CODEX VULTUS

by

Orchard Dwee

FADE IN:

INT. FOOD MARKET - AFTERNOON

WE OPEN to see a man, CONR, bring up some beer and Funny Bones to the counter for purchase. Another man, JUSTIN, is standing by, waiting for him to be finished. They are both dressed for camping with Justin being the more prepared of the two, suggesting he's gone camping before. He's wearing a waterproof camouflage jacket with a visor on his head, his beard moving as he chews on some jerky. Conr, on the other hand, has never been camping, and is just wearing multiple layers of old, faded clothes that look rumpled, as if he hasn't worn these clothes in a long time, but when he did, he wore them a lot. They both are in their mid to late 20's, but Conr, with his pimple-scarred face, thick glasses, and brandishing a logo of a college on his sweatshirt, looks younger. His nervous disposition makes the clerk suspicious so Conr gets asked for his ID. Conr gives his ID to the clerk who looks it over.

CLERK
Are you missing something?

Conr, confused, starts looking around to see if he's forgotten anything.

CONR
(flustered)
Oh crap! Sorry, there's always something I'm--

CLERK
(holding up the ID, smiling)
No no, I meant--

Conr calms down and gives a little smile, but Justin rushes in, annoyed.

JUSTIN
(impatiently)
--He knows what you mean.

CLERK
Guess you've heard that before.

JUSTIN
(sarcastically)
No, he never has. You are absolutely the first person to make a joke about his name ever.

CONR
Justin--

CLERK
It's just that I've never seen “Connor” spelled like that before. C-O-N-R. Is it spelled that way on your birth certificate?

CONR
It is. My parents thought it would be unique and give me an edge in life.

CLERK
Did it?

CONR
Kind of. Nowadays I always feel like I'm on the edge.

JUSTIN
Hence the beer. He needs to relax, and he will, thanks to my custom brew I whipped up special for our trip.

CONR
As you said, hence the beer. You keep that gasoline away from me.

EXT. OUTSIDE FOOD MARKET FRONT - LATE AFTERNOON

Justin and Conr exit the market and are walking to a CAR where we see two women sitting on its hood. They are both wearing protest t-shirts, and as we get closer WE SEE that their shirts have rips. The two women are ALLY, who is Conr's girlfriend, and FAY, who is Justin's. They are both around the same age as Justin and Conr. WE SEE that both of them have some minor cuts and bruises. Both girls are quiet, but for different reasons.

JUSTIN
(jokingly)
Looks like you had a fun time at the protest.

ALLY
Well, we were, but some asshole had to throw a bottle
(MORE)

ALLY (CONT'D)
at the cops which started a chain reaction which then turned into a riot.

CONR
That's awful. Are you two OK?

FAY
I'm fine.

ALLY
I'm just so angry that it happened at all, and of course the news was there getting every little salacious bit. Now people who might've been thinking about joining us are gonna think we're just a bunch of hooligans smashing things instead of trying to bring attention to our cause.

JUSTIN
(sarcastically)
Yes, of course all the protesters are totally innocent. Not a bad one in the bunch at all! Seriously, does no one vet anybody at these things? They just accept anyone to join their protest so it looks like they have a huge amount of support.

ALLY
Stop stereotyping.

JUSTIN
You just came from a riot that was started by someone throwing a single bottle. If a riot spread so fast just from that, then most of them came for a fight. Peaceful protest, my ass. Who threw it anyway?

Ally pauses to think, but to Justin it appears as if she's hiding something, but what?

ALLY
I don't know who it was.

JUSTIN
No doubt some unemployable loser looking to loot a store. Or maybe someone desperately hoping to impress some black people. Sound familiar?

Justin grins maliciously at Ally, who looks back at Justin angrily. Fay, who is next to Ally, is getting uncomfortable and keeps sniffing and wiping her nose.

ALLY
Well, you're full of all kinds of wrong today, aren't you?

JUSTIN
At least I didn't endanger Fay by taking her to a war-zone.

Ally looks like she's chomping at the bit to say something, but doesn't. Justin, seeing he's not going to have more fun with her, pivots to Fay.

JUSTIN
Fay, did you see who started the party?

FAY
(startled)
I, uh, I--

ALLY
--She didn't see.

JUSTIN
Let her finish. Fay?

FAY
I, um, I just wanted to go home. It was awful.

JUSTIN
Of course it was. I would want to go home too after wading deep in an ocean of whiners collectively going “WAAAH”. Bunch of crybabies. What a nightmare.

ALLY
We're protesting police brutality. How is that being a crybaby?

JUSTIN
OK, you're not being a crybaby. You're just being naive.

Fay and Conr look at each other, knowingly. Yet another argument they will have to sit through.

ALLY
Justin, police have been systematically killing black people for decades. I don't understand why you disapprove of these protests.

JUSTIN
Protest all you want, but protest for the right reasons.

ALLY
I am!

JUSTIN
You're not and you just proved it. You want to protest police brutality, then fine! Go for it. But to say the police have only been murdering black people is wrong since they've killed people from other races as well, including whites. All this protesting does is make police brutality a black-only issue when it really affects all of us.

CONR
Is this really the right conversation to have right before we go on a trip together?

ALLY
(ignoring Conr)
And yet, everywhere you look there are multiple instances of cops killing black people. I've yet to see a white person being brutalized by police. If this is happening to white people, then why isn't it being shown?

JUSTIN
That's what's driving me so fucking crazy about all of this stuff. They don't show it because it doesn't sell. Police have been brutalizing people forever but the news has to sell, so they only focus on the stories with the most racial content since racism is so hot now. The media knows that it's not sex or money that we all have in common nowadays, it's rage. Everyone's angry at something and they're all too happy to keep those fires burning. And when those fires spread to the buildings the media will be there to cover that too.

ALLY
(sarcastically)
Wow, your knowledge about the inner workings of the police and the media are so impressive given that you've never held a position in either industry in any capacity.

JUSTIN
(defensively)
Hey, I read things.

ALLY
I'm so glad that you take the time to read “things”. Maybe you should step away and start experiencing “things” instead. It might change how you think.

JUSTIN
What, like brainwashing?

CONR
Justin, if police are killing everyone, as you're making it out to seem, then what's the harm of it being a “black-only” issue, as you're calling it, since police reform would benefit all of us?

JUSTIN
That's just being right for the wrong reasons. If this issue effects everyone, then the worst thing that can happen is for one group to claim it as their own. If more people saw this as a human rights issue rather than a black rights issue, more people would get involved willfully rather than being guilted into it. Now all you see in the media are black people getting killed by police so everyone thinks it's an apocalypse.

ALLY
It is an apocalypse!

JUSTIN
It seems like an apocalypse, but it's not. It's all a numbers game.

ALLY
Bullshit.

CONR
I would like to remind everyone again that we're all going on a vacation together in a few minutes.

JUSTIN
Just a second. I've got this.

Fay and Conr look at each other again, rolling their eyes.

JUSTIN
Let's say there's a city that's populated by 1 million white people and 2 black people.

ALLY
So we're obviously talking about a red state here.

JUSTIN
I was thinking more Vermont.
(MORE)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
Anyway, the cops go nuts and kill 1,000 white people and one black person. Which side had it worse?

ALLY
Well, ignoring the fact that you put black and white people on the opposite sides when you were just before talking about everyone needing to band together, I would say both sides had it bad.

JUSTIN
So you're saying that the lives of 1,000 white people equals the life of one black person?

ALLY
No, I'm saying everyone has suffered a tragedy. What are you getting at?

JUSTIN
I'm saying that when a black person is killed, it seems like a holocaust since there are so few blacks compared to how many white people there are. No one cares if whites get killed by police because there are so many of us. We're like fucking deer. It's not newsworthy. If anything, this just proves that killing white people is not only acceptable, it's also routine.

ALLY
Acute paranoia aside, your parroting of right-wing hallucinations confirms you never would've made a good punk.

JUSTIN
Thank you. And your hair is looking rather normal nowadays so don't tell me who's not being a good punk.

ALLY
Punk isn't just about fashion! It's about rebellion and breaking things down and making something new and better from the ashes of the old.

JUSTIN
Yeah, in 1978. Now it's a joke.

FAY
All music scenes are a joke and so are the people that follow them.

JUSTIN
That's my girl.

CONR
(taken aback)
I thought you liked music.

FAY
I love music. I just hate music scenes. I bounced from one to another trying to find people that I felt comfortable with, but I never could. Turns out every scene had cliques I wasn't privy to. I can't tell you how many times I was disappointed to see all these “outsiders” acting just like the society they felt they never could fit into.

JUSTIN
It's conformist bullshit anyway.

ALLY
I guess the advantage of living in an ivory tower is that you get to call anyone who enjoys participating with others a “conformist”.

JUSTIN
Don't be ridiculous. The views are spectacular as well.

ALLY
It must be from way up there. I always knew your views were derived from height.

JUSTIN
And it's nice and quiet too. No drama. No fighting. Just peace.

ALLY
We all want peace, you idiot. We're just willing to work for it. We don't run away and hide when it gets tough.

JUSTIN
No, you just throw shit at cops and loot stores.

ALLY
Quit lying. You know it's not all of us!

JUSTIN
No, but you know who I'm talking about, don't you?

Ally stares at Justin angrily.

ALLY
You think you're so fucking smart and have all the answers.

JUSTIN
It's something we have in common. Anyway, it's getting late and I don't want to get caught in traffic. Let's get going.

Fay and Justin get in the car, but Ally stands where she is, fuming.

CONR
(to Fay and Justin)
Just a minute.

Conr walks up to Ally.

CONR (CONT'D)
Ally--

ALLY
Enjoy your roadtrip with your racist fucking friend.

CONR
He's not racist, he just has strong opinions--

ALLY
--that happen to be racist. And you're defending him so what does that make you?

CONR
We've been friends for a long time. It's not like I've seen him burn a cross or anything.

ALLY
Didn't you once tell me that while you were both looking up at the night sky that he said it looked like a bunch of interlocked black people jumping out of a plane?

CONR
Well--

ALLY
Didn't you once tell me that he didn't approve of interracial dating?

CONR
I know, but--

ALLY
And these are just the things you've told me about. God knows what else he's said.

CONR
He did say those things but that was when we were kids and kids stay stupid things. If he was as bad as you were making him out to be, then Fay wouldn't be dating him.

ALLY
Poor Fay. I really don't know what she sees in him.

CONR
I guess you were glad to finally get her out protesting with you, right?

ALLY
(thinks about it)
Umm, yeah, I guess. So when can I expect you to join us?

CONR
I've thought about it. There's just something so, I dunno, cultish about the whole thing. It feels different than the protests in the 60s. It feels more hostile.

ALLY
How would you know? Anyway, get out of your shell! People aren't all bad, you know.

CONR
I know. I just wish they wouldn't keep trying to prove the opposite.

ALLY
Mopey fuck.

CONR
Well, that's why I need you, so you can stop me from being a mopey fuck.

ALLY
Too late.

CONR
(smirking)
Maybe. Come on, let's go. It'll be good for us to get away from the city and have some quiet time.

Ally reluctantly relents and they both get in the car to join the others, Justin in the driver's seat with Conr next to him in front, while Ally and Fay sit in back.

ALLY
The world is burning and we're
(MORE)

ALLY (CONT'D)
going on vacation. If that isn't privilege then I don't know what is.

JUSTIN
Well, at least you're finally admitting it.

ALLY
Oh, Justin. It's really cute how you think nothing bad will ever happen to you if you just ignore what's happening.

JUSTIN
(dismissively)
Uh-huh.

ALLY
Fucking jerk.

JUSTIN
(uninterested)
Yep.

ALLY
Jerkwad.

JUSTIN
(bored)
OK, then.

ALLY
Jerkoff.

JUSTIN
And just how long will this go on for?

ALLY
It might be a while since you're such a jerk.

JUSTIN
(turns around to face Ally)
Well, to prove I'm not such a jerk, and to celebrate both you and Fay fighting for the betterment of black people, I was just about to play some inspirational black music to start our road trip with.

ALLY
Such as?

JUSTIN
Some nice, soulful, vintage, black metal.

ALLY-FAY-CONR
JERRRRRK!!

INT./EXT. CAR DRIVING THROUGH FOREST - NIGHT

WE SEE Justin's car driving down a dirt road with its brights on. Our POV is the same as the car's passengers and all we see is that the road is flanked by ENDLESS TREES on either side. There is nothing distinguishable. It's almost as if the view is looping with each passing minute. Every so often SMALL, MISTY CLOUDS cross in front of them.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Justin is concentrating on driving while Conr in the front passenger seat alternates between staring out the window and staring down at a wrapped PACKAGE in his lap. In the backseat, Ally and Fay just stare outside their respective windows. The monotony of the landscape wearing on them as much as the abrasive Heavy Metal music Justin is blasting.

