

GUARDIAN

by

Jess Gupta

(650) 504-0991
Tojessgupta@gmail.com

INT. NURSERY - DAY

A steely winter sky is visible through a window. Inches away, nine-month-old baby SAMANTHA sleeps cradled against a shoulder, facing away from us. A hand secures the baby as she is lifted up out of view.

Samantha is gently lowered down into a crib, fully swaddled with only her head visible. She still faces away. The adult hands gently unravel the swaddle, revealing the baby's arms.

Samantha sleeps peacefully.

Above the crib, a mobile of felted doves and blackbirds spins slowly:

A blackbird.

A dove with a red drip-stain down its side.

Another blackbird.

EXT. DRIVEWAY/CAR - SAME TIME

A crow CAWS on a tree branch, looking down toward a driveway.

In the driveway, a sedan sits parked in front of a charming two-story house. A yellow ribbon is tied to a nearby tree.

SUPER: "February 2017."

IN THE CAR

MICHAEL NOWLEN (33) sits in the driver's seat. He's clean cut, but his eyes betray a profound weariness. He wears a blue Army dress uniform, the collared shirt and necktie are loose around his neck.

Michael turns to look at papers on the passenger seat.

INSERT - ARMY LETTER:

Excerpts from a letter on "DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY" letterhead: "Staff Sergeant Michael R. Nowlen"; "inform you"; "recommending you for dishonorable discharge"; "investigation into the events of January 6, 2017".

BACK TO MICHAEL

He stares at the house. He removes dog tags from his neck and goes to place them in a shoulder bag. He stops. He peels something from the back of a tag.

It's a photo of a woman seated on a sofa and holding a swaddled newborn baby. Michael gazes at the photo, then places the tags with the Army letter in his bag.

He adjusts the rearview mirror, eyeing a beat-up hatchback parked on the street. Next to it are two garbage bins. Michael looks back through the rear windshield, scanning the area. There's no one around. He opens the door.

ALONG THE DRIVEWAY

Michael walks toward the bins, his breath visible in the air.

He opens a bin, revealing trash bags cinched with zip ties.

SEAN (O.S.)
Pick-up was yesterday!

Michael drops the lid and looks down the street. SEAN BAILEY (early 30s), a smirking weekend-warrior holds a garden hose. There's a fancy truck and boat trailer in his driveway.

Michael's tired eyes return to the bin.

MICHAEL
Shit.

Sean starts toward him. Michael grabs the bin handle, hoping to cut this short.

SEAN
You must be Michael. Hey, I'm Sean.

They shake hands. Sean takes in Michael's uniform.

SEAN
Dude, are you just getting back?!

Michael looks down.

MICHAEL
Oh. No, I had meetings on base. I got back Friday.

SEAN
Oh. Well... welcome home.

MICHAEL
Thanks.
(nods at Sean's boat)
Looks like you're just getting back too.

Sean looks back.

SEAN

Oh. Yeah. Spent the weekend up at
Lake Norman.

(turning back)

So... how was it over there? You
bag any ISIS?

Michael looks away, evasive.

SEAN

I heard you saw some shit.

Michael glances at Sean, analyzing this comment.

MICHAEL

I think we inflicted some pain,
yeah.

SEAN

Well right on brother. Wish I
coulda been there too, y'know.
Doin' my part.

MICHAEL

You serve?

SEAN

Me? Nah... I'm more of a
contractor, y'know, operational
side. Behind the scenes.

Michael nods, getting a big whiff of bullshit.

MICHAEL

Well, Lindsey said you've been a
big help since she moved in. So
thank you for that.

SEAN

Shit man, I'm happy to help. Can't
imagine coming back from all that
to a new house, new baby.

Michael nods in weary agreement.

MICHAEL

Been a long year.

SEAN

Well, rest up.

A RUMBLE can be heard in the distance. Michael perks up, scanning the periphery.

SEAN

Y'know, in the Spring, me and some buddies like to go paint-balling on the weekends. If you ever want to join.

The RUMBLE intensifies, getting closer. Michael grips the strap of his bag, tight.

SEAN

My buddy, he's got a M240. Thing fires like four-hundred rounds a minute! It's like pow pow pow pow pow!

Michael winces at Sean's excitement. The ROAR gets louder. It's coming from an engine, and it's very close.

SEAN (O.S.)

Dude, you gotta come! You'll feel like you're right back in the shit!

Two massive beige Humvees emerge from behind a tree-line, and careen around the corner of their suburban block.

Michael straightens, taking a step backward.

The vehicles barrel down the street, toward Michael's house.

SEAN

Whoa... you alright?

Michael steadies himself, looking over to Sean.

MICHAEL

Yeah... I just....

The Humvees close in, their windows darkened.

MICHAEL

Think I forgot something.

SEAN

Oh... sure.

Michael turns and walks briskly toward the house.

SEAN

Hey, I'm having some friends over later if you're interested!

Michael approaches his front door as the world around him grows blurry. The ROAR of the humvees behind him becomes muffled, along with the sound of YELLING and MACHINE GUN FIRE.

INT. ENTRYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Michael closes the door gently, shutting out the cacophony. Faint crosstalk can be heard in the next room.

TARA (O.S.)
I just don't think I should be the
one to tell her.

Michael turns and peeks out an entry window. The street is empty except for a DARK FIGURE standing in the center, facing Michael. It wears combat fatigues and a tactical helmet.

Michael stands frozen, watching the figure.

LINDSEY (O.S.)
Well... I guess that's up to you.

A PURRING sound causes Michael to look down. FRANKIE, their cat, rubs against his leg. Michael reaches down to pet him.

MICHAEL
(to the cat)
Hey Frankie. Miss me?

LINDSEY (O.S.)
Michael?

Michael looks back out the window. The street is empty.

MICHAEL
Hey.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

LINDSEY NOWLEN (31) sits at a bar counter by the kitchen, while TARA (23) stands by the kitchen sink. They stare at Michael like he just interrupted a conversation.

We recognize Lindsey from Michael's photo, but now she looks intimidating in a dark pant suit. A laptop is open in front of her. Tara is cute and petite, her raven-hair pulled back in a ponytail.

LINDSEY
(flashing a warm smile)
Hey... you're early.

Michael drops his bag by the entry. A faded "Welcome Home Daddy!" banner sags in the corner.

LINDSEY
Everything okay?

MICHAEL
Yeah. We just... wrapped up early.

Lindsey gestures to Tara.

LINDSEY
Michael, this is Tara. She's been watching Sam on the weekdays.

Michael nods to Tara, who smiles back.

TARA
Welcome back.

MICHAEL
Thank you.
(a beat)
Did I miss her?

LINDSEY
Yeah... she was tired. Tara just put her down.
(looking him over)
You're pale. You sure you're okay?

Michael smirks, mildly annoyed.

MICHAEL
Yeah, I'm fine. All good.
(he turns)
Maybe I'll just peek in....

TARA
(calling after him)
Please don't.

Michael stops, and looks back at Tara.

TARA
She's a light sleeper.

Michael looks to Lindsey, who smiles knowingly back at him.

LINDSEY
(now smiling at Tara)
Mama bear. It's only been a month but she's a natural.

Tara shifts, and smiles awkwardly back at Lindsey.

LINDSEY
 (to Tara)
 Oh! Any words today?

TARA
 No... I'm sorry.

Lindsey pouts.

LINDSEY
 (to Michael)
 She's so close to saying 'mama'. I
 mean so close.

Lindsey gushes at Tara.

LINDSEY
 Right? I mean, any day now.
 (voice trembling)
 I don't want to miss it.

Lindsey covers her face, tearing up.

LINDSEY
 Sorry, I don't know where this is
 coming from....

Tara reaches for Lindsey's hand, gets it.

TARA
 It's okay. You're weaning. It's a
 critical time.

Lindsey looks up at Tara, finding solace. She nods slowly,
 staring into the distance.

LINDSEY
 Yes.

Tara squeezes Lindsey's hand. Michael watches them.

TARA
 (whisper)
 I should go.

Tara turns to Michael.

TARA
 Welcome home. It's a... really nice
 surprise.

Michael smiles, confused.

MICHAEL

Thanks. I didn't realize it was a surprise.

His eyes shift to Lindsey.

LINDSEY

(to Tara)

He was in the hospital for a bit -- in Germany -- before coming home.

TARA

(concerned look)

Oh.

Michael frowns at Lindsey.

MICHAEL

I was in the hospital for a *month*.

Tara's eyes shift between them. Lindsey smiles faintly.

LINDSEY

Well... we're just glad you're home now.

Tara looks pointedly at Lindsey, then musters a polite smile.

TARA

Well...

LINDSEY

Yes.

(a beat)

Uh, this is for you.

Lindsey hands Tara a thick envelope. Michael notices. Tara shoulders a large beige tote bag.

TARA

Thanks.

LINDSEY

And I'll... walk you out.

Tara offers a thin smile to Michael as she passes.

TARA

Bye.

Michael nods to her.

As they leave, Michael removes his jacket. He drapes the jacket on a stool, then enters the kitchen.

Michael stops, then kneels down and dabs something with his finger. It's a drop of red liquid. He notices another drop further away, toward the sink.

Michael follows the drops and approaches the sink, but stops short. Inside are shards of a shattered wine glass. He frowns as he picks up a shard, red wine dripping off its edge. He drops it into a garbage bin, then picks up the other shards.

Lindsey appears, watching him from the doorway.

LINDSEY
Sorry about that.

Michael glances back at her.

She resumes her seat at the bar counter.

LINDSEY
It just... slipped out of my hand.

He runs the faucet, clearing out remaining debris.

LINDSEY
So? How'd it go?

MICHAEL
Fine. You know... just a check-in.
See how I'm doing.

He turns off the faucet, then moves toward the fridge.

LINDSEY
Oh, that's good.
(a beat)
God, they made you put on dress
blues for that?

He pulls a beer from the fridge and twists the cap. He shrugs.

Lindsey studies him.

MICHAEL
How'd you find her?

LINDSEY
Tara? Oh... through a friend. She's
a junior over at Methodist.

MICHAEL
Seems very... mature.

LINDSEY

Yeah well her own family's a mess,
but Samantha loves her, and she
helps out around the house.

Michael takes a swig.

MICHAEL

And so what? You just didn't think
to tell her I was coming back?

Lindsey SIGHS.

LINDSEY

Oh, here we go. Look... if I'd told
her, it just would've led to a
bunch of questions I didn't feel
like answering, okay?
(a beat)
I'm sorry.

Michael nods, and takes another swig.

MICHAEL

So what's she? Like, four-hundred a
week?

Lindsey SCOFFS.

LINDSEY

God I wish.
(she eyes him, suspicious)
Why do you suddenly care?

MICHAEL

I'm just curious. I mean, her, this
house. It just seems like a lot to
cover, y'know?

LINDSEY

(irritated)
Yeah... but you know I've got it
covered, right? Like I've had it
covered the past year --

MICHAEL

(hands up, in surrender)
I know. I just feel like, maybe I
should start helpin' out is all,
y'know? Help... shoulder the load.

Michael returns to the kitchen sink. Lindsey studies him.

LINDSEY
And what? Extend your leave?

MICHAEL
I don't know. Maybe, yeah.

Lindsey nods, thinking.

LINDSEY
I mean I guess, what you've been
through... maybe it would be good
to take a break.
(her eyes fix on him)
You could stay here at home with
Samantha.

Michael nods, swallows.

LINDSEY
Y'know, give her a chance to get to
know her daddy.

He looks down, then back up at her. He nods.

MICHAEL
Yeah, maybe.

Lindsey keeps her eyes on his.

LINDSEY
You don't seem to like that idea.

MICHAEL
I mean, come on Linds. Stay at home
dad? We both know I'm not really
the type.

Lindsey smirks, getting the answer she expected.

LINDSEY
Oh. Right. Well excuse me, *Staff
Sergeant* Nowlen.

Michael rolls his eyes. Takes another swig.

LINDSEY
I forgot about duty, honor, and
country. Any room for family in
there? What're you gonna... clean
guns down at the range for a few
bucks a pop until --

She stops herself. Michael sets his bottle on the counter.

LINDSEY
One day they call you back?

He looks at her, defeated.

LINDSEY
Sorry... I'm sorry.
(a beat)
You're back two days and here I am,
already grilling you.

Their eyes meet, calling a truce.

Frankie PURRS against Michael's leg. Michael pets the cat.

MICHAEL
I uh, met the neighbor. Sean.

LINDSEY
Oh yeah? He's nice. Nosey, but
nice.

Michael looks out the kitchen window.

Sean is hosing off the boat in the driveway.

MICHAEL
He's got a nice boat. He said he's
some kind of spook?

LINDSEY
Ha! He said that?

Michael glances at her.

LINDSEY
He sells insurance!

Michael smiles and shakes his head, his suspicions confirmed.

LINDSEY
He tried selling me a policy on you
a month after we moved in.

Michael looks out the window again, taking a swig.

MICHAEL
Still a nice boat.

Lindsey's phone rings. She looks at the number, concerned.

