

Ricky Johnson Portfolio

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Let The Heart Bleed – Excerpt

Novel | Horror, Romance

A full-length novel that reframes the slasher genre as an intimate story of grief, survival, and emotional discovery.

Let The Heart Bleed - Excerpt

I'm back in the electrical room. My head is spinning, the lights above me striking off into bright flares before my eyes. The floor beneath me is cold, the grit of the concrete digging into my face.

My cheek burns as if [my mom] has just struck me like she did several months ago. I wince at the pain that isn't there, recalling how it felt when she laid her hand on me for the first time in my life. I slowly drag my fingers at the ground beneath me. I look to my arms in front of me and attempt to move them, but they feel magnetized to the ground. A soft cry escapes my lips.

I wince again. I try to steady my breathing once more, but it feels hopeless. Four seconds in, four seconds hold, six seconds out. I repeat this to myself, my breaths coming out shorter and strained.

Come on, Scarlet. Pull it together.

I think of the Killer dragging Diego through the infirmary, how terrified he must've been. How he must've been carried throughout the staff area, and somehow down the ladder. Maybe even thrown from the top of the hatch. How he was likely dragged through the winding tunnels, the overhead lights and piped walls turning his brain into mush as he attempted to trace his path back to the resort. How now, he was probably propped up in some room, hopelessly calling out for me to find him.

I think back to before he was taken away, when he fought against the Killer to grant me more time to escape. He watched someone murder two people in cold blood right before his eyes, and he still fought to save my life. He knew the potential outcomes and that he might be overpowered, but he felt the risk was worth it; Just for me.

The same way he forced me to open up at the cemetery earlier. How he comforted me and assured me that he would always weather the storm with me. My burdens were not mine to carry alone. We were not just husband and wife. We were a team.

I feel my hands slowly curl into fists above me.

Four-four-six.

My breaths still come out jagged, but I manage to steady them ever so slightly. They almost fall in line with my count.

I think back to how he had cared for me during my heart flutter the night before, how he walked me to the room and comforted me while I sank into the bathroom floor. He stood by my side as I recovered, never once feeling it was worth it to leave. He was there with me until I was back on my feet.

I feel the blood flow back to my hands. I squeeze them together a couple of times until I am able to individually move each of my fingers. I slowly extend them against the ground, feeling the ridged texture of the concrete beneath them.

He had planned this whole trip for me. He had seen what I was going through and decided to take me somewhere where I could distract myself from my situation. He knew it was flawed, but he also knew it would help me get out of my head. He knew a weekend to relax in a place that wasn't our home would be enough for me to feel rejuvenated, and even if it wasn't, it would be enough for now. He got me a room on the top floor because he knew how much I loved being high up when we traveled, and he gave me a balcony facing the canyon so I could watch the sunset.

Four-four-six.

I manage a full set of unbroken breaths. The next one falters again as I feel a chill escape my throat, but I push through to produce another one. I slowly roll off my side, resting my stomach against the ground.

None of what happened was his fault. He could never have predicted that some monster was tracking me, hunting me down like a wild animal. Someone with a vendetta against me, for something I didn't do. Nothing could have possibly happened this weekend that could ruin what it meant to me that he planned this trip for us, for my well-being.

I hold my breath for a moment as I apply pressure to my palms, slowly pushing my body off the ground. I rise one inch, two inches...

A sharp exhale escapes my lips as I slowly release, resting my body back on the ground. I feel a chill flush my system, another cry escaping from my lips as I rest my cheek against the cold concrete.

He has always been there for me. The first time my panic attacks began to rise, supporting my pipe dream of becoming an interior designer, giving me space to grieve when my father died. Standing beside me every step of the way as I fought through my heart failure.

Four-four-six.

I stifle the cry and grit my teeth. I begin applying pressure to my palms again and hold my breath once more as I push off the ground.

Not a day goes by that he doesn't take care of me, even when he doesn't have to. Screw my recovery. From the day we first met, he always treated me with more respect than expected. Giving me space when I was overwhelmed, listening to me when I needed to vent about school or my career struggles, and making me breakfast in the morning just because he wanted to see me smile from the moment I woke up. Not a day goes by that he doesn't make sure I know I am loved for who I am, that I am always enough. That I am worth fighting for.

