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No Man's Land

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FINAL THESIS
TELEVISION PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Student Name: Preston Ray _____

Thesis Logline: NO MAN'S LAND (One-Hour, Horror) – In a dying Dust Bowl town suffering from the outbreak of a strange disease, a headstrong epidemiologist finds herself facing off against an ancient, supernatural entity.

No Man's Land

Title

A teleplay written and produced and presented to the faculty of
the Writing and Producing for Television MFA Program in the
School of Film & Television at Loyola Marymount University of
Los Angeles, California

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts

Writing and Producing for Television

By

Preston Ray

Student Name

Preston Ray
Preston Ray (Apr 27, 2021 19:27 PDT)

Student Signature

APPROVAL TO ADVANCE TO CANDIDACY

The following student has met all the criteria to advance to candidacy for an M.F.A. in Fine Arts with an emphasis in Writing and Producing for Television:

Preston Ray

Student Name

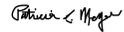


SCWR 680 Fall 2020 Instructor Signature

John Strauss

[John Strauss \(Apr 28, 2021 13:07 PDT\)](#)

SCWR 681 Spring 2021 Instructor Signature



Graduate Director Signature

Date: May 4, 2021

NO MAN'S LAND

Written by
Preston Ray

Every Night and every Morn
Some to Misery are Born.
Every Morn and every Night
Some are Born to sweet delight.
Some are Born to sweet delight,
Some are Born to Endless Night.

- *William Blake*

TEASER**EXT. MIGRANT CAMP - NIGHT**

A cramped settlement of shelters, all made from some combination of corrugated sheet metal, old tarps and plywood.

CHYRON: OKLAHOMA - 1933: THE DUST BOWL

A YOUNG BOY (10) in ragged clothes hurries down a narrow path between the flimsy structures, chasing after a playful but malnourished PUPPY. The dog leads him away from the camp and out into the --

EXT. PRAIRIE - NIGHT

Uninterrupted flatlands extend all the way to horizon. The harshness of the drought here has left the earth cracked and shattered, broken into little pieces like a jigsaw puzzle.

With the camp behind him, the boy can see a SMALL TOWN to the south. Farther west, there's a tall OIL DERRICK, silhouetted against the last traces of a blood red sunset.

In the fading twilight, we see an aching sadness in the boy's sunken eyes.

The puppy BARKS at his feet, drops a small stick for the kid to throw. He picks it up, throws it as far as he can manage.

Tail wagging, the dog fetches, hurries back with the stick to play again. The boy throws the stick once more, but this time the puppy doesn't chase after it.

BOY

C'mon, boy. Go fetch.

The puppy refuses, sits there whining, tail between its legs.

BOY

What's wrong?

The dog sees what the kid doesn't; a massive wall cloud racing towards them. It tumbles end-over-end, like a tornado turned on its side, and we realize it's filled not with rain, but swirling dust and sand.

The boy turns to see this just as it's too late. The dust cloud swallows him with a darkness as black as a thousand midnights.

EXT. DUST STORM - CONTINUOUS

Almost any hint of light is erased, creating near total darkness. Winds roar with a deafening howl.

Terror-stricken, the boy gasps for breath as the air has turned into flying sandpaper.

He wanders forward blindly, searching for anything that could lead him back to safety, until he sees a FAINT LIGHT in the distance. It looks like some sort of lantern, maybe from the migrant camp.

Desperate, the boy runs towards the light, but as he draws closer, he finds *something else*.

We don't see what he sees. Just the fear in his eyes.

CUT TO OPENING:

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE**EXT. THIRD HILL STATE HOSPITAL - NIGHT**

Torrents of rain whip against old brick walls.

CHRYON: THIRD HILL STATE HOSPITAL - SIX MONTHS LATER

Out of a cloudburst, crawling bolts of lightning fork across the sky, illuminating the facility in greater detail.

A sprawling complex of several buildings, tall barbed-wire fences and looming guard towers make it clear nobody is getting out of here who isn't supposed to.

INT. THIRD HILL STATE HOSPITAL - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

Rain pitter-patters against a small window covered with big iron bars. MARION HENDERSON sits at a table, staring absently at the raging storm outside.

At 33, she somehow seems older than her age. Her soft face is framed by messy hair but there's a weariness in her eyes.

She breaks into a fit of COUGHS, tries to cover her mouth, but her arms are pinned to her body by a STRAIGHTJACKET.

PILCHER (O.S.)

Marion?

Across from her is DOCTOR PILCHER. Mid-60s, bald, bearded, wrapped in tweed. He smiles at Marion with genuine warmth.

MARION

Yes?

PILCHER

We were discussing your diagnosis.

Pilcher has Marion's file next to him. It's dense, nearly overflowing with records.

MARION

I'm sorry. I wasn't listening.

PILCHER

I need you to understand what I'm talking about when I say paranoid schizophrenia.

MARION

(bored, as though reading
from a text book)

Schizophrenia. Latin, roughly translates to "splitting of the mind," referring to a division of psychological functions that results in a disease with symptoms that can manifest as delusional thinking, social withdrawal, visual or auditory hallucinations.

Pilcher's smile doesn't budge.

PILCHER

I'm told you made three attempts to escape your previous hospital. It's your opinion that you do not suffer from this condition.

MARION

Yes. That is my opinion.

PILCHER

In fairness, you must admit your recent incident could lead others to disagree.

Marion doesn't bite, breaks out into another coughing fit. Pilcher waits for her to stop.

PILCHER

I want to discuss what happened in Youngstown. I want to understand your side of the story. And I want to help you get better.

MARION

I want this straightjacket off.

PILCHER

Then we need to talk about why you're here. You need to tell me what you did in Youngstown.

Marion swallows hard. A long beat. She seems afraid to speak.

MARION

I arrived the morning after the boy was killed.

CUT TO:

INT. PASSENGER TRAIN - OBSERVATION CAR - DAY

We find a very different Marion fast asleep in her seat.

Far from the haggard woman trapped in the insane asylum, she is dressed professionally with a suit jacket, high-waisted column skirt and a small hat. Nothing that would attracted undue attention.

MARION (V.O.)

I took The Santa Fe Railway down
from Chicago, through Kansas City.
It was early and I was tired.

The train's whistle BLOWS, rousing Marion from her nap.

Now awake, she projects the quiet strength of a Clarice Starling, carries herself with a poised confidence. Still, there's an unmistakable pain hidden behind her eyes.

The only other PASSENGER in the car sees Marion's awake. This is CALVIN FRANTZ (70s), an old man with a sharp suit, ugly comb over, and a shit-eating grin.

FRANTZ

Sweet dreams?

MARION

I can't remember, actually.

FRANTZ

Well, you woke up just in time.

Frantz grabs his WALKING STICK, very ornate with an ivory handle, and gestures to the window.

FRANTZ

Here we are. Beautiful Youngstown.

Marion looks out the window and sees the small town drawing closer. Frantz gets up to shake Marion's hand. She tries not stare at his badly bent clubfoot.

FRANTZ

Pleased to meet you--

MARION

Doctor Henderson.

FRANTZ

Doctor?

MARION

An epidemiologist with The National Institutes of Health. You can call me Marion.

FRANTZ

Mayor Calvin Frantz. If there's anything you ever need in Youngstown, I'm the man to talk to.

MARION

We'll be seeing a lot of each other then. I was sent here to assess the situation in Youngstown.

FRANTZ

The situation?

MARION

The dust pneumonia.

FRANTZ

Is that so?

She can tell he's being facetious.

FRANTZ

(rehearsed, like a used car salesman's pitch)

Well, times are tough. Every town's got its troubles. But you'll soon find what I already know; Youngstown is the happiest little hamlet a homesteader could hope for. That's a matter of fact.

