

Coy Dog
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COY DOG

FADE IN:

A BLACK LIFELESS DEER EYE

The SOUND of GNASHING and GNAWING.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

A PACK OF COYOTE SNAP and SNARL as they feast on a bloated deer carcass.

A pair of COYOTE tug of war with intestines.

The ROAR of a DIESEL ENGINE spooks all but a few.

The SLAM of TRUCK DOORS chases away the rest, save a RUNT, that devours in desperation.

DALTON GRAVES, 30s, has a build for manual labor, but his moisturized hands and oxfords give him away, a visible scar on his temple. He tip toes towards the carnage.

A LOUD WHISTLE, FOREMAN BUCK, 40s, a barrel of a man, marches forward.

Runt scurries towards a stack of reinforced concrete pipes.

Foreman Buck spits tobacco as he surveys the gruesome scene.

FOREMAN BUCK
Fuckin' coydogs.

DALTON
You mean coyote?

FOREMAN BUCK
Coyote mate with strays. Their
mutts ain't afraid of man.

Dalton follows Buck as they navigate their way across a--

CONSTRUCTION SITE

The earth has been tilled and leveled. Stacks of rebar. A massive construction crane waits to be operated. Beyond the site is forest as far as the eyes can see.

FOREMAN BUCK
I'll have my guys haul the carcass.

Foreman Buck plows his way towards the stack of concrete pipes. Dalton skitters over the piles of dirt.

DALTON

The coyote actually breed with dogs?

FOREMAN BUCK

Not like chihuahuas, they'd eat them fuckers.

DALTON

You learn something everyday.

FOREMAN BUCK

We're ready to pour the slab as soon as you get those permits.

DALTON

What's the timeline?

FOREMAN BUCK

You get that permit--

DALTON

I'll get it signed.

FOREMAN BUCK

We'll have the slab down in five weeks.

DALTON

Could you make it four?

They inspect the reinforced concrete tubes. The coyote Runt growls and bares its fangs.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Hey. Whoa. What the hell?

Buck has drawn a pistol and takes aim at the Runt.

FOREMAN BUCK

They're fuckin' pests.

DALTON

We've got enough heat. Let's keep it to a single carcass removal.

FOREMAN BUCK

You're the boss.

Buck chuckles and kicks the concrete tube.

FOREMAN BUCK (CONT'D)

Go on. Get!

The Runt bolts and beelines towards the trees.

FOREMAN BUCK (CONT'D)

It'll be five weeks. Maybe six.

DALTON

Is there a porta potty?

Buck points at the woods. Dalton sighs.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Dalton treads out of sight. Double checks his surroundings, nothing but the trees. He unzips and relieves himself.

A whisper? Or the wind? Branches crack. Dalton goes on high alert. He spots--

The ALPHA COYOTE, visibly larger than the prior coyote. It watches him from the brush.

DALTON

See something you like?

The coyote just stares. Dalton hastens to zip back up, hurries back towards the construction site.

The Alpha coyote watches him go.

INT. FOREMAN BUCK'S SILVERADO (MOVING) - DAY

GRAVEL CRUNCHES under tires. The Silverado rolls away from the construction site towards an unseen highway.

Dalton rides shotgun. He's positioned awkwardly to avoid a tool box on the floor, this cab normally seats one.

DALTON

Do you have any Purell?

Buck thumps the wheel with his thumbs to some unheard melody.

FOREMAN BUCK

Any what?

DALTON

Rubbing alcohol.

FOREMAN BUCK

Glovebox.

Dalton extracts a bottle of something that looks like it's intended to strip varnish. He gingerly applies some.

DALTON

Thanks for bringing me across the line.

FOREMAN BUCK

You betcha.

The Silverado rounds a bend in the path towards a--

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD / INT. FOREMAN BUCK'S SILVERADO

A GROUP OF PROTESTERS block the path. A row of parked cars off to the side.

They hold signs that read: 'Protect the Aspens', 'No More Malls', 'Preserve our Forests' etc.

Buck taps the HORN. Dalton shrinks to hide his face.

The Protesters inch out of the way. The mass envelops the Silverado as it crawls forward.

Dalton glances the sea of angry faces. He's drawn to--

GAIA, 20s, Native American, a tattoo of a massive tree visible on her back. She leads a chant in a megaphone:

GAIA

Save the aspens.
Save our planet.
We don't want your mall, damn it!

FOREMAN BUCK (O.S.)

Gawd-damn, I wouldn't mind a piece of that.

Dalton regards Buck with a tinge of disgust.

A PROTESTER slaps the hood of the Silverado as it rolls past.

FOREMAN BUCK (CONT'D)

Scratch my truck and I'll bury you!

DALTON

Do you need to be so confrontational?

FOREMAN BUCK
 Shit man, they're confrontin' me.
 I'm just defending what's mine.

A PROTESTOR smacks the Silverado with a sign. Buck cracks open his door.

FOREMAN BUCK (CONT'D)
 You make me step outta this truck,
 you'll regret it!

DALTON
 Could you at least stay in the
 truck, please?

FOREMAN BUCK
 Ain't no reason to be afraid of
 these treehuggers.

DALTON
 I just don't want to end up on the
 evening news.

Buck chuckles and WAILS ON THE HORN.

INT. FANCY HOTEL RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A CHAMPAGNE CORK POPS. Bubbles erupt from the bottle. Two flutes are filled.

A WAITRESS, 20s, hands one to Dalton, the other to--

MR. YATES, 60s, reeks of old money. He winks at the Waitress, she forces a smile, moves onto her next table.

DALTON
 To Aspen Grove Center, and the
 ample opportunities it shall afford
 this struggling community.

MR. YATES
 To making fuck tons of money.

DALTON
 There's that too.

Dalton chuckles. They clink and drink.

DALTON (CONT'D)
 The slab will be done in five
 weeks, I talked them down from six.

MR. YATES

And the CGP requirements? How'd you get the EPA off our ass?

DALTON

A portion of the land, the park, shall serve as a preserve for local wildlife.

MR. YATES

Wildlife? I don't want any racoons or--

DALTON

It'll just be designated for birds and squirrels. And a donation.

MR. YATES

How much?

DALTON

Fifteen.

MR. YATES

That's it? Ms. Chow knew what she was talking about when she recommended you.

Something catches Dalton's eye--

Gaia, she's changed into an evening dress but her earth tattoo's still plainly visible. She saunters towards the bar.

Mr. Yates cranes his neck to observe.

MR. YATES (CONT'D)

A friend?

DALTON

More like the opposition.

MR. YATES

Aren't all women?

Dalton finishes off his champagne, refills his flute.

MR. YATES (CONT'D)

But men like us conquer our adversaries, don't we?

DALTON

I prefer persuasion to combat.

MR. YATES
Any path to victory.

Mr. Yates empties the champagne bottle.

MR. YATES (CONT'D)
Now, where's that cute waitress?

EXT. FANCY RESTAURANT PATIO - NIGHT

String lights illuminate the space. The dark countryside looms in the background. Gaia sips a margarita as she listens to distant COYOTES HOWL.

DALTON (O.S.)
Those are actual Coydogs.

Dalton leans on the railing.

GAIA
That's an urban legend. Coydogs don't survive in the wild.

DALTON
Really?

GAIA
When coyote mate, they form a strong parental pair. But dogs don't stick around so the pups die.

Dalton gulps his drink.

DALTON
You know a lot about coyote.

GAIA
In Native culture there are many myths about Coyote.

DALTON
About the animal?

GAIA
More of a trickster god figure.

DALTON
Did you grow up on these stories?

GAIA
I took an anthropology class in college.

Gaia gazes back out at the darkness.

DALTON

I enjoyed your chant. Though to be fair, they're not building a mall. It's more of an office, retail and residential center.

GAIA

You were at the protest?

DALTON

I was. Have to save the trees.

GAIA

Not just trees, aspens.

DALTON

Aren't aspens trees?

GAIA

You were at the protest and you don't know about aspens?

DALTON

Enlighten me.

Gaia scoffs and looks back out at the darkness.

DALTON (CONT'D)

That's quite the tattoo.

Gaia regards Dalton with a mixture of annoyance and charm.

GAIA

You don't give up, do you?

DALTON

(offering hand)
Dalton.

GAIA

Gaia.

DALTON

Like the goddess of life?

GAIA

Yes.

DALTON

I'm going to buy you a drink in exchange for your favorite myth about Coyote.

Dalton motions for the Waitress.