LINDSEY
Sorry. I have to take this.
(into the phone)
Hi.

Michael watches Lindsey move into the entryway, out of earshot. His eyes go to his bag, by the front door.

INT. GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Michael enters, holding his bag. He goes to a small safe and keys in a code. Inside the safe is a holstered pistol, a sheathed knife, and papers.

Michael takes the dog tags and paperwork out of his shoulder bag and places them in the safe, then closes the heavy door.

INT. KITCHEN

Michael enters and finds Lindsey standing in the living room, staring at him. Her phone is in her hand.

LINDSEY
I have to head in.

Michael nods, then takes a few steps.

LINDSEY
The judge is... rejecting our settlement, so it's all hands on deck.

He shrugs.

MICHAEL
Okay. How long?

LINDSEY
No idea. Not long.

Lindsey gathers her things as Michael watches, uneasy.

LINDSEY
Uh... dinner's in the fridge, so you can help yourself.

She kneels down by a baby car seat, lifting its handle.

MICHAEL
What are you doing?

Lindsey glances at him.

LINDSEY

Oh. Well, I was just thinking I would take Samantha with me, you know... so you don't have to --

Michael frowns, confused.

MICHAEL

Samantha? She's asleep Linds.

LINDSEY

Yeah but she likes car rides, and we won't be gone long.

Michael approaches.

MICHAEL

Wait. You're going to *wake* her? To take her to your *office*?

Lindsey fusses with the belts. Michael thinks.

MICHAEL

You don't trust me with her.

LINDSEY

What? No, that's not --

MICHAEL

And after that whole speech about daddy time --

She tosses the belts down.

LINDSEY

No, Michael! That's not it at all! Stop putting words in my mouth!

(a beat)

It's just that sometimes she can be a handful, and I don't want it... triggering you.

He cocks his head.

MICHAEL

Triggering me?

LINDSEY

Yes!

MICHAEL

You think I'd *hurt* --

LINDSEY
No Michael! You know what I mean --

MICHAEL
No! I don't --

Lindsey holds up her hands. She takes a breath.

LINDSEY
All I'm saying... is that since
you've been back, you've been wound
up. You're quiet. You barely look
at Samantha.

They lock eyes for a moment, then Michael looks away.

LINDSEY
It's like you're scared of her.

Michael turns to the laptop, watching the infra-red nursery-
cam image of a crib. The lower crib's lower half is obscured
by a mesh crib liner. Samantha is not visible, but her
SNORING can be heard.

MICHAEL
I don't know. Sometimes... maybe I
am.

Lindsey shifts, watching him intently.

MICHAEL
Sometimes I look at her and I
think... what if I don't deserve
her? What if I go to look at her...
and I see it in her eyes?

He turns to see Lindsey tearing up. She approaches and kisses
the top of his head, lingering there.

MICHAEL
Are you happy?

LINDSEY
Of course. I just...
(a beat)
I can't believe you're really here.

Michael grasps her arms, connecting with her.

She kisses his head again.

MICHAEL
I'm here, babe. I'm here.

Lindsey kisses him deeply. She tears up.

LINDSEY
You were always in my heart.

She looks deeply into his eyes.

LINDSEY
And now we have everything we
wanted. The life we always wanted.

Michael half smiles, a hint of hope in his eyes.

LINDSEY
We have a chance. We can... start
fresh. Maybe even somewhere new.

Michael's brow furrows.

MICHAEL
Where?

LINDSEY
I don't know. Anywhere.
(a beat)
Think about it.

Lindsey gently pulls away, wiping her tears.

LINDSEY
I'm gonna leave her here.
(turning serious)
But I need you to promise me
something, okay?

Michael smiles, intrigued.

LINDSEY
If she wakes up -- for any reason --
I don't want you going in there,
okay?

Michael's smile fades.

MICHAEL
Uh... okay. Why?

LINDSEY
Because I'm sleep training her,
Michael, and I don't want you
undoing weeks of work, okay? If she
wakes up, just call me. I'll come
right home.

Michael folds his arms.

MICHAEL

So don't go in there. Even if she's screaming?

LINDSEY

Even if she's screaming. Just call me.

Lindsey points to the laptop.

LINDSEY

I have my work machine, so I'll leave this for you.

Michael gives a tight smile, his apprehension showing.

She shoulders her bag.

LINDSEY

Don't worry.
(she smiles)
I doubt she'll make a peep.

She goes to the front door and looks back at him.

LINDSEY

Be back soon.

The door closes with a solid KA-CHUNK.

Michael sits at the counter in his uniform, looking out of place amid the pink baby items scattered in the living room behind him. In one corner sits a motorized baby swing.

He looks around the room.

We notice the ambient sounds: the TICKING of a wall clock; the HUM of the refrigerator; Samantha's SNORING coming through Lindsey's laptop.

Michael goes to the living room window, and peeks past the curtain.

Sean is talking to Lindsey by the car. He holds a power drill. Lindsey is laughing at something he's saying.

Michael releases the curtain. He walks back across the living room, stopping at a some framed photos on the wall:

1) A B&W photo of Michael and Lindsey slow-dancing at their wedding. Lindsey is laughing as Michael looks down, smiling.

2) A selfie, taken by Lindsey, of them at the top of a peak. Lindsey has a big smile while Michael wears sunglasses.

Michael looks at the photos as departing headlights shine through the window behind him.

A soft THUD from above.

Michael looks up.

Something has hit the floor in the room above. Michael goes to the laptop.

The nursery is dark and still.

INT. ENTRYWAY

Michael FLICKS a switch, illuminating a chandelier. He looks back at the switch and something catches his eye. He reaches and runs his finger over a nail-hole in the wall.

Michael looks down at a small entry table and begins searching for something. He opens a drawer and rummages, then removes a small metal crucifix. He holds it up to the nail-hole in the wall, then reluctantly puts it down on the table.

Michael turns and looks up a flight of stairs, to the mouth of a dark hallway.

He starts up the CREAKING stairs.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

View down the dark hallway as Michael's silhouette appears, his shadow cast the length of the hallway. Samantha's SNORING is louder up here. He flips another light switch. Nothing. He flips it again, then starts down the hall.

Stopping at a wall sconce, Michael peeks behind the shade and sees that the bulb is missing.

He continues down the hall, passing a messy master bedroom, followed by a bathroom. He glances in at an eerily tidy guest bedroom, its walls bare and the bed perfectly made. He continues, arriving at a door at the opposite end of the hall. He turns the knob.

INT. NURSERY - CONTINUOUS

Michael scans the dark room: a diaper changing table... crib... rocking chair.

White moonlight diffuses through the curtained window. He looks down and sees a child's doll laying on the floor in front of him. He picks it up.

The doll is about the same size as Samantha, and its eyelids open as Michael holds it upright. He puts the doll back on a shelf by the door, then moves to the crib and looks in.

Samantha is turned away, barely visible in the darkness.

INT. SHOWER - LATER

Michael in a steamy shower, the water hitting his face.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

A glass bowl hits the counter, and its plastic lid comes off. Inside, soggy broccoli mingle with white cubes of tofu, all nestled in cold brown rice.

Michael stands at the counter in his sweats, looking down at the bowl and rubbing his chin. He tilts his head a few degrees, eyeing his phone on the counter.

EXT. STREET/DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

A car pulls up in front of the house, DELIVERY GUY (20s) looking at his phone. MICHAEL hustles down the drive toward the car.

DELIVERY GUY

Michael?

Michael takes a proffered plastic delivery bag.

MICHAEL

Thanks.

DELIVERY GUY

Later man.

Delivery Guy speeds off.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

A large paper bucket is pulled from the plastic delivery bag, and placed on the counter; the lid pops off to reveal a bouquet of hot, golden fried chicken.

Michael brings his face down toward the bucket, breathing in the steam. He SIGHS.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Michael pushes aside some stuffed animals as he hits the sofa with a heaping plate of food and a bottle of beer. He closes his eyes.

MICHAEL

(whispers)

Bless us O Lord, and these gifts we
are about to receive...

He checks Lindsey's laptop, now stationed before him on the coffee table: the mesh crib liner still obscures any view into the crib, but the SNORING indicates all is well.

Michael takes a bite of chicken, savoring the moment. He brings up a remote and taps a button. We hear a few seconds of a high-speed CAR CHASE and SIRENS before Michael taps the remote again.

NEWSCASTER (O.S.)

-- Jury has reached a verdict in
the case of Army veteran James
Watts, who was accused of killing
his wife and three children. Watts
had recently returned from
Afghanistan, where he --

He CLICKS off the TV. He picks up his phone and flicks with his thumb as he eats.

Series of photos on his phone screen:

1) Michael with two other men, all in field camo and standing together in front of a desert sunrise. The two men wear nametags that read: "Dawson" and "Polacek".

2) A long convoy of army vehicles as they snake through a bombed-out Iraqi city.

3) A group of soldiers arranged around a beige jeep. In the back of the jeep, two soldiers hold up a green army unit flag. Front row, center, is Michael, holding up a Staff Sergeant rank badge.

4) Lindsey sitting on the living room sofa, holding a swaddled baby and smiling faintly in the soft morning light.
It's the same photo taped to Michael's dog tag.

Michael lingers on this photo.

He brings the phone down and thinks for a moment, then his eyes go to the laptop on the table. He sets his plate to the side, and grabs the computer.

He CLICKS an icon, opening a photo gallery. A thumbnail of Lindsey's face is at the top.

Faint images reflect in Michael's corneas as he CLICKS through pages of Lindsey's photos. It's obvious she chronicled everything they did.

He stops, his eyes narrowing.

At the bottom of her album are thumbnails of Lindsey's most recent photos. He clicks on the first one, pulling up a dark ultrasound photo of a fetus. Michael looks at the photo, getting lost in the whirls and shadows of the fuzzy image.

FLASHBACK - INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

The same image of a fetus is frozen on an ultrasound machine.

LINDSEY

(into phone)

Well fuck 'em, Todd! They need to know we're ready to go to trial!

Lindsey's knee jitters up and down as she sits on a hospital bed. Next to her is a brochure that reads "Sacred Root Midwives: Your Guides Through Pregnancy." There is a photo of a sixty-year-old woman, with a large head and big hair. Under the photo is a caption: "Miriam Caster, *Midwife*".

LINDSEY

(into phone)

Right.

(a beat)

No, we're looking at a house after this, but I should be in around three. Alright.

She ends the call and leans back, rubbing her exposed pregnant belly with a small mesh bag of dried pellets.

Michael watches her from a stool, concerned.

LINDSEY

Where the fuck is he?

MICHAEL

He's coming, Linds. Just... calm.

Lindsey glares at Michael as she rubs her belly with the bag.

LINDSEY
Fetal *arrhythmia*? Are you calm?

MICHAEL
Of course not. But I don't think
rubbing yourself with dried
lavender is gonna help.

LINDSEY
You don't know that.
(a beat)
It's soothing. The Phoenicians used
it.

She rubs her belly. He leans in and smiles faintly, trying to catch her eye.

MICHAEL
Right. The... Phoenicians.

She sees him and cracks up nervously, as her eyes tear up.

LINDSEY
(breaking down)
Fuck off. It was on Jennifer
Garner's instagram.

Michael approaches, taking her into his arms.

MICHAEL
You're gonna blow a fuse.

LINDSEY
(sobbing)
I just hate feeling so... *helpless*.

Michael holds her, caressing her head. Her knee stops bouncing, and she calms.

Her head lies against his chest. She BREATHES in and out.

LINDSEY
It's so... strange.

MICHAEL
Hm.

LINDSEY
Usually... when the two of us are
in a room, and one of us is
crying... it isn't me.

Michael smiles as the door OPENS, and their obstetrician, DR. WHITE enters. Lindsey softly pushes Michael to the side.

DR. WHITE

Sorry for the wait. I talked to the specialist and he thinks it's fine.

Lindsey EXHALES.

DR. WHITE

The heart rate's a little low, but it's within the normal range. Sorry for the worry.

Lindsey and Michael embrace again, tears in their eyes.

MICHAEL

(hushed)

She's okay.

Lindsey nods, tears streaming from her closed eyes.

MICHAEL

She's gonna be fine.

BACK TO PRESENT - INT. LIVING ROOM

Michael blinks and returns to the thumbnail images at the bottom of Lindsey's photo app.

He clicks on the image next to the ultrasound, pulling up a selfie of Lindsey, five-months-pregnant, passionately embracing him. A military cargo jet is behind them.

Michael clicks to the last photo, which is an un-cropped version of the photo of Lindsey holding Samantha on the sofa. Michael zooms in, examining a shadow on the wall near Lindsey. Whoever took the photo was tall, with a round figure and a big head.

He reads the photo date stamp: "**May 2, 2016**".

Michael clicks and the photo shrinks back down. He looks at the thumbnail and the white space after it. He frowns.

MICHAEL

That's it?

A CRY rings through the laptop speaker, startling Michael, who toggles through apps on the screen, bringing up the image of the crib. The crib is visibly shaking.