I rise several inches from the ground, enough to bring my knee forward to rest on. I slowly sit up in place, feeling the blood rush to my head and sending me into a quick dizzy spiral. I place a hand on my head, another on my heart as I feel it pound in my chest.

I think back to what Ophelia said to me the first time I sat with her, how she told me about her Felix and their trips together, and the amazing life they shared. Despite being two strangers sitting next to each other to watch a sunset one random afternoon, she still went out of her way to remind me not to forget the little things in life, the things that really mattered.

My heartbeat begins to slow a bit, the spell from my head dissipating as I open my eyes and face the bright light overhead. I rest my arm on my knee as I focus my breathing, not allowing the world around me to seem so threatening, to remind myself that I am surrounded by nothing more than four walls and a ceiling.

I will never forget what Ophelia told me, how she noticed the sparkle in my eye when I spoke about Diego.

"We need that person to lift us up when we're down and cheer us on, no matter what life throws at us."

Diego is my rock, the person to hold my hand through the storm. The person to stand by my side through every high and low, even if it meant surviving against a deranged maniac in a storm-ridden resort.

"Let's get through this--together."

Four-four-six.

I push my arm off my knee, feeling a bone in my leg crack as I straighten it out. My shoes grip tightly against the gritted concrete, holding me steady as I pull myself to my feet. I let out a soft groan as I allow all my weight to fall onto my legs. I hold my head high, my breath stabilizing as I look at the wall in front of me.

I *must* put an end to this.

Red Lake – Excerpt

Novel | Horror

A desolate-town horror story driven by mood and imagery, where isolation slowly blossoms into paranoia.

Red Lake - Excerpt

I made my way to the back of the shed. I kept my eyes on the ground for the hatch, searching the area for it. As I neared the back of the shed I quickly spotted it. It looked as if it had recently been set there, bringing me a sigh of relief that other life forms had existed in the space beyond its conception.

As I reached the hatch, the still air somehow grew cooler as if to ward me off. I felt goosebumps line every inch of my arms. The air not only affected my arms but also my eyes, for they sent them glancing forward towards the trees. I froze still in my tracks as my breath caught in my throat.

Somewhere deep in the woods I could see what looked to be a figure, almost indiscernible beyond the hundreds of trees that surrounded it. I swallowed and squinted my eyes to make out detail, but it proved useless. However, there was no doubt in my mind that what I saw was a figure, human or not.

“M-m-mi...” I began to stutter.

I swallowed again.

“Mi-michael?”

“What’s up?”

I could hear Michael still working away at the generator behind me. I did not dare take my eyes off the figure.

“Michael, c-come here.”

I heard Michael stop. I knew he could sense the shakiness in my voice. The ground below him groaned as he stood up and made his way towards me.

“Sabrina, what is it?”

I thought of raising my finger to point, but for some reason found that that would give it away to the figure that I could see it. Nevermind the ceaseless staring. Pointing at it would only confirm what I saw. I could be staring at anything out in the distance. If I couldn’t make out the figure’s features, how could it make out mine? It had no idea I noticed it, and I was intent on keeping it that way.

“I see something. Someone. I don’t know.”

Michael now stood beside me, the heat from his body doing nothing in warming the chill that occupied my own.

“Where at? Can you see who it is?”

I shook my head.

“Here, point to it.”

I shook my head again. *No way in hell am I doing that.*

“We need to go.”

I could sense Michael looking at me and the trees, glancing back and forth between the two, waiting for someone to respond. If only he knew that the trees only laughed.

Blood rushed to my head and adrenaline pumped throughout my entire body. I suddenly gained a new sense of urgency, one that warned me that staring was the worst possible answer right now.

“Michael, we need to go now. Just leave the tools. We’ll tell Mr. Shelby that we couldn’t fix it.”

“Are you sure? We can always-”

Shut the fuck up, Michael.

“No. We are leaving now.”

And with that I turned around, removing my gaze from the figure. I knew there was no point in staring. The only way out was to run as fast as possible, to remove myself from these woods at all costs.

I heard Michael’s heels spin behind me as his footsteps followed mine.

“Okay, let me get my flashlight.”

Michael’s words, and perhaps my own sense of security, told me to grab something myself. A weapon, a tool of some kind, anything to defend myself in the worst case scenario. Once I reached the generator I quickly bent down and picked up the crowbar. I heard Michael grab his flashlight.