LATER

The two sit at a table. Empty glasses between them.

GAIA

It was a time before death. The world was becoming overpopulated, so the tribes decided people should die, but after some time would return, that way people could visit their lost loved ones. Coyote, loving no one, argued that the dead should never return.

Dalton flags for two more drinks.

DALTON

Why would he do that?

GAIA

Perhaps he felt for life to be precious it must be finite. Or maybe he was just cruel. Either way, when it came time for the first dead human to return to a prepared magical hut, Coyote snuck up and slammed the door shut, thus creating permanent death.

DALTON

Is he always such a jerk?

GAIA

Mostly a chaotic figure. A cautionary tale for children not to behave like beasts.

DALTON

Well, that was fascinating.

GAIA

What about you? What's your story?

DALTON

I'm just a guy that gets things done.

GAIA

What kind of things?

DALTON
Anything that needs done.

GAIA
That sounds ominous.

DALTON
I prefer resolute.

The Waitress drops off another round of drinks. Gaia raises her glass.

GAIA
To getting things done.

They both take a chug from their drinks.

DALTON
So what am I missing about aspens?

GAIA
Redwoods live what, a thousand years? That's nothing. An individual aspen tree only lives a couple hundred years, but a grove is actually a single organism. It clones itself. They're clearing out ninety percent of a grove that's at least fifty thousand years old, maybe older, for another fucking mall, excuse me, office, retail, residential center.

DALTON
That's awful. But it'll regrow?

GAIA
Maybe. Maybe not. How would you fare if someone removed ninety percent of you?

Dalton chugs the rest of his drink. Flags the Waitress.

DALTON
Let's do a shot.
(to Waitress)
Two tequilas.

GAIA
I don't know...

DALTON
I might know a way to stop construction.

GAIA
You're not talking about blowing
something up?

DALTON
No. I know a thing or two about
land development.

The Waitress drops off the shots. Dalton picks up his, but
Gaia leaves hers untouched.

GAIA
You think you could help?

DALTON
Maybe. I can make sure they
satisfied the CGP requirements with
the EPA.

Gaia raises her shot glass. They throw back the shots.

Gaia traces her fingers along Dalton's forearm, up his
shoulder, finally to the scar on his temple.

DALTON (CONT'D)
I got it falling out of an oak
tree.

GAIA
I know...

A beat of intense eye contact. Dalton perplexes. But then:

GAIA (CONT'D)
Something that needs *done*.

INT. FANCY HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Dalton and Gaia mid coitus.

Wild.

Animalistic.

Their moans crescendo.

Dalton rolls off her as they catch their breath.

GAIA
Wow.

DALTON
Yeah.

Gaia leaps out of bed, vanishes into the bathroom. The SINK RUNS on the other side of the door.

Dalton's mood shifts, he springs out of bed and pulls on his boxers. There's a large scar on his abdomen.

Dalton yanks his pants off the floor, unnoticed, a golden ring fall from a pocket and rolls over to the bathroom door.

Gaia returns, steps on and then picks up the ring.

GAIA
What is this?

Dalton snatches the ring and slides it on.

GAIA (CONT'D)
You're married?
(off his shrug)
You're disgusting.

DALTON
Yeah.

GAIA
I suppose you don't have any
intention of actually helping stop
the land development.

DALTON
(pulls on his shirt)
Funny thing about that.

INT. FANCY HOTEL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Gaia heaves Dalton's oxford shoes at him from her room.

DALTON
I need my phone.

Dalton ducks as Gaia hurls his phone, it smashes against the wall.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Jesus! Gaia, look, I--

Gaia SLAMS her door shut. Onlookers peek at Dalton through cracked doors.

Dalton collects his phone with a sigh.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - NIGHT

The lights of a BMW illuminate the tilled terrain.

The BMW cuts the lights, shuts off. An expanse of stars and the moon above.

Dalton climbs out of the vehicle, plops down on the hood and twists open a bottle of whiskey. Chugs.

Dalton pulls out his

CELL PHONE

Through the cracked screen is a photograph of--

BEATRICE GRAVES, 30s, a calm, professional woman with a powerful gaze, affectionately embraces a small child, MAX GRAVES, 3.

The PHONE BEEPS, LOW BATTERY.

DALTON fumbles with his phone. Holds it up to his ear. An older lady answers.

DALTON'S MOM (V.O.)
(over phone)
Hello?

DALTON
Hey.

DALTON'S MOM (V.O.)
Dalton? Is everything okay?

DALTON
It's fine. I just wanted to talk to him.

DALTON'S MOM (V.O.)
It's almost midnight.

DALTON
Can you wake him?

DALTON'S MOM (V.O.)
He asks about you every day. You know I love looking after him, but he needs his dad.

DALTON
I have to go.

Dalton ends the call. Takes a long pull from the whiskey.
Dalton makes another call.

BEATRICE (V.O.)
(over phone)
It's Beatrice, I'm not able to
answer. If you're spam, shove off.
Otherwise, leave a message.

DALTON
Bea. I...

Note: Pronounced 'Bee'.

Dalton listens to the silence for a beat and then ends the
call.

Dalton pulls off his wedding ring, hesitates and then flings
it into the darkness. Immediate regret.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Shit.

MOMENTS LATER

Dalton searches the field using his phone as a flashlight.
Needle in a haystack.

COYOTES HOWL nearby.

Dalton scans the edge of the forest, the light from his phone
incapable of penetrating the gloom.

Dalton flinches. Yellow eyes stares at him from the darkness.

Dalton aims his light at the eyes, the silhouette of a large
coyote.

DALTON
Boo!

The coyote steps forward.

Dalton yells and flails his arms.

The coyote just blinks.

The light on Dalton's phone cuts off. A DEAD BATTERY BEEP.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Shit.

A blanket of darkness. An adjustment period to the glow of moonlight.

Dalton peers into the darkness towards the tree-line.

The pair of coyote eyes glow yellow. And then another pair. And another. Nearly a dozen.

Dalton slowly starts to back away.

A long stretch to the BMW.

The eyes of the coyote come closer.

Dalton's spots some on his flank, they're surrounding him.

Dalton hastens his retreat, but still faces the coyote.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Nice coyote.

The BMW's meters away, Dalton turns and races to the car.

He fumbles with the door, presses the key-less entry. It had been unlocked, he's locked it.

He yanks on the handle. Presses the button again.

Flings the door open. Dives inside--

INT. BMW - CONTINUOUS

Slams the door.

He catches his breath. Flicks on the car's lights. No sign of any coyote.

Dalton laughs, embarrassed.

He grabs the bottle of whiskey off the passenger seat and takes another chug.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD / INT. BMW - NIGHT

The BMW wends through the expansive darkness. Moonlit treetops as far as the eye can see.

The road runs alongside a gorge. A road sign warns of falling rocks.

The BMW swerves. Dalton struggles to stay in the lane.

A coyote darts out into the road.

Dalton slams the brakes.

The BMW skids and plows into the coyote.

The WINDSHIELD SHATTERS. Blood splatters across the glass.

The BMW drifts out of control. Goes off the road.

Dalton jerks the wheel. An over-correction.

The BWM rolls. Over the gorge. A twenty foot drop. CRASH.

BLACK.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

The BEEP of a HEART-RATE MONITOR.

Dalton's head is wrapped in bandage. His eyes flutter open.

DALTON'S POV

The world is hazy. Dreamlike. Beatrice sleeps curled in a chair next to the bed.

DALTON brings a hand to his face. Winces when he touches his temple.

BEATRICE (O.S.)

You're awake.

BEATRICE moves to Dalton, rests a hand on his chest.

DALTON

What happened?

BEATRICE

You don't remember?

Dalton struggles to recall. Shakes his head.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

The oak tree? I told you we should hire an arborist.

DALTON

That's right...

MEMORY FLASH: EXT. OAK TREE - DAY

Dalton on a ladder, high up in the tree. He clutches a saw.

DALTON (V.O.)
I was going to remove a dying
branch.

Dalton slips from the ladder. He crashes into a branch below.
It IMPALES his gut. He flips and SLAMS into the ground.

BACK TO SCENE

Dalton pulls the sheets off, his gut is wrapped in bandage.
Dalton grimaces from his quick movement.

BEATRICE
Take it easy. They said you have a
TBI. A brain injury. If the lower
branch hadn't broken your fall...

DALTON
I'm so glad to see you.

BEATRICE
I'll go get the doctor.

DALTON
No, stay with me.

