

BLACK DAMP

written by

Carla Robinson

(horror)

Carla Robinson
(323) 466-5532
cmrobin@earthlink.net

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FADE IN:

INT. MINE SHAFT

An empty mining rail car rolls along narrow-gauge tracks. The light on the rail car picks up bits of reflected rock and limestone along the glossy sides of the mine walls.

The rail car turns a corner and passes an --

ENTOMBED FACE in the wall, covered in limestone.

The face opens its eyes, drops open its mouth and --

SCREAMS.

INT. HAYNES BEDROOM - MORNING

A clock radio marks 5:00 AM and clicks on with "*Ooh, you make me live,*" from the Queen classic "*You're My Best Friend.*"

JOHN HAYNES, 30, kicks awake under his bedsheets.

JOHN

Dorrie.

John's wife, DORRIE HAYNES, 30, stirs. Reaches over and hits the button on the radio. It's quiet again.

DORRIE

I'm up.

She lies on her back, beside John. They're both exhausted.

JOHN

I'll make the coffee.
(glancing at her)
Unless you want to.

DORRIE

Hm?

JOHN

It's just that I made it yesterday. And the day before. I thought you might say, "relax, peach pit, I'll make the coffee. It's my turn."

DORRIE

Peach pit?

JOHN
It's a nickname. It's sweet.

DORRIE
It's the part of a peach you throw
away.

JOHN
I guess I'm making the coffee.

John sits up, but Dorrie holds onto his arm.

DORRIE
You know, we have ten minutes.

JOHN
Yeah?
(gets her meaning)
Oh.

Dorrie peels the bedsheets away and pulls John onto her.

DORRIE
I'm just thinking there are better
ways to wake up.

John kisses Dorrie, using his mouth along her neck and chest.

JOHN
You mean -- like this?

John entwines his legs with Dorrie. They roll over as one,
and now Dorrie's on top as they begin to make love.

JOHN (cont'd)
And this?

DORRIE
You catch on fast... peach pit.

John comes up for air, frowning.

JOHN
You're right about "peach pit."
It's a terrible nickname.

DORRIE
I think you may wanna get used to
it for awhile.

But the snooze alarm resumes with: *"Ooh, you make me live..."*

Dorrie reaches over and hits the alarm. They're both up.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - MORNING

The sun is rising, and soft light filters over green hills and the long, winding road that stretches through them.

INT. JOHN'S PICK-UP TRUCK - MORNING

John drives, but shivers as Dorrie cranks down the passenger side window and takes a deep breath of the morning air.

JOHN

It's kind of chilly out.

DORRIE

It's fresh air, John. Only fresh air I'm gonna get today.

John glances at her. He purses his lips with concern.

EXT. STETSON MINING COMPANY - DAY

A sign reads "Stetson Mining Company."

John and Dorrie park in a lot among other cars and trucks. They exit and walk to a row of trailers -- headquarters for the mining operation. They interlock fingers for a moment, then move apart -- each heading to separate trailers.

INT. MINERS' LOCKER ROOM - DAY

A team of ten COAL MINERS prepare for a shift. They zip up their coveralls, pull on steel-toed boots, and strap on packs heavy with tools, flashlights, and assorted gear.

A supervisor, GRAHAM, 40's, pops open the door.

GRAHAM

Got a quick meet with engineering before you head out.

A cocky, good-looking miner, ZEKE, 30's, snickers --

ZEKE

Another meeting. Hey, Graham -- are they gonna warn us how coal mining's bad for our health?

Graham and the miners share a chuckle.

GRAHAM

Tanner's up there today, too.

ZEKE

A mine boss shows up every anniversary. That ain't nothing new.

A nervous miner named PABLO, 18, faces BIG BILL, late 30's, African-American, huge in frame, but composed in manner.

PABLO

What anniversary?

Big Bill shakes his head, doesn't want to answer.

ZEKE

(continuing)

And they all give me that "look," cause they know I'm the only one who was here when it happened.

PABLO

When what happened?

BIG BILL

There was an accident in the mine. A methane explosion. Five years ago. Five years ago today.

PABLO

Someone died?

A veteran miner, MARLON, 40's, nods --

MARLON

Everyone died.

ZEKE

Almost everyone.