“We need to run, get out of here as quickly as possible.”

“Sabrina, are you sure there was someone out there? It’s not that I don’t believe you, I just-”

Against better judgment, I stopped and turned around all in one quick motion to face Michael. I couldn’t believe what he was saying to me. Under less intense circumstances, I would’ve been less aggressive. I had no time to screw around in this circumstance.

“Michael, listen to me. I am not staying here or going any slower than my fastest speed possible right now. If you do not share the same sentiment, then I am not waiting up on you.”

Michael’s eyes were wide and intense, but also sorrowful. He looked at me and nodded, straightening his posture.

“Okay.” He replied softly.

I stared at him for a moment and nodded. I began to turn as my eyes moved past and beyond Michael, to the trees.

The trees gifted us with the figure, who was sprinting full speed towards us.

In the moment I saw it, I made no effort to make out its features. I couldn't see anything in that blur in time, and I was perfectly content with keeping it that way if it meant more time to move.

I tugged at Michael's sleeve and began sprinting.

“SHIT!”

The word escaped my mouth against my will. I didn't even conjure up the thought to say it. It was more of a reaction in of itself, one that needed no thought to justify it.

My reaction gave way to a soft cry from Michael as the two of us began sprinting into the trees. I could hear two pairs of footsteps against the dry, now soft, ground. The shudder of our breaths and the wind air rushing past my ears were the only discernible sounds, only bested by the pounding of the blood in my skull.

We made it about a hundred yards from the shed, if I had to guess, when Michael let out a loud yell followed by a hard thud. I made it about fifty more feet until I realized Michael's footsteps were no longer following mine. I shredded to a halt and quickly yanked my head backwards.

Michael lay on the ground with his right hand stretched out towards me, his other hand reaching for the handle of a red axe rising above his back. The blade had lodged itself deep into his spine, a red crimson already blotting up his coat. About fifty feet behind him was a man sprinting towards him, the one the trees had unleashed upon us. The one I had seen standing among them.

Not only could I tell it was a large, jagged man, but I could now make out what little features he had. He seemed burly yet lightweight. Every part of him was covered by clothing save for his face and hair, the latter of which was frizzed out and shot around in all directions. It was a dark, almost unrealistically black color. He donned a white coat which had been torn up and dirtied, his large blue jeans now a deep dirt brown color. His sleeves had been rolled up and he was wearing long black gloves that stretched halfway up his forearm. The worst part of it all was his mask. It was the hardest to make out, but its dark, endless black eyes and open mouth burned itself into my brain. It was something I knew would never leave the back of my mind.

Echo Hollow: The Final Cut – Excerpt

Novel | Mystery

A small-town mystery told through forum-style posts, following a college student as he unravels a twisted secret through a trail of disturbing tapes.

Echo Hollow: The Final Cut - Excerpt

December 2nd, 2024 - 12:34 AM

Hey all!

Thank you so much for your patience today, I'm sorry I'm posting so late. I thankfully managed to cop a VHS player from Goodwill for only \$15, but when I got home and hooked it up to my TV, it wasn't displaying the tape or picture at all. I looked it up, and it has nothing to do with the tape. The tape should be playing something, but it's not. The TV is not able to read the player? Idk. Truth is, I'm exhausted and have a final tomorrow morning for one of my toughest classes, so I just need to clock out for the night. I just wanted to pop in real quick so I don't leave you guys hanging. I'm sorry I don't have any major developments.

On another note, if anybody has suggestions on how to fix this, PLEASE let me know. I tried a lot of solutions I found online such as tuning it to a different channel and switching the cables to a different output, but nothing worked for me. I would keep going, I just have to be up super early tomorrow morning. I have work again after my final but I'll come home right away and get everything sorted out before studying for the night.

Thank you again for your patience and I'll update you guys again tomorrow!

December 2nd, 2024 - 11:47 PM

Okay, so I was (thankfully) able to get the TV situation sorted out. It had something to do with the AV cables, they were busted up so I went and got new ones after work. Thank you to u/codywitha_k for the suggestion!

My roommates got back tonight, one of whom is my close friend, and asked about the VHS situation. I told them I hadn't found anything yet and was trying to figure it out. My friend, we'll just call him Stephen for now, sat with me to watch it. My movie enthusiast roommate, we'll call him Michael, told me to update him about it in the morning.