Beatrice seems hesitant, but she nods.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Where's Max?

BEATRICE
With mom. He's scared to see you
like this.

Dalton reaches for her hand, but she pulls away. She sits
back down next to him.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
Dalton, I... This isn't an
appropriate time, but I have to ask
you something.

DALTON
What?

Beatrice looks to be on the verge of tears.

BEATRICE
Who is Michelle?

Instant recognition, but Dalton does his best poker face.

DALTON
Who?

Beatrice can no longer hold back, tears stream down her face.

BEATRICE
Don't lie to me.

DALTON
Oh. I worked with a Michell a bit
on a land deal. Why?

BEATRICE
Dalton, I know. Don't be coy just
say it.

DALTON
I don't know what you're talking
about.

BEATRICE
I'd rather be stabbed by the truth
than poisoned with lies.

DALTON
Whatever you think happened--

Beatrice sobs into her hands.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Bea...

Dalton reaches. She bats his hand.

Dalton yelps and clutches his gut.

Blood soaks through the gauze on his belly.

BEATRICE
Dalton?!

Dalton's hands are covered in blood. Black blood oozes out
the sides of the wrapping.

Dalton screams in pain.

Beatrice jams a call button.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
Nurse! HELP!

Dalton presses his head back into his pillow as he groans in agony. He shuts his eyes.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. BMW WRECKAGE - DAY

Dalton's eyes shoot open. He moans. He's been flung from the vehicle. Scrapped, battered and bruised.

He reaches for his abdomen. A small branch has impaled him. The same spot as his prior injury. It protrudes a foot from his bloody flesh.

He prods the injury and gasps in pain.

Still prone, Dalton surveys his surroundings:

The BMW is a crumpled mess, a wonder he survived. The dead coyote is mangled beyond recognition, a crow feasts.

The BMW's gone over the cliff, a good twenty foot vertical rock-face, and then rolled down an incline. The road not visible above the precipice.

Dalton struggles to sit up, he keeps one hand pressed against his injured abdomen.

Dalton staggers to his feet, shuffles over to the wreckage.

The crow takes flight and watches from a nearby tree.

With great effort, Dalton crouches near the crumpled open trunk and extracts a--

GYM BAG

Inside: a 1 liter bottle of water, a set of workout clothes, a protein bar, a first aid kit.

DALTON rips off his tattered shirt.

Grabs the bottle of water. Chugs.

He rinses the flesh around the impaled stick. Fresh blood seeps out.

He pops open the-

FIRST AID KIT

Comically under equipped for this level of injury. A box of band-aids, some individually packaged pain relievers, burn cream, gauze wrap, and a small antiseptic aerosol.

DALTON rips open pain relievers, swallows a handful, pockets the rest.

Dalton sprays his scrapped up arms with the antiseptic like he's applying sun-block.

He empties the can on his abdomen, tosses it.

Dalton wraps the gauze around the contact point of the stick. Blood soaks the gauze, but the flow is stymied. Dalton grips the stick and snaps it off so only a few inches remain.

Dalton pockets the protein bar. He delicately slides on a fresh shirt and struggles to his feet.

He searches the front of the-

BMW WRECKAGE

The CROW CAWS at him. He finds the target of his hunt--

His phone. It's demolished.

Dalton desperately presses the power button. Nothing. The CROW CAWS again, Dalton flings his phone at it.

CLIFF

Dalton limps up the rocky incline to the twenty foot rock-face. The road just out of sight above.

Dalton examines the jagged rock wall, climbable for a professional, but an impossible task for him.

He tries anyway.

He struggles to grip the rocks, uses his "good" leg to push off, but slips, the impaled stick scrapes against the rocks.

Dalton hollers and collapses to the ground.

Dalton sobs for a beat. Collects himself, hears something--

A DISTANT CAR APPROACHES.

Dalton searches frantically, grabs a nearby stone.

DALTON

Help! Help!

The CAR'S RIGHT ABOVE. Dalton hurls the stone towards the out of sight vehicle.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Help!

The CAR RECEDES no indication of stopping.

MOMENTS LATER

Dalton's gathered a stack of dry wood. He futilely rubs two sticks together in an attempt to start a fire.

And rubs. And rubs.

No sign of smoke. Just the SCRATCHING of WOOD.

A CAR APPROACHES.

Dalton hurls a log in frustration. It clatters against the rock face and crashes back to the ground.

DALTON

HELP!

The CAR RECEDES.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Fuck! Fuck! FUCK!

Dalton plops down in defeat. He gazes out at the horizon.

DALTON'S POV

Early autumnal trees as far as the eye can see. Rolling hills covered in red, orange, green and yellow.

In the heart of the woods a single tree lords high above the rest. Ominous, almost mystical in stature.

In a different direction, the construction crane looms above the tree line. A few of miles away.

DALTON toils to his feet and shuffles in the direction of the distant crane.

BMW WRECKAGE

The crow has been chased away by a pair of vultures that rip apart the mangled coyote carcass.

Dalton grabs the gym bag, stuffs the empty water bottle inside and limps into the--

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Dalton hobbles along, the crane not visible through the dense tree cover.

BRANCHES BREAK. Dalton scans his surroundings.

A coyote watches him from twenty meters out.

DALTON
Your asshole friend got what he
deserved.

Dalton hurls a stone at the coyote. No where close.

The coyote doesn't budge.

DALTON (CONT'D)
You want some?

Dalton picks up a stick and lurches towards the coyote.

It retreats.

DALTON (CONT'D)
That's what I thought.

Dalton returns to his trek with his newfound walking stick.

FOOTSTEPS. The coyote follows him.

RUSTLING. Dalton spies more coyote through the trees.

Dalton totters on with bluffed confidence.

LATER

The shadows grow as the sun sinks close to the horizon.

Dalton's pale. He struggles on. His STOMACH GROWLS.

The coyote continue to track him. But keep their buffer.

EXT. CREEK - DUSK

A meter wide creek trickles through the woods.

Dalton collapses to his knees on the muddy bank. He scoops and slurps water.

Dalton digs around in the gym bag, pulls out and fills the empty water bottle.

Dalton rips open the protein bar and starts to scarf it down.

He thinks better of it, and pockets the last half of the bar.

Dalton notices the coyotes. They watch him from the far side of the creek. They've come closer. About fifteen meters now.

DALTON

You think I'm an easy meal?

Dalton hurls a rock. Hit!

A COYOTE YELPS and the pack scatter into the woods. Dalton smirks.

Dalton carefully removes his shirt. Blood has saturated the gauze.

Dalton gently removes the gauze. The flesh around the stick's red and inflamed.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Shit. Maybe they're right.

Dalton rinses the wound.

He shreds a pair of work-out pants and uses them to redress the wound. Ties it around his abdomen.

LATER

The eerie purple glow of the last tendrils of sunlight.

Dalton again attempts to start a fire with a stack of logs.

He futilely rubs, frustration growing.

DALTON

How the fuck does Bear Grylls do this?!

Dalton kicks the stack of logs.

He shuffles over to a poorly constructed shelter. A line of sticks lean against a log. It would do little to protect from the elements.

Dalton crouches to crawl into the shelter.

VOICE (O.S.)
Let us feed.

The VOICE wisps through the trees like the wind.

Dalton springs back to his feet.

DALTON
Hello?

He scans his surroundings. Nothing but the trees.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Is somebody there? Help!

Dalton listens. Only the FROGS and CRICKETS reply.

He shakes it off. Shuffles back over to his--

SHELTER

Dalton shimmies on his back into the tight space.

He inches his way inside until only his feet are left exposed.

He's rests his head on the gym bag. He listens to NATURE and the STREAM.

The moonlight filters through the slats in the logs.

Dalton's eyes flutter closed.

INT. BOUTIQUE CLOTHING STORE CHANGING ROOMS - DAY

Dalton's eyes blink open. Beatrice jostles him.

Dalton rests on a bench, a painted forest creek on the wall behind him. Not a scratch on him.

DALTON
(disoriented)
I must have drifted off.

BEATRICE

I promise we're almost done. What do you think?

Beatrice models a red dress. She twirls. She looks lovely and very pregnant.

DALTON

You look... Wow.

BEATRICE

I look fat.

DALTON

No. I mean, okay, you look pregnant, but you look absolutely beautiful.

BEATRICE

I feel like a whale.

Dalton leaps up and embraces Beatrice.

She's taken by surprise, but welcomes it.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

What was that about?

DALTON

We're buying the dress and that's final.