PABLO

How come you not die?

ZEKE

Just lucky, I guess.

The miners head for the door, and exit.

INT. MINING COMPANY MEETING ROOM - DAY

Zeke, Pablo, Big Bill, Marlon, and the miners gather as Graham tacks a large map of the mine on the wall.

A mine boss, TANNER, 50's, stands by, quiet.

John Haynes, in a button-downed shirt with rolled-up sleeves, uses a pointer to show them passages on the map.

JOHN

Engineers have okayed the Tolliver connecting shaft. Right here, on the Stetson line. It's a clean pass. Rail cars move directly from the coal face to the lift.

ZEKE

That's a deep drop. Did our shift foreman sign off on this?

Dorrie enters, dressed in her coal miner gear.

DORRIE

I did.

(grinning)

We have to go to the coal, Zeke. It's not gonna come to us.

John smiles at Dorrie. His coal miner wife.

EXT. STETSON MINING COMPANY - DAY

Dorrie, Zeke, Pablo, Big Bill, Marlon, and the other miners heft their gear into the back of a flatbed truck.

Another flatbed truck arrives with a team of miners, just off a shift. The miners are filthy with coal dust. They hop out with their gear. They walk by Pablo, making no eye contact.

PABLO

They don't even say hello?

The returning miners walk to and pause by a --

BRONZE MONUMENT

Depicting the engraved faces and names of five coal miners. On the bottom of the monument is a plaque which reads:

"With Us Forever, in Mind, Body, and Soul."

The miners move on, and Pablo walks to the monument.

Big Bill joins him. They look at the five engraved faces.

BIG BILL

These were the five miners we lost
in the accident.

Zeke sneaks up and taps Pablo on the back. Scaring him.

PABLO

Aahh!

ZEKE

Shit, you scare easy.

BIG BILL

Back off, will you, Zeke? I'm
trying to put the man at ease.

ZEKE

By showing him a bunch of dead
miners? Well done, Big Bill. I
know I feel all warm and cozy.

PABLO

He's got a point. I don't feel no
better.

Dorrie and Marlon approach the monument.

DORRIE

It's not their job to make us feel
better. But it's our job to
remember them. And the thousands
who came before them.

PABLO

You know any of these dead ones?

MARLON

(touches the monument)
I knew this one. Pat Carmichael.

PABLO

How you know him?

MARLON

He was my father.

Big Bill pats Marlon on the back. It's a moment.

DORRIE
 They're family to all of us.
 (mantra-like)
 Coal miners carry equal weight --
 cause we carry one another.

Dorrie touches the engraved face of the only woman miner.

DORRIE (cont'd)
 See her? Name's Darlene Hansen.
 She was the first woman to operate
 a continuous miner three thousand
 feet underground. Hell, she was
 the first woman to work this mine.

ZEKE
 First woman to die here, too.

Pablo notices that on the plaque, under each miner's name is
 a chain that bears the miner's brass identification tags.

PABLO
 Seems wrong to let their tags just
 hang out here like this.

ZEKE
 That's the drill, man. Every miner
 puts his brass on the board before
 he goes into the mine. And that's
 where they stay until he comes out.

DORRIE
 It's how the above-ground foreman
 keeps track of who's up and who's
 down.

Pablo fingers the chain and tags he wears around his neck.

PABLO
 I just think when a miner comes
 out, even if he comes out dead, he
 should get his tags back. If it
 were me, I'd want to be buried with
 my tags.

The miners exchange uneasy glances.

ZEKE
 Well, I'm gonna tell him since none
 of you will.

Zeke indicates the miners on the monument.

ZEKE (cont'd)

These five miners... they never came out of the mine. They're still down there. Somewhere.

(with emphasis)

And every day, you and I, and the rest of the Stetson Mining Company are walking on their graves.

From the flatbed truck, a HORN BLOWS and everyone JUMPS.

The DRIVER calls out --

DRIVER

Haynes team! Let's go!

The miners head for the truck. Pablo pauses, eyeing the monument, then heads for the truck. As he moves --

The faces on the monument seem to watch him walk away.

AT A WORK TRAILER

John exits, holding a wand-like device, and calls out --

JOHN

Hang on a minute. Dorrie! I forgot something.