I finally got the tape loaded up, and the screen was just black. The timer on the player was counting up, but there was nothing there. I tried reloading the tape a couple times, thinking something was busted. Stephen helped me look online again for some answers, and lo and behold an image pops up on screen like a minute into the tape. Initially it was just a different shade of black, but I could tell it was trying to display something. The FBI piracy logo thing popped up, and it rolled through a couple other screens. Next, some movie started playing. I don't know what it was, but it was like some western where this older cowboy rides into town and talks with the sheriff. By this point, I assumed I had just found someone's old movie on a VHS tape. I even asked Stephen again if he knew what the movie was or if the tape was maybe his, and he had no idea regarding either. I gotta admit I was pretty disappointed. Part of me had wanted this to be some weird, strange thing that I could share with everybody, but I was also a bit relieved. It eased my mind about the idea that I had just never noticed this box before and it was likely that a past resident had left it there or something.

So anyways, Stephen and I just start joking around and laughing it off, the movie continues. A couple more minutes into the tape it fades to black, and a dark screen with text pops up. We both stopped immediately and watched it. The room was completely silent, only the static from the TV filling the air. The text was simple: *Follow The Trail.*

Stephen and I just looked at each other, confused as hell. We decided to rewind the tape to see if we had missed anything, but it was just the movie the entire time. We rewinded it again, paying close attention to the movie, the story, the sets, the lighting, whatever that may have given us any idea of what the message meant. The old cowboy spoke to the sheriff about an old train car and the sheriff led him to it outside. It was just this

abandoned train car sitting outside the town all by itself. The sheriff pulls the door open as the old cowboy watches, and his eyes go wide. The screen then fades to black and that's it. No trail, nothing else out of the ordinary.

Stephen and I just sat there in disbelief. We tried looking up the movie, but couldn't find anything. We tried "old western with train car", "western old man cowboy and sheriff train car", "western with weird train car", and even browsed through results for old westerns. Nothing we found described the movie at all. We couldn't find it anywhere.

We went to see if Michael was up since he knows everything there is to know about movies, but he was already sleeping by then. It was already late by that point and we both had finals in the morning, so we decided we would figure it out tomorrow.

I can't get the strangeness of it all out of my head. Most importantly, *where did this tape come from?* It was very clearly made as a message, but why was it left in our basement?

I played the tape back from the start and recorded it on my phone so you guys can see. If you have any idea as to what the movie is or what "follow the trail" is supposed to mean, I would love some input. I'm running it through my mind right now and still can't figure it out.

As for future updates, I guess it just depends on what you or me find. Like I said, I hope to look into it further tomorrow with my friend. I'm headed to bed now, so I'll respond to any answers you guys give after work tomorrow. Thank you guys again!

Reply from u/corrupt_formula (December 3rd, 2024 - 2:45AM)

The movie is *Chasing The Wind*. It's some low-budget western made in the 60s with a no-name director and some unknown actors. The entire movie is about that "old cowboy", "Rascal" Ranger Beale, and his life and how he was kidnapped as a baby after his family was killed by a gang. He was raised by the gang and eventually found out what they did to his family, so during this big train heist they were supposed to pull off, he betrays them and kills most of them except the leader, "Treacherous" Tim Ringo. The rest of the movie is about him hunting down Ringo for like a decade and never finding him, until one day he finds out he was killed a couple years prior in a bar fight. He goes to the town seen in your video where he was allegedly killed, and the sheriff walks him to that train car. Where your video cuts out at the door opening, it's supposed to be Ringo, who shoots Beale straight in the chest. The two have a duel and it looks like Ringo has him, but Beale manages to get the upper hand and stabs him in the heart.

It's a pretty straightforward western and, despite how low-budget it is, it's actually not that bad. That's besides the point though. What I left out before and, what I found most interesting, was right after Ringo shoots Beale in the chest, he begins laughing maniacally and says:

"All you had to do was follow the trail, huh?"

Reply from u/hugor03 (December 3rd, 2024 - 12:03 PM)

Holy shit, wow. That's insane. Thank you so much for finding this. Will mention you in an update tonight.

December 3rd, 2024 - 8:01 PM

Another update you guys. So as many of you already saw earlier, user corrupt_formula found the movie, and I have his message pinned on the last post and pasted at the bottom of this one. In short, it's a movie titled *Chasing The Wind* and has to do with some cowboy named Beagle chasing down this bad guy named Ringo. The train car is seen at both the beginning AND the end of the movie, and it's where Ringo is hiding when Beagle arrives. He shoots Beagle and says, "All you had to do was follow the trail."