Beatrice beams. They kiss.

CHECK OUT - MOMENTS LATER

Beatrice waits in line.

Dalton examines various impulse items.

An ATTRACTIVE SALES ASSOCIATE folds clothes nearby. Dalton notices her pendant, a silver tree that's strikingly similar to the large tree in the forest.

ATTRACTIVE SALES ASSOCIATE

(seductive)

What do you desire?

DALTON

Excuse me?

ATTRACTIVE SALES ASSOCIATE

(plain)

Is there anything I can help you
find?

Dalton snatches up the closest item, a stuffed animal.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL - DAY

A manicured outdoor walkway, trees and coffee shops with
patios between connected shops. Condos on the floors above.

Beatrice and Dalton stroll hand in hand. Dalton carries the
shopping haul. Beatrice examines the stuffed animal.

BEATRICE

What is this?

DALTON

I think it's a coyote.

BEATRICE

I meant, what's it for?

DALTON

The little one.

BEATRICE

What do you think of Max?

DALTON

I like it. It's strong.

A HOMELESS MAN with a dog shambles towards the couple. He
holds a sign that says 'Let us feed.'

HOMELESS MAN

Spare change?

DALTON

I don't have any.

Beatrice pulls a fiver out of her purse.

BEATRICE

Here.

HOMELESS MAN

Bless you.

Dalton and Beatrice continue along.

DALTON
You realize he's just going to
spend that on booze?

BEATRICE
Wouldn't you?

DALTON
I'm all for helping the homeless.
But it's a systemic problem.

BEATRICE
You always do this.

DALTON
What?

BEATRICE
You can't face a problem head on.
Obviously, you're right, it's a
systematic issue. But guys like you
are the ones that set the system.

They reach Dalton's parallel parked BMW. Dalton opens the door for Beatrice.

DALTON
You've got me dead to rights.

Dalton helps Beatrice into the car. He hands her the shopping bag and then holds up a 'wait' finger.

Dalton jogs over to the--

Homeless Man on the bench, scratches his dog's chin.

Dalton holds out a twenty dollar bill.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Here, get you and your dog a nice
dinner.

HOMELESS MAN
You think this absolves you?

DALTON
Excuse me?

The Homeless Man snatches the twenty.

HOMELESS MAN
I see you for what you really are.
A coward. A coy dog. Am I wrong? Do
you care to prove it?

Homeless Man gestures. The dog growls and attacks Dalton's pant leg. Homeless Man cackles.

Dalton shakes off the dog. It transforms into a coyote. It lunges--

EXT. CREEK SHELTER - DAWN

Dalton awakens with a start, smashes away the bulk of his shelter in the act.

A COYOTE GROWLS as it attacks Dalton's foot.

Dalton grabs a stick and WHACKS the coyote.

The COYOTE YELPS and retreats.

Dalton leaps to his feet and swings wildly.

The pack of coyote encircle Dalton. Just out of range of the stick.

Dalton screams at the coyote and lunges at any that get too close.

VOICE (O.S.)

Apologies.

DALTON

Who said that?

Who's there?

Hello!?

The largest ALPHA COYOTE steps forward and stares at Dalton.

Dalton rears back, prepares to strike.

ALPHA COYOTE

We thought you dead.

Note: Yes, there are talking coyote. But these are no 'Lion King' talking animals. It's eerie and unnatural. Guttural.

DALTON

No, no, no.

ALPHA COYOTE

We have an offer.

DALTON

I- I- I- What the fuck.

ALPHA COYOTE

A way out.

DALTON

I'm going crazy. I must have sepsis.

ALPHA COYOTE

Most likely.

Alpha takes a step forward.

DALTON

Stay back!

ALPHA COYOTE

Relax.

Dalton swings wildly. Alpha backs away.

DALTON

Get the fuck away!

Dalton charges coyote after coyote until he chases them all into the brush.

He's left alone next to his destroyed shelter.

He catches his breath.

He delicately lifts his shirt and gently prods the wrapping on his gut wound.

His fingers are soaked in blood.

EXT. TREE TOP - DAY

The red morning sun illuminates and tints the leaves.

Dalton struggles his way up the tree until the branches bow.

He scans the horizon.

The construction crane is maybe a mile away. The DISTANT SOUND of MACHINERY BEEPS.

DALTON

Help!

He's too far away. He notices--

The ominous tree looms large, closer than before.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Dalton weaves between the trees. Walking stick in hand.

A RUSTLING. Dalton searches.

Alpha Coyote follows.

DALTON

Get lost.

ALPHA COYOTE

I'll make you a promise. We won't eat you until you're dead.

DALTON

I'm not going to die.

Dalton smacks his head in a vain attempt to stop the voices. Alpha pursues a few meters back. Dalton swings at him.

ALPHA COYOTE

Take it easy or you'll bleed out.

DALTON

I can't handle a talking coydog!

ALPHA COYOTE

Coydog? You're the only dog here.

DALTON

You don't know me...
Of course you do, you're my own conscience.

ALPHA COYOTE

I'm not your conscience, but I do know you, Dalton.

DALTON

Well, I'm not going to be judged by something covered in fleas.

ALPHA COYOTE

Who's judging? An alpha takes what they want. Consequences be damned.

DALTON

That's not me.

ALPHA COYOTE

No. I suppose not.

They walk in silence for a beat. Dalton's stomach growls.

Dalton gives in. He stops and leans against a tree.

Alpha stops and watches from a few meters away.

Dalton digs the last half of the protein bar out of his pocket. He wolfs it down.

DALTON

Where are the other coyote?

ALPHA COYOTE

I asked them to stay back.

DALTON

They do what you say?

ALPHA COYOTE

I am the alpha.

DALTON

If you're not my conscience then what are you?

ALPHA COYOTE

I'm a coyote.

DALTON

Then how do you know me?

ALPHA COYOTE

I've been watching you.

DALTON

That doesn't make any sense.

ALPHA COYOTE

I want to offer you a warrior's death.

DALTON

A warrior's death?

ALPHA COYOTE

A chance to face death head on, rather than limping along like a pathetic wretch.

DALTON

You're giving me a choice?

ALPHA COYOTE

It need be, for it to be a warrior's death.

Dalton takes a chug from his water bottle and returns to his trek. Alpha resumes following.

DALTON
I'll take pathetic wretch, the
construction site's a mile away.

EXT. WOODS - MIDDAY

Dalton struggles his way forward with each step. He's pale and sweaty, blood stains his shirt.

Alpha keeps pace.

Dalton finally gives in and plops down on a rock. Catches his breath.

ALPHA COYOTE
Giving up?

DALTON
I've got to be getting close.

ALPHA COYOTE
You're not. She won't let you.

DALTON
Who?

ALPHA COYOTE
You'll see.

DALTON
What's with the evasiveness?

ALPHA COYOTE
I'm a coyote. We're evasive.

DALTON
I don't suppose you know if I'm
headed the right direction?

ALPHA COYOTE
Would you believe me if I did?

Dalton nods in agreement. He searches for the tallest tree.

With great difficulty, he climbs.

EXT. TREE TOP - MOMENTS LATER

Dalton wheezes out of breath. He searches for the crane. Spots it. It is further away than before.

He notices the large ominous tree. It's even closer. As though it has been tracking him through the forest.

Dalton gazes at the tree, perplexed.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Dalton drops from the lowest branch of the tree.

Incredibly pale, he doubles over in pain.

ALPHA COYOTE
You look miserable.

DALTON
I must have gotten turned around.

ALPHA COYOTE
I told you, you will not leave
these woods alive.

Dalton raises his shirt and inspects the branch that impales him.

ALPHA COYOTE (CONT'D)
I could end your suffering.

DALTON
Maybe I deserve to suffer.

ALPHA COYOTE
You humans do seem to enjoy it.

Dalton shrugs him off, grabs his walking stick and continues to slog on.

ALPHA COYOTE (CONT'D)
Why else invent hell?

DALTON
A desire for cosmic justice? I'm
not really in the mood for a
metaphysical discussion with a
coyote.

ALPHA COYOTE
To be conscious is to be aware of
suffering.

(MORE)

ALPHA COYOTE (CONT'D)

Why imagine an afterlife at all if not for a desire of eternal suffering?

DALTON

You sound like a freshman philosophy major.

ALPHA COYOTE

Is is fear that drives you? There's nothing to fear about death. There is nothing sweeter than the embrace of the void.

DALTON

What would a coyote know about death?