John gives Dorrie a hand-held gas detector.

DORRIE

(grinning)

The Titan 185 Methane Monitor. I didn't know it was out.

JOHN

It's the prototype. The actual model won't be out till next year.

DORRIE

We'll take it for a test drive.

Zeke joins them, grinning at the device.

ZEKE

I like it. Sleep with someone in the engineering office, and you get all kinds of fancy gadgets.

Dorrie grabs Zeke and pushes him against the truck.

DORRIE

Do you have something to say to me?

John moves in, but gives Dorrie her space.

ZEKE

I just --

Zeke yelps. Dorrie's knee is planted in his groin.

JOHN

Just what, Zeke? My wife asked you a question. Do you have something to say to my wife?

Dorrie cocks her brow, waiting for a reply.

ZEKE

(in pain)

No ma'am.

JOHN

No, huh. But I bet you'd like your balls back. Wouldn't you, Zeke?

ZEKE

(in pain)

I would.

JOHN

You'll have to ask Dorrie.

ZEKE

(in pain)

Dorrie? May I please have my balls back?

DORRIE

Since you asked so nicely.

Dorrie drops her knee and Zeke doubles over, trudging away.

She moves in front of John, and faces him directly.

DORRIE (cont'd)

See, John? I can take care of myself. So don't worry about me.

JOHN

(indicates her team)

Should I worry about them?

Dorrie smirks at him.

EXT. MINE SHAFT - DAY

At the dusty mine entrance, WORKERS operate load-out silos that dump newly mined coal into train cars. The train cars, overflowing with coal and spewing dust, move along a track.

The flatbed truck arrives. Dorrie, Zeke, Pablo, Big Bill, Marlon, and the miners exit and go to a --

TALLY BOARD.

The above-ground foreman, an older man named ROSS, orders --

ROSS

All miners! Brass around your neck
and brass on the board.

The miners hang one set of identification tags on the tally board, and secure a chain with the tags around their necks.

Big Bill moves beside Pablo. The young miner flinches at the board, unable to hang his tags beside the others.

PABLO

Big Bill? I lied on the sign-up
sheet. This is my first coal mine.

BIG BILL

We know.

PABLO

Everyone knows?

BIG BILL

Everyone has a first time.

Pablo smiles, relieved. He hangs his brass on the board.

Dorrie gathers her team and takes a quick inventory.

DORRIE

Okay, guys. Helmets on.

The miners turn on their battery-operated helmet lights.

DORRIE (cont'd)

Self-rescuer, back-up and tool kit.

The miners check their equipment, as they move to the --

SHAFT ELEVATOR.

ROSS
Lift's a bit rough today.

The team boards the elevator. It's like a rickety cage.

ZEKE
That means hold on tight. It's
gonna be a bumpy night.

BIG BILL
And a tight squeeze.

ZEKE
I imagine anything for you is a
tight squeeze.

BIG BILL
How 'bout I just sit on you and be
done with it?

Ross pulls the shaft elevator door shut.

INT. SHAFT ELEVATOR - DAY

Dorrie, Zeke, Pablo, Big Bill, Marlon, and the miners jostle
as the rickety elevator cage lowers into the dark mine shaft.

ZEKE
(singing)
*Daddy said don't ever be a miner /
For a miner's grave is all you'll
ever own...*

Big Bill grabs Zeke by the neck. The cage rattles.

BIG BILL
Zeke! Sing a different song!

Zeke grins despite Big Bill's hand around his neck.

ZEKE
Got any requests?

DORRIE
Just one. Shut the fuck up.

The elevator hits the pit bottom with a jolt. Dorrie slides
the door open, and watches her team of miners file out.

DORRIE (cont'd)
(rolling her eyes)
Boys.

INT. MINE TUNNEL

A dim LIGHT approaches, followed by a SQUEAL of the narrow-gauge train tracks as the mining rail car rolls forward.

Dorrie, Zeke, Pablo, Big Bill, Marlon, and the miners are solemn as they ride the rail car through the dark tunnel.

Pablo looks around, and sees a flash of LIGHT on the wall.

PABLO
What was that?

DORRIE
Where?

PABLO
A light. Back there. Flickering.

Pablo waits for an answer, but the miners barely react.