The Mayor smiles wide. He's missing a few teeth.

EXT. YOUNGSTOWN - TRAIN STATION - DAY

The train SCREECHES to a stop. Marion and Mayor Frantz disembark, the only two people arriving.

There are, however, many people leaving. In fact, the train platform is crowded with women in RED CROSS UNIFORMS. One of the RED CROSS NURSES speaks to Marion in a burnt out tone.

RED CROSS NURSE

You're headed the wrong direction, sweetheart.

The nurse pushes past Marion and boards the train.

Frantz laughs as he walks away.

FRANTZ

Welcome to The Dust Bowl. Best of
luck with your work.

Marion navigates the crowd with her heavy suitcase.

NURSE ROTH (O.S.)

Doctor Henderson, over here!

Another woman in a Red Cross uniform waves a handkerchief
over the crowd. This is NURSE ROTH, early 20s.

MARION

Hi, I'm supposed to be meeting
Doctor Sullins here. Do you know
where he is?

NURSE ROTH

He wasn't feeling too good so he
sent me to come get ya instead.

The nurse grabs Marion's hand and shakes it hard. They walk
and talk, making their way to the end of the train platform.

NURSE ROTH

Everyone at the hospital is *so*
excited to have you join us.

MARION

It looks like everyone at the
hospital is hopping on that train.

NURSE ROTH

We do have a bit of a problem with
turnover out here.

MARION

Well, you can count on me to --

BOOM!

Marion flinches at the sound of a distant explosion.

MARION

What was that?

Nurse Roth sighs, rolls her eyes hard, scoops up some of
Marion's luggage.

NURSE ROTH

A little bit of the local culture.
C'mon and I'll show you.

Marion trails Roth as the train full of nurses slowly wheels out of the station, blowing it's whistle as it goes.

EXT. YOUNGSTOWN - MAIN STREET - DAY

A JACKRABBIT hops down the road before freezing in place. It's long ears twitch. Then --

BOOM!

The rabbit bursts into a cloud of fluff and blood.

A WILD-EYED MAN reloads a shotgun as he goes to grab the animal's carcass.

He's part of a MOB OF TOWNSPEOPLE, all carrying rifles, shovels or some kind of improvised weapon to attack the HORDE OF JACKRABBITS swarming through the street.

It's a chaotic frenzy and countless rabbits have already been killed, lying strewn about like the casualties of war.

A boy named WILBERT (10) has cornered an injured rabbit.

Without skipping a beat, Wilbert picks the rabbit up by the ears. He looks at it struggling in his hands as though it were a toy for him to play with.

A cold brutality comes over Wilbert as he flips out the blade of small pocket knife. Marion and Nurse Roth catch this as they round the corner to Main Street.

NURSE ROTH

Wilbert! Put that poor thing down
this instant or I'll tell your
mother on you!

Wilbert drops the animal and walks away without a word.

Off Marion's obvious confusion and disgust --

NURSE ROTH

Jackrabbit drive. Swarms come in
from the prairies after the dust
storms. Second time this month.

MARION

It's horrible.

NURSE ROTH

Sure, but if you let them live
every wheat field in town would be
gobbled up in an afternoon.

(MORE)

NURSE ROTH (CONT'D)
 Little rats could eat the bark off
 the fence posts and still be
 hungry.

Nurse Roth keeps walking, passing through the mob. Marion follows, careful to step over the dead rabbits.

EXT. HOLY TRINITY CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Marion and Nurse Roth cross a street to Youngstown's little cathedral. It's built in a striking gothic style with pointed arches and a steep gable roof.

Next to it in the churchyard is a small, decrepit CEMETERY. Scattered gravestones poke out of banked sand drifts.

MARION
 I thought we were going to the
 hospital.

NURSE ROTH
 This is the hospital.

MARION
 This is a church.

NURSE ROTH
 They ran out of room at the
 doctor's office.

INT. HOLY TRINITY CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Nurse Roth leads Marion into the makeshift hospital.

There's an impressive ALTAR at the far end of the church, but the central space is filled by HOSPITAL BEDS, with all the pews shoved back against the walls.

In the dim glow of kerosene lamps, Marion sees the beds are all full of CHILDREN. Very few of the kids are asleep. Their constant coughs build to an overwhelming din.

MARION
 Jesus.

Marion becomes very still, staggered by the sheer magnitude of the shit show she's just walked into.

NURSE ROTH
 Might wanna watch the Jesus word.
 If Father Kennedy heard that he'd
 chew your ear off.

MARION
They're all children.

NURSE ROTH
Yeah. They tend to come down with
it the worst. Especially the little
ones. Not enough room in their
lungs for all that dust.

MARION
What are the symptoms?

NURSE ROTH
Doctor Sullins will be able to tell
you more but it usually starts
after they get caught in a dust
storm. The first sign is always
shortness of breath. Sometimes it's
not too bad, they get better on
their own after a few days.

MARION
And sometimes they don't.

NURSE ROTH
Then the coughing starts. And it
doesn't stop until they're hacking
up mouthfuls of mud.

CUT TO:

INT. THIRD HILL STATE HOSPITAL - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

Marion COUGHS SEVERAL TIMES.

PILCHER
How did you like the hospital being
in the church?

She clears her throat, making a disgusting noise.

MARION
I didn't.

PILCHER
Why is that?

Marion thinks for a moment, seems to be choosing her words
carefully. A look of resentment crosses her face.

INT. HOLY TRINITY CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

A priest, FATHER KENNEDY (50s), stands below a stained glass image of the crucifixion. He wears a long, black cassock with a white tab collar.

MARION (V.O.)

It confused people. Gave them the wrong ideas.

Father Kennedy reads from The Bible in a soothing tone.

FATHER KENNEDY

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

Beside him is a YOUNG GIRL (7) in a hospital bed. A trio of RED CROSS NURSES tend to the child, wiping her mouth clean as she violently coughs up a viscous sludge of MUD and BLOOD.

FATHER KENNEDY

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

The other nearby kids sit up in their bed, their morbid curiosity compelling them to watch.

FATHER KENNEDY

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.

Marion makes her way through the labyrinth of beds, speaks with impatient authority.

MARION

What's wrong?

A PANICKED NURSE answers as calmly as she can.

PANICKED NURSE

We don't know. She's barely breathing.

Marion leans over the girl, listens to her breathing.

MARION

She needs to be intubated. Where's Doctor Sullins?

NURSE ROTH
He's not here.

MARION
What do you mean he's not here?

NURSE ROTH
I told you at the train station, he
isn't working today.

Now it's Marion's turn to panic.

She looks down at the girl. She's barely clinging to life. The coughing has stopped and the entire church has fallen silent as she slowly suffocates.

MARION
She needs an emergency tracheotomy.
Get me a scalpel.

NURSE ROTH
You're not a surgeon.

MARION
She's going to die.

A moment of hesitation. Everyone looks at Marion like she's crazy. Impatient and angry, she walks over to a table full of medical instruments, grabs a scalpel for herself.

Without skipping a beat, Marion puts the blade against the girl's neck and makes a SMALL INCISION.

The girl GASPS AIR.

Shocked into action by what they're seeing, the other nurses begin to follow her lead.

Father Kennedy continues his prayer as Marion swiftly completes the procedure.

FATHER KENNEDY
Through this holy anointing may the
Lord in his love and mercy help you
with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

As she feeds a NARROW TUBE into her airways --

The girl chokes on her own blood and saliva.

MARION
She's aspirating.

Keeping her composure, she suctioned away the excess fluid. The girl inhales deeply and normal breathing resumes.