CONR
I can't believe you still listen to this stuff. Have my mixtapes taught you nothing?

JUSTIN
They did, and I still have them. But I have to admit that when I was moving the rest of my stuff out of my mom's house I came across some old metal cassettes and I got really misty-eyed looking at them.

ALLY
Were you crying because you realized how much time and money you wasted listening to that shit?

JUSTIN
No, I just remembered how much I loved it. How I felt like a
(MORE)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
different person when I was listening to it. Like, I felt stronger and more confident.

CONR
OK, if you're next going to say that it also helped maintain your erection, I'm jumping out of this car.

JUSTIN
I'm just saying I missed the sound, that's all.

CONR
What, you mean that--

Conr then makes a deep guttural sound to imitate a death metal singer.

CONR (CONT'D)
--kind of sound?

FAY
That was just the cookie monster. What he's talking about is more like--

Fay makes a raspy scream that turns into a witch's cackle. She then coughs.

CONR
Was that a rabid chihuahua?

JUSTIN
See, this is the kind of talk I expect from people who don't appreciate or understand the magic of Heavy Metal. It gave me a shield from all of the assholes in school who were all listening to popular bullshit. Since then, I've been drawn to things that aren't popular.

ALLY
There's a reason why it's not popular. Your parents must've loved having all those demonic sounds coming out of their house on Long Island.

JUSTIN
My dad called it garbage, which made me like it more.

CONR
Actually, that whole “satanic panic” thing was happening around that time wasn't it? Did anyone harass you over the music you were listening to?

JUSTIN
Well, I think I was the only metal-head in town for quite a while, so a few people would say things about how long my hair was or what I was wearing, but that was the extent of it, and it basically stopped once more kids started getting into metal. Besides, my parents were busy getting a divorce around that time so they had other things to worry about.

ALLY
(sarcastically)
Yay for divorce!

FAY
Well, it did solve my parents' problem, which was each other.

Fay looks at Ally with a little smile but Ally just gives a quick look at her without smiling and then resumes looking outside the window. Fay, seeing she's being ignored, stops smiling and also looks outside the window. Justin and Conr don't notice the exchange since they are wrapped up in their own conversation.

CONR
So no one tried to convince you that you were going to Hell and that you needed to repent?

JUSTIN
Oh, I used to get some photocopied literature every so often. Even now I get them, and it's been a long time since I've cut my hair.

CONR
So reading that stuff never bothered you at all?

JUSTIN
At first it was more of a nagging doubt in my head, which I guess is why they do that in the first place, to plant that doubt. But then I realized that if there was a Hell, then I probably would be going to it, and that's fine.

CONR
How can you be fine with eternal suffering?

JUSTIN
Because I would still exist. I would still be able to think and experience things. Sure, I'll be in torment but I wouldn't just stop. That's something that terrifies me more than anything.

CONR
And yet you're an atheist.

JUSTIN
What, am I supposed to just swallow all those lies?

CONR
Why do you say they're lies? What if there's a religion that is the truth? Or what if all religions are the truth?

JUSTIN
How would that even work?

CONR
Well, what if it turns out that polytheism is a thing, but instead of multiple gods under one religion, it's multiple gods forming multiple religions? What if every religion is right and every follower gets what they believe is coming to them?

JUSTIN
So all those heretics and witches died for nothing? What a black joke on the piousness of humanity. And you wonder why I'm an atheist.

CONR
The joke is blacker than you think. As an atheist, you think there's no afterlife and everyone is wasting their time being a believer. But if all religions are right, then only atheists will get nothing because that's your belief. In effect, your hubris over how logically you think through things will prevent you from having an afterlife.

Justin keeps on driving but seems a little shaken from that idea, as if he's never thought of that possibility before. The music seems to blare more loudly now that no one is talking over it. Ally, annoyed, turns her head from the window and decides to break the noise.

ALLY
So, can we listen to something that resembles actual music?

JUSTIN
Actually, I think we're almost there. I'll turn it off.

About 10 long seconds pass as it starts to dawn on everyone that Justin is not turning it off.

ALLY
Goddammit Justin--

JUSTIN
I meant after the song is over, OK? It's bad enough that I can't finish the side.

CONR
Why so particular? You can always finish it later.

JUSTIN
At least let me get past this part here.

WE HEAR ill-defined words being violently expelled to the slow, throbbing mass of distorted music.

ALLY
You mean this part where the singer vomits his lunch? Do you even know what he's saying?

JUSTIN
I think it's some kind of incantation. I remember trying to make out what he was saying so I could cast the spell, but I never could figure it out.

FAY
Seriously? We're in a spooky-ass forest at night and I'm starting to get really creeped out and this isn't helping.

Justin shuts the music off. Everyone issues a sigh of relief in unison.

JUSTIN
OK, but you do know that we're only out this late because all of you just had to go get some antiques.

ALLY
Antiques are awesome. Well, the stuff that isn't racist, anyway.

FAY
And they're much cheaper out here, as well as being more random.

JUSTIN
Yeah well, everything in that shop smelled like advanced age. We haven't been able to roll up the windows thanks to what Conr bought.

Conr tightens his grip on his package of antiques, as if he's afraid someone is going to take it. He quickly relents, ashamed for thinking that. No one notices.

ALLY
Leave him alone. So he found some musty books that piqued his interest. What's the harm?

FAY
Why did you have to get those books, Conr?

JUSTIN
Why did you have to get any books at all? Those things attract bad odors like nothing else.

CONR
Eh, you just have to put them in a freezer overnight to kill the bad odors and they'll be fine. I used to do that with my sneakers. Always worked like a charm.

JUSTIN
You've told me that before. You also said that it made the ice taste like ass.

CONR
Well it worked didn't it? I'll just make sure there is no ice in there when I put the books in. Or maybe I'll just leave them outside tonight. It's pretty cold.

JUSTIN
You should've just put them in the trunk.

CONR
The trunk is pretty crowded and I was afraid they would get crushed or ruined during the drive.

ALLY
Speaking of, how much longer do we have to go? I have to pee and I really don't want to go out here.

JUSTIN
We're almost there. Do you see that path up a bit on the left? That leads to a clearing. In the middle of that clearing will be our destination.

ALLY-FAY-CONR
(tired and sarcastic)
Hooray.

JUSTIN
Look, you guys wanted to do some outdoorsy stuff. My family has this cabin. What's the problem?

FAY
We're just tired. It's been a long day.

WE SEE the path come up on the left and the car slows down to take the turn. The trees open up and a BLACK SHAPE can be made out ahead. It's presumed to be the CABIN, but it's unclear yet. The WIND that has been rousing the trees since they entered the forest rushes ahead to the old pines surrounding the shape. The pines rustle as they approach, as if they're bristling with anticipation.

JUSTIN
I swear to God this better not be the kind of trip where all of you just whine about how much you miss your WIFI. Anyway, here we are.

As the car drives up closer to the shape, we can make out the cabin more clearly with the help of the HEADLIGHTS, their shine being reflected by the cabin's windows, one light in each window. As the car moves closer, the lights move, almost as if the house was watching them. The car stops and shuts down, as does the wind. There are no other sounds to be heard, save from the passengers exiting the car.

FAY
So this is it.

ALLY
Not too creepy, I suppose. And what was that about the WIFI?

JUSTIN
I told you we had no electricity here. We have an oven that runs on coal and I've brought some oil lamps for lighting, but that's it.

CONR
Well, at least we have our cellphones.

ALLY
Umm, yea, about that; I have no bars.

JUSTIN
None of us will. I don't care who your carrier is. Anyway, shall we?

EXT. CAR OUTSIDE CABIN - NIGHT

All four of them get out of the car and stretch their legs. Justin shuts the car off and it goes very dark. There is no sound other than from them shuffling around. A glow from a cellphone appears.

CONR
Jesus, this is pretty fucking dark.

Another cellphone glow appears.

FAY
This must be what it's like to be blind.

Another cellphone glow appears.

ALLY
Wow! I mean I know people say “I couldn't see my hand in front of my face” but I really couldn't!

Justin lights a FLASHLIGHT.

JUSTIN
Yeah, no streetlights here. The clouds are covering up the stars and moon, which is unfortunate because up here
(MORE)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
you will see the most stars
you've ever seen in your life.
Anyway, let's get inside.

All of them start to gather their things to go inside the cabin. Among the items they bring are SUITCASES of CLOTHES, FISHING POLES, a COOLER, CAST-IRON COOKWARE, a SHOTGUN, a small FIRE EXTINGUISHER, and some OIL LAMPS. Justin pulls out a lighter and starts lighting the lamps. With each lighting, he passes the lamp to someone else.

JUSTIN
These are safe, but still,
don't drop them. You won't
believe the mess oil can make
and it's flammable as fuck.

CONR
(sarcastically)
Well, I feel really safe now.

JUSTIN
Coward.

CONR
Amish!

Ally and Fay are clasp their arms to their bodies.

FAY
Cold.

ALLY
Freezing!

JUSTIN
OK OK let's get inside.

Justin leads the way, digs for the keys inside his pants, and opens the door. He walks inside, then after a second the others follow, the cabin becoming more illuminated as each person steps in with their respective oil lamp.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

WE SEE that they are standing in a LARGE ROOM that is sparsely decorated with some CHAIRS and a TABLE. The table has a CLIPBOARD with PAPER and a PEN attached to the clip; a note written on the top page. A few feet above the table is a HOOKED CHAIN hanging by a HOOK in the vaulted ceiling. There's a basic KITCHEN area in the corner with a cabinet and a sink that drains into a BUCKET. Opposite the kitchen

is a small FIREPLACE. Besides the front door, there are two other doors that each lead to another ROOM.

CONR
So what does your family use this place for?

Justin hangs his lantern on the hook of the chain above the table.

JUSTIN
Just as a shanty basically. We would fish at the lake and just kick back and relax.

Ally starts to wave her hand in front of her face as if to dispel an unpleasant smell.

ALLY
And smoke weed, apparently. Phew! And you thought Conr's books smelled bad.

JUSTIN
Those *are* Conr's books!

Justin turns to Conr.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
Why did you have to bring them in here? What happened to leaving them outside?

CONR
It looks too much like it's gonna rain.

ALLY
I guess you could put them in the trunk of the car.

CONR
But I feel like reading. After a long trip, settling down with a book sounds pretty comforting.

Justin grabs the clipboard off the table and hands it to Conr.

JUSTIN
You want something to read? Here you go.

CONR
What's this?

JUSTIN
It's a note from the last person who used this place to the next person, which in this case is us. It's a family tradition from way back. We used it to inform the next person of any changes with the cabin, but since there are a million ways to keep in touch now we only use it to give the next person a gentle welcome.

Conr looks at the note and starts reading it out loud.

CONR
“Dear God, thank you for this house. I pray against any evil that tries to enter this place, and for the strength to overcome temptation. I pray we will leave no opportunity for the devil to enter, instead fill this house with your presence Lord and that our family would instead grow in you, in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Conr puts the clipboard down on the table.

CONR
You know, I really don't know what to make of that.

Justin, after lighting another candle, grabs the note off of the clipboard.

JUSTIN
Here's what I make of it.

Justin crumples up the note and burns it.

CONR
(unimpressed)
Very impressive. Can I read my books now?

JUSTIN
Do we have to suffer with your stinky books?

CONR
OK, I'll put all but one in the trunk. One book shouldn't be so stinky and you'll probably get used to it.

ALLY
God, I'm so tired that I don't care anymore! Can we just deal with all of this in the morning? Where's the bedrooms?

Justin gestures to one of the doors.

JUSTIN
(to Ally and Conr)
Your bedroom is over there. It's the smaller of the two bedrooms.

Justin turns to Fay and gestures to a door on the opposite side of the room.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
As for us, our bedroom is over there. That's usually where I sleep when I come up here.

THUNDER is heard in the distance.

JUSTIN
Shit, it *is* going to rain. Well, since we're all tired and can't do anything outside anyway, let's hit the hay so we can get up early to fish.

CONR
You can get up early to fish. I think if I caught a fish and saw it squirming in the boat gasping for air I would be too sad to eat.

JUSTIN
Sigh. We discussed all of this, you know.

CONR
I just don't think I can kill something when it comes down to it.

ALLY
Honey, it's just a fish. It's not like a cow or anything.

CONR
It's still alive though and I just feel weird about it.

JUSTIN
Fine. Enjoy your candy bars. Fay?

FAY
(thinking)
I think if it came down to it I could do it.

JUSTIN
I knew there was something I liked about you.

FAY
I hate that phrase. It doesn't sound as sweet as you think it is.

JUSTIN
(smirking)
What if I added a “honey” at the end?

ALLY
(mock-smirking at Justin)
What if you shut the fuck up and get the rest of our stuff before it gets rained on?

Again thunder is heard in the distance, but a little louder.