PABLO (cont'd)
We got lamps down here, right? For maintenance. I'm just saying, someone must've left one on.

ZEKE
I hear the mine boss himself comes down here to flip on a night light. He knows how a lot of us miners are secretly afraid of the dark.

The miners chuckle. Even Dorrie. Pablo sighs, relaxing.

PABLO
You laugh at me, but I saw a light.

DORRIE
Coal seam's been sliced and diced. The rail light picks up tiny pieces of metal. Even flecks of gold.

PABLO
There's gold down here?

ZEKE
Uh-oh. Only thing more dangerous than a novice miner is a novice miner with gold fever.

Dorrie puts her hand on Pablo's shoulder to center him.

DORRIE
 We're mining coal here, Pablo.
 With giant crushers and breakers.
 Don't go getting distracted by
 anything shiny.

PABLO
 No ma'am.

DORRIE
 Dorrie.

PABLO
 Dorrie. Boss.

The rail car nears the end of the tunnel, when --

TWISTED HUMAN-LIKE SHAPES

Hang from the ceiling, and watch the rail car roll away.

INT. MINE SHAFT - COAL SEAM

Huge fans WHIR as a machine called a continuous miner tears pieces of the coal seam wall to shreds.

Zeke and Big Bill are among the miners who guide the rocks from the cutting heads -- onto a belt conveyor system.

The conveyor belt leads to Dorrie, Pablo, and Marlon, who load the rocks onto a shuttle car. Dorrie wipes a filthy sleeve against her mouth and sees --

The new methane detector is flashing a warning light RED.

DORRIE
 Hold up! Check your masks. Now.

The miners check their self-rescuers. They flash GREEN.

ZEKE
 We're okay.

Dorrie shows them the new detector.

DORRIE
 This says we're not.

ZEKE
 (sarcastic)
 The Titan 185?

DORRIE

Yeah, Zeke. Damn it. This monitor is supposed to be state of the art. A cut above the old equipment.

ZEKE

They said the same thing about Windows Vista.

Big Bill takes the methane detector and waves it around. The light keeps flashing red. He returns it to Dorrie.

BIG BILL

I hope your husband kept the receipt. Cause according to the Titan 185 -- we're already dead.

The miners chuckle, but Dorrie frowns, concerned over the reading. She singles out a group of five miners --

DORRIE

Ned, Lance, Howard, and the twins. I want you guys on the northern face. Over by the lift.

The five miners nod and move in a separate direction.

ZEKE

You just cut our team in half.

DORRIE

Good, Zeke. You can count.
(explaining)
If we split up, we can work both ends, and meet in the middle.

ZEKE

Won't get done any faster.

DORRIE

It'll give us more room.

As the chosen five miners disappear into the shaft, a --

TALL SHADOW

Crosses behind them.

Dorrie does a double-take at the shadow, then looks again at the methane monitor, no longer flashing at all. She knocks it against her knee, then tosses it aside.

INT. MINE PIT FLOOR

It's their "lunch room." The ceiling here is ten feet high. A few lamps hang in alcoves and light up the area. A tackle box of food and several thermoses are on the floor.

Dorrie, Zeke, Pablo, Big Bill, and Marlon eat lunch. They sit on the dirt floor with their backs to the circular walls of rock. Zeke offers half a sandwich to Pablo.

ZEKE

Trade you for the chimichanga.

PABLO

Whatcha got?

ZEKE

Turkey and swiss.

Pablo shrugs "sure" and they trade food. Marlon nudges Dorrie, indicating Zeke and Pablo.

MARLON

Nice to see them getting along.

Zeke takes a bite of the chimichanga. And cringes.

ZEKE

Ugh! This tastes like dog shit!

PABLO

My mother made those chimichangas.
She's a lousy cook.

As Zeke scowls -- the walls of the mine CRUMBLE around them.

DORRIE

Everyone up!

The miners spring to their feet. They hold still as bits of dirt and rock rain from the mine ceiling onto them.

THE RAIL CAR

Squeaks and starts rolling away -- back toward the tunnel.

BIG BILL

The rail car. Brakes must be shot.

DORRIE

Alright, Bill -- you and Marlon.
Grab our ride. But step lightly.

