

"G R O V E R S M I L L "

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. MERCER COUNTY FARMHOUSE - NIGHT (OCTOBER 30, 1938)

Autumn wind rattles dry corn. A clapboard farmhouse glows against black fields.

On the porch, a sagging jack-o'-lantern flickers.

A low, distant RUMBLE vibrates the night.

INT. FARMHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A PHILCO RADIO hums on a lace runner. Tubes glow amber.

ED (30s) cleans a shotgun with the calm of habit.

MARIE (30s) darns socks at a lamp-lit table.

ROSE (10) clings to her shoulder.

TOMMY (6) peeks from a quilt fort.

On the radio: Ramon Raquello and His Orchestra—light, civilized.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

We interrupt our program of dance
music for a special bulletin—
Astronomers report a flaming object
streaking toward central New Jersey
—

The WINDOWS TREMBLE. Plaster dust snowfalls.

ROSE

Mama?

MARIE

It's Halloween, Rosie. A radio
play. Actors pretending.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

—a cylindrical object has fallen
near a place called Grovers Mill—

The HOUSE JERKS. Lamps sway. The dog in the yard goes feral.

Ed's jaw tightens. He sets the shotgun down.

MARIE (pleading)

Ed, don't—

ED

I'll just have a look.

He kisses Marie's forehead, tousles the kids' hair, shrugs into his coat.

ED (to the room)
Lock up. And turn that nonsense off if it tries to frighten you.

He steps out.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Short corn stalks shiver.
Neighbors cluster at a fence line, whispering.

Beyond: a half-buried METALLIC CYLINDER steams-red, pulsing like a heart.

FIELD REPORTER (V.O., RADIO)
The top is unscrewing—you can hear it—

A long, metallic SCREECH twists the air.
A ring of red light. Something SHIFTS inside.

INT. FARMHOUSE - SAME

The family huddles around the radio.
Outside: a SCREAM, a SHOTGUN BLAST, then a WET, CHEWING SOUND.

Marie crushes the children to her.

MARIE (shaking)
It's a story. It's a story—

The radio SNAPS back to chipper Raquello, as if nothing happened.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - LATER

Smoke drifts across stubbled fields.
A crooked sign:

WELCOME TO GROVERS MILL

It CREAKS on rusty bolts. Like it breathes.

INT. CBS RADIO STUDIO - NIGHT (1938)

Hot lights, hanging microphones, cigarette haze.

ORSON WELLES (23), fever-bright, sits at the mic.

He sips tea, shakes SULFA TABLETS into his palm, downs them, coughs raggedly.

On his legal pad: "BETWEEN = HISS" — circled twice.

ASSISTANT (whispering)
Doctor said rest, Orson.

WELLES (hoarse, wry)
I'll rest when Mercury stops watching.

He leans in.

WELLES (into mic)
We interrupt our program of dance music for a special
bulletin—

Beneath the band: a faint, WET HISS.
Every fourth beat lands wrong, like a limp in the song.

Welles winces, scribbles: "Sulfa → salvation?" Coughs into a
handkerchief.

EXT. CORNFIELD - NIGHT (1938)

WELLES runs through short, patchy rows, recorder bouncing.
His GAS MASK fogs; he yanks at the strap.

Behind him: a LONG GREY TENTACLE scythes low, tasting the
air.

A QUEER HOOTING rises: one... two... three... steady as a
metronome.

Welles clamps his cough shut, choking, stumbles into—

INT./EXT. TOOL SHED - NIGHT

He crashes through the door—dust, rakes, a rusted SLED with
steel runners.

The tentacle lashes in. Welles grabs the sled and SLASHES—
the runner SEVERs the limb. Ichor sprays.

He reflex-coughs, tearing the mask off. Spittle dots the
alien flesh. It SIZZLES.
From the fog, a Martian SCREAM: "ULLA!"—a voice tumbling down
stairs.

WELLES (hoarse, stunned laugh)

You can't breathe us.

He staggers out, clutching the recorder like scripture—

—catching sight of a row of BLACK SEDANS at the fence line.
MEN IN HATS stand, immaculate, humming along to Raquello in perfect time.

WELLES (to them, desperate)
Call the Army—anyone—this isn't—

They smile politely. One offers a linen handkerchief.

MAN IN HAT #1
Sulfa every four hours. Warm tea.
Rest your voice, Mr. Welles.

Behind Welles: ULLA rips the night again.
The Hats do not flinch.

CUT SMASH TO:

INT. MALL BOOKSTORE - EVENING (PRESENT DAY)

Banner: "VAMP U 6: BLOOD MIDTERMS."
A cardboard cutout of glamorous ABIGAIL HARKER grins.

CARSON PALMER (40s), rumpled, signs books with dutiful misery.

Three GOTH TEENS hover.

TEEN #1
Where's Abigail?

CARSON
Inside me, like a tapeworm with opinions.

TEEN #2
So... she's fake?

CARSON
She's a brand. I'm the factory.

TEEN #3
Who writes the kissing?

CARSON
A committee of bats.

Laughter—phones up for selfies.

A BOOK CLUB MOM approaches with a stack.

MOM

We love how readable you are.

CARSON

"Readable" is my love language.

His PHONE BUZZES: MERCER COUNTY SHERIFF. He answers.

CARSON (listening, draining pale)

This is— I'm... yes.