JUSTIN
(annoyed)
Fine. C'mon, Conr. We hath been commanded.

Conr, who has been looking at the package that contains his antique books, snaps his neck up looking surprised, as if he's just been in a trance. He starts to follow Justin, then he hesitates. Realizing he still has the package in his hands, he looks around frantically for a place to put the package down but he seems unsure. He then goes to Ally, gives it to her, and then follows Justin outside, looking back at Ally as if to make sure she hasn't run off with it. After a moment, she turns to Fay.

ALLY
So, can we talk for a minute?

Fay looks at Ally apprehensively.

FAY
I was wondering when we were going to get to this.

Ally motions for them to go to in one of the bedrooms.

INT. ALLY's AND CONR'S ROOM - NIGHT

The door opens and Fay and Ally enter the room. Ally tosses the package on the bed and turns to Fay.

FAY
Thanks for not telling them what happened.

ALLY
Never mind that. Why did you have to throw the fucking bottle?

Fay, uncomfortable, sniffs and wipes her nose.

FAY
I was just angry.

ALLY
We're all angry at the police, but this makes us look bad! Now when people think of the protest all they'll think about is broken glass and looted stores.

FAY
Those stores will be fine. Their insurance will take care of everything.

ALLY
I don't care about the stores, but I do care about how it looks. Capitalism sucks, but we don't want total anarchy either! We need structure and people need a helping hand. We should all be in this together but what you did today was selfish!

Fay starts to respond but stops as if she is thinking of something else to say. Is she hiding something? Thunder is heard again, even louder than before. Fay sniffs and wipes her nose again.

ALLY
I noticed you kept doing that all day. You've either caught something or you're stressed out again.

FAY
Of course I'm stressed out! It was too uncomfortable for me to be there. I just couldn't deal.

ALLY
Did you ever stop and think that maybe you're supposed to feel uncomfortable so you can realize how good you have it compared to others?

FAY
What I realized is that I didn't belong there.

ALLY
Just try to relax. Having a new experience can be really excruciating at first but you will get used to it.

FAY
You're just an extrovert and it's easy for you to do these things, but it isn't for me. You say I will get used to it but I don't even want to try. I don't want to go to another protest ever again. I've tried and it didn't work out. I'm done.

ALLY
OK OK, I'll let it go for now, but I'm very concerned you feel this way.

FAY
I know you are. That's how
(MORE)

FAY (CONT'D)
you've always been. If it means anything, I do admire that you're so passionate. You have a really good heart.

ALLY
Thanks, and I'm not giving up on you. You're limiting yourself but once you realize your full potential you'll be shocked at what a different person you end up being.

Ally touches her index finger to her head. WE HEAR another thunder clap as raindrops begin to fall, gently at first and then more frequent, creating a rumbling sound on the roof.

ALLY (CONT'D)
Trust me. I can tell. I have a knack for these things.

INT./EXT. INSIDE CABIN LOOKING OUT OF WINDOW - DAY

WE ARE LOOKING through the window at Justin, Fay, and Ally getting in the car with the fishing gear. As the car pulls away, we pan over and slowly zoom into Conr sitting by another window reading a book. As we get closer, WE SEE that the book is VERY OLD, bound in STAINED LEATHER. We also see that Conr looks visibly distressed as he turns a very YELLOWED PAGE. As we get closer we shift behind him so we can see the pages more clearly, which are marked with GRAVEN IMAGES and STRANGE SYMBOLS.

EXT. FISHING LAKE - DAY

Justin, Fay and Ally are fishing in a row boat. Fay reels in her line and sees that the hook is empty. She then extends her arm behind her to cast out the line but the hook catches on Ally's shirt. Fay puts the pole down and tries to free Ally.

JUSTIN
Amateurs. Check this out.

Justin catches a fish and swings it over to Fay and Ally. Ally grabs the basket while Fay pulls the fish off the hook and looks at it head-on as it slowly suffocates. Fay, feeling indifferent, tosses it into the basket.

FAY
You know, I thought fishing
(MORE)

FAY (CONT'D)
would bother me, but it really doesn't. I guess it's their eyes. Having eyes that never close and are always round makes their faces look fake. For some reason it doesn't register to me that I'm killing something. It does make fishing a lot more enjoyable that way.

JUSTIN
(distantly)
Yeah, I've always enjoyed fishing out here. It's pretty deep and there are a lot of plants for them to eat, so lots of fish to choose from. I can't wait to start cooking some up.

ALLY
Maybe the smell might make Conr want to join us.

FAY
Is he vegan now or something?

ALLY
He's just been feeling weird lately about the meat industry after watching a bunch of activist videos. They were pretty brutal. Now he gets squeamish around food, knowing it was once alive. He even doesn't kill bugs anymore, he just cups them and moves them outside, like a fucking bug is going to be thankful.

JUSTIN
Well, it's not like he doesn't have a point, when you think about it. The meat industry is pretty terrible, but I would hate to never be able to eat a steak again. I would feel like I'm missing out on one of the best pleasures in life.

ALLY
I've tried to go vegetarian before and I just couldn't take it. Does that mean I'm addicted to meat?

JUSTIN
It means you, and many other people, including Fay and I, prefer meat and we just like what we like and that's it.

ALLY
But isn't the fact that I wasn't able to go vegetarian mean that I'm addicted?

JUSTIN
No, because it's not like you're doing something to yourself that is really bad for you, so your subconscious never feels like your body is in danger, possibly giving you the strength your mind needs to make that change permanent. No matter what your conscious mind is thinking, your subconscious is really in touch with how your body is feeling, and if it doesn't feel threatened then change won't happen.

FAY
And what have you been addicted to?

JUSTIN
I haven't been.

FAY
I knew it. If you really were addicted to something you wouldn't be talking all mystical and shit. When I was into meth I knew the danger and I didn't care. In fact I pretty much embraced it, like I felt I was really living life and not being boring like everyone else. I mean, we're
(MORE)

FAY (CONT'D)
here for only a certain amount of time, as far as we know, so why not get addicted? Why not just give in to all that pleasure and just live how you want to?

A pause. Within the forest an ululation, not unlike laughter, is heard.

FAY
Shit. You see that? That was my addiction trying to claw itself to the surface again.

ALLY
So, you're still addicted to meth?

FAY
I'll always be addicted. I'll never stop being an addict. Whenever I'm relaxed my mind will bring up meth again and it will replay all those fun memories that I have while I was on it and I have to actively reject them. If I don't then I will give in. I'll have to deal with it for the rest of my life.

ALLY
(concerned)
Oh, honey!

JUSTIN
I'm sorry it's so difficult for you.

FAY
You know, you really need to work on how you word things.

ALLY
That's because he's not used to apologizing since he thinks he's right all the time.

JUSTIN
I didn't mean anything by it!
(MORE)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
I just said I was sorry that you're in this situation.

FAY
I'm in this situation because I'm an addict, and I think that the only difference between addicts and non-addicts is that we've found what makes us addicted while you non-addicts still haven't. Once you do though....

ALLY
It's unavoidable?

FAY
I think so, unless you rigidly restrict yourself to avoid those things.

JUSTIN
Can you a call a life of avoidance a life though?

Fay pauses and sighs, and wipes her nose.

FAY
What choice do I have?

INT. CABIN - LATE DAY

Conr is still reading the old book, although he's in a different part of the cabin since the sun kept moving throughout the day. It's almost as if Conr was acting like a sundial. He starts squinting a bit as he notices it's growing darker, making it more difficult for him to read. Blinking as if he's waking up, he gradually becomes aware of voices and of a SMELL. He starts to sniff and his stomach makes a hunger sound. He hasn't eaten all day. He gets up, rubs his legs as they've been cramped under him while he was sitting down reading the book. He slowly makes his way to the door to join his friends.

EXT. FIREPIT NEAR THE CABIN - LATE DAY

We see Conr make his way to Justin, Fay, and Ally cooking their fish in a cast-iron pan above a campfire. They are sitting around the fire, equidistant from each other, in a tripod formation. Justin's back is to the cabin. They are all drinking from the same THERMOS. They start making fun of Conr for giving in.

CONR
Well, if you're going to rub fish in my face what am I supposed to do?

JUSTIN
Oh please. You're just hungry and we have plenty of fish to eat, so just sit down and have some already, Mr. Morality.

Ally pats a spot between her and Fay for Conr to sit down. Justin, who has the thermos, tosses it with his left hand to Conr, who catches it with both hands. He smells it.

CONR
Is this what I think it is?

JUSTIN
Yes it is. Another family tradition. Drink up!

Conr takes a swig and immediately makes a face and coughs.

CONR
Disgusting.

Conr clumsily tosses the thermos back to Justin who catches it with his right hand.

JUSTIN
You're welcome. And you're out of practice. You almost overshot me. Watch.

Justin then throws the thermos from his right hand to Fay sitting on Conr's right, who catches it with both hands. She raises the thermos as if to both convey “thanks” and “cheers” and takes a drink. Justin smiles as if he's done something impressive.

CONR
So why am I being christened as Sir Conr Morality?

JUSTIN
No one said anything about calling you “sir”.

FAY
We were just chatting about your newfound belief that every life is sacred.

CONR
Talking about me behind my back, eh?

JUSTIN
How else are we supposed to find out embarrassing stuff about you?

CONR
You could ask me.

JUSTIN
That wouldn't work. Besides talking about people behind their back is more fun.

CONR
I thought we were past high school.

ALLY
Sorry, babe. I only told them because I actually think it's really noble of you.

JUSTIN
Even if he's acting weird?

Fay throws the thermos across the fire to Ally, who catches it with both hands. Ally takes a few sips.

FAY
So what is shaping your morals, Conr? Have you found religion or something?

CONR
Well, maybe, but in my own way. I've decided to believe in God.

JUSTIN
Which one?

CONR
Honestly, none of them. Or maybe all of them would be more accurate. I think all of the religions have a piece of the puzzle but are wrong for the most part, so I'm kind of cherry-picking from them all.

JUSTIN
So you're the Dr. Frankenstein of philosophers?

ALLY
Justin--

CONR
All I'm saying is that I have a theory and it's been giving me some comfort.

FAY
What is it then?

CONR
Well, the thing that made me want to stop believing in God is that it just doesn't make any sense. I mean, I was raised Catholic and I've tried reading the Bible and I couldn't get past Genesis. Have any of you ever read it? It's just a bunch of nonsense! Everything created within a week? Noah and his descendants living for hundreds of years? It's ridiculous!

JUSTIN
That ship must've smelled so awful from all of the animal shit.

FAY
You're talking about a boat that contained exactly two examples of every animal in the world despite most of those animals not being native to Noah's homeland, and that they didn't end up eating each other for nearly half a year. If you're going to accept all of that as truth, then why would there be any shit at all?

ALLY
Anyway, babe?

CONR
Anyway, when I looked at things logically then I stopped believing in God. The religion didn't matter; they all had logic gaffes. This lead me to despair for a bit until I realized that maybe this was all part of Satan's plan to drive us away from God. Maybe accepting God is to accept everything, no matter what logic tells you. Maybe God is against logic and the only way to join him would be for us to reject logic in order to go to Heaven, where nothing logical happens. Physics doesn't apply there. That's why Satan was kicked out of Heaven, because he's all about logic and Heaven was too goofy for him and he didn't appreciate it, so God gave him the boot.

JUSTIN
So it's a fairy-tale land. That doesn't sound any different than any other religion.

CONR
I'm just saying that there is no conflict with believing in God and believing in science, since they are two separate things entirely. I mean, do we deny the existence of green because we know about blue?

JUSTIN
But I can see both blue and green. If I couldn't, then I wouldn't be able to tell who had the ball when the Jets play the Giants.

CONR
And I'm telling you I can see both the existence of God and still believe in science that
(MORE)

CONR (CONT'D)
can't prove God exists, because it is two totally separate things!

FAY
Maybe there's something to what Conr is saying here. Going back to football--

ALLY
Eww. Must we?

FAY
(to Ally)
I know, but this won't really be about sports.

Fay turns to Justin.

FAY (CONT'D)
If you were color-blind, how would you know who has the ball?

JUSTIN
Well, I could look at their helmets.

FAY
Forget the helmets. Pretend the only distinguishing features of the uniforms are their colors.

JUSTIN
What, so it's the Blanks vs. the Generics? Sounds like the most boring game ever.

FAY
Stop with the jokes. How would you know which team had the ball if you couldn't see the colors?

JUSTIN
(thinking)
Well, I would have to listen to what the commentators, or what people around me, were saying.

FAY
So you would have to rely on others to tell you what's what, right?

JUSTIN
So?

FAY
Maybe that's what Conr is trying to get at here. Maybe people who aren't religious are missing something that all believers have. If you're color-blind, and have no qualms asking someone to tell you the blue you're looking at is actually green since they can see the colors and you can't, then why not trust him when he says there is a God?