ALPHA COYOTE

I am a coyote in the way a leaf is a tree.

DALTON

You're the Coyote. It makes sense. I just learned about you. So my sepsis addled brain has conjured you up.

ALPHA COYOTE

It's quite insulting to tell someone they're nothing but a figment of your imagination.

DALTON

Well, if you're real, make yourself useful and catch me something to eat.

ALPHA COYOTE

No offense, but I am waiting for you to die. Human meat is quite a delicacy.

Dalton's STOMACH GROWLS.

Dalton scans his surroundings. He spots a log. Hobbles over to it.

DALTON

So do you want to tell me why it appears some strange tree is following me?

Dalton rolls the log.

ALPHA COYOTE
She draws you to her.

A swarm of various insects scurry and scatter. Dalton catches a large slimy worm.

DALTON
Tell me who she is.

ALPHA COYOTE
She is the forest itself.

DALTON
There's a talking coyote, so why not a magic forest witch?

Dalton holds the worm between his fingers. Works up courage.

ALPHA COYOTE
Don't tell me you're actually going to--

Dalton jams the worm in his mouth. He chokes it down and gags.

ALPHA COYOTE (CONT'D)
That's disgusting.

DALTON
Yeah.

Dalton washes it down with a sip of his water. He catches another worm.

DALTON (CONT'D)
It's just spaghetti.

Dalton stares at the worm as it wiggles between his fingers.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Dalton slogs through the wilderness.

Alpha trails.

DALTON
What does the forest want with me?

ALPHA COYOTE
You'd be better off taking my offer.

DALTON
Oh, and you're unbiased.

ALPHA COYOTE
Better to be in a coyote's stomach
than what she has planned for you.

DALTON
And what is that?

Alpha offers no response. The two walk in silence for a beat.
The SOUND OF RUNNING WATER filters through the trees.

Dalton hastens towards the sound.

EXT. GORGE - MOMENTS LATER

A ROARING RIVER cuts through the forest.

Dalton stands at the precipice of one bank. Twenty feet wide
and a fifty foot drop on either side.

DALTON
Shit.

Dalton surveys the length of the river, he spots a fallen
tree that has created a crossing.

ALPHA COYOTE
Her invitation.

DALTON
Or the way to the construction
site.

Dalton traverses the precipice towards the fallen tree,
though not too close to the edge.

A powerful WIND buffets him.

ALPHA COYOTE
I implore you not to cross.

DALTON
That's nice.

Dalton pushes forward with newfound vigor.

ALPHA COYOTE
You misunderstand your predicament.

DALTON

I think I have a pretty good
understanding of my fucking
predicament.

Dalton nears the fallen tree.

The pack of coyote intercept his path. They snarl and bare
their fangs.

ALPHA COYOTE

I promised we wouldn't eat you
until you were dead, but if you
fall the river shall consume you.

Dalton rears back and readies his stick.

ALPHA COYOTE (CONT'D)

We'll make it quick. A mercy.

The pack of coyote encircle him. Alpha watches from the rear.

Dalton lunges at the coyote between him and the fallen tree,
smacks it across the face with the stick. It yelps and falls
back.

TWO COYOTE charge Dalton from behind.

Dalton kicks one of the coyote in the throat. It crumples to
the ground.

The other coyote sinks its teeth into Dalton's ankle.

Dalton screams as the coyote shakes vigorously. He jams it in
the eye with the stick. Knocks himself free.

Dalton bolts for the fallen tree as the rest of the coyote
give chase.

A mangy coyote leaps at Dalton, he deflects it and it
plummets over the side of the gorge with a howl.

ALPHA snarls.

Dalton reaches the fallen tree.

He leaps without hesitation. The whole thing shifts, Dalton
stumbles.

He catches himself, still atop the log.

The pack of coyote GROWL from the edge, hesitant to step on
the tree.

Dalton steadies himself, on his hands and knees now.
The RUNT COYOTE glares at their escaping quarry.
Dalton pivots to face the coyote, he locks eyes with Alpha.
Runt vaults out onto the fallen tree, pounces at Dalton.

ALPHA COYOTE (CONT'D)
Rip out his throat!

Dalton catches Runt by the neck.

DALTON
You little shit!

Runt snaps at him.

DALTON (CONT'D)
I spared you!

Runt chomps down on Dalton's arm. He screams in pain.
The pair wrestle. The fallen tree CRACKS.
THE WHOLE THING SHIFTS. PLUMMETS INTO THE ROARING RIVER.
Dalton and Runt vanish into the churning chaos.

EXT. DALTON'S FRONT YARD - DAY

A LARGE BRANCH CRASHES TO THE GROUND.

A work-gloved hand grabs the branch.

Drags it across the yard.

Tosses it into a pile.

DALTON gazes at the pile of branches. Lost in thought. Like someone that's walked into a room and forgotten why.

Dalton's PHONE BEEPS.

He snaps out of his trance, pulls the phone out of his pocket.

On the screen, A NEW TEXT FROM MICHELLE.

Dalton stares at his phone, hesitant to read the message.

A LEXUS SUV pulls into the driveway.

Dalton quickly pockets his phone. He waves at-

Beatrice smiles as she unloads MAX, 3, from the backseat of the Lexus.

Max rushes Dalton as soon as his feet hit the ground.

MAX

Daddy!

Dalton scoops up Max in an embrace.

DALTON

Hey, buddy.

Beatrice greets Dalton with a gentle peck on the cheek.

DALTON (CONT'D)

I told you we didn't need an arborist.

BEATRICE

Just be careful.

MAX

Can I help?

Dalton looks to Beatrice, her eyes say it all.

DALTON

You know, when I was your age I remember watching my dad trim the branches, maybe one day your kid will watch you.

MAX

I don't have a kid!

DALTON

You might, someday.

MAX

No way!

Dalton tickles Max, he laughs with glee.

BEATRICE

Could you put him down? I have a phone consult.

DALTON

Sure. I need your keys, the last branch is right above the driveway.

INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - DAY

Dalton lays Max down in his toddler bed, hands him the well loved coyote doll.

Dalton hums *Row, row, row your boat*. Max joins him.

Dalton's PHONE BEEPS in his pocket. He silences it.

Dalton continues to hum while Max's eyes flutter shut.

EXT. TOP OF OAK TREE - MOMENTS LATER

A LADDER CLANKS against the trunk. IT RATTLES as someone ascends.

DALTON reaches the top rung, a good twenty feet in the air, a hand saw in one hand and a rope in the other.

Dalton tosses the rope around a higher branch, ties it around the target branch, the other end of rope anchored to something off screen.

Dalton saws at the base of the tied off branch.

Dalton's PHONE BEEPS.

Dalton steadies the hand saw on the ladder, fumbles for his phone.

A NEW TEXT FROM MICHELLE.

Dalton uses his teeth to pull off a glove. He swipes to read the message:

MICHELLE: "I can still feel you inside me."

Dalton gawks at his phone for a beat. The PHONE BEEPS again.

MICHELLE: "I'll be in town next Tuesday."

Dalton slowly types a response with one thumb.

DALTON: "It was a mistake."

His finger hovers above the 'Send' button, but he doesn't press it.

His PHONE BEEPS again.

An IMAGE OF BREASTS.

Dalton fumbles with his phone, deletes his message.

He hesitates and then types a new message and hits 'Send'.

BEATRICE (O.S.)

Dalton?

Dalton startles, drops his phone. He jerks for it, shifts the ladder.

Dalton plummets, crashes into a lower branch that impales his gut, he flips and his head smacks the ground with a THUD.

BLACK

The SOUND of a RIVER.

MAX HUMS *Row, row, row your boat.*

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

Dalton comes to. He lies face down in the sandy soil.

The river has slowed to a GENTLE BABBLE.

Dalton groans and rolls onto his side.

He inspects the impaled branch. It's been driven deeper. He reaches around and feels it protruding out his back.

Dalton struggles to sit up. He surveys his surroundings.

Runt lies next to him, motionless, blood seeps from an ear.

DALTON

You did this to yourself.

Runt whines weakly.

DALTON (CONT'D)

You're still alive?

Runt's eyes blink open. The coyote fails to move.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Well, you've killed us both.

Dalton staggers to his feet. He shuffles away from the river towards an aspen grove.

RUNT WHINES. Dalton looks back at the pathetic runt.

For a FLASH it is MAX that lies on the sandy shore.

Dalton shakes the cobwebs out.

Runt lies helplessly on the ground.