Michael watches the screen, his jaw clenched. The CRYING continues. He puts the laptop back on the coffee table.

Michael brings up his phone, and calls Lindsey. The call goes straight to voicemail.

MICHAEL

Shit.

Michael hangs up.

INT. KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM

Michael paces back and forth, then stands, arms folded, looking down at the screen. The CRYING intensifies, reverberating within him. Michael clenches his fist, the WAILS echoing in his ears.

Michael tries Lindsey again, but no ring, only voicemail. He clutches his phone, thinking.

Michael bolts to the fridge, removing a translucent-pink baby bottle full of milk. He crosses the kitchen, and approaches an intimidating bottle-warming device. He lifts the warmer to examine it, but water spills from the top.

MICHAEL

Shit.

The CRYING intensifies. Michael sets the device down, turns a dial and reluctantly drops in the pink milk bottle. He wipes his sweaty forehead.

The timer on the bottle warmer TICKS loudly.

INT. ENTRYWAY

Michael approaches the stairs, the CRYING echoing down at him. He pauses, listening, then starts up the stairs.

INT. HALLWAY

Michael approaches the door, WAILS coming from within. He stops, his hand on the doorknob. He takes a DEEP BREATH IN.

INT. NURSERY - CONTINUOUS

Michael moves across the dark room toward the crib, gently SHUSHING over the infant's CRIES.

MICHAEL

I'm here, sweetie. Daddy's here.

He reaches down and picks up Samantha, who wears a thick sleep sack over her pajamas.

Michael holds her out to look at her, and for the first time we see that she is a beautiful baby girl. Her cries intensify as Michael cuddles her, shuffling toward the rocking chair.

MICHAEL

Hey Samantha. Don't cry.

He awkwardly tries to position her for feeding, sitting her up in his lap. He brings the bottle up to her mouth but she SWATS it away. He tries again, but she turns away from it.

MICHAEL

Come on sweetie.

He puts the bottle down and brings Samantha up to his shoulder, rocking her up and down as she CRIES in his ear.

MICHAEL

How 'bout a book? You wanna book?

He fumbles with his phone, using its bright screen to scan the small bookshelf next to him.

MICHAEL

Let's find a book, huh?

Michael scans the colorful book spines along the low shelf, but sees a thicker black leather book resting on top of the other books. He grabs it and opens to the first few pages, but the text is in Latin. Michael frowns.

He returns the black book and grabs a colorful one.

MICHAEL

Here we go.
(reading the cover)
"The Happiest Rhino."

Samantha's CRIES intensify as he reads.

MICHAEL

"There once was a rhino so filled
with sadness...."

Michael trails off, overpowered by the CRIES.

MICHAEL

Samantha.

Her CRIES intensify.

MICHAEL
 (louder, pleading)
 Sweetie, please.

Her CRIES go from general upset to RAGE.

MICHAEL
 Samantha!

Michael holds her up with both hands as he rises and moves toward the crib. He sets her down on all fours in the crib and takes a step back, watching her as she looks up at him, WAILING. He goes to the open door and looks back, about to leave.

Samantha's hands grab the posts of her crib as she looks up at him, tears streaking down her face.

Michael watches her for a moment, unsure of what to do.

Samantha reaches out toward him.

Michael's doubt gives way to resolve, as he returns to the crib and picks her up.

MICHAEL
 Come here sweetie. Daddy's here.

He sits back down on the chair.

MICHAEL
 I've got you.

He picks up the baby bottle again.

MICHAEL
 Daddy's got you. Daddy's not
 leaving.

Samantha starts to calm, and drinks from the bottle. Her eyes fix on Michael, watching him.

Michael smiles down at her.

One of Samantha's tiny hands releases the bottle and finds Michael's hand, playing with his fingers. He begins to rock her very slowly, HUMMING to her. His HUMMING finds a rhythm.

Michael licks his lips, preparing to speak.

MICHAEL
 (off-key)
 "You never -- "

Michael clears his throat, and tries again.

MICHAEL
 (singing Taylor Swift's
 "Ours", or something
 similar)
 "You never know what people have up
 their sleeves,"

Samantha gulps the bottle, looking up at him with big beautiful eyes.

Michael smiles lovingly down at her.

MICHAEL
 (singing)
 "Ghosts from your past gonna jump
 out at me,"
 (a beat)
 "And you say, don't you worry your
 pretty little mind,
 People throw rocks at things that
 shine,
 And life makes love look hard,"

Samantha watches him, her hand rising to touch his neck.

MICHAEL
 (singing)
 "The stakes are high,
 The water's rough,
 But this love is ours."

Samantha's fingernails graze his neck, slicing into it.

Michael GASPS.

MICHAEL
 Ahh... fuck!

Blood seeps from the cut, appearing black in the moonlight.

Samantha starts WAILING again, and Michael lifts her up and away from him, surprised by the pain.

MICHAEL
 Agh... Dammit!

He rises with Samantha, gently putting her back down in the crib, where she continues WAILING.

Michael holds his neck as he moves across the dark room to the door.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Michael leans against the wall. He feels the cut on his neck and winces, bringing up blood on his fingers. Behind him, the CRYING starts to subside, then stops.

Michael presses his head against the door, hearing faint baby noises from within. He pulls back, considering something, then carefully turns the nursery doorknob again.

INT. NURSERY - CONTINUOUS

The door opens silently as Michael crawls in on all fours, passing the crib toward the rocking chair. He stops at the bookshelf and feels the book spines, pulling one out.

As he passes the crib on the way back, Michael stops. From within he hears faint GIGGLING, and incomprehensible baby-talk. He stays still as the sound grows more sinister-sounding in his ears, getting louder and LOUDER.

INT. HALLWAY

Michael silently closes the nursery door, the black book in his other hand. He's about to start down the hall when he stops.

A faint SCRATCHING sound comes from behind the wall of the hallway. SCRITCH SCRATCH. SCRATCH SCRITCH.

Michael moves closer to the wall, trying to pinpoint its location. SCRITCH SCRATCH. He presses his ear to the wall. A faint SHUFFLING sound is heard, then silence. Michael looks at the wall, then moves away.

INT. BATHROOM

A sink faucet turns on. Pink water swirls down the drain.

Michael looks in the mirror, examining the inch-long cut on his neck. The cut appears irritated, red and swollen along the edges. He GASPS as he dabs at it with a tissue, then smirks at himself as he tosses the tissue.

INT. KITCHEN

The black book hits the counter.

Michael removes a paper clamshell box from the delivery bag and notices it has a plastic tape sealing it closed. He pulls at the tape but it's stuck on tight.

Michael looks around, and notices something. He walks toward a wood knife-block tucked in a corner of the under-cabinet counter space. It's empty.

CUT TO:

A drawer yanked open, followed by a hand digging through a collection of cooking utensils. The hand pushes in the drawer before opening the next one down, then the next.

CUT TO:

A dishwasher door opens, but there's only a few plates and glasses inside. The door closes.

CUT TO:

Michael looks down as he opens a another drawer and reaches in for something. He brings up a rounded dinner knife, feeling its dull edge.

CUT TO:

The dull dinner knife saws through the plastic tape, just before the clamshell box flips open, revealing a slice of silky cheesecake.

CUT TO:

Michael stands at the kitchen sink, looking out the window as he eats the cheesecake. A gauze bandage covers the cut at the base of his neck. He leans in as he hears laughter and faint music coming from Sean's backyard.

Michael leans back and looks toward the laptop, which is propped back on the bar counter. There's no sound, just the image of the crib in the darkness.

Michael looks past the laptop, to the black book.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Michael eases back into the sofa, the black book and a beer in his hands. He takes a swig then opens the book, stopping cold as he reacts to what he sees.

As he thumbs pages, we see the entire text is in a strange language, with obscure diagrams scattered on different pages.

MICHAEL
 (under his breath)
 The fuck...

He flips to the first few pages, but there is no title page before the text begins.

Michael stops at an illustration of a horned god, with a fire burning in its belly. He takes another swig of beer.

He opens a translation app on his phone and selects "Latin" from a list of languages. He aims his camera at the text as the app scans the page and displays:

"MOleCh. THE CHiLd Eater".

As Michael reads, Samantha's BABBLING drones from the laptop.

Within the black book are occasional illustrations and diagrams. Michael stops on a symbol of an upturned crescent atop a circle. It resembles the silhouette of "Molech".

Samantha's vocalizations become faint, like a whisper. Michael looks at the screen as a creepy GIGGLE comes from the crib. Just above the edge of the crib, two glowing eyes stare at the camera.

Michael pulls back slowly, his face going pale. The eyes disappear back down into the crib, and the room goes quiet.

EXT. BACK DECK - NIGHT

Moonlight shines on Michael as he takes a long pull from a beer bottle. He's sitting at a table, the CHIRP of night crickets all around. He begins tearing at the bottle label.

The crickets fill the silence for a beat.

DAWSON (O.S.)
 (gurgling)
 Good homecoming Sarge?

Michael ignores the voice coming from the chair closest to him. The figure is sitting between us and Michael, out of focus. It's human, but dripping with fluid. Raw.

Michael takes another pull from the bottle. The thing in the chair audibly INHALES.

DAWSON (O.S.)
 Ah... clean air.
 (a beat)
 You remember the smoke?
 (MORE)

DAWSON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Inhaling that shit while we turned
over those haji houses.

Michael nods slightly, a pained look on his face.

DAWSON (O.S.)
Yeah. You remember.
(a beat)
You ordered us in there.

Tears forming in Michael's eyes.

DAWSON (O.S.)
My daughter turned four the very
next day.

Tears streak Michael's face. The figure in the chair sits
silently, enjoying the moment. Michael regains control,
wiping his eyes.

MICHAEL
See... I know you're not real.
(a beat)
I'm back home... comin' down... so
my brain cooked you up.

Michael smirks at Dawson.

MICHAEL
Now if you'll excuse me.

Michael rises, heading back toward the house.

DAWSON (O.S.)
That book you found.

Michael stops at the door, and looks back at Dawson.

DAWSON
I know those words. Soon... you'll
know 'em too.

Michael moves toward the house.

DAWSON (O.S.)
Hey Sarge.

Michael stops again.

DAWSON (O.S.)
Can't keep us out here forever.

The figure sits in the moonlight. He's dressed in desert field camo and a tactical helmet, with the nametag "DAWSON" on his chest. His body armor is shredded, revealing glimpses of his face and body, which are flayed of all skin.

DAWSON
Eventually, we're coming in.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Michael enters, his phone in his hands. He stares at Lindsey's name in his contacts list. He moves to press it with his finger but stops. He rubs his chin. Just then it lights up with a call from "Lindsey". Michael STARTLES.

MICHAEL
Hey!

LINDSEY (V.O.)
Hi. How's it going?

MICHAEL
Uh... good. Good. How about you?

LINDSEY
It's fine, but I'm going to be here a bit longer.

MICHAEL
Okay.

LINDSEY
How's she doing?

Michael looks at the crib on the screen, his face tense.

MICHAEL
(forced)
Fine. Still sleeping.

LINDSEY
Oh that's good. I was worried.

MICHAEL
Yeah, well, she cried a little bit earlier, but then she stopped.

Silence on the other end, followed by muffled distortion.

MICHAEL
Hello?

LINDSEY
(whisper)
She was crying?

MICHAEL
Just for a few minutes --

LINDSEY
Why didn't you call me?

MICHAEL
I did. I got your voicemail.

LINDSEY
(groans)
Hold on.
(a beat)
I don't see any messages.

Michael shakes his head in frustration.

MICHAEL
I didn't leave a message.

LINDSEY
Well, how was I supposed to know
you called?

MICHAEL
I thought you would pick up the
phone --

LINDSEY
(raising her voice)
I can't always pick up the phone,
Michael!
(whispering again)
Okay? It's busy here. I'm working!

Michael scratches his forehead, seething.

MICHAEL
Hey, where are the knives?

A beat.

LINDSEY
What?

MICHAEL
The knives. I needed a knife, but
they're gone. Like... all of 'em.

LINDSEY
What do you need a knife for?

Michael frowns.

MICHAEL
Does it matter?

LINDSEY
Uh, I guess not.
(a beat)
I'm just... curious.

MICHAEL
So, what? Now you don't trust me
with knives in the house? What, do
I need to ask your permission
anytime I want to --

LINDSEY
Jesus Michael! I took them to get
sharpened!
(a beat)
They were dull so I took 'em to
Kelly's.

He closes his eyes, feeling like a dick.

LINDSEY
God, what the fuck has gotten in to
you!?

MICHAEL
Lindsey --

LINDSEY
(annoyed)
Hold on.

We hear a click like she's put him on hold, followed by a few
seconds of silence on the line.

LINDSEY
(whisper)
Look, I've gotta go. I'll call you
when I'm leaving --

The call disconnects and Michael looks at the phone. He puts
it on the table and sits back, rubbing his face.

MICHAEL
Fuck.

He furiously scratches his scalp with both hands, and checks the clock:

"9:23"

Michael looks toward the kitchen.