Justin thinks it over while the other three look at him. Ally tosses the thermos to Justin, who, after catching it with his left hand, puts it down.

JUSTIN
That's a cute idea, because it got me thinking about what kind of experiences I would have as someone who is color-blind and since I don't have that disability it was making me think that you might've been correct. But I'm now going to shit all over that because as it turns out all of us are in that same position.

FAY
How so?

JUSTIN
We can all see what's blue and what's green, but none of us here know what infrared or ultraviolet looks like, but we know they exist because these colors are measurable. They're detectable. The reason why we can't detect God is because God doesn't exist.

CONR
But what I'm saying is there will be no way to measure God because God sits outside our detection.

ALLY
Wait a second! What about the whole burning bush thing? Wasn't God talking to Moses through it, like a phone? If so, then wouldn't God not only be detectable, but also recordable?

JUSTIN
Good point, but since we haven't seen any field recordings of God's voice popping out from any flaming foliage, especially in this day and age where everyone is recorded by someone, this just proves to me that God doesn't exist.

FAY
Or that God grew tired of humanity's bullshit and left, leaving us to fend for ourselves.

A sharp wind forces its way through the forest, nearly blowing out the fire. The late-day sunlight, having been blocked by the trees, finally gives up and the sky darkens. The thermos gets blown over, making a hollow thud. Justin grabs the thermos and looks inside, and then turns it upside down to show that it's empty.

JUSTIN
All in favor of a refill?

All raise their hands as they've begun to eat their meals. Justin walks towards the cabin, a little wobbly, to refill the thermos.

INT. CABIN MAIN ROOM - EARLY NIGHT

Justin enters the cabin and lights the lantern above the table. He mutters about the stink in the cabin and looks around. He notices the book that Conr was reading. He looks at it curiously and opens it; a creaky sighing sound escapes. His eyes brighten seeing the ODD WRITING on the

pages. Conr enters, at first appearing somewhat inebriated but then immediately sobers up after seeing Justin looking at the book. Justin looks like he's mouthing the words. The door still open, a cold wind pushes through, causing the lantern to swing. Shifting shadows dance throughout the cabin. Nervously, he rushes up to him, and puts his hand over the pages to block Justin from reading them.

JUSTIN
What are you doing?

CONR
Don't read it.

JUSTIN
Why? This book actually looks interesting. I thought you were just getting some old Lit books but this thing--

CONR
Please! Just don't read it. I don't really get a good feeling from this book.

JUSTIN
What do you mean?

CONR
Look, I know it's just a book but I keep getting feelings of dread whenever I read it.

JUSTIN
Must not be too dreadful since you seem to have read a good amount so far.

CONR
Yeah. I know, it's a page-turner and that's part of the problem. Every time I read another page by the time I reached the bottom I kept saying to myself “OK, no more. This is it.” But I kept reading the fucking thing and now I really wish I hadn't.

JUSTIN
Well, maybe you're a bit on edge being out in this cabin
(MORE)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
with no electricity or plumbing and your mind is playing tricks on you.

CONR
No. It's not that. It's the book.

JUSTIN
Why? Because of these images of skulls and whatever? It's no different from any Heavy Metal album cover or horror movie poster.

CONR
This is different, OK? You know whenever you read something you kind of put yourself in the characters' head-space to immerse yourself more in the story? I did that here, and this book was written by an ill mind and I just feel unsure of everything now. Like I don't feel safe. Like I'm in danger.

JUSTIN
I think you're putting too much stock into this. You don't even know who it's written by since there are no credits. For all you know this is a lost workbook for a story or a game.

CONR
There are no credits because it's not that kind of book. This book is written by a madman. I just know it is. No one in their right mind would write something like this. This book is evil.

JUSTIN
Oh, come now--

CONR
I'm serious! I couldn't put
(MORE)

CONR (CONT'D)
the book down. I kept telling myself that I should but I kept wanting to read every sickening word, every twisted thought until I consumed it all. I've never felt that way about a book before.

JUSTIN
OK, so basically you found a book that you really liked--

CONR
I don't like it! I don't want anything to do with it.

JUSTIN
OK, so what's the problem then? Just stop reading it. Problem solved.

CONR
I can't stop reading it! As soon as you go to bed I'm going to read more of it. Maybe I'll stay up all night doing so.

JUSTIN
This is ridiculous. Do you want me to skip to the end and tell you what happens?

CONR
This isn't that kind of book! There is no beginning or end. It's not a straight path. You can open it up to any page in the book and skip around how you like.

JUSTIN
OK, why don't I just junk it then? Out of sight, out of mind.

CONR
No. I'll find it.

JUSTIN
Not if I don't tell you.

CONR
I'll find it.

JUSTIN
How about we return it to the shop you got it from?

CONR
I'll just come back later and buy it back.

JUSTIN
Why?

CONR
I don't want anyone else to have it.

JUSTIN
It's that valuable?

CONR
I don't know. It might be. That's not really what I'm talking about.

JUSTIN
What is it then?

CONR
I'm afraid what someone will do with it. Someone who I don't know and have no chance of reasoning with. It would feel like waiting for a bomb to drop.

JUSTIN
Fine. I'll just burn it.

CONR
I really don't think we should destroy it in any way. Can you imagine the ashes of this book going into the ground or the air? I mean as a book at least it's all contained in this form, but if it was broken down and released--

JUSTIN
If what was released?

CONR
I don't know. Something bad. Something I can't describe.

Justin, now worried that there is something really wrong with Conr, walks slowly to the door to close it. With the wind's music cut off, the shadows gradually stop dancing as the lantern stills itself. The party is over. Justin takes on a different tone, not knowing if this will set Conr off in a rage or not.

JUSTIN
Conr, look, I don't know what this book has done to you, but it's really weird that you feel so strongly about it.

CONR
You've never felt strongly about anything before?

JUSTIN
I have and it didn't do me any good. It's not good to be too obsessed with something.

CONR
No, this isn't like that. I'm not obsessed.

JUSTIN
But you can't let it go.

CONR
Because I don't want anyone else to get it.

JUSTIN
Because you're obsessed.

CONR
Because I'm trying to protect everyone!

JUSTIN
From the book?

CONR
From.... Sure. The book. Fine. Think what you want but give me the book. I don't want you or anyone reading it.

JUSTIN
Why, because you're afraid of all the evil inside getting out? How can you tell if it gets out anyway? You see how fucked the world is. Are you telling me this book will actually make it worse?

A pause as Conr thinks it over. He knows this is making him sound crazy but he can't help feeling this way. How to convince your friend of something that you're sure is true when your friend knows it to be false? Conr tries to think of something but is so worked up that he can't concentrate. A slow, rude creaking is heard which makes him jump. They both turn to see Ally and Fay come in.

ALLY
(annoyed)
Fine, guys, we'll get the drinks ourselves!

JUSTIN
Sorry, Conr and I kinda got lost track talking about....

Justin pauses, thinking maybe he should change the subject before things get too serious. Due to him being inebriated, however, he comes up blank.

ALLY
About...?

CONR
Nothing, really. We were just talking about what I bought at the store.

FAY
That book? How was it? Did you like it?

JUSTIN
(under his breath)
Christ, not this again.

FAY
What?

CONR
Nothing, it's--

JUSTIN
It's just that he's grown kind of protective of this book and he didn't want me messing it up.

ALLY
Babe, isn't that kinda petty?

Conr blushes.

JUSTIN
No it's cool. I used to be the same way with my comics.

FAY
The ones you threw out?

JUSTIN
I didn't throw them out. I gave them away to charity. They were all shit anyway.

ALLY
You donated shit to charity?

Justin is about to say something back, but he stops. He feels the need to talk about Conr's behavior to Ally.

JUSTIN
Um, Ally, can you help me clean up outside for a bit?

Ally, Conr, and Fay all look at Justin incredulously.

CONR
Not the slickest way to indicate that you have to talk about someone behind their back.

JUSTIN
This is about something between me and Ally. I just want to repair any damage I've done since I value her friendship. This isn't about you, OK?

Conr looks between Justin and Ally, unsure if Justin is telling the truth.

ALLY
Babe, it's OK. It's not like he's going to pull shenanigans with me.

CONR
OK. Fine. I guess I'm just gonna go to bed then if it's all the same to you. I'm really tired.

Ally walks up to Conr and gives him a kiss.

ALLY
I'll be there soon, OK?

CONR
(sighs)
Yep.

Conr, shoulders slumped, quietly goes to the bedroom. They all watch him.

FAY
(turning to Justin)
I think I'll tuck in as well.

JUSTIN
You just don't want to get stuck cleaning up the mess you made.

FAY
(smiling)
You know me so well.

Justin returns the smile. Ally, still focusing on the bedroom door Conr just walked through as if attempting to look through it, wonders what's with all the awkwardness over a dumb book. She then notices Justin looking at her.

JUSTIN
Let's go.

Justin and Ally leave. As soon as the front door closes, a thought pops in Fay's head.

FAY
(loudly)
Wait! You're not going to be talking about me behind my back now, are you?

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CABIN - NIGHT

Justin and Ally walk away from the cabin. Ally is about to speak but Justin signals for her to be quiet. He points to the car. They both make their way to the car and get in. Before she can speak, he puts a vertical finger up to his mouth and looks at the house for a few seconds. Satisfied they're not being spied on, he turns to Ally.

JUSTIN
Ally--

ALLY
--Justin, I gotta admit you surprised me with what you said in there.

JUSTIN
Huh? Oh, that. That was just a way to get out of there so I can talk to you privately. Forget it. This is totally about him.

ALLY
You ass!

JUSTIN
Ally, what the fuck is up with Conr and that book?

ALLY
I dunno. Maybe he just doesn't want it ruined by your grubby hands.

JUSTIN
That's not it. You didn't hear us talking before you came in. He's getting a bit weird with it. I think he's afraid of it.

ALLY
Why? What's the big deal? It's just an old book.

JUSTIN
I know! I don't give a fuck about it, but he's becoming neurotic. Like more so than usual.

ALLY
I really haven't noticed anything different about him since he got it.

JUSTIN
I think you will, and soon. Do you know if he's on anything, legal or otherwise?

ALLY
Not that I've seen.

Justin thinks on this for a bit.

JUSTIN
Ally, you're self-righteous. Is it ethical to do something behind someone's back if it's to help them?

ALLY
Like an intervention? And fuck you.

JUSTIN
What? Why?

ALLY
For calling me self-righteous, you judgmental prick.

JUSTIN
This time I actually didn't mean it in a bad way. I really need that point of view right now. So is it ethical or am I overreacting here?

ALLY
Sigh. It's questionable. I guess it really depends on what it is.

JUSTIN
Here's what I'm thinking: when he's sleeping tonight, sneak away with the book so we can take a look at it.

ALLY
What? I'm not doing that! You ask him for it!

JUSTIN
I was just reading it and he freaked out when he caught me. I don't want to deal with another situation like that, but I'm really concerned over his mental state right now and the only thing I can think of is to get that fucking book away from him.

ALLY
I'm not stealing from my boyfriend! That's fucked up.

JUSTIN
Look, I just want to check it out, OK? It's probably nothing to do with the book at all but I want to make sure. At least I want to understand where he's coming from. If it's nothing, then I'll give it back to him, I promise!

ALLY
I don't know if we should do this. He didn't sleep well last night so he would probably catch me.

JUSTIN
No problem. Before he goes to bed, give him some of these.

Justin reaches over and opens up the glove compartment to retrieve a PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE. He opens it up and gives Ally some pills.

ALLY
Sleeping pills?

JUSTIN
Tranquilizers. I always bring these up with me along with some antibiotics and vitamins when going on a trip, just in case. They should knock him out good.

ALLY
Are you fucking kidding me? He's been drinking!

JUSTIN
So then it won't be a problem getting the book from him.

ALLY
Yeah, because he'll be dead!

JUSTIN
Let me put it this way. In all the years that I've known Conr I've never seen him like this before. I am going to help him. I'm worried about him, and you should be too.

Ally mulls this over for a bit.

ALLY
OK, but let's be clear. I'm doing this for him. Not you.

JUSTIN
Fine, as long as you do it.

In agreement, they exit the car. The wind whispers chilly secrets to the trees, which in turn sway inward in a slow, rhythmic pulse. Ally and Justin's breath becomes visible.

ALLY
Damn, it's gotten fucking cold!

JUSTIN
It happens around here at night. That's why you have to wear layers. You wake up frozen, then throughout the day it gets much warmer so you take off some layers, but you keep them handy because the cold comes back with a vengeance at night. Anyway, I'm bushed from all of this.

ALLY
Yeah I think I'm done too. I didn't think fishing would be so strenuous but going to bed sounds so good right now.

JUSTIN
Absolutely, but please don't forget the book.

ALLY
(dismissively)
Yeah, yeah.