Dalton turns his back to the coyote. He sighs then softens.

EXT. ASPEN GROVE - DAY

Tall, ashen poles with sparse yellow foliage crowns blanket the landscape.

Dalton teeters forward, one foot at a time. Each step a battle.

He cradles Runt, the coyote clings to life.

Dalton follows a small path through the densely packed trees. The WIND WHIRLS and rustles fallen leaves out of the way.

Dalton shambles forward in silence for a beat.

DALTON

I do admire your tenacity.

Runt whines and licks Dalton's arm.

DALTON (CONT'D)

You're a lot quieter than alpha.
Don't get me wrong, I've had enough
of talking coyote.

Dalton spots something through the trees. A WHITE FIGURE camouflaged within the blanched tree trunks.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Hello!?

The figure blends into the trees.

Dalton stumbles in the direction of the figure. He squeezes through tightly packed trunks to reach its origin.

He glances it again. Ethereal. A white dress flows between trees. Long dark hair. A WOMAN. Her features indistinguishable from this distance.

Dalton pivots towards her.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Help!

She's vanished.

Dalton fights his way through the trees. He plows into a--

EXT. GLADE

The massive tree looms nearby, it's sprawling branches block the sun and creates an eerie twilight glow.

Dalton gawks at the tree. He steps over far reaching root tendrils as he navigates through the still glade.

Some of the roots twist and knot to form the basin of an otherworldly pool, within the water glows like moonlight.

Dalton limps over to the pool, gently lowers Runt to the ground. He gazes at his reflection in the almost metallic liquid. He's battered and broken.

Runt weakly laps up some of the water.

DALTON
Hey, don't drink that.

Dalton traces his fingers across the surface of the water. He stares at them in disbelief. His fingertips aren't merely clean, they're restored.

Runt staggers to his feet.

Dalton plunges an arm into the pool. He extracts his arm, his jaw drops, the scratches and scrapes have been washed away.

Dalton submerges his other arm to the same effect. He climbs into the shallow pool, the water only up to his knees.

He squats down into the water, and then lifts his shirt. The flesh has healed on his gut.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Come here.

Dalton snatches Runt. The coyote growls and snarls but doesn't bite.

Dalton swirls the coyote in the water. Runt's growl shifts into a soft whine, it then starts to lick Dalton.

Dalton dunks Runt and then sets the coyote down at the edge of the water.

Runt sprints around the clearing with newfound vigor.

DALTON (CONT'D)
As good as new.

Runt and Dalton locks eyes for a beat. Then the coyote dashes off into the woods.

DALTON (CONT'D)
You're welcome.

Dalton turns his attention to the branch in his gut. The flesh has healed around the shard the way a tree might grow around a barbed wire fence.

Dalton reaches around and grips the branch. He pulls... Harder... Roars in pain as he rips it out.

Dalton dips down into the murky water. Splashes his face.

WOMAN VOICE (O.S.)
Dalton.

Dalton searches for the source. He spots the Woman in white at the edge of the glade. Her features still imperceivable.

DALTON
Hey!

She turns and treads into an inner grove of gnarly trees nestled under the massive tree.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Wait!

Dalton scurries out of the pool in pursuit.

EXT. GNARLY GROVE - MOMENTS LATER

Twisted branches claw at Dalton as he chases the Woman.

DALTON
How do you know me!?

No matter how much he forges ahead he's unable to gain ground. Dalton leaps over the roots of a particularly gnarly tree.

Dalton fails to notice a large knot on the tree with what could only be described as a horrific face.

The face twists and shifts to watch as Dalton reaches the--

EXT. MOTHER TREE

A massive tree the height of a red-wood but as wide and full of branches as an oak. The Woman awaits at the base.

Dalton inches towards her.

DALTON
Hello?

Her features become perceptible, Dalton realizes--

DALTON (CONT'D)
Gaia?

Gaia struts towards him.

DALTON (CONT'D)
What the hell are you doing here?

As Gaia draws closer her figure becomes visible through her sheer dress.

DALTON (CONT'D)
(entranced)
I don't understand--

Gaia runs a hand through his hair, kisses him passionately.

She takes him by the hand and leads him towards a bed of moss at the base of the mother tree.

Dalton staggers forward, zombie-like, his eyes roll back.

INTER-MATCH CUT:

INT. FANCY HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

MICHELLE CHOW, late 20s, a young professional in Chanel, leads Dalton by the hand. Both clearly tipsy.

They reach a door at the end of the hall. Michelle opens it.

FANCY HOTEL ROOM

Michelle kicks off her pumps, teeters over to a dresser.

Dalton hesitates at the precipice.

DALTON
I shouldn't.

Michelle pops the cork of a wine bottle, pours two glasses.

MICHELLE
No, you shouldn't.

She offers Dalton a glass. He crosses the threshold.

EXT. MOTHER TREE - DAY

Gaia lays on her back in the bed of moss. She beckons Dalton.

Dalton climbs on top of her. His eyes still white.

Gaia pulls off his pants, wraps her legs around him.

INT. FANCY HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Michelle and Dalton crash into bed. The last remnants of their clothing are flung across the room.

The two twist and roll in the throes of passion.

Michelle pins Dalton, climbs on top of him.

EXT. MOTHER TREE - DAY

Gaia grinds on top of Dalton. They moan in ecstasy.

The roots of the mother tree shift. Roots emerge from beneath the moss and envelop the copulating couple in a nest.

GAIA

Give me your seed.

Roots wrap and ensnare Dalton's arms.

INT. FANCY HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Sheets instead of roots bind Dalton. He struggles to break free. Michelle still rides him.

MICHELLE

Don't resist.

It's no longer Michelle, but Gaia that mounts Dalton. She digs her fingernails into his chest.

GAIA

Give me your seed.

EXT. MOTHER TREE - DAY

The DRYAD thrusts on top of Dalton. Her hair's made of strands of ivy, her skin's greenish-brown bark, and her eyes are an inhuman yellow.

 DRYAD
Join my grove.

Root tendrils grow from the Dryad's fingertips, burrow into Dalton's flesh. He groans in a mixture of pain and ecstasy.

 DALTON
 (distant)
Stop...

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Beatrice flings clothes into luggage. Dalton blocks her path to a dresser, he has a bandage wrapped around his head.

 DALTON
Stop.

Beatrice places a hand on Dalton's chest.

 BEATRICE
Move.

 DALTON
Would you talk to me, please?

 BEATRICE
There's nothing left to talk about.

Beatrice pushes past Dalton.

EXT. DALTON'S FRONT YARD - DAY

Beatrice leads a crying Max towards a Lexus in the driveway.

Dalton chases.

THUNDER ROARS. The massive oak tree CREAKS in a buffet of WIND. The sky above is an eerie green.

 DALTON
I fucked up, okay?

She ignores Dalton as she loads a screaming Max into the back of her Lexus.

MAX

Daddy!

BEATRICE

It's okay, honey.

Beatrice kisses Max, closes the door. Dalton blocks her path. Beatrice again tries to push past, Dalton grabs her wrists.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

Let go.

EXT. MOTHER TREE - DAY

Dalton struggles against the roots, grips the wrists of the Dryad. He fights to pull the root tendrils from his flesh. His eyes still rolled back.

DALTON

I can't let you.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Beatrice struggles to break Dalton's grip.

DALTON

I can't. Something bad happen.

BEATRICE

You're scaring me.

DALTON

I would never hurt you.

BEATRICE

It's too late.

Dalton releases her. The green sky swirls above.

DALTON

It was a mistake.

THUNDER SHAKES the ground. Beatrice marches for the driver seat.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Please. You and Max are everything.

BEATRICE

Why don't you do what you always do? Just step aside. There's no reason to pretend and fight.

Dalton slouches.

EXT. MOTHER TREE - DAY

The Dryad increases the tempo of her gyration.

 DRYAD
 Just give in. Do what you're meant
 for.

Dalton's arms go limp, the roots pull his wrists back to his side. Dryad drives her finger tendrils deeper into his chest.

INT. FANCY HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Michelle pulls Dalton's face into her bosom as they near climax.

 MICHELLE
 Yes!

Dalton shoves Michelle off him.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

 DALTON
 No!

Beatrice LAYS ON THE HORN. Dalton blocks the Lexus.

A POWERFUL WIND SHAKES the MASSIVE OAK TREE.

 BEATRICE
 Move!

 DALTON
 I won't let you go!