I looked up the movie and found it on streaming and am planning on watching it tonight with Stephen. I texted Michael about it as well and he said he's never heard of it. I want to see for myself if I can find anything about the meaning of the trail or the train car and if it holds any significance to the story. I will post another update tonight, I just wanted to have a separate post updating you all.

Begonia – Excerpt

Feature Film | Horror, Mystery

A feature-length horror mystery blending paranormal grief with slasher conventions, as a young woman confronts a haunting tied to her mother's death.

EXT. LOS PROTEGIDOS CEMETERY - DAY

A cop, SARAH, a blonde woman in her mid-20s, and police chief JOHNSON, a slightly heavier, bald man in his mid-30s, stand in front of the graves of Maria and Vivian, both with an identical begonia flower engraving and begonia flower atop them.

Two PARAMEDICS load a body onto a stretcher, one of them putting the bloody, dangling arm back to rest. They pull a sheet over the body and carry it down the aisle of headstones.

A COP is pulling yellow tape around the area of the grave.

Four GRAVEYARD EMPLOYEES watch from nearby headstones and the main office, each wearing identical gray polo shirts.

Sarah watches one of the employees. She turns back to Johnson.

SARAH

Must've been a popular guy.

JOHNSON

Don't think they're here for him.

SARAH

How so?

Johnson points at Maria's grave.

JOHNSON

She was buried here just a couple days ago.

Johnson points at Vivian's grave.

JOHNSON (CONT'D)

She was moved here the day before.

SARAH

Why the move?

Johnson shrugs.

JOHNSON

Something the guarantor and cemetery company settled.

Sarah peers out at the employee.

SARAH

And our guy? What's his deal?

JOHNSON
No idea yet.

Johnson points at the main office.

JOHNSON (CONT'D)
Found him on the guest list at
Maria here's funeral. Heartbreak.
That's motive enough.

Sarah paces over to a beer bottle a couple graves down.

SARAH
Family? Sibling? Friend?
(a beat)
Lover?

The empty beer bottle.

JOHNSON
Haven't had time to ask around yet.
My money's on friend. She was
unmarried.

SARAH
Secret lover?

Sarah begins walking back. Johnson chuckles.

JOHNSON
He lived up in Virginia. Unless
they met on some dating site, it's
unlikely.

Sarah stops by Johnson, atop a trail of blood in the grass.
She watches it, turning her head to the sound of an ambulance
siren starting.

Her and Johnson turn their heads towards the ambulance at the
front of the cemetery.

A couple more employees are watching it from the parking lot
as it drives away. Sarah watches them.

SARAH
They seem very interested.

JOHNSON
How often do you have someone kill
themselves at a cemetery?

Sarah keeps her eyes on the employees.

SARAH
(quietly)
Fair enough.

Sarah turns back to the two graves.

SARAH (CONT'D)
So our guy...

Sarah snaps her fingers at Johnson.

JOHNSON
Andres.

SARAH
Andres. He gets drunk a couple
nights after his friend is buried,
decides to slit his wrists and
bleed out, nobody finding him until
the following morning.

JOHNSON
And...?

SARAH
Nothing, just...

Sarah looks down at Vivian's grave.

SARAH (CONT'D)
She had just been moved here, too.

JOHNSON
You thinking it has to do with her?

SARAH
Not particularly. Just...

Sarah watches the grave.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Does she fit in somehow?

Vivian's headstone.

EXT. LOS PROTEGIDOS CEMETERY - CONTINUOUS

Sarah nods at her. She begins to walk towards the entrance, glancing back at Alicia as she bends over in front of the graves.

ALICIA

I got you something. Your favorite.
It was the least I could do.

Alicia sets the blue orchids on top of her mother's grave.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

I brought you some, too. Didn't
know what you liked.

Alicia sets the other set of orchids on Vivian's grave.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry, mom. I know things...
things have been tough the last
couple years.

(a beat)

I should've been there for you
more. I know I wasn't around a lot.
I said I was busy. I know you know
the truth.

She picks up the begonia from her mothers grave and twirls it in her fingers.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

I was still mad. I don't know why,
I shouldn't have been. I should've
been there for you.