As Big Bill and Marlon pursue the rail car --

PABLO
 Sorry about the chimichanga, man.
 Do you want your sandwich back?

ZEKE
 We'll settle up later.

They hear a WHISTLING sound and the earth begins to SHAKE.
 The mine ceiling splits and large stones fall in a huge --
 CAVE IN

Dorrie pins herself to one wall, as the rocks fall fast.

Pablo pushes Zeke to the other wall, as a massive rock drops
 and nearly kills him. Zeke breathes heavily, beside Pablo.

ZEKE (cont'd)
 Forget settling up. We're even.

Zeke and Pablo are separated from Dorrie by a wall of rock.

DORRIE (O.S.)
 Are you guys alright!?

ZEKE
 Yeah!

DORRIE (O.S.)
 Pablo? Talk to me!

PABLO
 Hey, Boss!

On the other side of the ceiling-high pile of rocks --

DORRIE

Presses herself to the wall, and takes a deep breath.

DORRIE
 We've got oxygen. So let's not
 panic!

Dorrie fumbles to grab her walkie-talkie.

DORRIE (cont'd)
 (to herself)
 Don't panic.

As Dorrie breathes, the walls behind her "contort" to her form, as if inhaling and exhaling along with her.

DORRIE (cont'd)
 (into her walkie)
 Bill! Marlon! Damn it, tell me
 you're there!

BIG BILL (O.S.)
 (over the walkie)
 Where else would we be?

Dorrie yelps with glee. Her team's alive.

INT. MINE TUNNEL - INTERCUT

Big Bill and Dorrie talk over the walkie-talkies.

BIG BILL
 The kid okay?

DORRIE
 We're all okay. But the pit's
 unstable. Can you and Marlon get
 to station five?

Marlon shines his flashlight. There's nothing but dirt and rock ahead of him, blocking one end of the tunnel.

BIG BILL
 Negative, Dorrie. Station five
 ain't there no more.

DORRIE
 Then we'll find another passage!

But Dorrie sinks. This is the worst possible news.

INT. MINE SHAFT

Zeke and Pablo are huddled together.

PABLO
 Think they know about us up top?

ZEKE
 They will soon enough.

PABLO
 And they'll come and get us.

ZEKE
 (forcing it)
 Yeah.

INT. MINING COMPANY OFFICE - DAY

John stomps his foot, finishes a call on speaker phone.

JOHN
 (on phone)
 Immediate rescue. We have ten
 miners trapped in a major collapse
 along the Stetson-Tolliver line.

Graham races in, waving a surveyor's map.

GRAHAM
 Five of them got out!

John looks at him, expectantly.

GRAHAM (cont'd)
 But not Dorrie. I'm sorry, John.
 She's one of the five still down.

JOHN
 What do we know?

GRAHAM
 The foreman says that based on the
 hour, they would've been at lunch.
 (points on the map)
 That means this end of the shaft.
 We've got men there now, dropping
 sensors and a microphone.

John slams his fist on the desk.

JOHN
 I examined every inch of Tolliver.
 I never would've sent them down
 there if it wasn't safe.

GRAHAM
 I know that. Dorrie knows that.

JOHN
 Then, goddamnit, why?

GRAHAM
 It's coal mining, John. Bad things
 happen.

INT. MINE SHAFT

Zeke and Pablo take turns swinging a pickaxe at the upper section of the rock pile that separates them from Dorrie. Zeke jumps away from Pablo -- ducking his head.

ZEKE

Whoa. Watch where you swing that thing, Lizzie Borden. You nearly gave me a shave.

PABLO

Who's Lizzie Borden?

ZEKE

She was this church lady about a hundred years ago who got naked one day and chopped her mom and dad to death with an axe.

PABLO

I knew a girl like that in Guadalajara.

On the other side of the rock wall --

DORRIE

Chuckles. Then coughs. A violent cough. She rests her head on the wall, flutters her eyes, and sees in the distance --

A coal miner's glowing helmet light.

DORRIE

Who is that?

The image fades, and Dorrie hears --

ZEKE (O.S.)

Who do you think?

Dorrie focuses, as a huge piece of flat rock is pried aside.

ZEKE AND PABLO

Peer at her from the other side. Dorrie sighs, relieved.