Ally walks back to the cabin, followed by Justin.

INT. CONR AND ALLY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ally, with a GLASS OF WATER in her hand, opens the door slowly and sees Conr is fully awake, sitting on the bed. He's looking at the book, now standing upright on a table on the opposite side of the room. He doesn't seem to be aware that she's watching him. As she observes him for what feels like a long time, she notices that he doesn't even seem to blink.

ALLY
C'mon Babe. Beddy-bye time.

Conr finally blinks, shaking his head, as if he's come out of a trance. Has he been doing nothing but staring at the book all this time?

CONR
Umm, I was thinking of just reading more.

ALLY
Oh no, you don't. You've been reading all day! Get some sleep already!

CONR, realizing that he's been doing nothing but reading the book and ignoring everyone else, feels guilty.

CONR
Yeah. Sorry. I'm just....

Conr searches for words that will both convey what he's going through and not make Ally think that he's going insane. He can't think of anything.

ALLY
Out of it?

CONR
Yeah, that's it. Let me just--

ALLY
No. You're not doing anything but going to sleep, OK?

Ally reaches into her pocket to get one of the tranquilizers Justin gave her.

ALLY (CONT'D)
Just take one of these, OK? It will help you sleep.

CONR
But--

Ally pushes the pill into Conr's mouth and brings the glass of water up to his mouth.

ALLY
Just take your medicine and go to sleep. You'll feel better tomorrow.

Conr relents. Ally turns off the light and lays down with him. Their eyes remain open for some time.

INT. JUSTIN AND FAY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Justin enters the room and, after removing some clothes to get comfortable, he moves to the bed where Fay is currently laying down.

FAY
How'd it go with Ally?

JUSTIN
OK, I guess. I'm kinda worried about Conr.

FAY
Why?

JUSTIN
That fucking book. It's weird he's so into it.

FAY
I thought you said it was just like how you were with your comics?

JUSTIN
I just said that to lighten the mood. This is different. It's like he can't help himself. The conversation we had was so weird.

FAY
Weird in what way?

JUSTIN
He feels that there's something evil about the book.

FAY
Really? “Evil” as in “satanic”?

JUSTIN
Ha, you know, I didn't even think to ask him that! But I guess you could say that, but it's not like the satanism I was into when I was in high school.

FAY
(sarcastically)
Oh OK, so we're talking about “*real*” satanism, then.

JUSTIN
Stop. But in a way, yeah. He just seemed so haunted by it.

FAY
Maybe being up here, away from everything he's familiar with, has made him more paranoid and receptive to whatever ideas are inside the book.

JUSTIN
But it's just a goddamned book!

FAY
Maybe that's the problem.

INT. CONR AND ALLY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ally and Conr are both in bed. Ally's eyes are closed but Conr is wide awake and is tossing and turning. Ally opens her eyes.

ALLY
Babe, what's wrong?

CONR
Did I wake you up? Sorry.

ALLY
I wasn't asleep yet. What's up?

CONR
Nothing. Guess I'm still trying to get used to the outdoors life. You three were busy today.

ALLY
And you just read your book all day.

CONR
...yeah.

ALLY
Is that why you can't sleep, cuz you still wanna read it?

CONR
Sort of.

ALLY
Are you in the middle of a good part?

CONR
There are no good parts in that book.

ALLY
So you don't like it?

CONR
I don't know if that really applies here. It's not that kind of book.

ALLY
What kinda book is it?

CONR
I don't even know what you would call it. It's just so fucked.

ALLY
Fucked how? Is it just gross or--

CONR
It's just monstrous. I don't know how else to describe it. It's like it's not even written by a human.

ALLY
...OK, maybe I should take a look at this thing.

CONR
No, don't!

FAY
Why?

CONR
Sorry, I guess the sleeping pill you gave me is starting to hit me pretty hard and I'm too tired to deal with it now. Can we maybe do this tomorrow when my wits are more solid?

ALLY
Well, alright.

CONR
Thanks.

ALLY
But you are being kinda weird and it's making me a little freaked out.

CONR
You're right, you're right. Sorry I'm just tired. Let's get some sleep and we'll discuss it tomorrow.

Ally looks at him. She's seen this kind of behavior before, but not from Conr. Is Justin right? She resolves to stay awake to get the book from him tonight.

INT. JUSTIN AND FAY'S ROOM - NIGHT

The lights are out and Fay's sleeping, but Justin is awake and using his phone to illuminate the cabin's clipboard that he's drawing in to pass the time. Out of habit, he's drawing pentagrams, demons, wizards, skulls, and other fantasy-based imagery. Suddenly, there is a quick, furtive knock on the door. Justin jumps up right away to answer the

door. Fay groans herself awake.

FAY
(dazed)
What the fuck time is it?

JUSTIN
Shh. It's early.

FAY
I know it's early. That's why I'm angry. Is it really time to get up already?

JUSTIN
No.

FAY
You're kidding me.

JUSTIN
No. Just go back to sleep.

FAY
What's going on?

JUSTIN
Nothing. It's really nothing.

Justin gingerly opens the door and peeks through a crack. Seeing that it's Ally, he opens the door to let her in. She comes in quickly, looking worried, as if she's being chased. She's carrying the book.

ALLY
I got it.

JUSTIN
Awesome. And you're sure he's asleep, right?

ALLY
He's out cold. Hopefully I didn't poison him with your pills.

JUSTIN
He'll be fine. Now let's see what this is all about.

FAY
Whoa, wait. Are the two of you conspiring against Conr?

JUSTIN
We're not conspiring against him, we're conspiring... for him? Shit, that doesn't work. What would be the opposite of that?

FAY
The opposite would be *not* conspiring against him.

ALLY
We're intervening, OK? We're just trying to get to the bottom of his behavior.

FAY
With an intervention, the person you're concerned about needs to be present. Believe me I know.

ALLY
Fay, we're going to confront him, but we need to figure out why he's so obsessed about this book. He's not being forthcoming and it's starting to scare me a bit.

JUSTIN
We're just going to look at the book for a bit and that's it. He won't even know it was missing.

FAY
This really doesn't feel like a good thing to do. Friends shouldn't be doing things like this to each other.

JUSTIN
Right now, we are doing this because we're his friends and this is the only way to help him.

FAY
You're invading his privacy! There has to be another way. How can any of us trust each other now?

JUSTIN
We're just looking at a book. It's not anything personal, like a diary. This is the least invasive tack to take.

Fay looks at Justin, then at Ally to see if she's wavering, but she's holding firm. She looks back at Justin again.

FAY
I think you're both in the wrong here for going behind his back like this and I think we're all going to end up regretting this.

JUSTIN
Fine, be all regretful, but isn't it better to regret something you did do rather than you didn't?

FAY
(exasperated)
God-fucking-damnit I hate pithy sayings! They never help in a real situation, but they always crop up since they're so fucking catchy.

ALLY
Fay, we're going to open it now. If we don't immediately see something weird with this book then great, I'll bring it right back. If you want to feel less guilty, maybe wait outside in the meantime. You're totally innocent, OK?

JUSTIN
Actually, that might be a good idea. This way Fay can be our lookout.

FAY
That would make me an accessory!

JUSTIN
Well, maybe not as much of one?

ALLY
Fay, please get out so we can help Conr. That's all we want to do.

Fay looks at Ally and sees how concerned and upset she is over Conr.

FAY
If you two are really concerned that Conr is in some kind of danger from, and I can't stress this enough, *a book,* then....

She makes a dismissive wave, as if to say “go ahead” without saying it. Fay then leaves the room sharply. Justin and Ally look at each other, troubled.

JUSTIN
I'll talk to her later. Let's look at the smelly bastard.

Ally sniffs the book and wrinkles her nose.

ALLY
You know, it doesn't smell like a typical old book. It's weird smelling. I'm not sure what it smells like.

Justin grabs the book and looks at it briefly. He moves to a table with Ally and opens it.

JUSTIN
It's all-around weird. I don't even know what kind of language this is.

Ally looks at the script and shakes her head.

ALLY
Yeah, no idea. I've never seen anything like it before.

Justin then starts to flip the pages randomly. When he starts seeing that there's pictures, he stops flipping and focuses on one. WE SEE their faces change from curiosity to confusion to disgust.

ALLY
What the fuck?

JUSTIN
I think I now see what got Conr so shook.

ALLY
What is this? Didn't he say this was religious?

JUSTIN
Well, it's definitely not scientific, at least not what I consider to be science anyway. I don't know what this is.

ALLY
No wonder he's been acting weird. This thing really is--

JUSTIN
(absentmindedly)
Yeah....

ALLY
Now what?

JUSTIN
I was wondering that myself. Should we get rid of it for him?

ALLY
He'll hate us for that.

JUSTIN
Maybe not. Maybe he wants us to do this.

ALLY
How would you know?

JUSTIN
Well, maybe it's a reverse-psychology kind of thing where he says he doesn't want to get rid of it because he's ashamed and he can't do it himself, but in his heart he really wants us to.

ALLY
That sounds pretty iffy to me
(MORE)

ALLY (CONT'D)
and it's only something I can see you doing, not Conr. Why not just bring it back to him and we'll talk about it in the morning?

JUSTIN
But what if I'm right and he does want me to destroy it, and if I bring it back to him, it will just take hold of him again and he will do something with it tonight?

ALLY
Do something with it? Like what? It's a book! Yes, it's a weird book but books don't do anything! If it's so evil, wouldn't at least one of the previous owners who read from it already be causing untold amounts of horror and agony and whatever else goes along with that?

JUSTIN ruminates on this for a bit.

JUSTIN
One time in college, in my Medieval Literature class, we were discussing Dante's Inferno and we were asked what would Hell be. I kept thinking of torturous kind of stuff, of course, but one classmate said she thought we were in Hell already since there's so much pain and misery going on.

ALLY
I get it. Life sucks. But if this is Hell, why would we experience any happiness at all?

JUSTIN
So our sadness would hurt that much more. It's a bigger fall. And then we need a
(MORE)

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
bigger happiness to dig us out. And so the cycle goes, each time bringing us closer to the edge of madness. But was it always this way? For all we know years ago someone did do something with this book and we could all be living in Hell and we don't know it because we're all used to feeling awful since we think that's just the way the world is.

ALLY
I don't buy it.

JUSTIN
Of course you don't, because I said it and you think everything I say is wrong. But I think Conr does buy it. He could be seeing himself as some kind of guardian against evil, real or not, and we're getting in his way. We're the enemies here.

Ally is quiet, and looks at the book. She's feeling uneasy.

ALLY
What if we destroy the book?

JUSTIN
Conr took issue with that as well. To put it simply, and more sanely then he did, he didn't want to pollute.

ALLY
What if we made it unreadable?

JUSTIN
What do you mean?

ALLY then gets up and finds the clipboard, removing the pen from the clip.

ALLY
I mean this.

ALLY starts to scribble on the open pages with the pen.

JUSTIN
Don't--!

Justin then notices that the pen isn't writing on the pages.

ALLY
Shit!

JUSTIN
Maybe the pen's dry?

ALLY
Let me see if this works.

Ally grabs the clipboard and tests the pen on the paper and it writes fine. With that confirmation, she goes back to scribbling on the page but again the pen doesn't write.

ALLY
I guess the page is so old and dirty it's not allowing the pen to write.

JUSTIN
“It's not allowing?” You mean it's deliberately preventing itself from being marked?

ALLY
You know what I mean.

Justin and Ally both slowly turn their heads to look at the book. The page they've opened to has a drawing of a face contorted, but it's impossible to tell if it's from pain or laughter. As they focus on the face with it's mouth wide open we hear from the other room a sudden shout of “CONR!”

JUSTIN
Shit!

Justin and Ally both get up and move around the room in a panic, looking for a place to hide the book. Outside the room, we hear Conr asking for the book in an aggressive way while Fay tries to calm him down.

ALLY
What are we going to do?

Justin pauses, takes a deep breath, and puts the book on the table. He goes to exit the room, but then has a change of mind and goes back to the book to hide it in one of the suitcases, which he then hides under the bed. Satisfied, he exits the room to face Conr.

INT. CABIN MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Justin exits out the bedroom, and Conr immediately turns away from Fay to confront Justin. Justin has never seen him this angry. Subconsciously, he backs away.

CONR
Where's the book?

JUSTIN
Conr--

Conr then punches Justin in the face. Justin, surprised, falls to the ground and Conr jumps on top of him. They start fighting. Ally and Fay both try to pull them apart. Eventually they succeed. Justin is rubbing his hurt jaw.

JUSTIN
What the fuck?! It's not like I fucked your mom! What the fuck is wrong with you?

CONR
I told you to leave that book alone and then you break into our room to steal it so you can read it! I told you not to read it!

ALLY
(sternly)
Conr. Justin didn't take the book. I did.

Conr suddenly stops and looks at Ally with a mixture of confusion, betrayal, and anger.