(beat)

When?

He sets the pen down mid-signature. Packs fast.

STORE MANAGER

Uh—your craft talk?

CARSON

Craft tip: leave before the
audience realizes you're you.

He bolts.

INT. PALMER APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Bills. Dishes. A TV murmurs: "90 YEARS LATER — THE BROADCAST
THAT PANICKED AMERICA."

LILA (late 30s) at the laptop, practical and tired.

EMMA (15) sprawled with her phone, sharp and wry.

NOAH (9) draws a WATER TOWER WITH SPIDER LEGS.

Carson enters, still as a shock.

LILA

Sheriff?

CARSON

They found Dad.

(beat)

He used to say "Finish it" whenever
something was broken. Or bleeding.

EMMA

Finish what?

CARSON

Apparently... whatever we start.

NOAH (holds up drawing)

It hums so it doesn't wake up.

Carson flinches.

The TV shows a clip from the 1953 WAR OF THE WORLDS—wobbling saucers.

EMMA

You can see the strings. Still kind of cool.

NOAH

The people don't look scared right.

CARSON

They hired pretty, not scared.

TV HOST (V.O.)

The panic of 1938 was exaggerated—

CARSON (muttering)

Phone lines melted. Feet moved. "Exaggerated" is what you call a stampede after it's over.

Lila watches him more than the TV.

LILA

If you're already hearing it, we go now or never.

EMMA

And don't make Noah brave for you.

CARSON (soft)

Deal.

INT. BEDROOM - AFTER MIDNIGHT

Lila asleep. Carson sits on the edge, listening.

Outside, faint and wrong: a QUEER HOOTING carries over the city hum.

His phone BUZZES: UNKNOWN.

THIN VOICE (PHONE)

Finish it.

Click. Silence.

DREAM — INT. HALL OF RADIOS - NIGHT

Old radios stacked to the ceiling. All BREATHING.

A water tower with metal legs bows. Ramon Raquello plays.
Every FOURTH NOTE shifts into a HISS.

From the dark: the HOOTING. Closer. Louder.

A farmhouse door UNSCREWS like a lid.

A whisper threads the hum:

WHISPER
Don't breathe with it.

Carson gasps awake.

INT. LIVING ROOM - PRE-DAWN

Emma is awake under a blanket, watching him.

EMMA
You said "Finish it." And "Don't
breathe with it." Twice.

CARSON
Keep those on a post-it.

INT. APARTMENT - MORNING

Suitcases open. Piles of clothes.

LILA (packing)
We can't afford heroics.

CARSON
We can afford regret even less.

EMMA (to Carson)
And the Stephen King thing?

CARSON (CONT'D)
Which thing?

EMMA
Middle-aged writer goes back to the
small town with the monster under
it.

CARSON
I don't own enough sweaters.

EMMA (beat, sincere)
If this is nothing, we laugh. If it's something, we leave.

CARSON (CONT'D)
That's the outline.

EXT. TURNPIKE - DAY - MOVING

The SUV hums south.
A cassette of the 1938 broadcast plays softly.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
—a cylinder has fallen near Grovers
Mill—

NOAH
The trumpets sound like walking.

CARSON
Someone called last night. Said
"Finish it."

Emma studies him, a beat, then looks out the window.

EXT. SERVICE PLAZA - DUSK

A flickering neon sign. A bored CLERK slides peppermints
across.

CLERK
Headed south?

CARSON
Mercer County.

CLERK (mildly singsong, eerie)
Step on the line, you're theirs in time.

He blinks, normal again.

LILA (to Carson, tight)
We're driving around any lines.

EXT. TOWNSHIP LINE - NIGHT

Sign: WELCOME TO GROVERS MILL — Home of the 1938 Alien
Invasion!
Painted across the asphalt: a thick RED STRIPE.

The SUV rolls over—DASHBOARD DIES. PHONES GO DARK.

A FARMER on the shoulder hums Raquello in the cold.
Every fourth beat lands wrong.

All four Palmers wince, hands to temples.

EMMA
It's pressure. Inside.

CARSON (to himself)
In the music.

The engine coughs back to life. They roll on.

EXT. DINER - NIGHT

Steam fogs the windows. Neon flickers.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Checkered floors. Coffee and pie. The Palmers slide into a booth.

At the counter: AGNES and DOTTIE, two white-haired women
buttering toast, HUMMING.

AGNES (pleased)
New faces. Hospitality is owed.

LILA (pleasant, contained)
We're just passing through.

DOTTIE
Passing through's still a kind of
staying.

WAITRESS tops their coffee without blinking.

EMMA (low to Carson)
Everyone's tuned to the same station.

Agnes and Dottie tap their knives: one, two, three...
Emma refuses the fourth.

AGNES (smile wobbling)
Children should know their place in the measure.

The SHERIFF, BARLOW (50s), enters with a soft smile, baton
loose.

BARLOW
Evening. Hospitality, ladies.
(to Palmers)
Roads feel like choices until they
aren't.

CARSON
What are they after that?

BARLOW
Consequences.

He taps the baton on the tile. BOOM.
Conversations around the room settle into the wrong beat like iron filings.

DOTTIE (fond, to no one)
The elders hoot before they eat. It's beautiful when you know it's coming.

LILA (to Carson, controlled)
Check, please.

Barlow tips his hat as they leave, courteous to a fault.

