spots the blue door.

She pushes the cleaning cart down the corridor. A young girl's voice, accompanied with toy keyboard music notes reverberates from the walls. It's a familiar voice:

YOUNG CANDICE (V.O.)

(sings softly)

*Don't be afraid, my little one. All
bad things go away in the end.*

*Don't shed a tear, my little one.
'Cause momma's got your hand.*

Candice reaches the blue door. This one has a doorknob with an hourglass emblem and a keyhole.

A young girl can be heard *WEEPING* on the other side of the door.

Candice stoops down and peeks through the keyhole... and sees... her childhood bedroom. Her father comes into view, towering over her younger self.

RICHARD

Stop cryin'! You're bein' a little baby!

YOUNG CANDICE

I'm sorry.

RICHARD

Sorry ain't gonna dig up your momma! Sorry ain't gonna breath air into her lungs!

(beat)

You shoulda listened! She told you not to go near the water! But you went anyway! And now she's gone!

As Candice continues to peer through the keyhole, tears stream down her face. Her lips quiver. Her hands shake violently.

Candice watches as her father begins to strangle her younger self. She quickly stuffs her hand into her pocket, yanks out the skeleton key, inserts it into the keyhole. Turns it.

The blue door flies open...

INT. RICHARD'S HOME/YOUNG CANDICE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Candice bursts out of the closet and leaps onto Richard's back, claws at his eyes.

Young Candice climbs off the bed and hides underneath.

RICHARD

Get off me!

Richard breaks free from Candice's grip. He delivers a haymaker sending Candice to the floor. She lands hard.

RICHARD

Who the hell are you?! What're you doin' here?!

He straddles Candice, wraps his hands around her neck. Young Candice slides out from under the bed and jumps on his back.

Richard shoves her off. Continues to strangle Candice. Her eyes strain and bulge. Veins protrude from her forehead as her eyes begin to glaze.

Young Candice pulls his hair. His grip on Candice loosens.

Candice comes to, then pulls herself away. Seizes an opportunity to kick Richard. Her heel connects with his nose, breaking it. Blood pours down his mouth.

Richard stands to his feet with young Candice still holding tight. He throws her off. She hits the floor hard. She lies motionless.

Candice struggles to her feet. With Richard's back turned, she jars a bedpost loose.

Richard turns around. Candice strikes his face. He crumbles to the floor.

Young Candice opens her eyes.

Candice stands over Richard, the bedpost poised high above her head, ready to bash his skull.

Richard spits out a mouth full of blood.

RICHARD

Do it if you got the guts.

Candice turns to her younger self.

CANDICE

Close your eyes, baby.

Richard laughs, strained.

RICHARD

Come on! Do it!

Candice hollers, frustrated with herself. He's right. She doesn't have the guts. She brings the bedpost to her side.

Richard spots a large shard from his broken whiskey bottle. He grips it like a weapon. Rises to his feet. Lunges at Candice.

BOOOOM!

A shotgun blast sends Richard hurling through the air. He slams against the far wall. Collapses on the floor in a pool of blood.

Candice turns to find her younger brother Kevin standing at the threshold, poised with his father's shotgun. Smoke wafts from the barrel.

CANDICE

Kevin.

YOUNG KEVIN

How'd you know my name?

YOUNG CANDICE

She looks like mom. I think it's her ghost.

CANDICE

I'm not a ghost. And I'm not your mother. I know, I must look like a monster right now. But I'm a friend.

YOUNG KEVIN

I can tell.

CANDICE

You don't need to be scared.

YOUNG KEVIN

I'm not.

YOUNG CANDICE

Me neither.

Young Candice glances at Richard's lifeless body.

YOUNG CANDICE

Not anymore.

CANDICE

Good. Everything's gonna be all right. I promise.

YOUNG CANDICE

Are you a guardian angel? My mommy told me that guardian angels watch over us.

CANDICE

She's right. They do.

YOUNG CANDICE

Is my brother going to jail?

Candice peers through the closet. Sees the cleaning cart.

CANDICE

I'm not gonna let that happen.

Candice struggles to drag Richard's body through the closet, leaving behind a gruesome trail of blood. The streak leads into the corridor where she leaves his body.

She returns to the bedroom with the cleaning cart...

LATER

Candice wrings out the last remnants of blood from a mop into a bucket, the red liquid swirls and mixes with the soapy water.

Young Kevin and young Candice can't take their eyes off the bloodied stranger.

CANDICE

Kevin?

YOUNG KEVIN

Yeah?

CANDICE

I need you to look after your sister. Always remember that you're her rock. She's gonna need you more than you know. And no matter what life throws at you, you'll both have each other.

YOUNG KEVIN

What's going to happen to us?

CANDICE

You're gonna be sent to live with your great aunt. She's a nice lady, lives on a farm. Plays piano.

YOUNG KEVIN

How do you know so much?

YOUNG CANDICE

Guardian angels know everything.

CANDICE

Well, almost.

Candice approaches the cleaning cart.

CANDICE

I must be going now.

Young Candice wraps her arms around her adult self.

YOUNG CANDICE
Thank you, guardian angel.

CANDICE
You're welcome.

Candice pushes the cleaning cart

INTO THE CORRIDOR

and closes the blue door behind her.

YOUNG GIRL (O.S.)
BONES!!!

The young girl scurries around the corner and pounces on Richard like a writhing demon, devours his flesh. Blood splatters against the walls.

SERIES OF SHOTS - KEVIN'S RETURN

-- A dimly lit street. Rain pours down.

-- Kevin stumbles naked on the steps of the police station. His body bears marks of torture. His blood mingles with the rain.

-- A group of POLICE OFFICERS exit the police station, their expressions shift from surprise to concern. They rush to his aid.

-- Kevin sits on a bench, wrapped in a blanket provided by the officers.

BACK TO SCENE

Candice runs down the corridor. The elevator doors open. The Sickly Man steps out.

SICKLY MAN
Congratulations, Candice. Your brother is safe. They'll release Willy soon.

CANDICE
I want to see Kevin!

SICKLY MAN
You will, but first --

CANDICE

No! I don't want to hear anything you have to say! I want my brother!

SICKLY MAN

Do you hear that? It's *them*.

CANDICE

I'm done with your game! Where is he?! I want to see him!

SICKLY MAN

This was never about you, Candice. Or Kevin. Dylan. None of you. It was always about *them*. The onlookers.

(beat)

The same ones that were entertained by your suffering, are the same ones that want some sort of resolve. You fed them well, Candice. So much so that they failed to realize that they are a part of this game. And I don't want to let them go just yet.

Candice remains quiet, puzzled.

The Sickly Man holds out his hands. In each hand, he holds a skeleton key.

SICKLY MAN

You have two choices.

He gestures the right hand.

SICKLY MAN

I'll let you take Dylan back with you. His father Angelo is no good to me.

CANDICE

That's the one I want. I don't wanna hear the other choice.

SICKLY MAN

Trust me, Candice. You want to hear what I have to say.

Candice remains silent.

SICKLY MAN

Your mother drowned, trying to save you.

The Sickly Man gestures the left hand.

SICKLY MAN

This key will give you the chance
to go back and rescue her. Imagine
the possibilities.

(beat)

What'll it be?

Candice is paralyzed with her choices. Her eyes dart back and forth between both hands.

She reaches out...

The Sickly Man looks up and gazes directly at us, knowing we are still in his grasp. He grins malevolently.

FADE TO BLACK.

SICKLY MAN (V.O.)

(sings)

*...Who'll be the parson? I, said
the Rook, with my little book, I'll
be the parson...*

THE END