CONR
You did?

ALLY
Yes Conr, and I--

Conr then tries to strike Ally, but both Justin and Fay grab his arm. Ally stands her ground. Conr keeps struggling so Justin trips him and they both fall to the floor, Conr's head hitting the ground hard. Conr stops struggling and his countenance changes to a look of frustration filtered by panic. He realizes that he was just about to hit his girlfriend; something he never thought of doing before. Something he thought he wasn't even capable of doing. He breaks down.

CONR
(panicking)
This isn't me, Ally. Justin, this isn't me. I swear!

JUSTIN
I know. I've known you long enough this isn't you. And I know a book is only a book, but you're not getting this book back.

CONR
(angrily)
No! I have to have it back! You don't know what you're doing!

ALLY
Conr, this might be the best thing for you.

CONR
You're totally misunderstanding what's happening here!

FAY
Oh, for fuck's sake all of you suck at this!

Fay angrily turns to Conr and Ally.

FAY (CONT'D)
I told you this was the wrong way to go about it, but here we are. I don't blame Conr for acting this way.

CONR
Thank you!

FAY
(turning to Conr)
Shut the fuck up and look who you're arguing with! These aren't some creepy psych-pervs. They're your two closest relationships. They're not trying to trick you. They care for you and are trying to help you.

CONR
I don't need any advice from a junkie!

ALLY
Conr!

FAY
You do need my advice, you ass! Let me tell you what's happening right now. You've become fixated on that book where it's fucking you up so much that you almost punched Ally. Yeah, I'm a junkie, and guess what? I'm seeing that exact same behavior in you right now. I recognize it and I'm telling you you're an addict. It doesn't make you a bad person, but if you don't get help then you will become one. Let us help you.

CONR
I'm not addicted to a book. You're misreading everything!

FAY
(talking him down)
You're right. You're not addicted to the book, but everything you're saying is classic misdirection. You're addicted to something more obscure but for some reason your mind is linking it to the book. If we take the book out of the picture, maybe we'll find out what's really happening with you.

CONR
You just don't understand!

JUSTIN
Conr, you have your three closest friends telling you something is wrong. We're telling you because we care. Isn't it possible that it's really you that's not understanding?

CONR
No! It can't be! I know what reality is.

JUSTIN
So do I. So does Fay and Ally, but your reality doesn't match ours. Who's right then? The three of us, or just you?

Conr and Justin look at each other, holding each other's gazes for a few seconds. Finally Conr looks away.

CONR
(defeated)
I don't know what to believe anymore.

ALLY
If you don't know, why not believe the people you trust?

CONR
But what if all of you are wrong?

JUSTIN
Then we all help each other get through it, right?

Conr ponders on this while the others remain silent. The other three look at each other, hoping.

ALLY
Babe, I know this has been super stressful for you, but let Justin and Fay keep the book for now. They're not going to do anything to it.

CONR
I'm more worried about what it will do to them.

JUSTIN
Conr, it won't do anything. Do you see now why we think you're not seeing things as you should?

Conr, his head facing downwards, expels a long sigh, as if he was deflating from all the pressure. He brings his head up again to face them.

CONR
Years ago, I was given a book as a gift. I never heard of the author before but I was told it was good so I read it. The narrator was afraid of dying. I never was, until I read the book. Somehow, the author imprinted on me his fear and at times it's all I can think about. I don't want the same to happen to any of you with that book. I'm afraid of what would happen then. I can't even fathom it.

ALLY
Babe, let's go to bed. It's late, we're all tired. We all need a rest from all of this.

CONR
But--

JUSTIN
Conr, I don't give a shit about the book. Neither does Fay. I care more about getting a good night's sleep. Everything is gonna work out, OK? Just go to bed.

CONR
(frustrated)
...Fine!

Ally tries escorting Conr back to their room, but Conr stomps to the door, opens it, and slams it closed. Ally looks back at Justin and Fay, and then follows. After absorbing everything that's happened, Justin breaks the thickened silence.

JUSTIN
(sighing)
Guess it's time for bed then.

FAY
I'm not sleepy.

JUSTIN
Neither am I.

INT. CONR AND ALLY's ROOM - NIGHT

Conr is sitting on the corner of the bed with his head down in his hands and shoulders slumped. Ally walks into the room and sits on the bed next to him.

ALLY
Did slamming the door make you feel any better?

Conr lifts his head up, searching for the right thoughts to articulate, and then sighs deeply.

CONR
It never does. Sorry if it scared you.

ALLY
The door didn't scare me. What scared me is you threatening to punch me in the face.

Conr hangs his head down, his hands to his face. Shame rushes over him.

CONR
Jesus, Ally, I'm so sorry!

ALLY
So you're sorry. But don't ever do that again, Conr.

CONR
I know.

ALLY
I mean it! I won't be in a relationship with a violent person.

CONR
Ally, I swear I'm not violent. Please believe me. I don't want you to think I'm one of those quiet guys who just goes crazy one day. You don't think that, do you?

Ally looks at Conr silently, trying to make sense of what's happening to him. He looks crushed and Ally can see fear in his eyes, but fear of what? Fear of her walking out on him? No, there's something else driving this fear.

ALLY
Babe, I don't think you're a violent person, but I do think there's something wrong and I would really like to know what.

CONR
I would too. I don't know why I feel this way.

ALLY
OK. Maybe we should get some sleep, then?

CONR
In a few. I just don't feel like it. I feel like I've been asleep for far too long.

ALLY
Why do you say that?

Conr thinks about it for a moment. He takes a deep breath.

CONR
You know, as soon as I learned how to masturbate, I thought it was the greatest thing and I did it all the time. I had a favorite couch for masturbating, which was in a room where I could lock the door. Afterwards, I would wipe off the cum from my hand onto the couch. I did this so often that I noticed there was starting to be a buildup of dried-up cum on the arm of the couch.

ALLY
OK, either you're having a stroke, or this is going to be one of your famous backstories where you go on the most roundabout way to answer a question.

CONR
When was the last time you saw me masturbate?

ALLY
Well, I haven't. And I haven't noticed any cum-statues around the apartment so you've either grown more careful at hiding things or I'm doing my job.

CONR
Well, not to bruise your ego, but I quit masturbating before we met, after my grandma died.

ALLY
Why? Some kind of promise or something?

CONR
No. I just couldn't help but think that now she was dead, and if she was a ghost, that she could be watching me. Watching me masturbate to porn. And I couldn't shake that idea from my head, and I certainly couldn't cum since I was filled with so much shame at the thought of grandma seeing me like that, so I decided to stop. I just didn't know if she was watching me or not. It was such a stupid idea, probably thanks to my religious upbringing but I felt so unsure about what was real that I grew very frightened. I didn't know what to be frightened of, but I felt like I should be.

ALLY
You never told me about this fear you have.

CONR
Had. I think it's why I started to really resent religion and started hanging out with less religious people. Being in those kind of circles started to make me
(MORE)

CONR (CONT'D)
feel less guilty about my fucked-up thoughts, which I guess is what social circles are for. After a while I was able to laugh about my fear and was able to ignore it by the time we started dating.

ALLY
And now after reading that book it's all been brought back?

CONR
Well, I guess I've always had existential phobias since I started being less religious, but that book is making me question everything now. I feel so naked. I feel like I'm being watched and judged by people who know every move I make and there's nothing I can do about it.

ALLY
I guess that shows how addiction, or obsession, or whatever it is you have can really screw with your mind until you don't know what is real anymore.

CONR
Ally....

Conr lays down on the bed, and Ally follow. They cuddle.

CONR
The thing is after reading that book I feel like I know what's really real more than anyone else here.

INT. CABIN MAIN ROOM - DAY

Conr and Ally are quietly sitting at the table, barely eating their food. They glance occasionally at Justin and Fay's room. The door is closed and there is no sound coming from the room. The stillness is both unsettling and oddly comforting.

CONR
You think they're ever gonna come out of there? It isn't like Justin to sleep in like this.

ALLY
Umm, you do remember what happened last night, don't you?

CONR
It's just waiting for them to come out is making me really tense. I just want it to be over.

ALLY
Maybe they think they need to come up with a plan on how to deal with you.

CONR
Why would they need to come up with a plan? I've known Justin for years.

ALLY
We've all known each other for a while but we've never seen you act like that before. You were literally throwing fists at Justin, and you were about to throw one at me as well.

CONR
God, I'll never forgive myself for that! I think I need to get out of here. Maybe taking the book away from me was the right thing to do.

ALLY
Babe--

CONR
I know. It's just a book. You're right. That's all it is. And yet--

The door opens and Justin and Fay slowly and silently exit their room. Everyone looks at one another.

JUSTIN
Fay and I were thinking that maybe the two of us--

Justin gestures between Conr and himself.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
--can go hunting or something. Meanwhile, Fay and Ally can stay here and do whatever it is two girls do whenever no one's around.

Conr, Fay, and Ally give Justin a quizzical look. Justin rolls his eyes.

JUSTIN
Goddammit, you know what I mean!

CONR
I'm fine with that if Ally is.

ALLY
It's fine. I'd rather stay here and patch things up. I'm not the hunting type anyway.

CONR
Yeah, actually neither am--

JUSTIN
--well, if we're all agreed then!

Conr can tell Justin has something planned other than hunting.

CONR
(reluctantly)
OK. Let's go then.

Justin and Fay give each other a light kiss and look deep into each other's eyes. They both give each other a slight smile.

CONR
(to Ally, awkwardly)
Well, see you later.

ALLY
(smiling)
I know you will, because that's how time works.

CONR
(relaxing)
Hush, you.

Conr and Ally share a comforting smile with each other while Justin and Fay are watching them. They aren't smiling.

JUSTIN
(to Conr)
Ready?

Conr and Justin head out the door. Ally looks at Fay and smiles somewhat nervously. Fay looks at Ally, and after a pause, smiles back in response.

FAY
So, wanna take a look at the book?

DISOLVE TO:

EXT. - FISHING LAKE - DAY

A car pulls up. Justin and Conr get out of the car and start unpacking. Conr looks at all their stuff.

CONR
Fishing poles? Where's the gun? I thought you said we were going to go hunting.

JUSTIN
That was just to insure that Ally wouldn't tag along. Besides, fishing *is* hunting, just without a gun, and without the need to remain quiet. I wanted us to chat, alone, without any interruptions.

CONR
Don't get me wrong. I'm glad we're not hunting, but why play games like that? If you told Ally the truth she would've understood.

JUSTIN
Well, I didn't want to take that chance and start arguing all over again. You know how she can be.

CONR
I told you I wanted to talk. Not gossip.

JUSTIN
Great. By all means, let the talking start.

Conr and Justin just look at each other in silence.

CONR
Well, I guess this won't start by itself. I take it that you don't trust me anymore.

JUSTIN
This isn't about distrust. I wouldn't trust you to drive if you took a sleeping pill, because I can tell when you're messed up and I care about you enough so you don't get more messed up.

CONR
I'm not messed up! I'm totally, boringly sober.

JUSTIN
You're not yourself. There's something wrong with you.

CONR
(mockingly)
“Ever since you got that goddamn book.”

JUSTIN
Enough about the book! Can we stop thinking of it as some kind of magical object? It's just a bunch of paper bound together.

CONR
In human flesh.

JUSTIN
Oh, please! They just told you that to hook you in. I'm sure they wouldn't sell anything so blatantly illegal.

CONR
They didn't say it, but I know it is.

JUSTIN
How? Since when are you a leather expert?

CONR
I just know.

JUSTIN
I see. And what form does this knowledge take? Do you have some kind of unholy rapport with it that the rest of us can't see? Is that what you're saying?

CONR
I don't know what's going on, OK? I got the book because it was unique. It intrigued me! And when I was looking at it I felt like it was meant to be mine. Like I pictured the book in my possession. I saw myself reading it at the cabin and it just seemed natural that I had no choice but to buy it. And sure enough, when I got to the cabin I had to read it. But reading it--

Conr waves away the rest of the thought. Justin is looking at him.

CONR (CONT'D)
And then you're like “it's just a book, just throw it out.” But I can't! I want to do it, but I can't carry it through.

JUSTIN
Why not?

CONR
I don't know! I guess part of me feels that all of this is absurd and I have no reason to get rid of it. In fact, I
(MORE)

CONR (CONT'D)
started to resent you since you wanted me to separate from the book. When I punched you, I was so full of hatred for you, for mocking me, for taking it behind my back. I just felt like I didn't know you anymore, that you were a stranger, and it was right to hurt you. It felt so good to punch you. I didn't care about you or our friendship at all. I totally forgot about it. All I knew was that you were a problem that had to be fixed.

JUSTIN
Conr, look at what you're saying. Look at how you're acting. You know a book can't make you do these things. You're dealing with something that is poisoning your soul and you're blaming a totally random object.