EXT. MUSEUM STEPS / CHURCHYARD - MORNING

The War of the Worlds Museum faces a churchyard.
Kids jump-rope, humming Raquello. They never miss the wrong beat.

One kid stands apart: ANNA (10-11)-bright, off in tiny ways, eyes reflective.

She clocks NOAH'S sketchpad.

ANNA
Good legs.
(nods at his drawing)
The tower. You gave it legs. Smart.

NOAH
It hums so it doesn't wake up.

ANNA (secretive)
They say if it hums right, we won't have to anymore.

EMMA (gentle skepticism)
You from here?

ANNA
My grandparents heard the hiss in the corn. Said the air turned to needles.
When the elders hoot, it means supper's ready.
(soft, demonstrating)
Hoo... hoo... hoo.

Carson stiffens. Emma goes pale.

ANNA (matter-of-fact)
They don't smell. They think.
If you hear "Ulla," that means it hurts.

NOAH
Is "Ulla" a word?

ANNA
It's like falling down the stairs
with your voice.

A BLACK SEDAN glides past. Every kid winces, as if the
barometer dropped.

ANNA (hushed)
Shh. They listen with their mouths closed.

The sedan turns the corner. Pressure eases.

INT. WAR OF THE WORLDS MUSEUM - DAY

Glass cases: newspaper clippings; a row of antique radios; a
scale WATER TOWER MODEL whose bulb faintly PULSES.

A cheerful DOCENT materializes.

DOCENT
Welcome to Grovers Mill's proudest
story—
the broadcast that panicked
America.
A hoax, of course.
(smile tightens)
But myths are useful.

Carson drifts to a photo: RICHARD PALMER (his grandfather)
shakes hands with WELLES.

Under the glass, in pencil: KNIFE / MIRROR.

EMMA
What's "Knife/Mirror"?

DOCENT (still cheerful)
Shorthand. For what not to display.

Emma glances outside: ANNA watches through the window,
humming slightly off the beat.

The water tower bulb flickers in answer.

EXT. MUSEUM - MOMENTS LATER

Anna kicks a pebble along the curb.

ANNA

There's a cellar under the radio shop.
The bell on the door lies. If it lies, go under.

LILA

Why tell us?

ANNA

Because you didn't hum.
(nods to Noah's drawing)
And he gave it legs.

She tilts her head, listening to something only she hears.

ANNA (softly)

Don't breathe with it.

Emma locks eyes with Carson—same words from his dream.

INT. EVERETT'S RADIO & PHONOGRAPH - AFTERNOON

A door BELL chimes a beat late.
Rows of UNPLUGGED RADIOS gently HUM.

EVERETT (70s)—wiry, sharp—waits behind the counter like the Palmers were always coming.

EVERETT

Palmer boy. Took you long enough.

CARSON

You knew my father?

EVERETT

Everyone did.
Some listened.
Not all understood.

He drops a cracked acetate onto a turntable: Ramon Raquello swells.

Beneath the horns: the HISS—a wet, between-the-beats sound.

EMMA

That's not static.

EVERETT

That's the Between. The prayer with
teeth.

He slides over a weathered journal: RICHARD PALMER stamped on
the inside cover.

A scrawled page: "KNIFE cuts the mask. MIRROR holds the
face."

LILA

In English?

EVERETT

Mask's what it wears so you'll
shake its hand.
Knife separates mask from meat.
Mirror stops it wearing you.

He produces a battered cassette labeled: THE BETWEEN.

EVERETT (CONT'D)

Orson coughed Mirror by accident.
Your granddad tuned Knife on
purpose.
This?
Both. On one ugly ribbon.

He sets it in Carson's palm like a live coal.

EVERETT (CONT'D)

Don't play it unless you're ready
to finish what he started.
And if you start—don't stop.
Half a prayer is worse than none.

Through the front window: a BLACK SEDAN idles, then glides
away.

The bell chimes late again. Radios HUM a hair louder.

EVERETT (low, without looking)

Men in sedans. Hats. Never age. Always polite.
They didn't fight the Martians.
They made a deal.

CARSON

An accord.

EVERETT

Hospitality, they call it.
(smiles without humor)
You'll hear that word a lot.

EMMA (to Everett)

What's in the music?

EVERETT (CONT'D)

Leash. Litany. Lullaby.

Pick a hymn. It'll answer to any.

He points to the cassette again.

EVERETT (CONT'D)

Knife or Mirror. That's your hymn.

Carson closes his fingers around the cassette. It VIBRATES faintly—

or his pulse does.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

The Palmers step out of Everett's.

Across the way, the CHURCH doors stand open. Organ pipes glint.

From inside, barely audible: HUMMING—a gentle congregation of wrong beats.

Carson pockets the cassette like a grenade.

LILA (quiet)

We leave at first light.

EMMA

If it's nothing, we laugh.

If it's something—

CARSON (finishes)

—we leave.

They start down the sidewalk together.

Above them: the WATER TOWER against a pale sky, ordinary and benign.

Its red beacon blinks: one... two... three...
pause.

Somewhere in town, as if on cue, a few people HUM the wrong fourth beat.

HOLD on the tower's smooth, municipal skin.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. PALMER MOTEL - NIGHT

Printed sailboats. Thin walls. A buzzing neon sign leaks through blinds like a slow pulse.