DORRIE

So, Pablo. Your first coal mine. How do you like it so far?

Pablo forces a pained grin.

INT. MINE TUNNEL

Big Bill and Marlon move along the rail tracks, when the tunnel SHUDDERS and they hear a WHISTLING sound.

BIG BILL
Oh, shit.

Big Bill and Marlon barely exchange a glance, when the ceiling of dirt and rock falls hard on top of them.

EXT. STETSON MINING COMPANY - DAY

Rescue vehicles swarm on the gravel lot. Teams of RESCUE WORKERS converge and meet John and Graham.

RESCUE WORKER
We got a confirmed contact. Two taps on the number six pipe. Two taps every few minutes.

GRAHAM
Two taps means two are alive.

JOHN
Maybe not. It could mean two miners are in that section. Pipe six. That's in the tunnel.

The mine boss Tanner approaches. He's grim.

TANNER
I just got conflicting information. Engineering reports the Tolliver tunnel has collapsed.

JOHN
What do you mean "engineering?"
I'm engineering.

TANNER
You're also family to one of the miners, John. We haven't begun to notify the families yet.

JOHN
No. No, Tanner. They're not dead. Goddamnit, they're not dead!

GRAHAM
He's not saying that.

JOHN

He's a fuckin' mine boss! Not a miner. And not an engineer.

John grabs the surveyor maps and puts them in Tanner's face.

JOHN (cont'd)

There are air pockets all along both Stetson and Tolliver. That's a lot of breathing room.

John moves to the rescue worker who had good news.

JOHN (cont'd)

When was the last contact?

RESCUE WORKER

About twenty minutes ago.

JOHN

They're probably moving between stations. If we go now, we can meet them at the next one.

John grabs the rescue worker, and they run to his vehicle.

When John's out of earshot, Graham takes Tanner aside.

GRAHAM

What do you have?

TANNER

The tunnel collapse was massive. It triggered the Richter Scale. And there's been no contact since.

Graham drops his head.

INT. MINE SHAFT

Zeke and Pablo have Dorrie by the arms, coaxing her over to their side of the rock pile. But it's too tight a fit.

They hear a WHISTLING sound and grow wary --

DORRIE

We're in trouble.

The wall collapses and dirt begins to flood Dorrie's side.

ZEKE

Close your eyes!

Zeke grabs his drill cutter, and fires it up. Dorrie sees the drill inches from her head. She nods and turns away.

Zeke cuts the rock, shredding it until the opening widens. Zeke and Pablo pull Dorrie over the rocks toward their side.

A PAIR OF ARMS

Emerge from the dirt and grab Dorrie. She feels the "grab" and kicks it away as she plummets into Zeke and Pablo.

DORRIE
Something grabbed me!

Dorrie stumbles to stand, as the other side of the shaft fills fast with dirt, sealing it shut.

DORRIE (cont'd)
Did you see it? Something fucking grabbed me!

ZEKE
It was me and Pablo. And seems to me it was just in time.

Pablo pats the new wall of dirt.

PABLO
Like you say, Boss.
(reciting it)
Miners carry equal weight -- cause we carry one another.

Dorrie's uneasy. She brushes herself off.

EXT. AUXILIARY MINE SHAFT - DAY

John and Graham meet up with rescue workers at a barricaded mine shaft opening in a desolate, dirt field.

RESCUE WORKER
Radar and global positioning estimate the highest ceilings at this mark. If the miners escaped the initial collapse, they could end up here.

JOHN
I want two thirty inch drills -- a thousand meters apart.

The rescue workers start to assemble equipment for a dig.

John and Graham move to a splintered, wooden barricade.

GRAHAM

This shaft has been closed since
the last accident.

JOHN

But the old miners moved a lot of
coal before they closed it. And
the groundwater here is depleted,
so elevation is on our side.

GRAHAM

I'm glad something is.

A sedan arrives, and the mine boss, Tanner, exits. He has a
report in his hand and approaches John and Graham.

JOHN

What's that?

TANNER

An air quality report.

Graham takes the report from Tanner and frowns at it.

GRAHAM

Black damp.

TANNER

This shaft is full of it. The only
air down there -- is poison.