FATHER KENNEDY

May the Lord who frees you from sin
save you and raise you up.

Father Kennedy closes his Bible.

Marion takes a sigh of relief. She looks down at her hands. They're covered in blood.

NURSE ROTH

Marion... That was amazing.

Marion backs away as Father Kennedy kneels at the girl's bedside and begins to pray.

INT. THIRD HILL STATE HOSPITAL - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

Pilcher looks at Marion the way a scientist with a microscope might scrutinize some strange germ swarming below their lens.

MARION

When you're an epidemiologist it's easy to get used to studying statistics. A book tells you ten-thousand people you've never met dropped dead in a place you've never been and it's just a number. You don't even bat an eyelash. But when you're really there... Then you realize just how much every one of them counts.

EXT. HOLY TRINITY CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Marion exits through the front of the church and stops on the steps to light a cigarette. She strikes a match with shaky hands, still rattled from what just happened inside.

Father Kennedy follows her outside, approaches calmly.

FATHER KENNEDY

Doctor Henderson.

MARION

(surprised, embarrassed)
Father Kennedy.

Marion is startled to see him, puts out her cigarette. The priest almost laughs.

FATHER KENNEDY
Oh, that wasn't necessary.

MARION
Just an old reflex, I guess.

They shake hands.

MARION
Is the girl being looked after?

FATHER KENNEDY
Yes, the nurses seem to have things more under control now. But what happened in their was a miracle, to be sure.

MARION
I was just doing my job.

FATHER KENNEDY
Yes. And I felt God's hand guiding you through my prayer. How fortunate we are to have both played a part in His plan.

Marion gives a pained smile, nods her head.

MARION
Yes. Very fortunate.

FATHER KENNEDY
My prayers will be with you, of course. I'm sure God has sent you here to help me save Youngstown.

Marion seems increasingly putt-off.

MARION
You and Doctor Sullins didn't have any luck together?

FATHER KENNEDY
The strain became too much for him. Turned to the bottle, I'm afraid.

MARION
I'm sure he can still help. Do you know where I can find him?

Kennedy hesitates, searches for the right words.

FATHER KENNEDY

Yes, but to speak plainly, I really think your time would be wasted in speaking to him.

Marion takes on a more terse tone.

MARION

I'd still like to speak with him.

Kennedy concedes, gives a soft smile.

FATHER KENNEDY

Of course. He's sleeping off last night's indulgences at the courthouse. I'm sure Sheriff Schaefer would be happy to let you visit with Doctor Sullins.

INT. THIRD HILL STATE HOSPITAL - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

Marion rapidly taps her foot with a nervous energy.

MARION

I thought Doctor Sullins was crazy. You probably look at me the same way I did him.

PILCHER

What'd you think of the sheriff when you met him?

MARION

Sheriff Schaefer seemed like Youngstown.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Marion approaches from the sidewalk, walking fast.

MARION (V.O.)

Like he was the entire place squeezed into one person.

The small government building, two-stories of brick with faded white paint that has been chipped away by the elements, is a relic of the town's old west days.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

SHERIFF RAYMOND SCHAEFER (30s) sits at his desk with CARDS splayed out in front of him. He's playing solitaire, carefully mulling over his next move.

DEPUTY VERBLE sits at his own desk, cleaning a REVOLVER.

DEPUTY VERBLE

You listen to The Lone Ranger last night?

RAYMOND

That show's for kids.

DEPUTY VERBLE

You wouldn't say that if you actually listened to it.

Marion enters through the front door. Verble looks at her like a kid seeing some foreign creature at a zoo.

Raymond addresses her without looking up from his cards.

RAYMOND

Be right with you, ma'am.

MARION

I was actually just wondering if I could see Doctor Sullins?

DEPUTY VERBLE

Youngstown's most wanted.

Verble continues tending to his gun.

DEPUTY VERBLE

Anyways, you'd like that show the most. Probably remind you of your old man back when he was sheriff, blowing away bandits, hanging cattle rustlers. Now everything's boring.

RAYMOND

Boring is good.

Marion CLEARS HER THROAT loudly. Raymond plays one final card to win his game and turns to her.

RAYMOND

You want to see Doc Sullins?

MARION
I need to talk to him.

RAYMOND
Good timing. I was just about to
give him his wake up call.

Raymond grabs a set of KEYS.

INT. COURTHOUSE - JAIL CELL - DAY

Raymond leads Marion down a darkened corridor.

RAYMOND
A couple months back Doctor Sullins
was caught out in a duster. Hasn't
really been the same since.

MARION
I've seen pictures of the dust
storms. They seem horrible.

RAYMOND
They're worse than they look.

They come to a jail cell. Raymond unlocks the iron door and
pushes it open. Rusty hinges creak loudly, waking the cell's
occupant, DOC SULLINS (50s). A hangover personified, he lies
on a small cot, marinating in sweat-stained clothes.

DOC SULLINS
Raymond, I drink I've had too much
to think.

RAYMOND
Very funny, Doc. Now how about you
sit up and mind your manners.
There's a lady present.

Sullins sits up, rubs his eyes, yawns.

MARION
Doctor Sullins?

DOC SULLINS
For the time being.

MARION
You were supposed to meet me at the
train station this morning. I'm
Doctor Henderson. I need you to
tell me everything you know about
dust pneumonia.

DOC SULLINS

You can't help them. I already tried. I tried everything. And it didn't work.

MARION

Doctor, I know this is difficult but --

DOC SULLINS

Difficult? You don't know difficult. All those kids. I was there when they were born. Every single one of them. Watched them grow up from little babies.

MARION

Maybe if we both worked together, we could find a solution.

Something snaps inside Sullins, filling him with venom.

DOC SULLINS

Listen to me, you dumb bitch. Listen to the words I am saying.

RAYMOND

Watch your mouth, Sullins.

Raymond moves to enter the cell but Marion waves him off.

Sullins seems like he could cry. Marion looks at him with pity. This guy is just as pathetic as she was warned he'd be.

DOC SULLINS

They are not sick. They're dying. But they aren't sick. There's something else. Some *thing*... In the dust storms.

Marion exits the cell, turns to Raymond.

MARION

I've heard everything I need to hear.

Raymond shuts the door, locking Sullins back inside. They turn to leave when--

Sullins LUNGES at them through the bars. He grabs Marion by the arm, looks her in dead in the eyes.

DOC SULLINS

It happened again. Last night. In
the storm. I saw it in my dreams.
You'll see it, too.

Raymond reaches for his holster, hand hovering over his gun.

RAYMOND

Let her go.

Sullins lets her go as Verble comes running down the hall.

DEPUTY VERBLE

Sheriff, there's something--

He cuts himself short at the sight of Marion, whispers in
Raymond's ear. Whatever words are spoken are enough to send a
look of shock across the sheriff's face.

Marion notices this, turns back to Sullins.

DOC SULLINS

Go to the Ottawa Indian
Reservation. See their children.

Sullins sits back down in his cot begins to sob hysterically.

RAYMOND

Ma'am, I'm going to need to see you
out now. There's some urgent police
business that needs seen to.

MARION

Of course.

Marion follows Raymond back down the corridor with Sullins's
cryptic message still ringing in her ears.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO**INT. THIRD HILL STATE HOSPITAL - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT**

Marion sits in across from Pilcher, her expression blank.

MARION

Raymond got a call from a rancher who lived out on the edge of town. Said he was rounding up livestock that had gotten loose in the storm the night before. That's when he found the body.

Pilcher leans in, his interest piqued.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Vultures fly corkscrews in the sky, their shadows spiraling on ground around Raymond. He stands beside a banked sand dune with Deputy Verble.