CONR
No, it's not just some random object. I was drawn to it. I wanted it. But it's deeper than just a simple craving. Let's say I give the book back to the store, or I throw it out, or I try to destroy it but some of it still is readable or--

JUSTIN
I get it.

CONR
No, you don't! If I keep that book, I'll get obsessed with it, but if I get rid of the book, I'll never be able to stop thinking about it! All it takes is one person, one careless person who doesn't know any better and then that's it! It's too late!
(MORE)

CONR (CONT'D)
Once it's read out loud then things will happen. And it will be all my fault! If I only had the strength to keep the book, no matter the personal cost, then these things won't happen. I can't let them happen. I don't want to be responsible for damning the world!

Justin looks in silence at Conr, who is breathing heavy. Conr starts crying. Justin can't think of the last time when he's seen Conr this upset.

JUSTIN
Conr, I'm going to ask a question which will sound like I'm making fun of you, but I'm really not. How can an old book damn the world?

CONR
Someone will read from it and something will happen.

JUSTIN
What will happen?

CONR
Something bad. Something catastrophic.

JUSTIN
Conr! Nothing will happen. I'll prove it to you. When we get back, I'll read aloud a few pages from it and then you'll see that the book isn't your problem.

CONR
No! You're totally ignoring what I'm saying. Didn't you see the drawings in the book?

JUSTIN
Yeah, I used to draw stuff like that in my notebooks all the time. I even used to use red ink, like that book does.

CONR
It's not red ink.

JUSTIN
OK. This is ridiculous and I'm going to put an end to this right now. Conr, you're dead-certain that the book has a hold over you that you can't explain, right?

CONR
Well, it's not like--

JUSTIN
Stop all of the psycho-babble. Yes or no.

CONR
Yes.

JUSTIN
And the hold this book has over you is total and complete? In fact, you seem to have a sense for it, don't you? I'm not making fun of you, here. I'm just trying to understand. You honestly do feel you have a connection with it.

CONR
Yes! God help me I'm drawn to it and I feel like I can't get away.

JUSTIN
You don't want anything to do with it, right? You regret ever laying eyes on it and wish it were gone forever?

CONR
Yes, of course! It's ruining my life but it keeps calling me, draining me--

JUSTIN
Just as I thought. Conr, I destroyed the thing last night when you were asleep.

CONR
(shocked)
You destroyed...? But--

Justin approaches Conr.

JUSTIN
I destroyed it. It's gone. And you know what? No demons came. There were no ominous clouds or destructive lightning. No voices were heard and no ground was broken open with light shining through it. Nothing happened. Do you get it? All of your problems plaguing you; it wasn't the book. It was just a convenient scapegoat.

Conr opens his mouth to say something but he thinks better of it. Justin and Conr sit in silence for a minute. Being proven wrong is always hard to take, but to be *this* wrong? Conr, touches his head, as you would any other body part that starts hurting, as if a gentle touch could heal it. But for this type of hurt, the only way to heal would be to talk about it. Conr takes a deep breath.

CONR
(dejected)
It wasn't the book.

JUSTIN
Of course it wasn't. I'm not sure what it is, but you're not well and you need to deal with this. And you're not alone! I'll help you. And Fay too.

CONR
I guess it was all a lie after all. I feel so fucking stupid. I'm sorry.

JUSTIN
What are you sorry for? You're just sick. If you don't apologize for getting a cold then don't apologize for this. Just let go of the book and admit your perception is faulty.

Conr thinks about it.

CONR
Justin, I'm scared I don't know what I'm doing anymore.

JUSTIN
Stop it! Yes you do. You're just having a setback, that's it. And now you know that it's not the book that's causing all these problems, and that's the first step to seeing things as how they really are.

Conr stares out into the lake, his eyes following the ripples in the water. His pupils jump from lily pad to lily pad and then dives below, trying to make out what is happening underneath the surface. He remains quiet, so Justin leaves him briefly to fetch their things out of the car. He returns with their fishing gear. Conr looks up at Justin.

JUSTIN
(smiles)
C'mon dude. Let's fish.

CONR
I think I'd rather drink.

JUSTIN
Why not do both?

Justin and Conr smile at each other. For the first time this trip, Conr feels like he can relax.

INT. CABIN MAIN ROOM - DAY

Fay and Ally are sitting at the table looking at the book. Every page contains disturbing drawings and cryptic writing.

ALLY
I really don't get why this book is such a big deal.

FAY
Well, you know how he likes to collect things that are unique. He probably never seen a book like this before, so he grabbed it.

ALLY
I've never seen one like this before either, but c'mon, it's just an old, musty book.

FAY
Sure, but old things connect us with the past so we can understand the present.

ALLY
Did Conr tell you that?

FAY
No, it's just how I feel. Reading about things that have happened in the past helps give me some understanding about things happening today.

ALLY
Like what?

FAY
Anything really. Disasters, scandals, societal changes, you name it. Seeing that similar things have happened in the past gives me a kind of anchor to clutch onto in case I feel like I'm getting lost in the chaos. In other words, things will be OK since we've been through this before, so try not to despair as we go through it again.

ALLY
That is so depressing. It feels like we're just going around in circles and nothing is progressing. This is exactly why we protest.

FAY
Why *you* protest. My first time was a disaster and I have no intention of going back to being harassed by those fucks.

ALLY
The police? Is that why you threw the bottle at them?

Fay pauses. The time is now.

FAY
Ally, I didn't throw the bottle at the police.

Before Ally can ask “who?” it dawns on her what Fay has been hiding.

ALLY
(stunned)
You threw that fucking bottle at the protesters? At us?

FAY
I did. And I'm not going to apologize for it.

ALLY
The fuck is wrong with you? Why would you do that? What right have you to do that?

FAY
You were a lot less concerned when you thought I threw it at the cops.

ALLY
That's different! They have riot gear! They're well protected! We're not!

FAY
And yet it wasn't the cops I was afraid of.

ALLY
Then you're wrong! There's no reason to be afraid of protesters.

FAY
No reason! Did you forget how people confronted me for a public shaming since I wasn't chanting along with my fist raised? Do you know how horrific it is to have angry people surround you and yell at you when you try to defend yourself? Do you know what
(MORE)

FAY (CONT'D)
it's like to have people mock you when you're just trying to help out? And they recorded all of it on their phones! You know how quiet and private I am and now I have to worry about being memed! And you just let it all happen.

ALLY
I know you felt humiliated, but it's good for you to feel uncomfortable. It will help you understand that other people feel that way most of their life so you can empathize, and empathy helps build communities!

FAY
The fuck would I want to join a community who berated me and talked down to me simply because of who I am?

ALLY
Don't you think black people ask the same question?

FAY
So two wrongs make a right?

ALLY
I thought you hated catchy sayings.

FAY
How about this one: “Silence equals violence.” What the fuck is that about? Maybe now after the riot they feel differently after experiencing some *real* violence.

ALLY
That's so irresponsible! Your actions hurt people!

FAY
Those people hurt me. I'm tired of turning the other cheek when no one else does.

ALLY
You're being selfish! You're cutting yourself out from the world when you need to be a part of it. You breathe its air, you eat the food, but you don't care one bit for helping the world.

FAY
“Helping the world!” What a bunch of self-aggrandizing bullshit that is. It must make protesters feel so noble when they start looting.

ALLY
God, what has Justin done to you?

FAY
Don't blame Justin. I can think for myself and draw my own conclusions.

ALLY
The wrong ones, apparently.

FAY
The thing is I do care about what happens in the world, but protests are for people who like being loud and obnoxious and that's not me. I just want to live and let live and not cause any more problems in the world. How is that a bad thing?

ALLY
God, you sound like my parents! You just don't get it because you're afraid and you've trapped yourself in your own shell. And what's worse, you like being trapped.

FAY
What are you talking about? I'm free and I like freedom just as much as anyone else does.

ALLY
You're not free and you don't want to be free. You just want to be safe.

FAY
That's a kind of freedom!

ALLY
No, it's different. If the world was burning you wouldn't give a shit, as long as you were safe. And before you start thinking the worst of yourself again, I'm not just talking about you. Most people feel the same way.

FAY
(defiantly)
I'm not most people!

ALLY
Most people say that.

Fay gets up and starts walking around the room to break off the argument. Ally keeps flipping the pages randomly in the book. Ally's back is turned away from Fay.

ALLY
What language is this in anyway?

FAY
It's Arabic.

ALLY
I can't even read it. Can either of you?

FAY
Kind of. We were looking at it last night closely and after a while it was making some sense to us.

Fay is walking behind Ally and into the kitchen. WE SEE her reach for something, but we can't see what.

ALLY
How? I can't make anything out of it.

Fay cranes her neck to see where Ally is in the book.

FAY
You see that bookmark I have in the book? Turn to that and I'll show you what I mean.

Ally turns to the page. Fay approaches her from behind.

FAY (CONT'D)
Start reading it.

ALLY
I can't read this. I told you.

FAY
Just try. You'll start seeing patterns and before you know it the text will almost seem like English after a while.

Ally grunts and looks at the text closely. After some time her brow furrows and she starts blinking and rubbing her eyes. Fay has positioned herself right behind her.

FAY
You see?

ALLY
It just seems kinda illegible, like it's blurry.

FAY
Sort of like when you're trying to look at something that is moving faster than you can process?

ALLY
...what?

Suddenly, Fay smacks Ally in the head with a cast-iron pan. With a groan, Ally's head falls into the book. Fay brings the pan down again on her head a few more times. Blood starts to splatter. Fay stops, pauses and examines Ally, who is not moving.

EXT. FISHING LAKE - LATE AFTERNOON

Justin is holding a huge fish. It's getting dark out. Clouds are gathering.

CONR
Looks like we've been here for a while. Should we start packing up?

Justin pauses, and then looks up at the sky. He then closes his eyes. Conr notices this and thinks it's a strange thing to do when you're gauging the weather, but he drops the thought. Justin opens his eyes.

JUSTIN
Yes, I think it's a good time to head back.

CONR
That's quite a monster you caught. Look at that thing!

JUSTIN
Yeah, haven't caught one this big in a while. Let's see how long it is.

Justin holds the fish lengthwise, the head of the fish pointing at Conr. The eyes seem to be looking directly at him, who can't help but feel unnerved by its stare. As the fish tries to breathe the suffocating air, the mouth opens and the fish's head starts to shake. A rhythmic croaking sound is heard.

CONR
Ugh. Maybe I'll give up eating fish as well.

JUSTIN
Don't be such a baby. Once we clean it you'll find it more palatable.

CONR
Let's do it now. I just can't look at it's face anymore.

Conr makes his way to their gear. He rummages around, but can't seem to find what he's looking for. He stops and Justin notices a puzzled look on his face.

JUSTIN
What is it?

CONR
I can't find the knife. That big one you have.

JUSTIN
It must be back at the house. I guess I forgot it this morning. Let's wrap this up and get back before the fish gets too tainted to eat.

CONR
OK. Hopefully it's sharp enough to gut that thing.

JUSTIN
Should be. I had it sharpened before the trip and I haven't used it yet. It should be able to cut through anything.

INT. CABIN MAIN ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Fay lifts up Ally's head, blood dripping down her face. Slowly, even sensually, she takes her fingers and touches one of the wounds where she struck Ally. She then withdraws her fingers, now covered in blood, along with a few strands of hair, and tastes it. She smiles. Ally is groaning.

FAY
Ally, I'm so sorry, but I know you will appreciate why I'm doing this. It'll make sense, I promise. Here, look at the book! Do you see how it's drinking up your blood?

Ally, still woozy, looks down to see the book sopping up the blood that is falling from her head. As the blood gets soaked up, a barely perceptible sound not unlike slurping is heard.

FAY
Do you now understand why I hit you? Do you see what your blood is doing to the book?

Fay pulls Ally by her hair so the chair tips over. Ally crashes to the floor with a loud slam. Her head bounces off the floor with a sickening thud. Fay grabs the chair and tosses it aside. She then sits on Ally's stomach and pulls out Justin's knife.

FAY
I do care about the world, Ally, I do. I really want to
(MORE)

FAY (CONT'D)
make it better, and this book will help me make the world right. The book is powerful, but it is old, and it needs to recharge. Blood helps, but it needs more! It needs something more substantial. It needs a strong, passionate heart, and you have the most heart of anyone I know. Ally, I am sorry, but you do understand! You must!

Fay tears at Ally's top. Ally starts to struggle, but weakly, as Fay rips away the fabric covering her left breast. Ally struggles some more, but to no avail, as Fay grabs her breast, stretches it out, and then starts sawing it with her knife until it rips off. Ally screams.

INT./EXT. CAR DRIVING THROUGH FOREST - DUSK

Justin and Conr are driving back before it gets too dark. Above them, clouds join together, enveloping the sky. The air around them starts to grow thick with fog. Justin and Conr are talking about random things to pass the time. A nagging thought within Conr finally makes its way out.