JOHN

Then we'll pump in some clean air.
We'll do it whatever it takes.

(grabbing him)

But we're not giving up on them,
you weasel-faced son of a bitch!

Graham pulls John off of Tanner.

GRAHAM

John! Tanner already got the
pumps! We'll be moving air any
second.

Tanner brushes himself off, and gets in John's face --

TANNER

You don't know me, Mr. Haynes.

Tanner eyes John, and walks away.

INT. MINE SHAFT

Dorrie, Zeke, and Pablo crawl on their bellies, breathing hard, along a two foot high crevice. They wear self-rescuer masks, and the glow of their helmet lights shine eerily.

Zeke stops them. He sees something on the side of the wall.

DIRT SWIRLS

In a circular motion, as if being sucked into a drain.

ZEKE

Hey... you know what that is? It's
an opening.

Zeke reaches for his fire iron and pokes the wall. The dirt crumbles away, revealing a narrow space. Zeke and Dorrie exchange a hopeful glance and move toward the narrow opening.

Zeke and Dorrie plummet into --

INT. MINE PIT FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

It's another open space, much like the lunch area. Zeke and Dorrie stand, and look toward the opening for Pablo.

DORRIE

Pablo. C'mon. Get out of there.

Pablo grips the edges of the wall to pull himself forward.

PABLO

Here I come.

Pablo grabs at the wall, loosening clumps of dirt, and a --

MUMMIFIED CORPSE

Falls loose and stares back at him, embedded in the wall.

PABLO (cont'd)

Aaah!!!

The corpse swings forward, blocking Pablo.

DORRIE

Pull him out!

Zeke and Dorrie grab Pablo's arms and yank him out.

Zeke glances at the corpse.

ZEKE

Who the fuck are you?

The corpse stares back, a ghastly image of mottled skin on a brown skull, with yellowed teeth and empty eye sockets.

Dorrie reaches for the I.D. tags around its neck.

DORRIE

Pat Carmichael.

(realizing)

Oh, God. It's Marlon's father.

Zeke's eyes widen with surprise.

ZEKE

I was on this crew. We never made it to this end of the mine.

(to the corpse)

Damn, Pat. How the hell did you get here?

Dorrie finds a SERVICE PIPE marked fifteen.

DORRIE

How did we? Pipe fifteen. We're miles away.

Dorrie uses her iron to strike the pipe three times.

EXT. AUXILIARY MINE SHAFT - DAY

Rescue workers drill in two spots and pump air until a loud SQUEAL stops one group cold.

John hurries over.

JOHN

What happened?

RESCUE WORKER

The drill bit. It broke off.

John sinks. This is bad news. He toughens, then --

JOHN

Second drill's up. Extract the vent and get this one running.

The rescue workers offer a futile nod and grab their tools.

EXT. STETSON MINING COMPANY - DAY

Reporters race around and sound trucks vie for position.

Mine officials move in and out of trailers, with grim stares.

One REPORTER speaks on camera:

REPORTER

Officials at the Stetson Mine are saying very little, but we can report that a massive cave-in occurred early this morning in a connecting shaft. We are told that five miners remain trapped, and that rescue efforts are underway.

Cars pull up, as distraught FAMILY MEMBERS begin to arrive.

Graham stands by the work trailers, and directs them inside.

INT. MINING COMPANY MEETING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Graham addresses the family members of the trapped miners. Tanner and some mine officials stand by quietly.

GRAHAM

We're confident our air pumps will extend the miners' chance of survival, but we haven't yet been able to pinpoint their location.

A woman, LOUISE, 40's, introduces herself.

LOUISE

I'm Louise Whitlock. Bill's wife. Big Bill. My husband needs medication. He didn't say anything because he was afraid of losing his job -- but he needs his pills.

GRAHAM

Write down whatever he needs, and we'll get it to the medics.

Zeke's father, ELI, stands, drinking a beer, skeptical.

ELI

You say you don't know where they are. So you don't even know if you're drilling in the right place.

GRAHAM

No, sir. We can't be sure.

ELI

My son's Ezekiel Harris. He's a boozier, a gambler, and a smart-ass, but he's the toughest piece of work on wheels. He got out last time. Only one who did. If there's a way out of the ground, he'll find it.