Lila spreads maps; Emma watches Noah sketch; Carson palms the cassette THE BETWEEN.

LILA

If we stay, we die polite. If we
run, we die rude.
Pick a death.

EMMA

Or we don't die. That an option?

CARSON (to Emma, low)

If anything—anything—reaches under the door, hold your
breath.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Why?

CARSON

Because the air in you is yours.
Not theirs.

The bathroom fan dies. The TV clicks off. Every sound in the room seems to bow.

A LONG SHADOW slides under the door—curved, tasting the room.

Noah grabs Emma's hand. The shadow becomes a LONG GREY
TENTACLE, wet, patient. It taps the rug in a slow measure.

Tap... tap... tap...

One... two... three...

It waits for the fourth.

Emma clamps a hand over Noah's mouth. Lila pinches her nose; tears fill. Carson raises his phone, cues a barely-audible pure tone.

The tentacle quivers, drifts to the phone—then swivels toward a tear rolling off Noah's chin. It hovers, tracking the drop, then taps where it lands.

EMMA (lips barely moving)

It counts wet.

A distant QUEER HOOTING answers somewhere outside—one, two, three—metronomic.

The tentacle retracts like a tape measure. Silence crashes back in.

Four people breathe at once.

LILA (shaking)

We're done pretending doors are walls.

CARSON (CONT'D)

We move. Everett's cellar. Now.

EXT. BACK ALLEY / MAIN STREET - NIGHT

They slip into shadow. A BLACK SEDAN glides past an intersection and pauses, like it's listening for a wrong footstep. It rolls on.

Across the street, ANNA appears from the churchyard dark as if she grew out of it.

ANNA

They count the alleys. Curfew runs on four.

If you stop on three you don't belong.

EMMA

You want to not belong?

ANNA (small, fierce)

I don't want to belong to them.

An upstairs curtain lifts a hair—someone watching. Or something.

CARSON

Come on.

They move.

INT. EVERETT'S RADIO & PHONOGRAPH - NIGHT

The bell chimes late again. Radios hum under their breath.

EVERETT already has a lantern and a canvas bag on the counter.

EVERETT

You heard it under the door? Good.
Fewer surprises left.

He rolls back a rug; there's a trap door scratched with:

LUNGS → FILTER → PURGE

EVERETT (CONT'D)

Mind your heads. And your names.

He lifts the hatch.

INT. ROOT CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

Lantern light. Stone walls. Shelves of unplugged radios—all breathing almost the same.

ANNA drops last, light as a thought.

LILA (to Anna)

If we walk away, you're in every thank-you note I write.

ANNA (matter-of-fact)

Don't write it. Sing it wrong. That's thanks enough.

Above: a floorboard whines. Dust dances.

A TENTACLE threads down through a gap. Eyeless. Patient.

Radios auto-tune to its rhythm, like flies to a web.

Carson hovers a thumb over PLAY. Everett catches his wrist.

EVERETT (whisper)

Half a prayer's worse than none.

Emma raises her phone—another mirror-pure tone. The tentacle stills, curious. It darts for Noah's new tear and smashes a shelf instead; radios scream Raquello and die.

Carson presses PLAY.

THE BETWEEN floods the cellar—a fine, surgical braid of Knife and Mirror.

The tentacle shudders, slams stone; black mucus crystallizes red.

It withdraws into the dark.

Far off, something cries "ULLA."

NOAH (tiny)
Somebody else got hurt.

Everett edges a dial a hair sharper.

EVERETT (low)
That's Knife. Sharp enough to cut the mask.
Not so sharp you cut the face.

CARSON (rattled)
It asked me how hungry I am.

EVERETT
Don't let it be hungrier than you.

ANNA (listening inward)
They're gathering at the church.
He'll sing it pretty so no one hears the words.

EMMA
Who?

ANNA
Reverend Dunn. He sings like he's
three people tall.

A low HOOT rolls across the floorboards. The lantern flame wavers.

EVERETT (grim)
Time's up for hiding. Time for company.

FLASHBACK — INT. CBS BACK HALLWAY — NIGHT (1938)

Welles staggers, feverish. Two MEN IN HATS flank him, courteous.

They guide him into—

INT. WINDOWLESS ROOM — CONTINUOUS (1938)

A chair. A table. A PHILCO RADIO—unplugged—humming anyway.

MAN IN HAT #1 (pleasant)
We appreciate the broadcast, Mr. Welles.
It moved people.

WELLES (raw throat)
You heard what it was. You saw what it was.

MAN IN HAT #2
A test the public failed. Panic
isn't helpful.

He places a typed STATEMENT on the table: HOAX / PRANK /
DRAMA.

MAN IN HAT #1
Read this on air. Call it a
Halloween trick.

WELLES
And if I don't?

A calm smile.

MAN IN HAT #2
Then your friends at Mercury lose
their theater, your sponsors lose
their nerve, and your career loses
its air.
(beat)
Or-read, and we help you to
Hollywood.
We're very good at hospitality.

Welles swallows, eyes burning. He coughs; the radio flinches.

WELLES (hoarse)
Hospitality to whom?

MAN IN HAT #1
To the future.

Welles stares at the page. The radio hums into the wrong
beat.

He signs.

EXT. SIDE STREET / DINER ALLEY - NIGHT (PRESENT)

The Palmers and Anna slip past a glowing diner back door.