DEPUTY VERBLE

Old man said the buzzards and coyotes were already picking at the remains when he found them.

At Raymond's feet, we briefly glimpse the bloodied and mutilated corpse of the migrant boy from earlier just barely poke out of the sand dune, nearly buried by the dust storm. The puppy he played with is also with him, flies swarming over them both.

Raymond is frozen, rattled by the gruesome scene.

RAYMOND

Go to the funeral home. Tell them we need help getting the body to the morgue. I'll find somebody who can perform an autopsy.

INT. THIRD HILL STATE HOSPITAL - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

Lightning FLASHES out the window. A BOOM of thunder rattles the room. The lights FLICKER, plunging the small room into momentary darkness.

Marion closes her eyes, takes several deep breaths. She looks scared, like she's on the brink of panic.

PILCHER

It's says in your file that you also suffer from rather severe nyctophobia. That you've been scared of the dark since you were a little girl.

Marion collects herself, regains a degree of composure.

MARION

I just never really grew out of my night light, I guess.

Pilcher stares back at her with intensity.

PILCHER

Is this what caused your bad dreams?

Marion is hunched in her seat, clearly put-off by the topic.

MARION

No, it's not... I don't--

PILCHER

Marion. We made an agreement. If you don't want to talk to me, so be it. But you need to start showing me some trust if I am going to trust you enough to remove your straightjacket.

She looks like she could kill him.

PILCHER

Believe me when I say I take no joy in seeing my patients tied up like animals.

There's enough simmering anger behind Marion's eyes that almost does make her seem like an animal, like a tiger ready to be let off its leash.

MARION

The dreams started my first night in Youngstown.

CUT TO:

EXT. OSAGE HOTEL - NIGHT

Three-stories tall, this is Youngstown's skyscraper. The hotel's name blinks out in RED NEON.

Marion approaches the building, suitcase in hand.

INT. OSAGE HOTEL - MARION'S ROOM - NIGHT

The door creaks open.

A grubby HOTEL CLERK lets Marion into the room, gives her the key and leaves.

She takes a hesitant step inside and switches the light on. One incandescence bulb that dangles from the ceiling is the shabby room's only illumination.

She eyes the dull light suspiciously before setting her things down on the bed.

As she unpacks, we find some odd items in the suitcase. Nestled between her clothes there's a large flashlight, several candles, a box of matches.

Going around the room, she strategically places the candles, eliminating any hint of darkness.

Finally, Marion stashes her flashlight in the nightstand drawer, right next to a copy of The Gideon Bible.

Now settled in, Marion slips into her pajamas and gets into bed, pulling the covers all the way up to her chin.

Her eyelids flutter like heavy butterfly wings until, finally... Sleep.

CLOSE ON -- Marion's eyes, moving in a quick, jerky motion.

She's dreaming.

EXT. YOUNGSTOWN - MAIN STREET - NIGHT - DREAM

We enter Marion's dream.

She walks down the middle of an empty street. All color has been drained away from the world, casting everything in a monochrome haze.

Everything expect the bright, blinking lights of a massive movie theater marquee. The theater's name reads out in huge glowing letters; DREAMWORLD.

EXT. DREAMWORLD MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT - DREAM

Marion approaches the theater, cautious. She reaches a darkened ticket booth, searching for anybody at all.

MARION

Hello? Is anybody there?

A voice answers. It sounds wobbly and scared.

LUCILLE (O.S.)

You shouldn't go inside there.

Marion turns around to find LUCILLE, 6 years old, hollow-cheeked, hair as yellow as hay.

LUCILLE

That's where the sandman lives.

As she says this, the theater's doors float open. If someone is inside, there isn't enough light to see them.

A musical sound, like a broken accordion, wheezes out from somewhere within. Marion is drawn towards it.

Just as she is about to step inside --

INT. OSAGE HOTEL - MARION'S ROOM - NIGHT

Marion wakes up.

There's a noise. Something above her. She sits up in bed, still shaking off the dream, when --

Again, the same sound, louder this time. The distinct sound of footsteps, like there's somebody up on the roof.

Annoyed, she grabs the TELEPHONE off her nightstand, an older upright model. She quickly dials the front desk, holds the receiver cup to her ear.

CUT TO:

INT. OSAGE HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

The same grubby clerk who let Marion into her room is passed out, leaned way back in his chair, feet up on the front desk, right next to the RINGING telephone.

The clerk's loud snores nearly drown out the harsh ringing.

INT. OSAGE HOTEL - MARION'S ROOM - NIGHT

Marion waits on the phone when more heavy footsteps pound above her. Impatient, she hangs up the phone, opens the nightstand drawer and grabs her flashlight.

She throws on her coat on and heads out to investigate.

EXT. OSAGE HOTEL - ROOF - NIGHT

The roof access door opens just wide enough for Marion to slip through. Flashlight in hand, she searches for the source of the footsteps she heard in her room.

Scanning in every direction, she finds the roof is crowded with chimneys that obscure her view. As she weaves between them, we notice a SHADOW move towards her.

She approaches the roof's ledge, nearing the hotel's large NEON SIGN, bathing her in a red glow.

MARION

Hello?

No response.

Then she hears the sound. A muffled rustling. Behind her.

Marion whips around, breathless, scared, and then...

Surprised.

Caught in the beam of her flashlight, a man with a CAMERA.

This is GORDON WOLCOTT (40s). At first glance he exudes a Harrison Ford kind of cool you can't help getting caught up in. Underneath it all, we detect a shrewd intellect keeping in check an anger fighting to show itself.

GORDON

You're not another jumper, are you?

MARION

What?

GORDON

Listen, a three story fall just isn't going to cut it. Didn't you hear about the guy who tried last month? Broke his leg, got sent to the mental hospital.

(MORE)

GORDON (CONT'D)

Now he's locked up with a bunch of nuts AND he's on crutches. It was in the newspaper.

MARION

What are you doing up here?

GORDON

Taking pictures.

(holds up his camera)

What are you doing up here?

MARION

I heard a noise.

GORDON

Sorry. Didn't realize anybody else stayed in this dump. Glad to see another out-of-towner. You must be the one everybody's talking about.

MARION

Talking about?

GORDON

I'm actually kind of jealous. Nobody even cares about me being here anymore.

He aims his camera at her.

GORDON

Smile for me real quick?

Marion definitely does not smile. Gordon snaps a photo, lowers his camera, goes to shake her hand.

GORDON

Gordon Wolcott. Photographer for The Farm Security Administration. "Documenting the plight of the rural poor." Or something like that.

Still unsure about him, she doesn't reciprocate, keeps her distance. He doesn't seem to mind.

GORDON

Nice to meet you too, Doctor Henderson.

INT. OSAGE HOTEL - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Marion walks ahead of Gordon, heading back to her room. He tries to make conversation.

GORDON
You talked to Sullins?

MARION
Yes.

GORDON
How was the old sawbones? Didn't seem to be doing too hot when I left him at the bar.

MARION
He doesn't think the children in the hospital are sick.

GORDON
He told you about the Indian kids.

Gordon walks faster, catches up, tries to get a read on her.

GORDON
You didn't believe him.

MARION
He's just a crazy old man.

Gordon laughs a little. Marion gets to her door, unlocks it.

GORDON
Guess we're neighbors.

Gordon walks just down the hall and stops at his room.

GORDON
So. How was your first day in Youngstown?

MARION
It was...

All the right words seem to escape her.

GORDON
Can't put your finger on it.

He takes on a new seriousness for the first time.

GORDON

Neither could I at first. But you felt it. Like a breath on the back of your neck.