Eli slumps into his chair and takes a drink.

Pablo's mom, ROSARIO, sits with his brother RAUL, 15.

Marlon's spacy wife JENNY, 40's, approaches.

JENNY

Is it alright if I sit here?

ROSARIO

Of course. I'm Rosario, this is Raul. My son's in the mine.

Jenny smiles oddly at them.

JENNY

Do you think he passed peacefully?

ROSARIO

(horrified)

What are you saying?

JENNY

This mine. Five years ago, my husband lost his father down there. Now I've lost him.

ROSARIO

Please. Don't take our hope.

JENNY

I'm sorry. It's just that I... I have psychic ability. And I could feel Marlon this morning. I could feel him leave me.

ROSARIO

Yeah? Well, I think that psychic crap -- is crap.

Jenny just stares, a head-case.

INT. MINE SHAFT

Dorrie, Zeke, and Pablo move into a wider end of the shaft.

Dorrie's on her walkie-talkie, getting nowhere.

DORRIE
(on her walkie)
Bill. Marlon. Come in.

Zeke puts his hand over hers. Over the walkie.

ZEKE
It's okay.

Dorrie pulls the walkie away from him.

DORRIE
We don't know anything, Zeke!

Zeke leads her a few steps, and shines a light on the floor.

RAIL CAR TRACKS

Lead into what looks like a solid wall of dirt.

ZEKE
That's the tunnel. That's what's
left of it. And we do know that
Big Bill and Marlon would've been
coming from that direction.

Dorrie slaps Zeke. He takes it. She swings again, and this time he catches her hand and pushes her against the wall.

ZEKE (cont'd)
You wanna play the tough guy,
Dorrie, you'd better play it now.

A PENKNIFE

Appears at Zeke's neck. Pablo holds it there.

PABLO
Take your hands off of her.

Zeke steps back, and glances at Pablo. He chuckles.

ZEKE
Well, didn't you grow up fast.

Dorrie pushes Zeke away, and moves on. Her team follows.

EXT. STETSON MINING COMPANY - SUNSET

The outdoor lights come on. Reporters and their trucks stay in place in the gravel parking lot.

AT THE BRONZE MONUMENT

John approaches Pablo's brother Raul, staring at the engraved faces of the miners.

JOHN
Pablo's brother. Raul, right?
(on his nod)
I'm John. Your brother works with
my wife.

RAUL
Your wife's a coal miner?

JOHN
Took me some getting used to, too.

Raul indicates the dead miners on the monument.

RAUL
The lady on the news said the
miners are gonna die. Just like
these people died. From something
called black damp.

JOHN
I believe the miners are alive.

RAUL
What's black damp?

JOHN
It's bad air. The kind of air you
get deep inside a coal mine. It
doesn't have a lot of oxygen in it,
so it's hard for people to breathe.

RAUL
Or just hard for normal people.

JOHN
What do you mean?

RAUL
Coal miners live underground.
Maybe they learned some way to
breathe the air down there.

JOHN
 (patting his back)
 Thanks, Raul.

RAUL
 For what?

JOHN
 For reminding me that we're not
 dealing with ordinary people.
 We're dealing with coal miners.

John puts his hand on Raul's shoulder and walks him away.

As they move, the faces on the monument seem to follow them.

INT. MINE SHAFT

Dorrie, Zeke, and Pablo move along on hands and knees. They wear self-rescuer masks, but drop their heads, growing weak.

Dorrie removes her mask. She inhales. As she exhales, she hears the sound of BREATHING. As if the walls are breathing.

EXT. AUXILIARY MINE SHAFT - MORNING

Exhausted rescue workers gather by the drilling sites. One worker taps an exposed pipe that bores into the ground. He gets silence in return. He frowns and shakes his head to people in the crowd -- including Graham and Tanner.

John arrives as a large ambulance wagon pulls up and parks. Two MEDICS exit, open the back end, and unload something. John walks over to them to see what they're unloading.

Five body bags lie on the ground. Waiting.

JOHN
 Body bags. Put 'em back in the
 bus.

MEDIC
 It's just a precaution, sir.

JOHN
 Put 'em back in the bus or the two
 of you are going in them!

The medics start to pick up the body bags, when --

THE GROUND SHAKES.