INT. GARAGE

KA-THUNK as Michael turns the handle on the safe door, opening it. He pulls out a large hunting knife, removing it from its sheath. It gleams silver as Michael feels its edge with his thumb.

FLASHBACK - EXT. ARMY COMBAT OUTPOST - MOSUL - DAY

Michael stands in front of a Humvee, addressing several soldiers. He appears to tower over them in his full combat dress and armor.

MICHAEL

Y'all know what today is?

Silence as the squad look at each other.

Michael shakes his head.

MICHAEL

Fuck me y'all are a bunch of godless pagans.

(laughs from the squad)

Today marks Epiphany. It marks the day when Jesus revealed himself as our lord, and awed us with his grace.

(a beat)

And so today... we will reveal ourselves...

(he pulls the large, gleaming knife from its sheath)

As avenging angels to the limp-dick Johnny Jihads who killed our brother, *Private First Class Chris Schweers*.

Grunts and hoots from the squad.

MICHAEL

Now, after some polite questioning by Dawson and myself....

Dawson tilts his head back and sloppily pours water from a bottle into his mouth, eliciting snickers from the group.

MICHAEL (CONT.)

Hazem's pointed us to a house in al-Muthanna, so look out for civilians.

(a beat)

Make no mistake, this is a spiritual battle, and we... are *His* tools of mercy.

(more hoots and hollers)

Alright, let's roll.

Engines ROAR as assault vehicles start up. Soldiers grab their gear and get into their respective vehicles.

As Michael approaches an idling Humvee, Dawson runs up to him, pressing his fingers to his earpiece.

MICHAEL

(walking and talking)

Dawson.

DAWSON

Sir, the Battalion Commander. Sitrep indicates suicides are in the area.

MICHAEL

(mocking)

No shit.

DAWSON

He wants us to abort and wait for more intel.

Michael stops at the Humvee and turns to Dawson.

MICHAEL

Tomorrow they're gone!

(he claps a hand on

Dawson's shoulder)

Sometimes we're on our own.

Michael climbs in the Humvee and takes a seat. He slaps the outside of the vehicle and its engine GROWLS. Dawson reluctantly climbs in next to Michael.

MICHAEL

(yelling over the noise)

CHRIS WAS FAMILY.

The vehicles move out.

BACK TO PRESENT - INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

Michael looks at the knife. He rises, holding the knife and looking intent.

INT. KITCHEN

HISS and CRUNCH as the knife pries open a beer bottle.

A THUNK as the knife is stabbed into a wood cutting board, the handle pointing to the ceiling.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Michael hits the sofa again, beer in hand. He picks up the black book and pages through it.

He flips a few pages to a woodcut illustration of a young man nailing a live rabbit to a wall. Below the rabbit is a woman nursing a baby. The rabbit's blood spatters their faces.

Michael grimaces at the image. He pulls up his phone again and aims the camera at the page. On his screen, the translation caption:

"oFferIng tOthe God."

Michael examines the drawing. The suckling baby appears completely calm, undisturbed by the bloodbath above. He flips another page and finds another woodcut illustration:

The woman from the preceding illustration holds the baby in her lap. The baby appears a bit older, and the woman wears a dress buttoned up to her neck. They face forward, with the child's hand reaching up toward her neck. The woman's right hand is raised, a powerful halo of light emanating from it.

Michael studies the drawing intently.

The doorbell CHIMES.

Startled, Michael looks toward the entry.

MICHAEL

Shit.

He turns to the laptop monitor. No sounds in the nursery.

Michael rises and puts the book on the counter as he moves toward the entryway.

INT. ENTRYWAY - CONTINUOUS

The front door opens, revealing an embarrassed Sean.

SEAN
Did I wake the baby!?

Michael looks up toward the stairs.

MICHAEL
I don't think so.

SEAN
Sorry man. I just wanted to let you
know I brought your bins up.

MICHAEL
Oh right. Thanks.

SEAN
Yeah man, trust me, you don't want
a raccoon buffet down there.

MICHAEL
Right.

They both nod.

MICHAEL
Uh, you wanna come in? Have a beer?

SEAN
Sure....

Sean enters and Michael closes the door after him.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Sean takes a seat at the bar counter as Michael grabs his
beer from the coffee table.

SEAN
She left you with the kiddo, huh?

Michael goes to the fridge and gets a beer.

MICHAEL
Yeah, she had some fires to put out
downtown. You know, power lawyer
stuff.

SEAN
Right.

Sean stares at the knife stuck in the cutting board.

SEAN

So... how you settling in?

Michael goes to the cutting board and takes the knife.

MICHAEL

Good. You know....

He pries off the cap, then hands the beer to Sean.

SEAN

(raising the bottle)

Cheers.

Michael sets the knife on the board, and takes a swig.

SEAN

I hear fatherhood's a trip, man.

Michael rubs his bandage.

MICHAEL

Yeah... it's a challenge.

SEAN

I bet, man. I just... I don't know
if I could do it, y'know?

(a beat)

One of my paintball buddies, he
just had a son. Told me he felt
like he gained a kid, and lost a
wife. Y'know, always fightin' and
shit. Said it feels like he's
livin' with a stranger.

Michael raises his eyebrows, holding his beer.

MICHAEL

Well, that's a harsh way of lookin'
at it, but yeah... the baby comes
and suddenly... you're no longer
the most important person.

(another beat)

But then you hold it for the first
time and you realize, that's okay.

Sean nods. He notices the black book, and turns it toward
him.

SEAN

Yeah, well... you're lucky. I mean,
Lindsey's great.

Michael frowns as Sean begins flipping pages. Sean stops at the symbol of the circle and crescent.

SEAN

This has to be Tara's.

Michael perks up.

MICHAEL

How do you know that?

SEAN

She's into this sorta shit.

Michael gently takes the book. Sean looks up, realizing he's tipped his hand.

SEAN

(hushed)

Dude. Okay, you can't tell Lindsey this... but Tara and I went out a bit a few months back.

(a beat)

She's into some freaky shit, man. I mean, I'm a red-blooded guy, but... *man.*

MICHAEL

Freaky shit? Like what?

Sean leans in, like someone could be listening.

SEAN

Well... she only has sex on her period --

MICHAEL

(waiving him off)

Waitwaitwait... I can't hear this.

SEAN

Dude, there's more.

MICHAEL

No. No, she's our nanny. I can't...

(a beat)

Wait, *when* was this?

Sean thinks.

SEAN

Uh... Halloween. So four months ago.

MICHAEL

Lindsey said she hired her last month.

SEAN

Nah man, she's been around since y'all moved in.

MICHAEL

Since the birth? Huh.

(a beat)

You know, I can't find any photos from the hospital. Nothing at all from the past year.

Sean CHUCKLES.

SEAN

It's probably 'cause she's been a little busy since then!

Michael nods, conceding the point.

SEAN

Must be hard to make it back in time, when the baby comes.

MICHAEL

Lotta guys miss it. I told myself I wouldn't.

SEAN

But you did, right?

Michael's eyes fix on Sean.

SEAN

Sorry, I didn't mean it that way.

Michael simmers.

MICHAEL

Yeah well, Lindsey's labor came on so fast, I didn't find out until after Samantha was born.

(a beat)

She talked to you about this?

SEAN

No, I mean... just that things had gotten crazy over there and... you were really busy.

Michael puts his beer down, irritated.

MICHAEL

Yeah well... she was right.

(a beat)

We were getting hit harder and harder on our patrols, and I was squad leader.

(a beat)

I knew Lindsey and Sam were safe, but I couldn't say the same for my team.

Sean tears at the label on his beer.

SEAN

You lose any guys?

Michael smirks and shakes his head. *This fucking guy.*

SEAN

Sorry, I didn't mean to pry --

MICHAEL

Nah, go ahead.

SEAN

Nah man, I don't mean to get into your business.

MICHAEL

No, I'll tell you, if you want to know --

SEAN

No, you don't have to. Please.

MICHAEL

You wanna know if I lost guys?

SEAN

No. It's okay.

MICHAEL

'Cause, *yeah*, I lost some guys. You wanna know how many?

Michael pins Sean with his eyes.

FLASHBACK - EXT. MOSUL NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

A silent sequence as a convoy of Humvees arrive at a house in a semi-destroyed suburb. Soldiers hit the ground running, kicking up fine dust as they raise their M4 rifles.

A MILITANT and an IRAQI WOMAN emerge from the house. The Militant holds the woman in front of him, a knife at her throat. The woman, wearing a black robe and niqab, screams in terror, her eyes visible through the slit in the niqab.

The sound floods in as Michael yells at the Militant from a Humvee window, his rifle aimed at him.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
GET DOWN! GET THE FUCK DOWN NOW!

Other soldiers begin to move in toward the house.

BACK TO MICHAEL IN THE KITCHEN

MICHAEL
All of 'em.
(a beat)
Every last one.

Sean's eyes make a slow crawl from Michael's down to the counter. He puts his beer down gently.

MICHAEL
It's not a fucking paintball game,
okay? It's not a fucking... jaunt.

Michael takes a big slug of beer, then firmly plants the bottle on the counter with a CLANK.

INT. ENTRYWAY

Sean looks back at Michael as he exits out the front door.

SEAN
Thanks for the beer.

He closes the front door behind him.

INT. LIVING ROOM

PFFUNK! The hunting knife opens another beer.

Michael sits in Sean's seat at the bar, and takes a drink. He picks up the black book, and examines its exterior.

Michael sits back and looks over at the bookcase across from him, by the TV. It's completely filled with books, except for one single, shadowy gap in the middle row.

Michael looks at the black book again, then rises. He approaches the bookcase, holding out the book.

A WHOOSH as the book slides perfectly into the gap. Michael lets go and looks at it sandwiched between two books, one in paperback and one in hardcover. He pulls out the hardcover book. The cover reads, "Spiritual Childbirth, by Miriam Caster".

We see the back of the hardcover book, as Michael flips a few pages. The author photo shows the same big-haired woman from the "Sacred Root Midwives" brochure.

A small card falls from the book, fluttering down to the floor. Michael picks it up. It's another ultrasound photo, but different from the one before. Michael turns it over.

INSERT - BACK OF THE PHOTO:

"To my new sister,

You are not alone. Soon, you will be stronger than you ever imagined."

BACK TO MICHAEL

He smirks at the note. Just some anodyne self help bullshit. He keeps the photo, but returns the book to the shelf.

He pulls the black book out again and picks up a different paperback laying loose on another shelf. That book also fits neatly in the shadowy gap of the bookshelf.

MICHAEL
(to himself)
There.

He sets the ultrasound photo and the black leather book on the coffee table, then brings up his phone to text Lindsey:

"I think Tara left a book here, FYI."

He drops the phone on the table, and resumes his place on the sofa. He turns on the TV as he brings up his beer bottle.

EXT. NOWLEN HOUSE - NIGHT

The house and yard are dark except for the light from the living room window on the ground floor. Faint TV sound can be heard.

INT. ENTRYWAY/LIVING ROOM

We track around a dark corner, toward Michael, who is asleep on the sofa in the dark room. EERIE MUSIC from the TV can be heard, along with something else, some sort of WHISPERING.

It's coming from the laptop.

The sound causes Michael's eyes to open, sleepily, and he looks at the laptop screen.

Samantha's crib shakes slightly, as the WHISPERING gets louder.

Michael rubs his eyes, squinting in the darkness.

The WHISPERING sounds like a different language, something old and sinister.

Michael leans in, toward the screen.

The crib shakes.

Michael's hand goes toward the image, about to touch --

A large, clawed hand reaches up from within the crib, grasping the top edge!

Michael pulls back.

Another clawed hand appears and grabs the edge. The whole crib shakes as something moves within.

Michael leans in, watching the screen.

A dark head appears above the crib edge, its eyes glowing as it stares at the infrared camera light.

Michael is frozen in place, terrified. The figure's whispering becomes a low guttural LAUGH --

The laptop sound CUTS OUT, and a blue 'connection lag' swirl covers the ghastly image.

Michael stares, terror in his eyes. He slowly looks up.

A BOOM! From above.

Michael shoots to his feet, knocking over his beer as he looks up to the ceiling.

THUD! THUD! THUD! THUD! THUD!

Heavy footfalls as something runs across the floor above.

Michael follows the sound, looking up at the ceiling.
The sideways beer bottle pours beer down onto the floor.
The footfalls stop.
Silence. Michael watches the ceiling, his body clenched.

INT. ENTRYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Michael looks up the stairs to the dark hallway. Silence, except for the loud TICKING of the wall clock.
He listens, then starts up the CREAKING stairs, each one announcing his presence.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Michael's silhouette appears at the entrance, his shadow extending down the hallway. He looks down and sees his shadow extend, on its own, all the way to the nursery door.

It's impossibly quiet.

Michael starts toward the nursery, scanning the other rooms as he passes. Bedrooms. Bathroom. He arrives at the nursery door, his heart POUNDING, his BREATHING steady.

Michael turns the doorknob, unleashing a SQUEAK. He winces.

INT. NURSERY - CONTINUOUS

Light from the doorway spreads across the dark room.