(A beat)

Just know that I'm still going. I'm
still in school, I'm still working
towards my degree.

(a beat)

I still... love you.

A beat. Alicia sets the begonia back on her mother's grave.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

And I miss you more than I could've
ever imagined I could miss someone.
If only we had had more time
together.

Alicia picks up the begonia from Vivian's grave.

ALICIA (CONT'D)
 (softly)
 I could've changed that.

She twirls this flower as well.

ALICIA (CONT'D)
 Just... please take care of your
 little sister now, okay? Take care
 of each other. I won't be long
 before I come back.

A beat. Alicia winces.

ALICIA (CONT'D)
 Ow!

Her finger is oozing a drop of blood from a thorn in the begonia flower. A couple drops fall to the grass below. Alicia pulls her finger to her mouth and sucks the blood. She sets the flower back down on the headstone. She lets out a sigh and stands up.

ALICIA (CONT'D)
 I love you both.

She stands, then turns her head.

The MALE CEMETERY EMPLOYEE, a middle-aged man, watching her from one of the graves. He is holding a bouquet of begonias in his hand, has just placed one on the headstone below him.

ALICIA (CONT'D)
 (whispering)
 Weirdo.

Alicia turns towards the graves, then turns back, walking back towards the entrance, the male employee watching her.

Coke Refreshing Commercial

Commercial | Romance

A one-minute commercial concept that uses romance and nostalgia to celebrate the power of shared moviegoing experiences.

FADE IN:

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

ANTHONY, a college student wearing a flannel and black jeans, walks up to the ticket booth. He buys a ticket from TICKET TAKER. He looks around.

The ticket, a movie called STEEL VENGEANCE II.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - MOMENTS LATER

NAOMI, a college student with her makeup done and wearing a black dress, steps up to the ticket booth and buys a ticket.

Her ticket, also for STEEL VENGEANCE II.

INT. THEATER AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Anthony enters the theater with a Coke, roughly twenty other THEATERGOERS sitting in the seats. He sits in the back middle row. Naomi steps into the theater with popcorn, glancing around. They catch each other's eyes and stop.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Anthony and Naomi, dressed up, excitedly rush to the ticket booth. They purchase two tickets, smiling and laughing.

The tickets, each saying STEEL VENGEANCE.

INT. THEATER AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Anthony and Naomi sit in the back middle row together, sharing a coke and popcorn, smiling at each other.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. THEATER AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Anthony smiles at Naomi, she smiles back. She slowly walks up the aisles to Anthony. She sits down next to him. He offers her his Coke. She takes it, both smiling. The lights dim as she rests her head on his shoulder.

FADE OUT.

Silent Snow – Excerpt

Short Film | Horror

A psychological horror piece examining the parallel worlds of dreaming and waking life and the emotional stakes when they collide.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Alice stands in her robe, alone, on a desolate snowy street. A few streetlights illuminate the road ahead. She begins walking forward.

Crunching in the snow behind her is heard. She tries to turn her head, but can't. She keeps walking, her steps becoming slower and slower. She eventually stops. Noises from a hushed, echoey WHISPERING VOICE are heard.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

Turn around...

Alice's eyes go wide. The footsteps continue behind her. She tries to turn her head once more, but is unable to.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Turn around...

The footsteps grow louder. The streetlights flicker more violently. Alice's face scrunches up. She tries to turn her head. As if finally unlocked, it whips around, her body following. The footsteps stop.

In front of her is a brown door. Alice looks at it curiously.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Open the door...

Alice reaches forward and pulls the handle. An empty void greets her. Alice slowly steps forward into it.

INT. COTTAGE BASEMENT - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Alice finds she is inside her empty, derelict basement. She notices an open window in the distance, snow blowing in and piling on the floor.

A light turns on in front of her. She stares up at the dangling lightbulb from the ceiling, a cord hanging down. She reaches forward and pulls it. It comes off, falling to the ground.

Alice stares at it.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

The window...

A slam is heard. Alice jolts her head up, the window on the wall and snow below it now gone.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
They're in the house...

ALICE
(confused)
What?

She brings her head back down to see a staircase in front of her. She slowly begins walking towards it.

She climbs the steps, the heavy creaks ringing out around her. She winces at the sounds.

ALICE (CONT'D)
(shakily)
Why are they so loud?