A teen BOY-TOMMY-steps from steam. Pale, jittery.

TOMMY
Don't go to the church.

EMMA
Why not?

TOMMY

That's where they count you out
loud.
If you don't hum right, you don't
belong.

BARLOW (O.S., mild)
Tommy.

Sheriff Barlow strolls in, baton loose, smile kind.

Tommy's jaw ripples under his skin.

TOMMY (defiant, shaking)
I'm not your son.

BARLOW (kindly)
You're everyone's son. That's what belonging means.

He plants the baton. BOOM. The alley's steam listens and
falls into rhythm.

Tommy bolts. Barlow tips his hat to the Palmers, still
pleasant, and goes.

ANNA (to Emma, small)
Sometimes I think I have a father, and then I remember the
choir.

INT. ABANDONED BARN - NIGHT

They duck inside a drafty barn—dust motes and bird nests.

Two figures step from the shadows, hands up—MARK (26) and
DANIEL (27), road-worn and scared.

MARK

Don't—don't freak out. We're just
lost.

DANIEL

We're also engaged. That's relevant
if you're a pastor or a monster.

LILA

We're neither.

EVERETT

You took a wrong turn that doesn't
let go easy.

MARK (to Carson)
He wanted an art crawl. I wanted cheesesteaks. Philly's compromise was this.

DANIEL (trying for a smile)
Waze said "Grovers Mill." Cute name. We thought cider. Then the car radio... it only played one song.

ANNA
They hum when they're pleased.
Sometimes I can't tell if I'm
pleased or they are.

LILA (gently)
You don't have to hum at all.

ANNA (a fact)
Sometimes the humming isn't in my mouth.

A HOOT rolls the rafters, patient as tide.

EVERETT
Orchard is where they feed. Rows
long, cover lies.
If someone screams "Ulla," you
don't look back. That's not a word
you answer.

NOAH (to Anna, whisper)
What's "Ulla" feel like?

ANNA
Like falling down stairs with your
voice.

Everett lifts the lantern.

EVERETT
Go.

EXT. ORCHARD EDGE - NIGHT

Pale trees. Woolly fog. The pressure in skulls tightens a notch.

EMMA (wincing)
They're talking without mouths.

EVERETT

Keep your thoughts dumb. Shoe
sizes. Old commercials. Something
without corners.

DANIEL (to himself)
Ten and a half. Wide. Orthotics.
(beat)
I'm going to die reciting my feet.

MARK (low, to Carson)
My dad stopped calling when we got engaged.
If you get out—tell him we danced anyway.

CARSON (soft)
If I get out, I'll write it exactly like that.

ANNA (fingers on soil, listening)
Far rows are counting up.
The hoot's their grace before meat.

EVERETT (CONT'D)

Down. No silhouettes. Watch the
wind, not the trees.

They crouch behind a low stone wall.

FLASHBACK — EXT. I-95 REST STOP — DAY (WEEKS AGO)

MARK and DANIEL in their hatchback, maps and snacks
everywhere. Golden, ordinary.

DANIEL (reading a text)
Dad says he'll come to the wedding "if you stop making it
political."

MARK (snorts, then soft)
You are my politics. In a good way.

Daniel kisses him over the console; they laugh like it's
easy.

DANIEL

Next time—Paris.

MARK

Next time—Grovers Mill cider.
(wink)
I'm kidding.

They pull out, still laughing.

ORCHARD FEEDING — BACK TO SCENE (NIGHT)

Two CAPTIVES stumble into view—a WOMAN and a TEEN BOY—bloody, frantic.

From fog: HYBRIDS glide—human/grey flesh glitching, forearms sprouting barbed tubing like hungry veins.

A low QUEER HOOTING swells—one... two... three... on the wrong beat.

A hybrid hooks the woman—tubing PIERCES beneath her jaw. Another catches the boy—tubes plunge into his throat.

Blood SURGES in violent pulses through clear lines into alien veins.
Hybrid skin stabilizes—human for a breath, then wrong again.

The woman's veins blacken. Eyes fill red.
Spray from ears and nose glasses in air—crimson beads harden to brittle dust.

EMMA (tears held)
They engineered the black smoke. Human-only.

EVERETT (hollow)
They made the plague... polite.

The boy tries to scream. What comes out is "ULLA!"—a voice tumbling down stairs.

Noah squeezes his eyes shut; Anna stares, jaw set, hating herself and not blinking.

ANNA (flat, knowledge she despises)
They don't smell. They taste motion.
The hoot is so no one misses the pulse.

She closes her eyes once. When they open, they're a little more human.

ANNA (to herself)
I won't sing this.

A hybrid turns toward their wall, tubing unfurling like snakes.

Everett flashes two fingers: breathe on two.

Carson counts silently. The hybrid hovers inches away—then pivots back, distracted by another ULLA.

DANIEL (whisper, wet eyes)
Marry me again. Every day. Say yes every day.

MARK (squeezing his hand)
Yes. Yes.
(beat)
I should've picked Paris.

DANIEL (crooked smile)
I should've picked better sneakers.

Feeding ends. The captives collapse.
Hybrids hum Raquello like grace after supper, then glide away.

Silence. Not relief. A lack.

Anna's hands tremble. Lila takes one, squeezes.

LILA
You're not them.

ANNA (barely)
I don't know what I am if I'm not a song.