Michael looks around, then starts toward the crib, trying to see over its edge.

Samantha lays on her front in the crib, swaddled in her sleep-sack, and her face turned away. She's completely still.

The tension in Michael's body eases a bit, and he rubs his eyes. He looks down again, and cocks his head.

Michael leans down, his ear pointed at Samantha to hear if she is breathing. Silence. He leans down closer, then turns his head to look at her. His arms come over the edge and turn her over.

It's not Samantha, it's the doll.

The doll's eyelids open, and it looks up at him.

Michael slowly pulls back in terror, revealing something standing on the changing table next to him.

Michael senses it and turns to face it.

A small figure stares at him with gleaming white eyes, but it's face and entire body are charred and blackened, the cooked skin pulling away. The melted mouth peels open as it reaches out for Michael.

CHARRED BABY

DA-!

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Michael shoots up from the sofa, SCREAMING, and clutching at his face and neck. The room is dark except for the light from the laptop screen.

A blue swirl rotates over the camera feed, along with the message:

"Internet connection lost."

Michael shivers, and his breath is visible in the chilled air. He picks up his phone, turns on its flashlight, and rises off the sofa.

He flicks a nearby light switch. It's dead.

INT. KITCHEN

Michael dials Lindsey on speakerphone. Her phone RINGS.

The phone flashlight illuminates the countertop as Michael picks up his knife.

LINDSEY (V.O.)

Hi, this is Lindsey, please leave a message.

BEEP.

INT. ENTRYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Michael enters, the cell phone flashlight illuminating his path. His knife is at the ready in his other hand.

MICHAEL

(hushed, into phone)

Hey.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Um, I think you need to come home right now. I... I think there's something going on with Sam, but I'm not sure. Either way, I think it would be good if you came back here.

(a beat)

Okay? Call me back.

He ends the call. He composes a text to Lindsey:

"Call me ASAP."

He flicks another light switch, to no avail, then starts up the stairs, his breath visible in the flashlight beam.

INT. HALLWAY

Michael approaches the nursery door and turns the knob.

INT. NURSERY - CONTINUOUS

Michael enters, his phone casting light across the walls. His knife is in a combat hold, ready to strike. The doll is by the door, where he left it. He stalks across the room, scanning the periphery until he reaches the crib. He peeks over the edge.

Sam sleeps peacefully, her tiny arms next to her head.

Michael watches her, captivated. He looks at the knife in his hand, and lowers it as his face crumples in anguish. He covers his face with his fists as muffled whimpers are heard. Michael recovers, revealing a tear-streaked face. He kisses the tips of his fingers and presses them to crib rail.

Sam shifts slightly, deep asleep.

INT. GARAGE

A breaker panel door SQUEALS open, revealing columns of breaker switches. Michael holds the phone flashlight as he scans the switches, and pushes back the tripped one.

The lights in the garage come on. Michael looks up and exhales, his breath still visible as vapor.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Michael pushes buttons on a wall thermostat, pauses, then slaps the control cover closed, frustrated. He rubs his hands together and blows into them.

INT. BATHROOM

The legs of a metal stepladder are kicked out and locked in place. Michael looks up at a ceiling hatch, a screwdriver clenched between his teeth. He climbs the ladder.

INT. CRAWLSPACE - CONTINUOUS

The hatch panel rises, letting some light into the dark, narrow space. Michael sets the hatch to the side and brings up his phone flashlight. There is a metal furnace box next to the hatch opening. Michael reacts to a foul smell in the air.

Michael turns slowly, getting a 360 degree view of the shadowy space, which is partly obscured by wood framing and pink fiberglass insulation. Samantha's SNORING can be heard through the ceiling.

Michael sets the screwdriver down by the hatch opening and begins sliding an access door on the furnace box. He winces as the DOOR screeches open a little way, before getting stuck. He shifts his weight and pulls harder.

The door gives way with a CLANG, and Michael nearly falls from the ladder. His arm brushes the screwdriver, which drops to the bathroom tile floor in a RINGING CAUCOPHONY of noise. Michael freezes, listening for any noise from Samantha.

INT. BATHROOM

Michael picks the screwdriver up off the tile floor.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He presses his ear to the nursery door. Samantha's SNORING continues uninterrupted.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michael enters just as Frankie is halfway up the ladder.

MICHAEL
(hushed)
Hey!

The cat startles and disappears up into the crawlspace.

MICHAEL
(hushed)
Shit! Frankie!

Michael looks up at the dark opening. He grabs a long butane grill lighter and starts up the ladder.

INT. CRAWLSPACE - CONTINUOUS

Michael looks around the space, but there's no sign of Frankie. He notices a loaded mousetrap, inches away.

MICHAEL
(hushed)
Frankie!

A MEWL comes from somewhere deep in the shadows.

Michael turns to the furnace and CLICKS the lighter until it spits up a small flame. He pushes a knob and reaches into the furnace with the lighter.

Another noise from somewhere in the darkness. Like a MEWL but more guttural and prolonged. Michael looks, then pulls out the lighter, continuing to press on the knob.

MICHAEL
(hushed)
Frankie?

Another GUTTURAL sound, much closer now. It doesn't sound like a cat. Michael tenses, his eyes unblinking.

Tiny CLICKS emit from within the furnace ignition system.

Michael leans forward, his eyes trying to penetrate the inky blackness.

WHOOSH!

The heating chamber IGNITES, filling with gas jets of flame.

In front of Michael, firelight illuminates a rotting animal face, just inches away. He startles, nearly falling again.

Michael steadies himself. He reaches for the cat, but it retreats with the carcass back into the shadows.

MICHAEL

Frankie!

Michael pulls himself up into the narrow passage. In the furnace-light, Michael notices a bankers box tucked to the side. He pulls the box toward him but stops cold.

A faint CREAKING sound can be heard, somewhere ahead.

Michael brings up his flashlight, and sees dozens of loaded mousetraps are spread out in front of him. He gets low, starting to crawl along the floor, the flashlight beam ricocheting off everything. He GROANS as he moves, elbows and knees pressing against plywood.

He advances a few feet, then stops.

Another few feet.

SNAP!

Michael GASPS, his head lifting up. He winces as he turns on his side and brings up his leg.

A sprung mousetrap hangs off his toes.

He removes the trap and looks ahead. Something is moving.

CREAK. CREAK.

His right hand narrowly avoids a mousetrap.

CREAK. CREAK.

It's inches away. He brings up his flashlight.

A small, doll-size cradle rocks side to side.

Michael looks at it, stunned. He reaches and stops the rocking. A SCRATCHING to his right. A foot away, Frankie is licking the dead rabbit.

Michael turns back to the cradle. It's carved from dark wood, with darker drip stains running down the sides. He runs his fingers over a small carving of a watchful eye in the headboard. The eye appears to look down into the cradle.

Michael moves the cradle, and notices a small shaft of light piercing through a hole in the floor. He presses his eye to the hole, looking down.

Directly below him is Samantha's crib. Inside the crib, the dark form of Samantha lays on her front, facing away.

Michael pulls back, amazed. He looks again.

Through the nursery ceiling, next to the hook for the hanging mobile, Michael's eye is visible through the peephole. He watches her shadowy form, completely still...

In a flash, Samantha half-rises and turns to look up at the peephole!

Michael pulls away, CLAPPING his hand over the hole.

MICHAEL

Shit!

Faint baby BABBLE can be heard below, like Samantha is cooing up at him.

INT. KITCHEN

The carcass of a dead rabbit drops into the kitchen sink, its rotting eyes looking up.

Michael winces as he prods it with his knife. Rotting flowers are tied around its body. He uses the knife to hook it and drop it in the garbage bin.

He brings up his phone and dials Lindsey. The call is picked up, but Michael only hears muffled STATIC, like the phone is in a pocket.

MICHAEL

Linds!?

More sounds of JOSTLING, mixed with muffled CROSSTALK.

LINDSEY (V.O.)

-- Don't have time! We've been here... hours debating this --

A deeper voice with a heavy drawl interrupts.

VOICE (V.O.)

Well whose fault is that, huh? Now we're in this position. I mean he could ruin *everything*.

Michael strains to hear the voices over the STATIC.

LINDSEY (V.O.)

I have it under control.

VOICE (V.O.)
Well I hope so, 'cause if you're
wrong --

STATIC crackles in Michael's ear and he pulls the phone away. He looks down and sees the call disconnected. Michael thinks, then makes another call. The phone screen displays:

"Calling: Lindsey - Office"

MICHAEL
Get your fucking phone outta your
purse, Lindsey.

OPERATOR (V.O.)
Thank you for calling the law firm
of Sanders Powell, the extension
you have dialed is no longer in
service. If you'd like to reach the
main switchboard --

Michael draws the phone away, staring at it.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Michael sits on the sofa, the bankers box on the floor in front of him. He removes the lid, and looks inside.

He pushes aside a toothbrush and removes a framed photo of Tara sidling up to a young, serious-looking Biker Dude. He sets it down, then removes a couple of old books, examining their spines.

Lastly, he reaches in and brings up another piece of paper. It's the same ultrasound image he found on the bookcase.

Michael frantically moves some items on the table and finds the other photo. He holds them together, confirming they are the same. He flips them both over. On the back of Tara's is the circle and crescent symbol.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

"Tara" is typed into a "Search My Computer" field. It returns a contact file, including a phone number. A CLICK on the number and a text box appears, from "Lindsey" to "Tara".

Michael paces the room. He goes to the laptop, and types:

"You forgot your book."

He hits "Send" and rubs his face, anxious.

A few seconds pass, then a bubble appears as Tara types.

Michael watches, intent.

On the screen from Tara:

"R U back?"

"Im sorry."

Michael frowns.

He types:

"It's ok."

From Tara:

"Whats the plan?"

Michael's eyes narrow. He looks at the book.

He types:

"Come get the book. I'll tell you."

From Tara:

"U sure ur not mad?"

He types:

"Yes. All good."

A beat.

From Tara:

"Lindsey?"

Michael tenses.

MICHAEL
(under his breath)
Shit.

He thinks, then types:

"I'll be up for another hour."

Thought bubbles appear, then vanish. Michael squeezes his fists. Tara responds:

"Ok, C U soon."

He exhales and sits back for a moment, his eyes settling on the photo of Tara and the Biker Dude.

INT. GARAGE

KA-THUNK as Michael turns the handle on the safe door, opening it. He removes the holster and slides out a 9mm handgun. He checks the clip and closes the safe door.

INT. BATHROOM

Michael opens a medicine cabinet, revealing, among other things, several pill bottles in a row. He scans the labels. One label reads: "ADDERALL - Stimulant; DO NOT MIX WITH ALCOHOL"

Michael pulls the bottle and closes the medicine cabinet, revealing his reflection in the mirror. He swallows a pill, then peels back the bandage on his neck.

The cut has swollen and darkened into a larger blotchy shape.

Michael examines the cut, then re-covers it with the bandage.

INT. BEDROOM

Looking in a mirror, Michael zips up a collared fleece over the bandage. He looks himself in the eyes.

INT. ENTRYWAY

A metal ring is lined up over a nail-hole, and a hammer TAPS a nail into the hole.

Michael steps back and we see he has re-hung the crucifix on the wall.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The lights are off. Michael watches the front yard from the edge of the window, the pistol in his hands. All is quiet and still. He turns his head, looking to the back of the house.

INT. BACK PATIO DOOR

Michael scans the moonlit backyard, staying to the side of the screen door. Small fir trees line the back fence.

He scans across the trees, and stops on a silhouette.

It's a figure, wearing a robe and a dark hood.

Michael pulls back, his breathing picking up.

He takes another peek. The figure stands among the trees, looking up at the house.

Michael slowly unlocks the door, his pistol in his other hand. He takes a breath, then slowly slides open the door.

The hooded figure disappears behind the tree.

Michael throws the door open.

EXT. BACK DECK/BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Michael leaps across the deck, and takes the stairs three-at-a-time, down to the large back lawn.

He sprints across the lawn, hitting the tree line and pushing past fir trees, looking for the intruder.

He reaches the neighbor's fence and stops, panting. Several feet behind him, we see the robed figure facing him. It's the Iraqi Woman from the earlier flashback, wearing a niqab.

Michael turns around, and sees nothing.

CUT TO:

Michael walks through the fir trees to where the figure was standing. He sees a rectangular and slightly raised patch of bare dirt. He traces part of it with his foot, but something draws his attention, and he looks up.

Michael walks to the fence on the other side of the yard, and peeks between the boards of the fence.

A wood fire CRACKLES in a firepit. Empty chairs nearby.

A sliver of orange firelight reflects off Michael's face as he stares at the fire.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

GET DOWN!

FLASHBACK - EXT. MOSUL NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Michael stands behind a Humvee door, his rifle raised.

MICHAEL
GET THE FUCK DOWN NOW!

We see the Militant and Iraqi Woman from Michael's earlier flashback. The Militant YELLS at the soldiers in Arabic, his knife at the throat of the Iraqi Woman.

One of the other soldiers takes aim at the Militant, the Iraqi Woman whimpering as the blade is drawn up to her neck.