She knows exactly what he's talking about. He can see it in her eyes. The unmistakable fear.

GORDON

You should let me take you to the Ottawa reservation.

MARION

Thanks. But I can find it myself.

GORDON

You'd be doing me a favor. I'm trying to get reassigned but my boss needs me to send him some pictures to go along with all the sob stories. You and some poor sick kids could be my ticket out.

MARION

That's very sympathetic of you.

He actually seems a little offended at that.

GORDON

I take pictures of a sick kid. People see the pictures and feel sorry for the sick kid. Then, *and this is the important part*, people send money for disaster relief.

Marion is quiet, seems to consider what he's saying.

GORDON

You really want to help this town?

They lock eyes, holding each other's gaze across the hall.

INT. THIRD HILL STATE HOSPITAL - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

Marion watches Pilcher as he quickly writes something in her file, his pen flying over paper while he speaks.

PILCHER

This was the first time you saw this girl in your dream?

MARION

Lucille doesn't have anything to do with why I'm here.

PILCHER

Perhaps. It's nonetheless important to understand the relationships you had formed in Youngstown. The company we keep can have a great impact on our lives.

Pilcher sets his pen aside, returns his focus to Marion.

PILCHER

From what I gather you and this photographer became quite close.

MARION

He was a good person to talk to.

Marion seems sad for a moment.

EXT. HOLY TRINITY CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Gordon races up to Marion with the roof down on his FORD MODEL A ROADSTER, the most rudimentary kind of car you can imagine. Just wheels, an engine and some paint.

MARION (V.O.)

He picked me up at the hospital the next morning and we went to the Ottawa reservation.

Marion gives the car a skeptical look.

GORDON

You're going to chip in on gas money, right?

She ignores him, opens the door and finds a large METAL CHAIN sitting in the passenger seat.

MARION

What's this?

GORDON

Just a little souvenir from my days working on the chain gang.

She can't tell if he's kidding or not.

GORDON

It's for incase we get caught in a duster. The clouds build up enough static electricity to short out the car. You need to drag a chain like that behind you when you drive to stay electrically ground. That way nothing gets zapped.

Marion just barely believes him.

MARION

And the convertible top won't be a problem in a dust storm?

Gordon reaches back, flips up the car's flimsy top, smiles.

GORDON

Nope.

Marion gets in the car, holding her DOCTOR'S BAG in her lap.

MARION

I have the distinct feeling that you're going to get me into trouble, Mr. Wolcott.

GORDON

What makes you say that?

He FLOORS the gas, kicking up a cloud of dust as the car disappears into the distance.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Way out in the middle of nowhere.

Marion and Gordon race past a rusty sign that reads "ENTERING OTTAWA INDIAN NATION" as pavement gives way to a dirt road.

EXT. OTTAWA RESERVATION - NIGHT

A collection of RAMSHACKLE HOUSES have staked their claim out of the surrounding prairie land. They're all exactly alike, as though slapped together on a government assembly line.

Marion sits on the porch of one of these houses with a CONCERNED FATHER (40s) and his smiling SON (4). They're both Native American, members of the Ottawa Tribe.

Marion uses a stethoscope to listen to the boy's breathing while he plays with SMALL TOY SOLDIERS. Gordon has his camera out, photographing the scene from every angle.

CONCERNED FATHER

Doctor Sullins has already been out here. He saw my son and said everything was fine.

Marion smiles, tries to seem sympathetic.

MARION

I met with Doctor Sullins, actually. I'm sure it's annoying, but my bosses back in Washington, D.C. need me to double check everything.

CONCERNED FATHER

Does my son seem sick to you?

Marion looks confused, almost disappointed. She moves the stethoscope over the child's back, searching for anything out of the ordinary.

MARION

No. He seems as happy and healthy as can be.

Gordon goes in for a close up shot. The father eyes him with obvious concern. Marion helps the boy off her lap and he runs off to go play.

GORDON

Hey, kid.

The boy stops. Gordon reaches into his pocket and fishes out some spare change.

GORDON

Give you a nickel for one of those army men.

The kid's eyes light up at the sight of money. They make the trade and Gordon gives the kid a BUFFALO NICKEL. One side of the coin is stamped with the image of a bison, the other a Native American man in profile.

The boy admires his treasure while Gordon inspects the toy, a World War One soldier posed with its rifle.

INT. / EXT. GORDON'S CAR - DRIVING - DAY

Gordon tosses a ROLL OF FILM out the window as the zips down the road. Marion, deep in thought, watches the landscape roll past her window.

GORDON

Well that was a fine waste of time. Didn't get a single shot even worth developing.

MARION

Sullins was right though. None of them were sick.

GORDON

Maybe it's an Indian thing. They're lungs are more used to being out in nature and all.

MARION

You know that doesn't have anything to do with it. Something else is going on. I just don't know what.

Something catches Gordon's eye through the windshield; a large ABANDONED BUILDING.

MARION

What are you doing?

Gordon pulls over, stops in front of the building, grabs his camera and loads a new roll of film.

GORDON

I didn't get any pictures all afternoon. This place at least looks interesting.

MARION

It looks like it's about to fall over.

EXT. ABANDONED BUILDING - DAY

Gordon approaches the entrance, almost giddy with curiosity. Marion lags behind, clearing less eager.

GORDON

One look at this place and my boss is gonna blow his wig.

The building is on its last leg. Every window has been shattered and banks of dust pile against the walls as though the earth were trying to swallow the place whole. A plaque above the doors reads --

"YOUNGSTOWN INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL."

INT. YOUNGSTOWN INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL - DAY

Gordon and Marion stand in what was once a classroom. Like something you'd find in Chernobyl today, it looks as if the students simply went out for recess and never came back.

MARION

I can't imagine having to be a student here.

Gordon hesitates to respond, too busy lining up a picture.

GORDON'S POV - through the lens, focused on a chalkboard at the front of class with the day's lesson still clearly written. The shutter CLICKS, momentarily obscuring our view.

GORDON

Well they weren't just learning here. They made those kids live here until they forgot how to be Indian. I bet the bedrooms are upstairs.

INT. YOUNGSTOWN INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL - UPSTAIRS - DAY

Gordon leads Marion down the hall. They pass doorway after doorway. Inside each room is the same repeating scene.

One bunkbed shoved against the wall, two small desks, and a delicately woven DREAMCATCHER dangling in the window. Feathers and beads hang from the hoop and spiderweb-like net.

Marion enters a bedroom and examines one of the dreamcatchers more closely.

MARION

You see these things in the windows?

He's barely paying attention, face glued to his camera.

GORDON

They're dreamcatchers. Some Indian charm. Supposed to keep out bad dreams I guess.

Marion takes one of the charms from the window.

MARION
They're new.

GORDON
What do you mean?

MARION
I mean they seem like they were put here recently.

GORDON
Folks probably came over from the reservation. Like a ceremonial thing or something.

Marion pockets a dreamcatcher while Gordon isn't looking.

MARION
I'm going to go wait in the car. I don't like it in here.

GORDON
Okay, I'll be down. Just need one more good one.

Marion heads down a dark staircase and leaves Gordon alone. He stands in the middle of the hallway with his camera's lens aimed all the way down corridor.

GORDON'S POV - The empty hallway, framed in his lens with perfect symmetry. He CLICKS the shutter and the camera BLINKS...

The shutter OPENS to reveal a SHADOWY FIGURE.

Gordon JUMPS OUT HIS SKIN, lowers his camera, but finds himself all alone.

GORDON
Marion?

No answer.

He looks out a window and sees her back at the car. Shaking, he runs down the stairs.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. / EXT. GORDON'S CAR - DRIVING - DAY

Marion and Gordon make their way back to Youngstown in silence, the sun setting on their day together.