The creaks get louder, almost distorting into yells.

ALICE (CONT'D)
They're so loud...

Tears well up in Alice's eyes. She keeps climbing up the stairs. She soon reaches another door, extending her hand out and opening it.

INT. COTTAGE DOWNSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Alice finds herself in her kitchen, Christmas decorations strewn about. The sink is full of dishes, a candle is lit on the counter as Christmas music rings through the air.

Across the kitchen in the living room is Sofia, late-20s, wearing a creme turtleneck and smiling as she watches a young CHILD, 2 years-old, play with a toy train on the ground. MARK, late-20s, with dark hair, a beard, and wearing a green sweater, sits next to her.

Alice walks up to the reclining chair, watching as Sofia and Mark smile at the child on the ground.

ALICE
Sofia? Mark?

They continue smiling. They don't pay any attention to Alice. The music in the room begins slightly distorting.

ALICE (CONT'D)
What are you doing here? It isn't
Christmas yet.

She looks at the fireplace as it roars heavy flames, the window next to it wide open. The air outside remains still. The music grows louder.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Who put this on? It's hurting my ears... Someone please turn it off.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)

GET AWAY!

Alice jolts, the chair below her reclining slightly. She looks down to see Sofia, staring up at her, her smile wider than what is natural. Alice stumbles back, Sofia and Mark now vacant from her living room. The music is gone.

The chair folds back up. Alice backs down the hallway, watching the room. The fire ceases, the music stopping. Sofia's distorted face slowly peaks over the chair. Alice gasps.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Go to bed. It's time to wake up...

Alice turns to run, but bumps into the front door suddenly behind her. Wind knocks against it, causing it to creak and waver in it's frame. She looks back at the chair, Sofia now gone.

She turns to the dark stairwell, A FIGURE disappearing behind a wall across the upstairs hallway. Alice jolts again.

ALICE

H-hello...?

Alice slowly ascends the stairs. When she reaches the top, she stares down the hallway towards an open door, an empty room lying beyond. Alice squints her eyes at it.

Footsteps are heard moving down the hallway. Alice gasps and turns, opening her bedroom door. The footsteps hurry.

INT. COTTAGE MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Alice's room is filled with snow. The window she fell asleep to is wide open, snow blowing in. She shuts and locks the door behind her. She backs away to her bed.

The footsteps reach the door, then stop. Alice stands, watching the door. She looks down at her feet, soaked in the snow.

She rubs her arms with her hands, her teeth chattering.

She looks back up at the door, now open. She lets out a gasp.

WHISPERING VOICE (V.O.)
SOMEBODY'S IN THE ROOM.

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alice's eyes shoot open and she sits up in bed. She clutches her chest, heavily panting. She looks at her bedroom door, now shut.

She turns to her nightstand, her phone missing. On the ground is a digital camera.

ALICE
(quietly)
What the...

She slowly pulls the covers back and steps down into her slippers. She reaches down and grabs the camera, turning it on.

She navigates to the gallery, starting at the first photo. It's Alice's cottage.

ALICE (CONT'D)
(nervously)
What?

The next photo is of a U-Haul truck parked outside, Alice standing on the porch hauling boxes inside. The next is of her cottage late at night. Next from outside her window, watching her cook in the kitchen.

ALICE (CONT'D)
Oh my god...

Next she is asleep on the recliner in the living room. Next is of her getting into her car in the driveway.

Alice's expression grows increasingly alarmed as she continues clicking through. Her expression soon freezes.

ALICE (CONT'D)
No... What is this, I...

A photo of Alice in the living room from earlier in the night, drinking her wine.

Another of her putting her glass in the sink. Next from a window by the door as she ascends the stairs.

The photos shift to inside her living room.

Alice's face stay's frozen.

Her downstairs hallway. The stairs. Her bedroom door. The door cracked open, Alice sleeping on the bed. One that's closer. Even closer. A few inches from her face.

ALICE (CONT'D)
(shakily)
This can't be happening...

One last blurred, shaky photo of her startling awake.

A creak is heard. Alice freezes. She looks up. The closet door is slightly cracked open. An inaudible, whispering voice can be heard.

Alice slowly stands. A hand slowly creeps out to pull the door back.

Alice lets out a scream and runs for her bedroom door. The closet door is thrown open behind her as she exits.