A BLINDING FLASH OF LIGHTNING. A MASSIVE BRANCH BREAKS OFF THE OAK TREE AND CRUSHES THE FRONT OF THE LEXUS.

EXT. MOTHER TREE - DAY

Dalton snaps back to himself, breaks his arms free. Notices Dryad on top of him, root fingertips still buried in flesh.

 DALTON
 What. The. Fuck!

Dryad gapes. Dalton rips her hands off him, uproots the bloody tendrils.

Dalton scurries away as he pulls up his pants.

GAIA

It's okay.

Gaia stands in her sheer dress where Dryad had been.

GAIA (CONT'D)

I won't hurt you.

Dalton inspects his chest riddled in bloody lesions.

DALTON

What the hell are you?

Gaia sashays forward.

GAIA

Whatever you desire.

Gaia draws close. She peers into Dalton's eyes. Dalton softens, allured again.

Her yellow eyes. Dalton snaps back to it, bolts.

EXT. GNARLY GROVE - MOMENTS LATER

Dalton clambers over gnarled roots and ducks under crooked branches. A dark and tangled quagmire with purple leaves.

GAIA (O.S.)

There's no reason to run!

Dalton races ahead, trips over a particularly distorted cluster of roots.

Dalton struggles, a hand of twisted roots clutches his ankle.

The hand extends from a WRETCHED CREATURE. Bark-like skin stretched over the bones of a skull and torso, the legless figure grows from the base of a contorted tree.

The Wretched Creature lets out an inhuman groan that sounds like CREAKING WOOD.

The DRYAD WAILS a response in the distance.

Dalton kicks the Wretched Creature in the face. WOOD CRACKS, black tar oozes from the Creature's nose. Dalton breaks free.

Dalton rolls away as a Creature from a neighboring tree grasps at him.

Dalton dodges Creature after Creature that grasp at him from the tangled roots.

The light from the sun begins to filter through the canopy, the woods grow less dense.

Dalton charges ahead. A break in the trees, sunlight.

A Creature trips Dalton right as he leaps out onto a-

HILL

Dalton tumbles down the incline.

His head SMASHES into a rock at the base of the hill.

BLACK.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Dalton's eyes blink open. He groans and prods the side of his head. Blood.

A dead fish plops to the ground in front of him.

Dalton scurries to his feet.

Alpha Coyote stands before him.

Dalton lunges for the nearest stick and strikes a defensive posture.

ALPHA COYOTE
Greetings.

DALTON
Stay back!

ALPHA COYOTE
It's a peace offering.

Alpha takes a step forward. Dalton swings wildly. Alpha steps back.

ALPHA COYOTE (CONT'D)
Take it easy.

DALTON
You tried to eat me!

ALPHA COYOTE
Better that than transforming into
one of those wretched creatures.

Dalton catches his breath.

DALTON
What do you want?

ALPHA COYOTE
I have a proposition for you.

DALTON
Why would I trust you? You promised
you wouldn't eat.

ALPHA COYOTE
I promised we wouldn't eat you
until you were dead. Which is why
we were going to kill you first.

DALTON
Gee, thanks.

ALPHA COYOTE
But now that I know you can resist
her, I no longer wish to eat you.

Dalton inspects the fish that was given, a few teeth marks
but relatively fresh.

DALTON
What is it?

ALPHA COYOTE
Like me, she has many names.

DALTON
It took the form of a girl I know.

ALPHA COYOTE
A dryad can take many forms.

DALTON
A dryad?

ALPHA COYOTE
Would you care to hear my
proposition?

Dalton collects nearby sticks in preparation for a fire.

DALTON
Not really.

ALPHA COYOTE
It's your only hope of not ending
up as one of those living trees?

Dalton arranges the sticks.

DALTON
I've figured it out, I'm in a coma.

ALPHA COYOTE
If that's the case you may as well
go get laid.

Dalton rubs the sticks together. After a beat of frustration.

ALPHA COYOTE (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

DALTON
What does it look like?

ALPHA COYOTE
Apply downward pressure while
spinning.

Dalton shrugs him off, but follows his advice. After a beat a
small amount of smoke rises.

Dalton fumbles with some tinder, blows on it, more smoke. A
small flame flicks to life.

Dalton's feeds small sticks into the growing fire. He howls
in celebration.

LATER - DUSK

Dalton roasts the fish over the embers of a fire.

Alpha Coyote rests nearby.

Dalton picks at the fish, chows down carefully, spits out
bones.

DALTON
This doesn't make us even for you
trying to eat me.

ALPHA COYOTE
I was attempting to spare you.

DALTON
You said human meat was a delicacy.

ALPHA COYOTE
Okay. It was a little bit of both.

DALTON
So, what's your proposition?

ALPHA COYOTE
You kill the dryad.

DALTON
I'm not killing anyone.

ALPHA COYOTE
It's the only way to break her
enchantment.

DALTON
There's no such thing as magic.

ALPHA COYOTE
Or talking coyote, dryads, living
trees.

Dalton sighs, motions for Alpha to continue.

ALPHA COYOTE (CONT'D)
It's not magic, merely forces
beyond your comprehension. Our kind
have been around for millennia. She
intends to add you to her grove.

DALTON
Why?

ALPHA COYOTE
To expand her power, extend her
life.

DALTON
And why do you care?

ALPHA COYOTE
You and I are kindred spirits.

Dalton chuckles and tosses the fish remnants on the embers.
He meanders over to a large tree.

ALPHA COYOTE (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

DALTON
 To sleep. No offense. Or some
 offense, I don't trust you.

Dalton climbs up into the tree.

ALPHA COYOTE
 You trust the trees?

Dalton doesn't. But he nestles across a pair of large
 branches nevertheless.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Dalton forges ahead. Alpha Coyote stalks him.

ALPHA COYOTE
 Where are you going?

DALTON
 Down hill, towards the river.

ALPHA COYOTE
 You're going the wrong way.

DALTON
 The fact that you said that is
 incredibly encouraging.

Dalton treks on for a beat. The atmosphere shifts, heavy
 clouds pass above.

Dalton steps over a massive root. A WRETCHED CREATURE grasps
 his leg.

Dalton breaks free and retreats the opposite direction.

Alpha watches the whole ordeal, follows Dalton.

ALPHA COYOTE
 It doesn't matter which direction
 you travel, her enchantment will
 draw you back to her grove.

Dalton shoos Alpha and marches on.

LATER

Dalton slogs ahead, Alpha in his wake.

A familiar shift in the surroundings, the gnarled trees.
 Dalton slows to a tiptoe.

DALTON
This is impossible. Her grove was
hours that way.

Alpha Coyote lies down and watches.

A Wretched Creature lunges. Dalton breaks away and rushes
back to Alpha Coyote.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Don't say it.

Alpha Coyote licks his paws.

DALTON (CONT'D)
How would I do it?

Alpha bares his fangs in a grin.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Dalton follows Alpha Coyote through the woods.

The pair walk in silence for a beat.

Alpha stops. Gazes at something.

Dalton sidles up next to Alpha, notices-

A gaping maw in the Earth, A CAVE into the depths.

ALPHA COYOTE
You're going to want to start
another fire.

INT. DANK CAVE - DAY

The daylight from the entrance struggles to penetrate the
gloom.

The silhouette of Alpha Coyote stands in the threshold.

Dalton joins him, he holds a torch.

Alpha Coyote leads the way into the engulfing darkness.

Dalton hesitates, the last rays of sun on his back.

Alpha disappears into the void.

Dalton creeps forward.

The FIGURE OF ALPHA shifts in the darkness. His features not distinguishable, but he seems to now be bipedal. The yellow eyes rise to eye level and peer at Dalton in the darkness.

Dalton holds out the torch to illuminate, but Alpha seems to be made of the darkness itself.

ALPHA COYOTE (O.S.)
Stay close.

DALTON
What are you?

ALPHA COYOTE (O.S.)
This is my domain.

Dalton follows Alpha into the bowels of the cave.

ALPHA COYOTE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I have been searching for you for years.

DALTON
For me? Why?

Dalton spots something in the darkness. He moves towards it. The flicking torchlight outlines a stone pedestal.

ALPHA COYOTE (O.S.)
Seeking my champion.

An ancient blade forged from obsidian rests on the pedestal.

DALTON
Then why try and kill me?

ALPHA COYOTE (O.S.)
You needed to prove yourself.

Dalton examines the ancient dagger. Intricate runes adorn the worn leather hilt.

DALTON
If you want the dryad dead, why not kill her yourself?