Everett clears his throat, too loud in the quiet.

EVERETT
We go. Before they decide we're
dessert.

EXT. BACK STREETS - PRE-DAWN

Town lit but emptied. A BLACK SEDAN idles as if it's a
confession booth.
Pressure spikes; it waits for a fourth beat that never comes;
it glides on.

ANNA
Everyone's walking to the church.
He'll sing it pretty so no one
hears the words.

They follow the drift.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

Pews packed. Faces serene. Candlelight and stained glass.

The ORGAN groans one long unresolved note.

At the pulpit: REVEREND DUNN—collar straight, eyes bright.
When he speaks, three harmonics ride his voice like a secret choir.

DUNN

No one would have believed, in the
last years of the nineteenth
century,
that this world was being watched—
keenly and closely—by intelligences
greater than man's...

A murmur of humming threads the nave—Ramon Raquello, wrong beat.

DUNN (CONT'D)

We, in our complacency, went about
our little affairs...
while minds measured our breath.

(rapture)

When ninety-five in a hundred withered in their machines, we
called it plague.
They called it baptism.

Two MEN IN HATS slip in at the back, benevolent, notebooks
open.
Pressure ticks up.

DUNN (CONT'D)

Then came Hospitality. Black
sedans. Soft hats.
They said: Let us keep you. Let us
count you.
Let us build a tower that hums, so
you may sleep.

Carson freezes; Emma notices. Anna looks at the floor, jaw
clenched.

DUNN (CONT'D)

An accord: a colony for a choir.
We would be their lungs, when lungs
were knives.
We would be their mirror, when
faces were masks.

His timbre blossoms—pretty, frightening.

DUNN (CONT'D)

And so we learned the hoot.
We learned the measure.

(MORE)

DUNN (CONT'D)
We learned the blessing that tastes
like metal.

(soft)
Long ago, a fevered young man coughed on a monster and made
it mortal.
This is our hope and our warning:
that we are poison—and we are cure.

Carson's breath catches. Welles.

Dunn's gaze finds him like he felt the thought.

DUNN (CONT'D)
Now we will keep the song. We will
hold the note.
We will be counted—and we will
belong.

He lifts his hands. The congregation hums louder—some with
smoke-burned faces smiling through blood cracks, some clean
and entranced.

BARLOW stands at the aisle, tapping baton—BOOM—keeping time.

The MEN IN HATS close their eyes; their mouths don't move;
the hum gets truer.

EMMA (harsh whisper to Carson)
They think they're chosen.
They're livestock with a songbook.

EVERETT (low)
Chosen and livestock aren't opposites here.

ANNA (eyes wet, furious at herself)
I can hum louder than all of them.
(beat)
I won't.

Dunn's smile becomes something like love and like hunger.

DUNN (CONT'D)
Hospitality remains. Forgiveness
remains.
We forgive much—

He looks right at Carson.

DUNN (gentle)
—We forgive all.
(then, a benediction that sounds like a blade)
And when the time is right... we will draw our plans against
them.

The organ's off-note resolves into a chord that makes the nave two degrees colder.

The congregation exhales in pleasure. Someone sobs like they've been saved.

Barlow plants the baton—BOOM—and the hum locks into a march.

Everett touches the cassette in Carson's pocket like a trigger.

EVERETT (sub-audible)
Knife, not club.

Carson nods, white-knuckled.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. CHURCH STEPS / STREET - MORNING

Congregants spill out like a pleasant tide.
Banners flutter: COMMUNITY BROADCAST — 100TH ANNIVERSARY.

A BLACK HELICOPTER hangs overhead, unmarked and silent.

BARLOW appears beside the Palmers like a maître d'.

BARLOW
Road up the hill is open. That's
where we keep our view.

LILA (smile without teeth)
We like our views ground-level.

BARLOW (same warm smile)
You will change your mind. We are excellent hosts.

He taps his baton. BOOM. Heads turn toward the hill as though tugged by an invisible thread.

EVERETT (to Carson, sotto)
We'll need the horn, the ribbon, and a place to stand.
Not yet. Not till it breathes for itself.

EMMA
"What" breathes?

Everett doesn't answer. Anna stares up the slope, jaw tight.

ANNA (listening inward)

They're tired. Tired makes them brave.
 (beat)
 Or hungry.

CARSON
 Which one's worse?

ANNA (decides)
 Hungry.

They move with the crowd.

EXT. WATER TOWER HILL - PRE-DAWN

Fog clings to grass. The town gathers in gentle ranks,
 humming Ramon Raquello—every fourth beat wrong.

The BLACK HELICOPTER hovers above, lights off, wind chopping
 the fog.
 Two MEN IN HATS take notes with quiet delight.

BARLOW plants his baton in the soil. BOOM.
 The humming locks tighter.

REVEREND DUNN steps to the fore, arms wide.

DUNN (three harmonics riding his words)
 Witness mercy perfected.

The WATER TOWER looms above: municipal, benign, flecked with
 peeling paint.
 Its red beacon blinks one... two... three... pause.

Emma shivers.

EMMA
 That's not a light. It's a
 metronome.

EVERETT (grim)
 Heartbeat.

DUNN
 Hospitality gave us the song.
 We give them our lungs.
 We give them our mirrors.
 We give them ourselves.