The Militant YELLS, then slices the throat of the woman just as she SCREAMS. Blood spews from the wound as the woman clutches at her neck through her niqab, and staggers to the ground.

A single shot bursts the head of the Militant, and he topples backward.

Michael presses on an earpiece.

MICHAEL
DIAZ! MEDIC!

Soldiers move in toward the Iraqi Woman, who convulses on the ground.

Two soldiers scramble to her, opening a medic backpack. They remove the black niqab from her head, revealing a frightened young woman. She reaches for the soldiers, her eyes bulging as blood seeps out from under her hand.

MEDIC SOLDIER
Get her arms!

Two more soldiers come up behind them, rifles trained at the house, providing cover.

Michael watches from his station at the Humvee.

The Medic Soldier tears open a gauze pad and presses it to the Iraqi Woman's neck. He looks down at one of her arms and notices a wire running from the cuff of her sleeve to her hand. He looks at her face.

The woman smiles at him.

MEDIC SOLDIER
BOMB! BOMB--

The BLAST vaporizes the soldiers and the woman, shattering the nearby windows and throwing everyone to the ground.

Michael lays face down in the dust, blood trickling from under his helmet. Agonized SCREAMS in the background as he gains consciousness, looking around.

Bloody and dusty bodies are strewn around the area.

Michael uses his forearms to drag himself forward.

MICHAEL
(dazed)
Dawson?

More SCREAMS as Michael gets up on all fours and vomits. He looks over and sees a soldier moving on the ground. Michael crawls to the soldier and grabs his arm, but sees his other side is blown off.

MICHAEL
Polacek!

Michael gets under Polacek to lift him up, just as something smacks Polacek's head, causing it to drop to the side. Michael hurries, dragging the body. He passes a shredded body on the ground. The name tag reads "DAWSON".

A MALE FIGHTER with a rifle appears in the doorway. In one motion Michael pulls his pistol from a holster and puts two rounds in the fighter, who crumples. Michael drags Polacek behind the humvee, just as sniper fire hits the chassis.

Michael sets Polacek down.

MICHAEL
(into radio)
CHECK IN!

Michael hears RADIO STATIC. Two more rounds SMACK the corner of the Humvee. Michael pulls a small mirror from his chest pocket and extends its handle. He holds the mirror past the Humvee and looks at the reflection of the house.

IN THE MIRROR

One of the curtains is pulled back in the now-broken window opening. The other curtain hangs down straight. The iron security grate over the windows is half blown off.

Michael puts the mirror back and pulls a grenade from a pouch on his waist. He pulls its pin and steps out from the Humvee, over-handing the grenade twenty feet into the window opening. He takes cover as a BLAST erupts offscreen.

Michael turns to Polacek, and sees that he's dead. A secondary and smaller BLAST can be heard from the house and Michael turns back to look.

Flames are beginning to engulf the ground floor of the house, lapping out of the windows.

MICHAEL
 (into radio)
 CHECK IN! ANYONE!?

Radio STATIC.

Michael hears something, and perks up.

The FAINT sound of high-pitch CRYING. Michael turns to the house, watching the flames intensify. Michael looks up at the second floor windows, locating the source of the CRIES.

It's the WAIL of a baby.

Michael runs to the front of the house, but the flames allow no way in.

The WAILS intensify as Michael steps back, looking up at the dark, blown-out window openings. Backup vehicles arrive behind him as the reflection of the flames illuminate his face and the CRACKLE of the fire can be heard.

BACK TO PRESENT - EXT. BACKYARD

A sliver of firelight reflects on Michael's face, along with the CRACKLE of Sean's fire-pit.

SEAN (O.S.)
 Lost?

Sean's face appears through the fence, startling Michael.

Sean SNICKERS; he's holding a bottle of bourbon.

SEAN
 Man, you were miles away.

Michael gazes at Sean, coming back to the present moment.

MICHAEL
 Hey. Hey, did you see anyone else
 back here?

Sean takes a swig and shakes his head.

SEAN

No sir.

A beat.

MICHAEL

Hey, I'm sorry... about before.
Y'know, I guess this stuff is
still... pretty raw.

Sean nods.

SEAN

Hey man, your business is your
business.

He offers the bottle over the fence.

MICHAEL

No, thanks, I'm okay.

(a beat)

Hey, maybe you can help me out. I
asked Tara... to come over and pick
up that book.

Sean arches an eyebrow.

MICHAEL

Look, I can't get into it right
now, but... you know anything about
a biker guy she might hang with?

SEAN

(exhales)

Dougie. Her ex.

MICHAEL

What's his story?

SEAN

Uh... I'm pretty sure Dougie's a
piece of shit.

Michael nods.

MICHAEL

Dangerous?

Sean shrugs.

MICHAEL

Well, it's probably nothing, but
just in case... I might need
backup.

Sean nods slowly.

SEAN

Yeah, man. I gotta nine milli --

MICHAEL

No no no. I mean like an overwatch.
Y'know, the house... the yard.
Watch my six, and call the cops if
things get out of hand.

(a beat)

Think you can do that?

Sean nods, containing his excitement.

SEAN

Fuck yeah, man. I got you.

MICHAEL

(nodding)

Alright, good. That's good. Thank
you.

A beat.

SEAN

So should I go up there now --

MICHAEL

Yeah, why don't you --

SEAN

Yeah. I'll just go up... put a pot
of coffee on.

Sean turns back toward his house, giving a thumbs up.

SEAN

Overwatch! I gotch'yer back man.

Michael watches Sean walk away, concern in his eyes.

INT. BACK PATIO DOOR

Michael closes and locks the door.

INT. HALLWAY

Michael approaches and quietly opens the nursery door.

INT. NURSERY - CONTINUOUS

Samantha sleeps peacefully, her tiny body facing up. Michael looks down at her, concern in his face.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Headlights illuminate the curtains. Michael waits in the darkness. The car shuts off and a door OPENS. Michael peeks past the curtain.

A female figure closes the door and hurries toward the house.

Michael looks down at his handgun. He goes to the lounge chair across from the sofa and tucks it behind the cushion.

INT. ENTRYWAY

The front door opens, revealing Tara, bundled up in the cold. She's shouldering her beige tote bag, and she's surprised to see Michael.

TARA

Hi.

MICHAEL

Hey. Thanks for coming.

Michael quickly scans the distance behind her.

TARA

Is Lindsey here?

He looks back at her.

MICHAEL

Yeah. Yes, she's just upstairs.
Please, come in.

Tara gives a slight smile and enters.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michael leads Tara into the room and gestures to the sofa.

MICHAEL

Have a seat.

Tara scans the room as she drops her tote bag by the entrance. She goes to the sofa, and sits.

MICHAEL
Can I get you something? Water? A
beer?

TARA
I'm fine, thanks.

Michael perches by the bar counter, facing Tara.

TARA
What happened to your neck?

Michael touches his neck, feeling a corner of bandage peeking
out from the collar.

MICHAEL
Oh... nicked myself.

He checks his fingers for blood.

Tara nods.

MICHAEL
So... *this*.

He turns to pick up the black book.

TARA
Oh... right. That's mine.

Michael flips a few pages.

MICHAEL
Yeah, Lindsey told me.

TARA
(surprised)
Oh. She did?
(a beat)
Sorry, I know it's a little --

MICHAEL
I mean, what is all this?

Michael examines the drawing of "Molech".

TARA
Uh, it's just for school.

Michael nods.

MICHAEL
Huh. What class?

TARA

Uh... medieval literature.

Frankie the cat rubs against Tara's leg, and she reaches down to pet him.

MICHAEL

Medieval literature. Hm. You can read this?

TARA

No. Well, I was trying to translate it.

Michael's phone vibrates on the counter. He sees an incoming call from "Lindsey". He taps to ignore the call.

MICHAEL

Yeah, well... uh, I did translate some of it, and, uh, it's pretty fucked up --

TARA

I know. I'm sorry --

MICHAEL

So, you can imagine, y'know, when I found this in our *nursery*.

His eyes bore into her.

TARA

(pleading)

I know, it's just that sometimes she falls asleep and....

Tara swallows.

TARA

I'm sorry. Did you say you found it?

MICHAEL

Right there with the baby books.

Tara shifts, suddenly very uncomfortable.

TARA

You were in the nursery?

Michael cocks his head, intrigued.

TARA
Sorry, do you think you could...
get Lindsey to come down?

MICHAEL
In a minute.

He brings up the book again, flipping pages.

MICHAEL
What do you know... about this?

He gets up and walks toward her, holding the book out.

MICHAEL
This symbol, here.

Tara dazedly looks up to see he's pointing to the circle-and-crescent symbol. She shakes her head.

MICHAEL
You don't know this?

TARA
No.

MICHAEL
You're sure?

Michael towers over her.

MICHAEL
You see, I talked to Sean. He
seemed to think otherwise.

She looks up, indignant.

TARA
I want to talk to Lindsey.

Michael lowers the photo.

MICHAEL
I told you. She'll be down in a
minute --

DAWSON (O.S.)
Liar.

Michael turns. Dawson's form emerges from the dark kitchen.

DAWSON
(gurgling)
She's lying.

Michael turns back to Tara, his face pale.

She looks back at him, alarmed.

TARA
Does Lindsey know?

Michael steadies himself.

MICHAEL
Know what?

TARA
That you....

MICHAEL
That *I*? Found your creepy book? She
will.

He brings up the ultrasound photo.

MICHAEL
And she's gonna see this.

Tara's eyes meet his.

TARA
Where did you get that?

MICHAEL
Why do you have a picture of our
baby?

Tara stares at him, stunned. Michael flips the photo, showing
the symbol on the back.

TARA
I think I should go --

She rises.

Michael steps forward.

MICHAEL
Sit down.

Tara holds out her hands to keep Michael at a distance.

TARA
Stay away from me.

Michael holds out the photo, the symbol facing Tara.

MICHAEL
What does this mean!?

TARA
I don't know!

DAWSON
Liar!

MICHAEL
(to Dawson)
Shut up!

TARA
(louder to the ceiling)
Lindsey!?

INT. SEAN'S LIVING ROOM

Sean watches Michael's house from his window. He hears faint YELLING.

SEAN
Shit. Go time.

Sean brings up his cell phone to make a call, but just then his doorbell CHIMES. Sean cancels the call, and looks toward the door.

INT. SEAN'S ENTRYWAY

The door opens to reveal MIRIAM CASTER (66), the woman from the back cover of the book on Lindsey's bookshelf. She appears dowdy, but also tall and solid. She smiles at Sean and the heavy drawl in her voice sounds familiar.

MIRIAM
(sweetly)
Hi. I'm sorry to bother you. I was wondering if you could help me?

INT. MICHAEL'S ENTRYWAY / LIVING ROOM

Tara moves along the wall, toward the entryway.

TARA
Stay away!

Michael pulls the trash bin out from behind the counter. He corners Tara, who is terrified.

MICHAEL

Wait! Look here!

Michael holds out the bin with the dead rabbit inside. Its rotting snarl and eyes looking up at Tara. She SHRIEKS.

MICHAEL

Did you do this? Did you put this over Samantha's room?

TARA

(whimpering)

Oh my God.

Tara hugs the wall, moving into the entryway. She knocks over her tote bag, sending translucent-pink bottles of milk skittering on the floor. Michael ignores them. The faint sound of a HEARTBEAT can be heard.

MICHAEL

Did you!?

DAWSON

No. But she knows who did.

Dawson is now at the entrance to the kitchen.

DAWSON

She's an apprentice. Eager to please her masters.

Dawson approaches. The HEARTBEAT is louder.

TARA

(sobbing)

You need to talk to Lindsey --

Michael follows her with the rabbit, looking intense.

MICHAEL

Why? I'm talking to you! Is this for Molech!? Is that what this is!?

Tara realizes something and stops in the entryway.

TARA

(defiant)

I'm getting Samantha.

She starts toward the stairs.

TARA

(sobbing)

I'm going to get her.

Michael stops next to the lounge chair. He sets the bin down and reaches into the cushions, pulling out the handgun.

MICHAEL
No, you're not.

The HEARTBEAT is loud and racing. Tara sees the gun and stops, her SOBBING intensifying.

TARA
Yes.

She slowly starts up the first two steps, facing Michael.

Michael points the gun at her.

MICHAEL
Don't.

DAWSON
Gonna have to shoot her.

MICHAEL
(to Dawson)
Shut up, I'm handling it!

TARA
(voice quavering)
You need help.

She takes another step.

DAWSON
We've seen how you handle things.

MICHAEL
(at Dawson)
Fuck you.

RADIO CRACKLE erupts from the top of the stairs.

Michael looks up to see another bloody soldier, stepping out from the hallway. He looks down at Michael, gaping holes in his body allowing a view to the wall behind him.

Michael stares, terrified.

Dawson approaches Michael, blood seeping down his face.

DAWSON
I told you we'd come in.

MICHAEL
No, no, no...

DAWSON
Don't be afraid.
(reaching out)
We're here... for you.