She more closely examines the dreamcatcher she took from inside the Indian school. He glares through the windshield with a thousand yard stare.

INT. OSAGE HOTEL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

They've returned to their hotel, walking on tired legs back to their rooms. Both stop at their respective doors.

GORDON

What are you going to tell everyone
back at the N.I.H.?

She shrugs.

MARION

What are you going to tell The Farm
Security Administration?

GORDON

I have some pictures to develop.

MARION

You said you didn't get anything
good.

GORDON

Changed my mind.

He goes into his room, she goes into hers.

INT. OSAGE HOTEL - MARION'S ROOM - NIGHT

Marion goes to a writing desk in the corner. She takes the dreamcatcher and hides it away in a small drawer before sitting down in front of a small travel typewriter.

She loads a sheet of paper into the typewriter, a form labeled "REPORT OF MEDICAL SURVEY."

CUT TO:

INT. OSAGE HOTEL - GORDON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Gordon has made himself more than at home. In fact, he's turned the place into his own personal photography lab.

Finished pictures are clothespinned to a wire strung across the length of the room.

He switches on a small lamp with a RED LIGHT BULB, filling the room in a ruby glow, and goes over to a table where he has prepared a series of chemical baths for developing film.

Gordon unloads the new cartridge of film from his camera without emotion.

INT. OSAGE HOTEL - MARION'S ROOM - NIGHT

Back to Marion.

Her fingers fly as type-hammers SLAM ink onto paper.

Words pour out of her, filling her report quickly.

INT. OSAGE HOTEL - GORDON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Like a mad alchemist trying to conjure magic from a potion, Gordon soaks his reel of film in a developing tank.

He concentrates on his watch (worn on the inside of his wrist) and counts the seconds until his pictures are ready.

INT. OSAGE HOTEL - MARION'S ROOM - NIGHT

Marion twists a knob on the side of the mechanical contraption until it releases her writing.

She scans over her work, eyes jumping left to right, left to right, left to right, until she seems to become frustrated.

In a fit of anger, she crumbles the paper into a ball and tosses it into the trash.

INT. OSAGE HOTEL - GORDON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Gordon's having better luck.

His negative is finally ready to be seen in the light of day. He unrolls the reel, holds it up to his lamp.

A thumbs through the series of tiny frames until landing on exactly what he was looking for.

We don't see what he sees, not yet. But whatever it is, the look on his face tells us enough to know that we should be afraid.

PILCHER (PRE-LAP)
Your investigation into the epidemic had ran into a dead end.

INT. THIRD HILL STATE HOSPITAL - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

We return to Marion and Pilcher, just as we last left them.

MARION
I was at a dead end until the sheriff came to see me.

PILCHER
What did he come to see you about?

MARION
Apparently he was under some pressure from the mayor.

PILCHER
What kind of pressure?

MARION
The kind of pressure that would make a man admit he needs help.

EXT. RAYMOND'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Far away from town, deep into the prairie.

Youngstown's sheriff sits on his porch, gently rocking back and forth in a rickety old chair with a beer in his hand and a gun on his hip.

A small radio on the window sill next to him plays an episode of THE LONE RANGER.

He raises the volume, listens closely.

RADIO
A fiery horse with the speed of light, a cloud of dust and a hearty Hi-Yo Silver! The Lone Ranger!
(MORE)

RADIO (CONT'D)

*With his faithful Indian companion
Tonto, the daring and resourceful
masked rider of the plains led the
fight for law and order in the
early western United States!
Nowhere in the pages of history can
one find a greater champion of
justice!*

Something about these words seem to resonate with him.

He finishes the bottle of beer, stands, and crosses his yard until stopping at his fence.

Raymond balances the empty bottle on a fence post and turns around, walking some thirty feet back before stopping again.

His eyes focus on the bottle, his hand hovers over his gun.

RADIO

*Return with us now to those
thrilling days of yesteryear! From
out of the past come the thundering
hoofbeats of the great horse
Silver! **The Lone Ranger RIDES
AGAIN!***

Like a wild west hero, he draws his gun, aims for the bottle.

BOOM!

A puff of smoke clears to reveal the bottle perfectly intact.

Maybe he's not so heroic after all.

Raymond's face falls until he's caught in the beam of bright headlights approaching his house.

A car stops a short distance away, shuts off its engine and kills its lights. Out of it exits Mayor Frantz.

There's a bitter look to him, with the illusion of fake politeness he put on for Marion earlier totally set aside.

He notices Raymond's revolver.

FRANTZ

I remember that gun. I remember
when you're daddy carried it.
Fastest hand I ever saw. Can't
count how many times some stranger
galloped into town looking for
another notch on their pistol.

(MORE)

FRANTZ (CONT'D)

But your old man always came out on top. They'd have hardly cleared leather before they hit the dirt.

Raymond holsters the gun.

FRANTZ

Guess that was back when being a sheriff meant something.

Frantz is trying to get a rise out of him and he knows it.

RAYMOND

What do you want?

FRANTZ

You've got an open homicide investigation in my city.

RAYMOND

We're looking at all the evidence. A killer can't hide in a town this small for long.

FRANTZ

I don't think you understand me. I don't want to know who did it. I don't care. I just want it over.

RAYMOND

And let the monster who did it get away?

FRANTZ

Yes. Because if word gets out about this the boy won't be the only death on your conscience. This whole town will die. I have oil prospectors on the hook, ready to gobble every inch of this city and suck up every last drop of oil splashing around beneath it. But if they hear one word, *one syllable* about some mutilated migrant boy...

Frantz walks closer to Raymond. His voice drops to almost a whisper, like he's telling some secret.

FRANTZ

There goes their money. There goes Youngstown. And then you're sheriff of nothing but dust.

RAYMOND

You can't just make something like this disappear.

FRANTZ

A poor boy from a poor family got caught in a storm. The world will move on. If you like your job, so will you.

Having made his point, Frantz turns to leave.

RAYMOND

There are some things more important than my badge.

Frantz walks back to his car.

FRANTZ

Your father would never have let his happen.

He drives away, leaving Raymond in a cloud of dust.

INT. THIRD HILL STATE HOSPITAL - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

Marion coughs hard, pausing to catch her breath before she can form words.

MARION

So he came and asked me to perform an autopsy.

INT. HOLY TRINITY CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Morning light pours through stained glass.

Marion is saying something to Nurse Roth when Raymond enters, removes his hat.

He looks like a lost puppy, tail between his legs.

EXT. HOLY TRINITY CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Marion and Raymond speak in hushed voices.

RAYMOND

We think he got lost in the dust storm. The body was badly injured but I'm not sure if those wounds were postmortem.

(MORE)

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

I need to determine a conclusive cause of death and Doctor Sullins is in no condition to help anyone.

MARION

So I'm only the only qualified person left in town.

RAYMOND

I'm sorry. I wouldn't ask but the mayor is coming down on this hard.

MARION

No. I'd be happy to help.

INT. MORGUE - DAY

The Youngstown morgue is also the Youngstown Funeral Home.

Far from a modern autopsy room, a porcelain embalming table sits in the middle of the room draped by a long sheet.

Marion and Raymond stand on one side of the table across from the FUNERAL DIRECTOR, an older man who looks suspiciously at the woman here to perform the examination.

Marion nods at him and he lifts the sheet. Her senses and emotions explode into a battle at the sight of what lied beneath.

RAYMOND

Okay?

MARION

Just write down what I say.

Raymond has a pen and a pad in hand, ready to take notes.