He gestures to a local—YOUNG MAN—in his Sunday best.
 The man steps into a drifting SILVER VAPOR venting from the
 tower's base.

He inhales. At once his VEINS BLACKEN.
 Blood jets from nose, ears, mouth—hardens mid-air to crimson
 glass dust.
 He collapses—black-veined, frozen.

The congregation HUMS louder—rapture and terror married.

EMMA (reeling)
 They designed plague. Human-only.

EVERETT
 Hybrids breathe it like spring air.

DUNN (tender, to the crowd)
 A sacrament against sentimentality.
 A test of belonging.

From the fog: the tower SHUDDERS.
 Bolts pop like knuckles. Rivets ping into grass.

EVERETT (to Carson)
 Wait. Let it own the air.

EXT. HILLTOP CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

The MEN IN HATS stand at the perimeter.
 The helicopter hovers, a black star.

The tower's tank distends, unfolding in slow, obscene grace.
 STEEL LEGS tear free from poured footers.
 Cables snap taut like tendons.
 Paint plates slough off, revealing bone-bright alloy beneath.

The LAST TRIPOD rises out of its disguise.

People cheer. Others pray. Many just hum.

LILA (a breath, barely voice)
 We stop it or we leave forever.

EVERETT (steady)
 Knife, not club. Nick the seam. Don't cleave the choir.

He swings the field horn to face the machine.
 Carson pulls the battered cassette THE BETWEEN.

DUNN (to Everett, cordial)
 Mr. Everett, you are welcome to belong.

EVERETT (pleasant)
 I'm impolite by nature, Reverend.

DUNN (loving smile)
Hospitality forgives much.

BARLOW (to the crowd, genial)
Make room.

The tripod vents more SILVERY VAPOR.
A WOMAN—eager—steps in; Lila takes a step as if to stop her;
Everett grips her arm.

EVERETT (low)
Not yet.

EXT. HILL - FIELD RIG - CONTINUOUS

Everett drops a needle on a turntable—Ramon Raquello blooms.
Beneath it: the HISS—wet, between the beats—magnified.

The tripod's head TWISTS toward the sound.
Townsfolk sway, smiling.

CARSON
It's their leash.

EVERETT
And their lullaby.

Carson yanks Raquello. Silence knifes the air.

He slams in THE BETWEEN.

A thin, surgical MIRROR TONE laces the fog.
Down the hill, the RED STRIPE across the road flares WHITE—as
if startled awake.

The congregation staggers; a few faces ripple, bones slipping
sideways, then snapping back.

The tripod BUCKLES—one leg PILES the grass.

DUNN (voice blooming to three perfect notes)
Belong!
(softer, dangerous)
Belong.

BARLOW drags his baton—BOOM—trying to re-lock the tempo.

The MEN IN HATS hum without moving their mouths.
Their perfect pitch fights the Mirror tone like a smile
fights a knife.

EVERETT (to Carson)
Sharper. A hair.

Carson adjusts the dial-notch by notch.
The Mirror finds a seam in the machine's voice.

The tripod emits a SCREA—
—no, a CHORD, raw and intelligent, that throws birds out of
the trees.

ANNA (clutching Noah, whisper)
It's counting backwards. It's angry polite.

NOAH (to Anna)
You can sing louder than it, right?

Anna stares at the machine, then at Dunn, then at the
gathered faces.

ANNA (a vow)
I can sing wrong.

She opens her mouth and hums a single note just off the
town's beat—pure and disobedient.
Two pew-grandmas near her waver, eyes clearing as if a dream
sloughed off.

DUNN (a lash under velvet)
Child.

Anna hums louder, tears on her cheeks, off-tempo on purpose.

EVERETT (eyes flick to her, awed)
Good girl.

The Mirror tone threads with Anna's defiance, becoming
something like a human key.

The tripod LOWERS ITS HEAD as if listening.
Its red beacon blinks: one... two... three...
The town's instinct answers the missing fourth—

CARSON (shouting)
Don't give it four!

Half the crowd chokes off the beat in mid-breath. The other
half sings it.
The air beats against itself, a war of time signatures.

MAN IN HAT #1 (calling, pleasant)
Mr. Palmer—your father kept the note true for years.
You can, too.

CARSON (shouts back)

My father apologized for you in his sleep.

The Hat smiles, takes a note.

EXT. HILL - CHAOS

The tripod swings a leg. Parked cars crumple. Windows explode.
A school bus alarm wails, off-tempo, annoying the machine.

The tripod vents SILVER VAPOR in a wide arc.
Some townsfolk step in almost happily— freeze into black-veined statues as red dust floats around them like bitter confetti.
Others keep humming, blood streaming in lace along their cheeks, still smiling.

LILA (to Dunn, fury clipping each word)
You call this mercy?

DUNN (beaming, tears bright)
It is a mercy to be useful.

Lila lunges; Carson hauls her back; Everett keeps the tone steady, jaw clenched.

EVERETT (to Carson, urgent)
Knife, not club. Don't tear it—shape it.

Carson feather-twists the knob. The Mirror focuses—thread pulled taut.

The tripod STILLs for a beat. Something inside it listens.

EMMA (to Carson)
It hears you.

CARSON (to the machine, absurd and sincere)
Sleep.
(then)
Sleep somewhere else.

The head tilts—almost a bow.

BARLOW (soft)
Hospitable. To a point.