Michael spins and points the gun at Dawson's mangled and bloody form.

MICHAEL
Fuck you!

Tara SCREAMS.

Dawson's bloody mouth falls open and an otherworldly SHRIEK emanates from within. His eyes roll back into his head, revealing yellowish-white sclera.

The SHRIEK intensifies, causing Michael to cover his ears while unleashing his own upward SCREAM. He passes out and falls to the floor.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Michael's eyes open, and he lifts his head. He's seated upright on the sofa. He attempts to move but can't. Something behind him RATTLES. He looks down and sees his ankles are zip-tied together.

Michael looks forward and sees Miriam, sitting across from him in the lounge chair, Frankie the cat in her lap. She watches Michael with a slight smirk on her face. In her hands is the black leather book.

MICHAEL
Who are you?

Miriam strokes the cat.

Michael pulls on his wrist restraints, agitated.

MICHAEL
(yelling)
Hey! Lindsey!?

MIRIAM
You were scarin' the girl, so we had to restrain you. Sorry.

MICHAEL
Who the fuck are you?

MIRIAM

I'm Miriam. I'm a friend of
Lindsey's.
(sizing him up)
You're heavier than you look.

MICHAEL

Where is she?

MIRIAM

She's coming.

MICHAEL

Where's *Samantha*?

MIRIAM

Oh. Well... I wouldn't know.
Sleepin' I hope.

The cat jumps down from Miriam's lap.

MIRIAM

You've had quite a night.

Lindsey and Tara enter the kitchen through the garage door.
Lindsey hurries toward Michael.

LINDSEY

Michael, oh my God!

MICHAEL

(relieved)
Lindsey.

LINDSEY

What the hell happened?

Michael struggles.

MICHAEL

Baby, cut me loose.

Lindsey turns to Miriam.

MIRIAM

(archly)
We've met.

Lindsey kneels by Michael. She caresses his face.

LINDSEY

(soothing)
I will, honey. I will. I just need
to know what happened.

Michael jerks at the restraints, startling Lindsey. He calms.

Tara watches from the kitchen, cautious.

MICHAEL

I don't know what happened.

LINDSEY

Honey, you had a gun.

Lindsey glances at Tara.

LINDSEY

Tara called me.

(a beat)

I just need you to tell me what's going on, okay?

MICHAEL

The book. Did you find it?

LINDSEY

Book? What book?

MIRIAM

(holding it up)

He means this.

Miriam opens it and flips some pages.

MIRIAM

Frankly, I can see why he was upset.

LINDSEY

Michael, Tara is a student --

MICHAEL

No, no, there's more. She has a picture of Samantha, okay? And -- and... the rabbit --

LINDSEY

Honey, hold on! She showed me everything. Baby, that photo... that ain't Samantha. And that attic... was filled with dead squirrels when I moved in.

(a beat)

Honey, you are seeing things and making connections --

MICHAEL

Yes. And I'm telling you there's something wrong here.

Lindsey sits back.

LINDSEY

You found an old book and a critter in the attic, and now you think, what... that Tara's some kinda witch? That she's cursing us? Cursing Samantha?

Michael stares at her, letting the words hang in the air.

LINDSEY

Jesus, Michael.

(a beat)

Well I hired her, so am I a witch too?

DAWSON (O.S.)

(gurgling)

Yes.

Michael looks up. Dawson's mangled figure is behind Miriam.

Miriam is composed, studying Michael.

MICHAEL

(hushed to Lindsey)

I'm telling you... she's lying.

Lindsey holds up her phone.

LINDSEY

And what about you, Michael? Texting her? Pretending to be me?

(a beat)

From what I can see, the only person here who's lying is you.

Michael looks at Lindsey, distressed. She softens.

LINDSEY

And look, I'm sorry I left you here alone, that's *my* fault. But we need to get you help because you're starting to scare me.

Michael tears up, then steels himself.

MICHAEL

What's in the backyard?

LINDSEY

What?

MICHAEL

There's a dirt patch. Something's buried there.

DAWSON

You *know* what's there.

LINDSEY

I don't know, Michael! The sewer line? A sprinkler hose? Now you're digging around the backyard?

Dawson approaches.

DAWSON

They buried her and replaced her with that... thing.

MICHAEL

(to Dawson)

Stay back!

Lindsey pulls back as he talks at empty space.

Dawson advances.

DAWSON

A cuckoo in your nest.

MICHAEL

(to Dawson)

You're lying. You've been lying this whole time!

MIRIAM

(to Lindsey)

This isn't workin'.

MICHAEL

(toward the ceiling)

Help! Please Lord, help me!

DAWSON

Open your eyes!

LINDSEY

I'm here, baby. *I'll* help you.

DAWSON

(approaching)

Join us! *Kill* these bitches!

MICHAEL
 (whimpering to Lindsey)
 I'm seeing things, horrible things!

Dawson is now behind Lindsey, his flayed face and piercing eyes leaning in toward Michael.

DAWSON
 And that unholy thing up there!

MICHAEL
 (screaming at Dawson)
DEVIL!

Michael rises at Dawson, thrashing against his restraints!
 Lindsey CRIES out, holding up her hand to try to steady him.

MICHAEL
 (to Dawson, spitting)
 You devil! You... liar!

Michael falls back, sweaty and struggling. His eyes bulging.

MICHAEL
 (hissing)
 I see you! Yeah, you want me to
 burn with you, but I see you now,
 so *fuck* you!

Lindsey turns to Miriam, and they lock eyes, alarmed.

Michael collapses forward, speaking into his own lap.

MICHAEL
 (whimpering)
 I love my family.
 (a beat)
 I love my family.

Lindsey grabs his hands, SHUSHING him softly. Michael
 WHIMPERS unintelligibly.

A moment passes, then Michael looks up. Dawson is gone. He
 SIGHS in relief.

MICHAEL
 I'm so sorry, baby.

LINDSEY
 It's okay.

MICHAEL
 I love you. I love Samantha.

LINDSEY
(softly)
I know.

She smiles at him.

LINDSEY
We need you, honey.
(a beat)
We need you to be okay. I need to
know that you're gonna be... okay.

He gives her a faint smile, and nods.

LINDSEY
Okay.

Lindsey goes to the kitchen and pulls a pair of scissors from a drawer. Holding the scissors, she shares a concerned look with Tara, who then looks away.

Lindsey returns to Michael.

LINDSEY
Lean forward honey.

Michael leans forward and to the side, so Lindsey can reach the zip-tie.

As Michael leans to the side, his neck stretches, causing his bandage to peel away and exposing his cut and the symbol on his neck.

Miriam sees it.

MIRIAM
(lifting a hand)
Wait.

Lindsey glances back at Miriam.

MIRIAM
(to Michael)
Where'd you get that?

Lindsey catches sight of the symbol on his neck. She staggers back. Her stunned gaze rises to meet Michael's eyes.

Michael turns toward Miriam, who's eyes bore into him.

MICHAEL
(shakily)
Shaving.

Miriam smirks, incredulous.

Michael turns to Lindsey. All color is drained from her face.

MICHAEL

Lindsey?

Lindsey, shaking now, turns to Miriam. The old woman draws in a long breath. They share a look of mutual understanding.

Miriam shakes her head.

MIRIAM

(to herself)

Stupid.

Tara steps toward the edge of the kitchen, listening.

Lindsey turns to Miriam, pointing at Michael's cut.

LINDSEY

That's it? She did that?

Lindsey turns back to Michael.

LINDSEY

Did she do that?

Tara steps into the living room, now able to see the cut. She brings her hand to her mouth, terror washing over her face.

TARA

(stunned)

Oh.

Lindsey raises a hand, steadying the room and taking command.

LINDSEY

Wait. Fucking, just... wait a second.

Lindsey comes back down to Michael's level, placing the scissors on the coffee table. She resumes a soothing voice.

LINDSEY

Honey, I need you to tell me. Did Samantha do this?

A beat.

MICHAEL

I was trying to feed her --

LINDSEY

Fuck!

Lindsey bolts up, covering her face with her hands.

LINDSEY

Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!

Lindsey kicks over a nearby pile of toys.

MICHAEL

Linds?

Lindsey aims a piercing stare at Miriam.

LINDSEY

(to Miriam)

This is your fault.

Miriam continues observing Michael, thinking.

LINDSEY

You called me away.

Tara wrings her hands.

TARA

What about Samantha?

LINDSEY

(to Miriam)

Look what you've done!

Miriam snaps out of it, and levels a stare at Lindsey. She gestures toward Michael.

MIRIAM

(icily)

You were keepin' secrets. Don't forget that now.

(a beat)

We could have avoided this.

Michael looks at the scissors on the table. His wrists and the zip-tie slide along the bed-frame tube.

TARA

Is she okay?

Tara's pleading eyes shift between Lindsey and Miriam. She's starting to lose it.

LINDSEY
 (at Miriam)
 You wanted this to happen.

MIRIAM
 What?

LINDSEY
 To keep me in my place.

Tara's hands press together, turning purple.

MIRIAM
 Nonsense.

LINDSEY
 You couldn't stand that *I* was going
 to raise it!
 (a beat)
 That it was going to mark *me*!

Miriam sits forward in the chair, simmering.

MIRIAM
 After a lifetime of preparation...
 you think I'd waste this chance on
 some squabble!?

TARA
 (whimpering)
 Please stop fighting.

MIRIAM
 I knew you weren't ready. You're
 still too selfish. That's why it
 didn't mark you... because you were
unworthy!

Tara's hands shoot to her sides.

TARA
 Can somebody please just fucking
 tell me my baby's okay!

Samantha's CRIES pierce the room. She's awake.

Miriam bolts from the chair, glancing back at Michael.

MIRIAM
 (to Tara)
 Keep your voice down, dear!

Michael's eyes fix on Tara, then over to Lindsey, who looks
 away.

TARA
 (at Miriam)
 You said she'd be safe here --

MIRIAM
 (approaching Tara)
 And she is! Now, why don't you...
 go on up and get her?

Tara nods, apprehensive.

TARA
 And bring her here?

MIRIAM
 I think that'd be best.

Tara glances at Michael, and they lock eyes. Traces of fear line both their faces. Tara turns and exits.

Michael sits forward, agitated.

MICHAEL
 What did she mean by that?
 (a beat)
 Lindsey?

Lindsey ignores him, looking at Miriam.

LINDSEY
 (to Miriam)
 It's still early. Maybe there's
 some way we can undo it.

Miriam brings up her bag and removes a cloth roll.

MIRIAM
 It doesn't work like that.

She unrolls the cloth and removes a small black-iron dagger. The handle looks like a tangle of twigs.

MIRIAM
 As soon as she brings it down...
 you know what to do.

Lindsey looks down at the dagger. Michael struggles behind her.

Lindsey gestures toward Michael.

LINDSEY
 (to Miriam)
 What if we just kill *him* instead?

Michael leans, trying to see her face.

MIRIAM

It's marked him. If we kill him first... it could go *feral*.

Miriam gives a severe look.

LINDSEY

But he's read the book --

Miriam SCOFFS.

MIRIAM

If he'd read the book, we'd be dead already.

(a beat)

Even if he has the power, he has no idea how to use it.

Miriam puts a comforting hand on her arm, and hands her the small dagger.

MIRIAM

You can do this.

(a beat)

Once it's over, we can think about starting again.

Lindsey takes the dagger, wiping tears.

LINDSEY

What about Tara?

A beat.

MIRIAM

Let me worry about her.

Miriam shoots a glance at Michael.

MIRIAM

And him?

LINDSEY

I... don't know. I need to think.

MIRIAM

Okay. But don't take too long.

Miriam goes into the kitchen as the sound of a baby CRYING can be heard upstairs.

Lindsey turns to Michael.

MICHAEL
(whispering)
What the fuck is going on!?

She looks through him, her eyes glazed.

Michael suddenly pulls on his restraints, trying to stir Lindsey, but she doesn't flinch.

LINDSEY
Don't worry. It's gonna be okay.

The CRYING gets louder as Tara descends the stairs and enters with the baby against her shoulder. Tara is rocking her and gently COOING.

Lindsey turns from Michael toward Tara.

LINDSEY
(adoringly)
Awww, there she is.

Miriam smiles behind the bar counter, still in the kitchen.

Tara approaches Lindsey.

TARA
She seems fine.

LINDSEY
Oh, that's good. What a relief.

TARA
So she's okay, right?

Tara nuzzles the baby tenderly, looking at both Lindsey and Miriam.

Miriam gives a reassuring smile.

LINDSEY
She looks great.

Lindsey approaches Tara as Miriam comes out of the kitchen.

LINDSEY
(arms out)
Here, let me help you.

Michael watches as Tara reluctantly passes the baby to Lindsey.

As Tara watches Lindsey rock and SHUSH the baby, Miriam comes up behind her and brings the plastic delivery bag over Tara's face, suffocating her.

Michael shoots up, but is pulled back down again by his restraints.

MICHAEL

Hey!

Lindsey walks toward Michael with the baby as Tara claws backward at Miriam. Miriam kicks Tara's legs out from under her, bringing her to her knees as Tara's mouth sucks in the plastic bag.