INT. THIRD HILL STATE HOSPITAL - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

Marion sits with her eyes closed, remembering every detail.

MARION

I dissected the lungs. Clear signs of dust pneumonia.

She opens her eyes. They're wide with the horror of memory.

MARION

It was helpful to see the disease I had come there to study.

(MORE)

MARION (CONT'D)

I held it in my hand and, for a moment, I thought "maybe I could actually help this town."

Marion shakes her head.

MARION

Then I found the other injuries. Two large puncture wounds on both sides of the skull. Major trauma to the brain. Most of the gray matter dissolved into a soupy liquid. That's what killed the boy. That's what killed all of them.

CUT TO:

INT. MORGUE - DAY

Marion brushes back the dead boy's hair to reveal the punctures wounds to Raymond.

MARION

Who would do something like this?

Raymond considers her question.

RAYMOND

Someone trying to scare people.

Just then, Deputy Verble bursts in, breathless and red in the face. He looks to his sheriff.

DEPUTY VERBLE

Migrant family just came into the courthouse. Reported their son missing.

He sees the deceased body on the table.

DEPUTY VERBLE

The description they gave matched.

Raymond exits with Verble, leaving Marion by herself, still reeling from everything she's just taken in.

INT. WHITE ELEPHANT SALOON - DAY

Gordon sits at the bar, a few rounds in judging by the number of empty glasses before him. He's drunk, playing with the toy soldier he bought off the Indian boy on the reservation.

Marion enters, drawing the attention of everyone in the bar. She's the only woman in the place, but she doesn't seem to care. She just seems like she needs a drink.

Noticing Gordon, she sits near him, keeping one bar stool between them. The BARTENDER goes to her.

MARION
Whatever he's having.

GORDON
(to the bartender)
Put it on my tab. And bring me another.

She nods to Gordon in quiet thanks.

MARION
I thought about what you said.

GORDON
What did I say?

MARION
About this town.
(whispering)
Something is wrong here.

The bartender hands them their drinks. Gordon knocks his back in a single gulp.

MARION
If we work together, I think maybe we could get to the bottom of it.

GORDON
No.

MARION
What do you mean?

GORDON
I'm not digging any further.

He reaches into his jacket produces a series of bizarre photographs. He hands them to her and she flips through.

First, photos featuring children, but all distorted and warped. Then, the photos from the abandoned Indian boarding school. All of them feature a DARK SILHOUETTE lurking at the edge of the frame.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**INT. THIRD HILL STATE HOSPITAL - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT**

Marion watches Pilcher as he takes a box of cigarettes from his jacket pocket, Lucky Strikes.

MARION

The migrant family arranged to have their son buried in Youngstown. They didn't want to, but there wasn't any choice.

Pilcher takes a cigarette, holds it in his mouth. He pats himself down, searching his pockets for matches.

MARION

Mayor Frantz opened up his wallet to them, paid for a quick funeral.

Pilcher finds his matches, takes one in his hand.

PILCHER

Sounds like a very generous man.

MARION

He just wanted them to get out of town quicker.

Pilcher STRIKES his match.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. HOLY TRINITY CATHOLIC CHURCH - CEMETERY - DAY

Marion STRIKES a match, shields the flame with a cupped hand to protect it from HOWLING WINDS. Her hands shake as she lights the cigarette between her lips.

She takes a long drag and exhales. Through the smoke, she watches Father Kennedy leading a funeral service attended only the migrant boy's parents.

Marion is a good distance away, on the edge of the small cemetery, but the wind carries Kennedy's words to her.

FATHER KENNEDY

"I'll lend you a child of mine," He said. "For you to love while he lives and mourn when he's dead.

(MORE)

FATHER KENNEDY (CONT'D)

He'll bring his charms to gladden
you, and though his stay is brief,
You'll have his lovely memories as
solace for your grief."

He opens a Bible and reads from it as the Funeral Director
lowers the casket into the earth.

FATHER KENNEDY

In sure and certain hope of the
resurrection to eternal life
through our Lord Jesus Christ, we
commend to Almighty God our child,
and we commit his body to the
ground.

The Parents cast handfuls of soil over the casket only for
the wind to sweep the falling dirt away into the atmosphere.

FATHER KENNEDY

Earth to earth, ashes to ashes,
dust to dust.

Father Kennedy closes his Bible.

Looking up from the grave, he notices Marion watching from
afar and goes to her.

FATHER KENNEDY

Did you speak with Doctor Sullins?

Marion flicks her cigarette away.

MARION

He warned me about something in the
dust storms.

FATHER KENNEDY

But you don't believe things like
that. A woman of science like you.

He studies her.

FATHER KENNEDY

And yet it troubles you still.

MARION

What do you think about Sullins's
stories. As a man of God.

FATHER KENNEDY

I live my life by keeping faith in
the things I can't see. But I know
one thing for certain.

(MORE)

FATHER KENNEDY (CONT'D)
 The evil Youngstown suffers from is
 of an all too common kind.

Marion seems surprised to hear this coming from Kennedy.

FATHER KENNEDY
 The Bible speaks of many evils. And
 the devil is a powerful foe for us
 all. But this evil that you face,
 that **we face**, is mundane sin.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Lucille walks up to her school, a nondescript brick building
 that could mistaken for a prison.

FATHER KENNEDY (V.O.)
 Personal sins and institutional
 sins. Not superstitious monsters.

Kids of every age mingle about outside, waiting for class to
 begin.

A bell RINGS, summoning everyone inside.

INT. SCHOOL - FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY

Marion stands at the front of the classroom chatting with the
 teacher, MRS. CRESSWELL (20s).

Lucille takes her seat at the back with Eddie. With so many
 kids stuck sick in the hospital, many of the class's desks
 are left unoccupied.

MRS. CRESSWELL
 Students, I'd like you all to
 welcome our visitor, Dr. Henderson.

Marion steps forward, smiles. The class greets her in unison,
 expect for Lucille, who stares at Marion.

The two have never met, but the lingering memory of her dream
 triggers some vague recognition in Lucille.

She cocks her head to the side, scrunches her face in
 concentration, struggling to remember.

MRS. CRESSWELL
 She's a doctor and she's here to
 make sure you all keep healthy.

One STUDENT starts catching on.

STUDENT

She's gonna give us shots.

A worried murmur rolls over the room.

MARION

I'm actually here for something else.

She kneels down to a WOODEN CRATE and reaches inside, withdrawing a DUST MASK, a modified gas mask that would look more at home on a battlefield than in a classroom.

MARION

I'm not going to give anybody a shot, just one of these.

The kids leer back at her, skeptical.

MARION

These are dust masks. They'll protect you during the storms so you don't breath any of the dust and get sick.

Mrs. Cresswell grabs one of the masks and demonstrates putting it on. Wilbert laughs at the way she looks.

WILBERT

I ain't gonna wear one of those!

Mrs. Cresswell yanks her mask off and snaps back at him.

MRS. CRESSWELL

Wilbert, you're this close to losing recess again. Now, everybody come on up and get your mask.

The students fall into line as Marion and Mrs. Cresswell start handing out the masks. Lucille is last in line. The other kids have all gone outside to play when it's finally her turn.

MARION

Here you are.

Lucille takes the mask, stifling a cough as she does.

MARION

Make sure to wear this anytime you go outside, okay?

LUCILLE

Okay.

Lucille stares down at her mask in obvious consternation.

MRS. CRESSWELL
You can go out for recess now,
Lucille.

Lucille takes her leave. Marion turns to a window.

Through it she can see the playground. The kids she just spoke to can be seen running around and playing games.

None of them wear their masks. Instead, their respirators have been stacked in a small pile off to the side.