He steps toward the rig, baton lifting.

Everett shifts his footing, keeping the dial steady with his whole body.

EVERETT (to Carson, low)
You take them. Cross the stripe. Don't stop if they ask.

CARSON
Come with us.

EVERETT (a small smile, eyes on the dial)
I rang this bell. I'll see who answers.

Dunn raises a hand toward the Palmers, benediction-shaped.

DUNN
We forgive all.

LILA (backing away, to Dunn)
We remember more.

Anna grips Noah's hand; Emma takes Carson's sleeve. They RUN.

Barlow watches them go, human-pleasant.

BARLOW (calling)
If you come back before dusk, the view is something to behold.

EXT. SLOPE / TOWN ROAD - CONTINUOUS

They pound downhill with the flow of panicked stragglers.
A BLACK SEDAN glides sideways to block the road; its windows never roll down.

Anna hauls them through scrub to avoid it.

EMMA (panting)
You sure about this path?

ANNA
It's not a path. That's why it's safe.

They burst onto the RED STRIPE—now faintly WHITE, lit from within.

CARSON
Do not stop.

They CROSS.

Immediately: PHONES LIGHT UP. DASHBOARDS CHIME.
The pressure in their skulls lifts like a weight taken off a chest.

Behind them, Dunn's voice rolls down the hill—gentle, terrifying.

DUNN (O.S.)
Hospitality remains. We forgive
much.

LILA (turns, shouting back)
We don't.

The words seem to hit Dunn like a thrown stone.
He smiles anyway, wider.

Anna sways, almost turns back; Emma steadies her.

EMMA (to Anna)
You're with us. Pick our wrong note.

Anna nods, breathing hard.

EXT. HILLTOP - SAME

Everett stands alone with the horn. The Mirror tone sings,
delicate as glass.

The tripod steps closer, cautiously, head dipped—an animal
arrested by music.

The MEN IN HATS hum perfect Raquello—counterpoint to Everett—
the air tears in shimmering standing waves.

Everett dials one hair sharper. Not rage—surgery.

The tripod's leg FLEXES; rivets drop like hail; plates curl
back from living metal.

For a breath, the machine bows.

Everett laughs once, amazed and broken.

Fog rolls in, swallowing him, the horn, the dial.

(We do not see what happens next.)

EXT. TURNPIKE - DAY

The SUV eats northbound miles. Everyone is wrecked quiet.

NOAH (small)
Are we safe?

LILA
We're away.

EMMA (staring out the window)
Safe and away aren't the same.

Carson drives, white-knuckled. The cassette BETWEEN sits in the cup holder like a live coal.

CARSON
When I was a kid here, I dreamt the
radio was a mouth in the wall.
Maybe it was a door.

EMMA
What's on the other side?

CARSON
Us. If we don't get lazy.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Carson buys a spiral notebook and a white Bic.

CASHIER
You a writer?

CARSON (decides)
Yeah.
(then)
Science fiction.

He pays. The cashier hums one, two, three without knowing it.
Carson doesn't give him four.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Family asleep. Carson writes longhand.

Emma pads over, reads from his shoulder.

CARSON (V.O., writing)
No one would have believed, in the quiet century after the
broadcast,
a small town sang the same song to keep a god in plain sight.

EMMA

Don't make it a joke. Don't make us
dumb.

CARSON (meets her look)
I won't.

She nods, returns to bed. Carson keeps writing.

He reaches into his bag, pulls a cassette recorder—old,
stubborn.
He clicks PLAY.

FLASHBACK / TAPE — INT. CBS STUDIO — NIGHT (1938)

WELLES (ON TAPE, hoarse, steady)
Ladies and gentlemen... I am required to say I frightened you
on purpose.
I am required to say it was a prank, a Halloween card.

(pause; a smile we can hear)
I hope you forgive me when I confess: I was reporting.
And I hope you forgive me when I confess: you saved me.
You—your breath, your sickness, your stubborn, ordinary
bacteria—
made monsters mortal.
Keep being human. Keep making each other sick in all the
small ways that mean you touched.
And if a choir ever asks you for your lungs—
sing wrong.

The tape ends on a faint, wet HISS.

Carson sits in the quiet. Then writes faster.

TAGS — VARIOUS

— A little girl jump-ropes, humming Raquello; she never
misses the wrong beat—until she stops and grins because she
chose to.
— TOMMY, jittery teen, hums the mirror note beneath his
breath. A streetlight flickers and obeys him.
— REVEREND DUNN brushes black flakes off his sleeve, looks
skyward, listening with love and calculation.
— The museum's unplugged radio glows faintly; its placard
tilts toward 100TH ANNIVERSARY — COMMUNITY BROADCAST.
— Inside the tripod's drained tank, a tiny pilot light
blinks: one... two... three... pause... reply.
— Low orbit: nothing. Then a thin answer whispers back— a
hiss you can almost see.

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Sodium lamps buzz. Cold air. Carson stands with the notebook, testing the air like checking for gas.

CARSON (V.O.)
And when the time is right, they
will draw their plans against us.
But if we keep the note true... we'll
hear them coming.

He listens. Silence— not peace, just waiting.

Then— the faintest wet HISS between highway hum and light buzz.

Carson doesn't run. He writes. He goes back inside to his sleeping family.
The door shuts soft. The night keeps breathing.

FADE OUT.