MICHAEL

Hey! Fucking stop!

Miriam pulls tight on the plastic bag, shaking her violently as she does it. There's a frightening calm in Miriam's face as her thick arms overpower the girl.

MICHAEL

(at the top of his lungs)

Sean!

(a beat)

Sean! Get help!

Lindsey stands over Michael with the baby.

LINDSEY

Sean can't hear you honey.

Michael looks up at her.

LINDSEY

(cooing to the baby)

Who is that? Is that daddy?

Michael looks up, aghast. He eyes the scissors on the table.

LINDSEY

(to Michael)

Hold her for a second?

Lindsey abruptly places the baby in Michael's lap as he watches helplessly, struggling to cradle the baby with his thighs.

The baby WAILS.

Miriam now has Tara's bag-covered head in a choke hold as Tara claws back at her.

MIRIAM
(at Tara, struggling)
Stop it. Stop!

Michael uses his bound feet to grasp the scissors off the table, while steadying the baby in his lap. He looks up at Lindsey, who has turned and is watching Miriam, the dagger in her hand.

He leans to one side as he brings his legs back toward him and releases the scissors near the back of the cushion.

Tara stops moving, falling out of Miriam's arms to the floor. Miriam leans forward and looks down, catching her breath.

MIRIAM
Okay, now... quickly, bring the
baby here.

As Miriam comes up, Lindsey is already there, bringing the iron dagger into Miriam's belly. Miriam GASPS and spasms, grabbing Lindsey's wrist and looking at her with bulging eyes.

Michael watches, stunned, then frantically maneuvers the scissors down to his bound hands.

Miriam grabs Lindsey as she pushes the blade deeper. They struggle across the room toward the corner.

Michael's hands find the scissor blades and wedge one into the zip-tie, SNAPPING it. His free hands then cut the ziptie around his ankles.

Michael picks up the WAILING baby and looks up as Lindsey and Miriam struggle across the room from him. Their faces are hideous masks of ferocity.

Michael stops, looking down at the baby. He puts it back down on the sofa, not sure who or what it is. He steps back, reaching for the kitchen counter, disoriented as the WAILING and STRUGGLING swirl around him.

The baby CRIES and reaches for Michael, terrified by the commotion.

Michael backs into the kitchen, overwhelmed. Suddenly, his hunting knife STABS into the cutting board just a few feet away, the blade standing upright. Michael startles and looks.

Dawson hulks in the corner by the sink, dripping gore.

DAWSON (O.S.)
 (gurgling)
 Now! Kill it!

The baby CRIES, its tiny hands reaching for Michael.

Michael looks at the knife, then across the room at the baby.

EXT. DRIVEWAY/SEAN'S HOUSE

A figure holding a baby runs across the driveway, past the parked boat, and toward the house next door. The house's lights are still on.

 MICHAEL
 Sean!

Michael holds the whimpering baby against his chest, wrapped in a blanket, and POUNDS on Sean's front door. No answer. He looks to the right, then moves that way toward the garage.

As Michael approaches the garage, a faint mechanical WHINE can be heard inside. Michael enters through a side door.

INT. SEAN'S GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

The WHINE is louder, coming from further in. Michael holds the baby, gently rocking it, as he stalks deeper into the garage. The baby COOS softly against his shoulder.

 MICHAEL
 Sean? Please tell me you called the
 cops, man.

Michael passes some boxes and approaches a workbench at the far side of the garage. The mechanical WHINE is loud, and in the foreground something is spinning around.

Michael brings the baby closer, a look of nausea on his face.

Sean lies across the workbench, a cordless drill sticking out of his ear. The drill bit has gone through his entire head and into the wood surface beneath, causing the body of the drill to spin around. Sean's eyes bulge out, a scream frozen in his mouth.

The baby COOS on Michael's shoulder.

 LINDSEY (O.S.)
 She was twenty-eight weeks.

Michael spins around, startled.

Lindsey is several feet behind him, her front spattered with blood. She holds Michael's pistol.

LINDSEY

When they told me she was dead.
(a beat)
Dead inside me.

Michael brings the baby close.

LINDSEY

The people at the hospital were
so... clinical about it. So cold.
(a beat)
Miriam helped me deliver her body
here at home.

MICHAEL

(angry)
You... should have told me.

LINDSEY

You were six-thousand miles away!
(a beat)
After we buried her... that's when
Miriam told me about Tara. And that
maybe... I could get Samantha back.

MICHAEL

Linds. This isn't Samantha.

LINDSEY

You don't know that.
(a beat)
We have a chance... to be a family.

MICHAEL

Not like this.

She approaches, tears in her eyes, and raises the pistol.

LINDSEY

Don't make me choose.

MICHAEL

(pleading)
I... love you.

LINDSEY

I nursed her for nine months...
made all the offerings.
(a beat)
You're back three days and she
marks... you?

The baby COOS against Michael's shoulder.

MICHAEL
She needs her family.

Lindsey COCKS the gun.

LINDSEY
I'm her family.

Michael brings the baby closer. The baby COOS again, louder and looking out at Lindsey.

BABY
(cooing)
Mah.

MICHAEL
Lindsey, she'll fall --

LINDSEY
Believe me... she'll survive.

MICHAEL
At least let me give her to you --

Her finger tenses on the trigger.

LINDSEY
Not a chance.

The baby stirs.

BABY
(looking at Lindsey)
Mah. Mah-mah.

Lindsey's eyes fix on the baby. She lowers the gun slightly.

Michael's eyes shift between the baby and Lindsey.

Lindsey GIGGLES in surprise. She looks joyfully at Michael.

LINDSEY
Did you hear that?

Lindsey GIGGLES again, then blinks.

BABY
Mah-mah.

Lindsey blinks again, like something's caught in her eye.

She reaches up to rub the eye but then starts clutching at it. *She GROANS as the pain intensifies, until she emits a SHRIEK!*

Something POPS within her head, her right eye bursting with blood. She collapses.

Michael steps back, stunned. The baby COOS.

BABY
Mah mah mah.

Michael's eyes track from Lindsey's body up toward the baby.

INT. KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM

Michael enters from the garage, the baby cradled on his shoulder. His pistol is in his free hand.

He crosses the kitchen, approaching Tara's body on the floor. Frankie the cat is huddled next to her, and looks up at him. He crosses into the middle of the living room, looking at the blood spatter and scattered items on the floor, but there's no Miriam.

Michael takes the baby to the rocking swing.

She squirms as he tries to put the straps over her arms and legs, all the while looking around for Miriam. He struggles to CLICK all the safety belts into the harness. The baby's eyes meet Michael's in a mutual look of alarm.

Michael rises, revealing that Miriam's bloody face is right behind him. Before he can turn and bring up the gun, she runs the iron dagger into his side.

Michael GASPS, dropping the pistol.

MIRIAM
You ruined it!

She twists the dagger.

Michael YELLS in agony!

MIRIAM
(hissing in Michael's ear)
That baby was a child of Moloch!
Guess what I traded for it!

The baby looks up, eyes wide as she watches them struggle across the room, into the kitchen. They collide with the kitchen cabinets.

MIRIAM

Lindsey couldn't figure it out.
Couldn't figure out why her baby
was dying!

Michael reaches back at Miriam, grabbing air. Miriam stares at the baby, her hideous face smeared with blood.

MIRIAM

Maybe she's in there somewhere.
Watching us. Watching daddy.

Miriam pushes the dagger deeper into Michael's flesh, her face up against his ear. Michael WHIMPERS from the pain.

MIRIAM

Either way, I'm going to kill it
after I'm done with you!

Michael looks toward the baby in the rocking swing as he starts to go into shock, his eyes closing. The baby looks back at him.

Michael summons the last of his strength, a sudden calm coming over him.

Miriam CACKLES into his ear.

MIRIAM

I thought you were supposed to be
tough!

Michael *swings his head back into Miriam's face*, sending her stumbling backward.

He spins and grabs her head, SLAMMING it into the counter, then SMASHING it through the nearest kitchen cabinet door, sending wood splinters flying!

Miriam rises and SCREAMS in fury. She charges at Michael, who stops her cold with a palm strike to the throat.

In a flash of movement, he SLAMS Miriam backwards over the kitchen counter, PLUCKS the buck knife from the cutting board, and STABS it down through her throat, into the kitchen counter.

Michael ROARS over Miriam. She looks up at him, blood welling up out of the wound. He steps back, dazed, and falls back against the battered cabinets. He releases an anguished CRY.

The baby plays with its hands, calmly watching Michael from the rocking swing.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BATHROOM

Michael sits on a chair in front of the vanity, his shirt off. The baby is next to him, on the floor, belted into a baby carrier with a handle. On the vanity in front of Michael is a tube of ointment and bandages.

He grips the handle of the iron dagger, stuck in his side. He GASPS in pain.

Michael looks down at the baby, as it plays with its hands. He dials '911' on his phone, but does not place the call yet. He sets the phone down by the sink.

He puts the handle of his knife between his teeth, then slowly begins to pull the dagger out. He YELPS as he draws the entirety of the small blade out.

Michael steadies himself against the vanity, GASPING.

He notices blood seep from the wound. He claps a bandage over it, and holds it in place. His fingers hover over the "Call" button. He looks down for a beat. The bleeding is contained.

INT. BEDROOM

Michael looks in a mirror, buttoning up a shirt. He looks himself in the eyes.

He clips his sheathed knife onto his belt.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Morning light diffuses through the window, onto the blood-spattered carpet. GRUNTING can be heard, as Lindsey's face is pulled into view. Next to her is Sean's corpse.

Michael sits by Lindsey's corpse, looking down at her. He winces from his wound. He looks back down at her and bursts into tears. He reaches down and caresses her face.

INT. HALLWAY

Michael drags Sean's corpse down the hallway and into the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM

Michael struggles to get his Army dress blues on Sean's corpse as it lays in the middle of the bed.

He looks down at the corpse, then brings up his dog tags, which read "NOWLEN, MICHAEL R" and places them over the head, and under the dress shirt.

Michael checks the chamber of his pistol and places it in the corpse's hand, struggling to press the stiffened fingers around the pistol grip. He brings the pistol up under the corpse's jaw, adjusting it under the teeth.

Michael repositions himself on the bed to hold the pistol in the corpse's hand. He places a pillow over the corpse's head and the pistol. Michael braces himself.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

The baby sleeps in its carrier as a MUFFLED GUNSHOT echoes from upstairs.

INT. CRAWLSPACE

Michael opens the crawlspace hatch, the black book in his other hand. He opens the furnace hatch, then looks at the book one last time.

 DAWSON (PRE-LAP)
 That book you found.

FLASHBACK - EXT. DECK - NIGHT

Dawson glares at Michael from his chair.

 DAWSON (O.S.)
 I know those words. Soon... you'll
 know 'em too.

BACK TO PRESENT - INT. CRAWLSPACE

Michael places the book in the furnace combustion chamber, then closes the hatch door.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Michael holds the baby carrier, pushing buttons on the thermostat with his other hand.

INT. FURNACE IGNITION CHAMBER

Small jets of flame surround the black book, followed by a WHOOSH as the whole chamber IGNITES and pages begin to burn.

INT. ENTRYWAY

Michael carries the baby carrier and a duffel bag toward the front door. He glances at the crucifix on the wall as he passes, and exits.

INT. FURNACE DUCTING

Burning pages from the book float down the dark coils of the HVAC ducting, carried by the forced air from the furnace.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Michael stands near the fence line, looking down at the bald patch of dirt. He looks somber, paying his respects to the child he never knew.

The baby BABBLES in its carrier.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Bits of flaming paper spew from ceiling vents, floating to nearby curtains and the bedding under Sean's corpse. The fabrics start to burn.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Bits of flaming paper spew down around the arranged corpses of Tara, Lindsey, and Miriam on the carpet, igniting the window curtains and other flammable materials in the room.

Everything begins burning.

EXT. SEAN'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

Michael secures the baby carrier into the passenger seat of Sean's truck. Below, Frankie the cat purrs in a pet carrier. Michael closes the door.

He turns the key in the ignition and shifts out of park. The truck eases out of the driveway, the boat trailer and boat following behind.

Michael stops the truck in front of his house. He looks out his window.

Pockets of smoke are visible in the house windows, the fire growing within.

Michael's eyes focus on something.

Looking out from the living room window, is Dawson, standing inside. Dawson stares at Michael as flames start to envelop him.

Michael looks back to the street and eases the truck forward.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Fields pass by as Michael drives the truck. He continuously checks the rearview mirror.

MICHAEL

Uh, I... I don't know if you can understand this, but they're gonna be looking for me soon.

He glances toward the carrier.

MICHAEL

So if you have any more tricks, well... I could sure use 'em.

COOING comes from the carrier, and Michael sees the baby watching him from its shaded seat, smiling.

Michael smiles back. He reaches out toward the carrier.

Michael's hand enters from the bottom-left side of the frame, his fingers turned upward. The baby's hand enters from top-right, its fingers angled down, and reaching out for Michael.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.