MRS. CRESSWELL
Masks are a good idea but I don't
see any of those kids ever wearing
them.

Lucille comes into view through the window.

EXT. SCHOOL - PLAYGROUND - CONTINUOUS

Lucille sees her classmates playing. She looks between them and her mask, clearly deliberating a choice inside her head.

Reaching a decision she, puts her mask on.

Other kids take notice of this.

Wilbert turns his attention to her.

LUCILLE'S POV -- through the round, bug eye lenses of her dust mask, Wilbert points at Lucille, laughing.

WILBERT
What's wrong Chicken Little? Scared
of a little dust?

He scoops up a handful of powdery dirt and THROWS it at Lucille.

INT. SCHOOL - FIRST GRADE CLASS - CONTINUOUS

Back with Marion and Mrs. Cresswell, both watching this moment of bullying play out.

MRS. CRESSWELL
That poor girl. It's so sad. The
bank took her family's house and
her father left town for work. She
lives with her mother in a rented
out chicken coop.

Mrs. Cresswell watches Lucille through the window, her eyes brimming with sympathy.

MRS. CRESSWELL

Why do bad things sometimes happen to the nicest people?

MARION

Because they can.

Mrs. Cresswell doesn't like that answer.

MARION

She's showing symptoms. Would her mother mind if I paid them a house call?

Mrs. Cresswell shrugs.

MRS. CRESSWELL

Sure. Assuming you can all three fit inside the coop.

INT. THIRD HILL STATE HOSPITAL - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

Cigarette smokes curls around Pilcher's face.

PILCHER

That night was the first time you were caught in a dust storm.

Marion stares forward blankly. A buzzing TINNITUS rings in her ears. It grows louder as she fixates her gaze on Pilcher's cigarette.

In a dream-like SLOW MOTION, she watches as he takes a drag. The tobacco and paper gently glows as it burns.

Pilcher stubs the cigarette out in a small ashtray already filled with a still-smoldering pile of black and gray matter.

The ringing in Marion's ears grows louder and louder and louder until, suddenly:

PILCHER

Marion?

She snaps out of it. No more SLOW MOTION. The TINNITUS is gone. Marion looks up at Pilcher.

PILCHER

You need to tell me what happened.

He leans in to hear her story. She give him half a smile, almost laughing at how eager he is.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHICKEN COOP - DAY

Marion drives up in Gordon's car. She exits the car and approaches the small shack.

She knocks on the flimsy door, puts on a prepared smile.

Helen, Lucille's mother, greets her with a frown. She sees Marion's doctor's bag. Never a good sign.

INT. CHICKEN COOP - MOMENTS LATER

Marion deflates a blood pressure cuff around Lucille's skinny arm while Helen watches with concern.

MARION
Okay, almost done.

She reaches into her doctor's bag and removes a STETHOSCOPE.

MARION
Might be a little cold.

The stethoscope slides across Lucille's back, pausing here and there to listen.

MARION
Take a big breath.

She hears a gravelly, broken sound as Lucille inhales. Marion's expression falls. Things are not looking good.

Marion looks to Helen.

MARION
Can I talk to you outside?

EXT. CHICKEN COOP - DAY

The winds whip, throwing Marion's hair around her face as she pleads with Helen.

MARION
You need to let me take Lucille to the hospital.

Helen shakes her head. She doesn't want to hear it.

HELEN

My husband already left with the boys. She's all I have left. I can't lose her.

Suddenly, the wind stops.

A unnerving silence fills the air. Then, a flock of small BIRDS soar past Marion and Helen.

Marion watches as the birds fade into the distance. Helen has turn to see where the birds came from.

As Marion turns back around, she sees what Helen already has.

A MASSIVE WALL OF DUST. Like a boiling mountain range, it descends upon Youngstown from the prairies.

Helen wipes away the tears that have pooled in her eyes.

INT. / EXT. GORDON'S CAR - DRIVING - DAY

Marion has the throttle on the floor. Helen and Lucille sit with her in the car as the race to the church.

The view through the rearview mirror is filled with nothing but an impending wall of dirt as she digs a DUSK MASK out of her bag and gives it to Lucille.

MARION

You need to put this on right now.

Helen nods, does as she's told just as--

The storm finally envelops the ambulance. The sunlight is erased, creating almost TOTAL DARKNESS. Even with the windows rolled up, a torrent of sand works its way into the car.

Marion flips on the headlights. Still, the road ahead is barely visible.

Suddenly, her headlights start to flicker until they finally burn out, leaving the car in a world of swirling shadows. She tries to turn them back on, but the lights are dead.

Then, the engine starts to sputter and backfire before suddenly shutting off.

MARION

No, please...

She bangs on the steering wheel, begging the car to continue as it rolls to a gradual stop.

Lucille and Helen stare at Marion, eyes wide with fear.

MARION
What happened?

HELEN
The battery shorted out.

Just as a wave of fear crashes over Marion, the flimsy convertible roof of the car is RIPPED away by the wind.

Marion begins to panic, gripped by her fear of the dark and overwhelmed by the storm.

She puts a finger to her jugular, takes her pulse and tries to control breathing.

But her first deep breath takes in more dust than air. She chokes, gasping to air until she sees SOMETHING in the distance. Through the windshield.

A light.

MARION
Stay with the car. I'm going to find help.

She exits the car.

EXT. YOUNGSTOWN - CONTINUOUS

Marion steps out of the car and tries to orient herself in the dust before wandering into nothingness. The road is already almost buried in sand.

She slogs forward, feels her way to the front of the car, slowly making her way towards the light source.

As she walks, light seems to move towards her as well, closing the distance between them.

Suddenly it's only a short distance away.

She strains to see through the dust until gripped by paralyzing terror. Before her stands a HORRIBLE MONSTER.

It has the body of a man made from cobbled together clumps of wet sand and a spider-like head with long, furry legs that dangle in its face around eight black, glassy eyes and two massive pincer fangs.

The abdomen section of the spider-head glows in the same way a firefly might, acting as a lure in the darkness.

Just as she begins to process what she sees, the dust storm passes, sweeping any trace of the creature away with it.

As the air clears, Marion starts violently coughing until she finally faints, drifting away into unconsciousness.

INT. THIRD HILL STATE HOSPITAL - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

Pilcher looks at Marion more seriously than ever. She coughs horribly, as though she is physically affected by the memory.

PILCHER

This monster. You must know it can't be real. Just a figment of your unhealthy mind.

Marion holds to her silence.

PILCHER

If you can't see reason, I can't help you.

He stands, starts to gather his things.

MARION

Wait.

He pauses.

MARION

You're right. I need help.

A smile creeps over his face.

PILCHER

Good, Marion. Very good.

He goes to the door, opens it, whispers to a nearby ORDERLY.

PILCHER

Someone to remove her straightjacket, please.

Marion stares at Pilcher. She seems angry.

MARION

Doctor. Could I borrow a cigarette?

Pilcher is surprised at the request, but happily obliges. He takes one of his Lucky Strikes.

Marion holds it her mouth as her arms are still restrained.

Pilcher STRIKES a match, carefully holds it for Marion.

Suddenly, Marion spits out the cigarette and BITES Pilcher's hand. Like a rabid animal, she bares down with all her strength.

Pilcher pulls himself back, terrified. But we notice something strange.

His hand doesn't bleed.

Instead, where Marion bit him, he DISSOLVES into dust, trickling out of his wound like sand through an hourglass.

Marion spits out a mouthful of MUD. THUNDER ROARS outside, knocking out the electricity.

A bolt of lightning illuminates the darkness.

Pilcher is gone, transformed into the monstrous beast Marion saw in the storm.

END OF PILOT