CONR
Justin, how did you destroy the book?

JUSTIN
I burnt it.

CONR
When?

JUSTIN
Last night.

CONR
I know, but when last night?

JUSTIN
I don't remember exactly, but it was late since I was so drowsy.

CONR
But when you burn something the smell lingers.

JUSTIN
That's why I burned it away from the cabin so the smell would dissipate outside quickly.

Conr looks at Justin, his stomach getting queasy with unease.

CONR
OK, but what did you do with the ashes?

JUSTIN
Conr, forget the book already. It was never even yours to begin with.

CONR
What do you mean? I purchased it.

JUSTIN
It really wasn't meant for you at all.

CONR
You mean that book just isn't my style?

A quick lightning flash followed a few seconds later by thunder. Justin starts to drive faster.

JUSTIN
Better get back to the girls before the storm comes. Maybe I should take a shortcut.

Before Conr can object Justin drives off-road, which makes the journey much more bumpy. Conr hits his head.

CONR
Ow! You're lucky Ally's not here or she would complain.

JUSTIN
Yes, I'm glad she's not here. I remember the fights we used to have when we dated for a few microseconds. You two belong together while I belong with Fay.

CONR
I guess opposites do attract.

JUSTIN
Well, on the surface Fay and I may be opposing poles but we've bonded together in a more meaningful and deeper way, much more so than my limited mind thought possible.

CONR
Was that self-deprecation coming from you?

JUSTIN
No, I hate that. I think self-deprecation is a way for cowardly people to go about fishing for compliments from kind people. “Oh, I'm so ugly. I'm so useless. I'm so stupid.” “No you're not.” That kind of thing. I was just being factual when I said my mind is limited. Yours is too, just like everyone else's. It's funny that we all have that in common but since our minds are so limited we just don't realize it. What a joke. Don't you see what a joke it all is?

Justin drives even faster. The thunder gets louder as the storm moves closer, almost as if it was following them. The car jumps again. A smash is heard as one of the headlights goes out. Conr starts to panic.

CONR
Justin! Be careful! You just lost a headlight!

JUSTIN
(ignoring Conr)
We think we're so smart and yet we keep inventing different beliefs because we know in our hearts that there's something missing while the truth has been sitting in front of us all along!

CONR
Justin! Stop! You're starting to act like I did when I had the--

Thunder crashes again as an explosion of light blinds Conr. The car keep bucking. Another smash is heard as the other headlight is broken. The roar of the engine is still heard, but nothing can be seen.

JUSTIN
Humans need to be reminded that they're not the ones in control. We never were. It's all been a lie.

CONR
You never destroyed the book, did you? You read it and it's got you now. Justin! Snap out of it! Please!

WE HEAR a crash, and then nothing, as the storm moves past them to the cabin.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

WE HEAR a groan accented with pain. WE SEE a cellphone blink on. The cellphone is turned to Conr's face as he looks at the phone. His face is covered in dried blood, as if he's been unconscious for some time. His glasses are missing. He turns the camera on his phone to look at his face. His eyes widen as he sees himself. He looks down, trying to remember what happened.

CONR
(dazed)
Justin!

Conr stumbles getting up and looks around quickly, using his phone as a flashlight, but everywhere he turns all he sees are angry leaves and accusatory twigs. Justin is nowhere to be found, and neither is the car. He starts to call out for Justin.

CONR
(shouting)
Just--

He abruptly stops. If the book really has him, maybe it's best that he doesn't call Justin. Where could he be though? Is he watching Conr right now? Or is he on his way back to the cabin?

CONR
(panicking)
Ally! Fay!

If he's on his way back, what would he do once he gets there? He had to get back, but how? He doesn't know his way to the cabin from here, only Justin does. He's totally lost. Again he shines his phone in different directions, desperately looking for an idea. He then shines the light down on the ground, noticing tire tracks. He starts following the tracks, trying to hurry despite his limp. As he runs, branches slash at him. They rip at his clothes and his skin, but he moves onward.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CABIN - NIGHT

WE SEE Conr stumble out of the forest. He freezes when he sees the car. Slowly he creeps up to it, looking for Justin. The car is empty. He looks around and sees no one. He looks toward the cabin and sees a faint glow from inside. Quickly but fearfully he runs up to the door.

INT. CABIN MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

WE SEE the cabin is full of smoke and it's difficult to make out details due to it being dark inside, with only the light coming from the fireplace. WE HEAR liquid boiling over which then causes the fire to flare up intermittently. WE ALSO HEAR a lone dripping sound at first that gets drowned out by the sudden onrush of raindrops. The door knob frantically turns and Conr opens the door, rushing inside. He leaves the door open. Conr coughs from inhaling all the smoke. He looks around and sees the fireplace raging. He starts to feel around for the fire extinguisher. As he moves around he occasionally slips, almost falling at times. Finally finding the extinguisher, he sprays the fire out and fans the air to get rid of the smoke. As the smoke slowly starts clearing, Conr blindly looks for a lamp, again slipping on the floor. He then finds a lamp, lights it, and places it by the fireplace.

CONR
What is this? Are they cooking?

Conr takes the poker next to the fireplace and slowly pushes it into the cauldron to feel around. After a few tries he hooks something on the poker. He then withdraws it to take a look at what it is. At first he thinks it's some roundish piece of meat, like a roast, but then he turns it over and sees what looks like arteries... and then all of his fears swell up in his mind. That isn't what he thinks it is, is it? In a daze, Conr realizes too late that someone is

behind him and he hears a click. He turns toward the sound and WE HEAR a bang as his hand holding the poker explodes. The poker, covered in his blood, chimes sweetly as it hits the floor. Conr, clutching what's left of his wrist, falls screaming in agony. Writhing on the floor, he repeatedly is clubbed in the mouth by the gun butt, his teeth falling out onto the floor in a bloody puddle. He tries to speak but he chokes on his own blood filling up his mouth. He yells but can only make a gurgling sound. In extreme pain, Conr is stunned as his eyes fill with tears. He lifts his head up to stare at the figure standing over him. It's Fay, swathed in blood and gore. She has a wild, angry look in her eyes, the shotgun pointed directly at him.

FAY
You fucking asshole! You ruined everything! Why did you do that? What the fuck is wrong with you?

Conr spits out some blood and manages to speak.

CONR
Fay! What--

FAY
Everything was perfect but you had to fuck it all up didn't you? Right when it was going to fucking work too! It was gonna happen!

CONR
(panicking)
What was? What do you mean?

FAY
I'm talking about the world, you irresponsible shit! I was gonna save it and now because of you everything's pointless again. You asshole! I can't even count on my friends! Is the whole world just populated with shitty people?

Conr sees Fay is being just as manic as Justin was and tries to crawl away as she keeps talking. He flails and feels something slippery. He picks it up and sees that it's long and bloody. He throws it away. His mind races. That couldn't be what it was. This couldn't be happening. Conr screams. She kicks him in the face to quieten him. More smoke flies out the door and Conr can see more clearly. WE

SEE he is inside a broken circle made up of intestines. He vomits.

FAY
Yes, Conr. Turns out her heart was not the only thing that was useful.

Fay tosses the shotgun away, seemingly without a care, and grabs a lamp and lifts it to the ceiling. Instead of a lantern hanging from the chain, WE SEE Ally's body; the chain wrapped around her throat with the hook of the chain piercing both of her lips shut. Her eyelids ripped off, fully exposing her eyes forever staring. Her torso sloppily gutted and dripping. The bucket from underneath the sink being used to catch the blood. Conr screams.

FAY
Your screaming is distracting and annoying. Maybe that's why you kept so quiet all the time, because you knew how annoying you were. We all felt sorry for you, how inept you were at making friends. What a worthless little shit you are! What good are you to anyone being a scared, silent, little man? You couldn't even protect Ally. She had a lot more guts than you ever did. Here, I'll show you.

She puts down the lamp to grab some of Ally's viscera. She stands up over him, stepping on his remaining hand to keep it from moving; the intestines hanging down directly over his head. Conr, wide-eyed, struggles to move away but can't. Fay grips the intestine in a fist and she pulls it through, as if she's moving something through a tube. She gets to the end and points it at Conr. Feces start to spill out, covering his face. Conr shuts his eyes and mouth, still struggling to escape. Fay kneels down and grabs Conr's stump roughly, digging her nails into the wound. As Conr opens his mouth to scream, Fay, knowing Conr can't bite her since she smashed his teeth out, shoves some of Ally's shit into his mouth. Conr gags.

FAY
What's the problem, Conr? People always gave you shit and you were happy to take it before, so what's a little
(MORE)

FAY (CONT'D)
more now? Always giving in to others. Always afraid to express your opinions. Always afraid of confrontations. Such a coward you are! I don't know what Ally saw in you. How many times did you disappoint her? And now you do this! It was all working but then you had to show up. Well, now there needs to be another sacrifice.

Fay goes to the kitchen to get the same knife she used to butcher Ally with, now all bloody. Conr crawls to the poker and uses it as a crutch to stand up. Knife in hand and with a curiously relaxed stride, Fay walks back to Conr. As she gets near, Conr smashes her across the face with the poker. Fay turns away to recover. He loses his balance and falls to the floor, the poker bouncing away from him. Fay turns back to face him, blood trickling from where he struck her. She stalks him as he tries to crawl away. As he crawls, he bumps into the oil lamp she was using. Out of desperation, he grabs it and throws it at her. The lamp breaks on her head; the oil and flames exploding on her, him, and parts of the cabin. Fay runs to the fireplace and picks up the steaming cauldron. WE HEAR sizzling sounds, like fat being fried in a skillet. She pours the boiling water from the cauldron over her in an attempt to put out the fire. Conr, horrified and beating himself to put out the flames on his jacket, notices the gun. He grabs the gun, stands up, and shakily points it at Fay with his remaining hand. Fay, still on fire, covered in sores and burns, is calm as she steps in the circle of intestines. Once in the middle, she looks at him with disgust.

FAY
So presumptuous! How can a loser like you have such an ego to think you're the one?

Fay then takes the knife and stabs herself in the gut. Slowly she drags the knife through her stomach, reminding Conr of how samurais used to kill themselves. Dropping the knife, she takes both hands and reaches into the opening and starts pulling out her innards. Seeing Conr is still watching her, with a crazed smile she holds up her entrails as if she's won a prize. The fire then spreads outward to envelop more of the cabin. Conr runs outside gasping for air and nursing his arm.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CABIN - NIGHT

Outside Conr stumbles and sees more smoke coming from the cabin as the fire grows. He stares at it, uncomprehending. Hearing a scream, Conr turns around. He sees Justin running towards the cabin, bloody and naked. Conr catches him.

CONR
She's dead! They're both dead! There's nothing you can do!

Justin, not once looking at Conr, pushes him to break free and runs into the house. Conr falls to the ground, calling after him.

CONR
Justin! Justin!

Conr doesn't hear anything except the cabin still burning despite the torrent of rain. He breaks down and cries. This trip wasn't supposed to end up like this. Then he notices Justin exiting out of the cabin, his flesh melted and smoking. Conr can see that he's clutching the book tightly to him. Justin stops and opens the book. Just as it looks like he's about to read from it, he falls. Conr gets up and moves to Justin and sees that he is dead. He then notices the book right next to him. He picks it up, looks at it, and throws it inside the cabin to burn. Exhausted, he goes to the car and collapses inside.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CABIN - MORNING

It is daylight and the storm is over. Conr slowly sits up. He appears half-dead, his stump wrapped in a bloody makeshift bandage. He looks at the remains of the smoldering cabin. With a groan, he gets out of the car to examine it, armed with the shotgun. He limps around the ruins, watching the smoke still being expelled from its bones, searching for something. He stops when he sees Fay's corpse, burnt black with fire-cleansed bones sticking out. The cauldron is next to her, the only thing that seems to have made it out of the fire. He kicks the cauldron over out of anger and underneath is the book, completely undamaged. Out of shock, disbelief, and fear, Conr jumps back from it. How can this book still be intact? He stomps on the book. He yells at it. He aims the gun at it and pulls the trigger, but the shell doesn't fire. Using his knees to steady the gun, he opens it and WE SEE that the shell's primer has a five-pointed star-shaped dent. Out of desperation, he gets on his knees and opens the book. He

grabs some random pages and he tries to tear them out. Trying multiple times with fewer and fewer pages, he finds he can't even tear out a single page. He stares at the book, dumbfounded, not knowing what is real anymore. Exhausted, he slumps down and cries. After some time, Conr looks back down at the book again and his face changes, as if he's noticed something. He then picks up the book, takes in a deep breath and starts to read a passage aloud. A strong, sudden wind rises up as the remaining smoke from the cabin grows thicker around him until he's obscured.

CUT TO BLACK