ALPHA COYOTE (O.S.)
I lack the opposable thumbs necessary to plunge that blade into the heart of the mother tree.

Dalton returns the dagger to the pedestal.

DALTON
I'm not your champion.

Alpha's presence expands to fill the void. His voice reverberates through the cave.

ALPHA COYOTE (O.S.)
You are your own champion. You live a life in service to yourself.

DALTON
That's not true.

ALPHA COYOTE (O.S.)
There's no shame in taking what you desire. Why suffer the sentiments of others? Before you lies the solution to your quandary. If you wish to escape these woods, then pick up that dagger. But steel yourself, for the dryad shall hold nothing back.

The yellow eyes of Alpha loom above Dalton.

Dalton picks up the dagger. The torch light blows out.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Dalton bounds between the trees with purpose.

EXT. GNARLY GROVE - DAY

The gloom permeates. Dalton spots a WRETCHED CREATURE in his path, but plows straight ahead.

The Wretched Creature lunges, clutches Dalton by the waist.

Dalton drives the obsidian blade into the Wretched Creature's forehead.

The Wretched Creature lets out a CREAKING WAIL. It shrivels and collapses into a pile of twigs and dust.

The DRYAD WAILS in the distance. Dalton glances the dagger in awe.

The leaves of the creature's host tree crumple and shed.

Dalton kicks aside the pile of leaves and forges ahead towards the DRYAD'S WAILS.

Wretched Creatures cower as Dalton passes.

EXT. MOTHER TREE - DAY

Dalton stands within the shadow of the massive tree. Summons his resolve.

Gaia approaches him in her sheer white dress.

GAIA
I'm glad you've returned.

She eyes the obsidian dagger, but pretends not to notice.

DALTON
Release me from your curse, dryad.

GAIA
Tis a blessing, not a curse.

DALTON
You call those wretched creatures blessed?

GAIA
They live in eternal bliss.

DALTON
That doesn't look like bliss to me.

GAIA
Let me show you.

Gaia saunters towards him. Dalton brandishes the dagger.

DALTON
Stay back.

Michelle now stands before Dalton in the thin white robe.

MICHELLE
Perhaps you'd rather it was me? I still think about that night.

Dalton lowers the dagger. Michelle reaches for him, but he shoves past and marches towards the Mother Tree.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Dalton. I can give you whatever you desire.

DALTON
No, you can't.

The world around them shifts. The trees turn into stone pillars and they are in-

INT. GAIA'S TEMPLE - DAY

A large structure full of silk pillows and lace curtains. The Mother Tree at the nucleus, it rises through an opening in the roof.

DOZENS OF SCANTILY CLAD WOMEN, Michelle and Gaia among them, surround Dalton.

They grope and tug at Dalton's clothing.

WOMEN

Come on Dalton, don't you want to fuck us?

Gaia kisses Dalton, he gives in.

GAIA

Stay with us here, forever.

Michelle leans in and kisses Dalton's neck.

MICHELLE

I ache for you.

DALTON

No!

Dalton breaks free of the Women. They sob as Dalton forges ahead. Gaia walks next to him.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Is that all you think of me?

GAIA

This is what those so called 'wretched creatures' live with. An eternity of every desire fulfilled.

DALTON

And in exchange they sacrifice their autonomy.

GAIA

A small price to be part of something greater than yourself.

DALTON

I already was.

Dalton approaches a large hollow gap in the Mother tree.

MORE SCANTILY CLAD WOMEN step of the tree and surround Dalton.

WOMEN

Don't leave us, Dalton.

Michelle and a WOMAN kiss in Dalton's path.

DALTON

I'm done letting my cock rule my life.

GAIA

He's lied to you.

DALTON

Release me.

GAIA

I can't.

Dalton shoves past the Women and enters the--

INT. MOTHER TREE HOLLOW - CONTINUOUS

Dalton surveys the dim space in awe.

Vines feed into a large pulsing 'heart' in the center of the space.

Dalton approaches the heart. He watches the rhythmic pumping.

BEATRICE (O.S.)

Dalton.

Dalton spins--

EXT. DALTON'S FRONT YARD - DAY

Dalton's eyes blink open. His head wrapped in bandage. Beatrice leans over him.

BEATRICE

Dalton?

The OAK BRANCH CRUSHES THE LEXUS. Beatrice yelps, startled. Max cries, standing nearby.

Dalton sits up, confused.

DALTON
Your Lexus.

Dalton looks to Beatrice, she comforts Max.

DALTON (CONT'D)
You're okay? What happened?

BEATRICE
You collapsed. Come on, let's go
inside.

Beatrice helps Dalton up.

INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - DAY

Beatrice lay Max in his bed.

MAX
Coy dog. Coy dog.

Max points in Dalton's direction.

BEATRICE
Can you grab Coy dog?

DALTON
Coy dog?

BEATRICE
The coyote. It's Max's favorite.

Dalton spots the stuffed coyote doll on a shelf. He snatches
it and hands it to Max.

Max beams and snuggles the stuffed animal.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
(singing)
Row, row, row your boat /
Gently down the stream /
Merrily merrily, merrily, merrily /
Life is but a dream.

Dalton joins her for the second refrain.

BEATRICE & DALTON (CONT'D)
Row, row, row your boat /
Gently down the stream /
Merrily merrily, merrily, merrily /
Life is but a dream.

Max's eyes shutter closed. Beatrice looks to Dalton, the softness leaves her expression.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Stainless steel appliances and marble countertops. Fresh flowers in a fancy black glass vase.

Beatrice prepares a kettle. Dalton watches through a window as a tow truck lifts the Lexus.

BEATRICE

I'm not ready to forgive you. Not even close. But after you nearly died, and then today, it just feels like... maybe we're being given a second chance.

DALTON

I don't understand. You and Max were in the Lexus.

BEATRICE

We got out after you fainted. Are you listening to what I'm saying?

DALTON

Do you think second chances exist?

BEATRICE

That depends on you.

Dalton leans back against the counter, accidentally knocks over the black vase. IT SHATTERS on the ground.

DALTON

Shit.

Beatrice grabs a broom and sweeps up the black glass.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Let me help.

Dalton helps pick up the large shards.

BEATRICE

Careful.

Dalton inspects the large black glass shards. Something familiar about them. Obsidian.

DALTON
I was in a forest. There was a
talking coyote. And a dryad.

BEATRICE
What's a dryad?

DALTON
Some sort of tree spirit.

BEATRICE
Sounds like a crazy dream.

Beatrice holds out a waste bin for him.

Dalton hesitates, the KETTLE WHISTLES.

Dalton deposits the black glass into the waste bin.

DALTON
It felt so real. I had to do
something...

BEATRICE
Could you pour the tea?

Dalton pours the cups. He peers through a window to the front
yard.

The Mother Tree stands where the Oak had been.

Beatrice puts away the broom, the CLATTER draws Dalton's
attention.

He looks back to the tree, it's the Oak again.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Dalton and Beatrice regard one another from across a glass
table. Steaming mugs of tea in front of them.

DALTON
In my... I'd lost you.

BEATRICE
You nearly did.

DALTON
I feel like something is missing.

BEATRICE
The doctors said the TBI could
cause memory problems.

DALTON

It's more than that. I don't know what's real.

BEATRICE

What's more likely? That you're here with me. Or you're in a forest with talking trees and animals?

DALTON

I mean...

Beatrice moves around the table, she holds Dalton's hand to her heart.

BEATRICE

Does this feel real?

Dalton nods.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

Then it is.

Dalton doesn't look too sure.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

I need to know why.

DALTON

What do you want me to say?

BEATRICE

The truth.

DALTON

I don't know. I'm a piece of shit.

BEATRICE

Did you want our marriage to end?

DALTON

No.

BEATRICE

Then help me understand. Was I not enough?

Dalton paces.

DALTON

I can't do this.

BEATRICE

Why do you always run?

DALTON
 You died, Bea. I was there. I
 buried you. I still miss you.

BEATRICE
 I don't feel dead. It's the TBI
 confusing you.

DALTON
 Maybe you're right. Talking coyote?
 Dryads? That doesn't make any
 sense!

Dalton laughs a fit. Beatrice takes him by the hand.

BEATRICE
 Come on.

Beatrice guides Dalton past the kitchen he looks towards the-
 WASTE BIN.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Beatrice and Dalton snuggle in the bed. She listens to his
 heart, he massages her scalp.

DALTON
 I could stay here forever.

BEATRICE
 Yeah.

They make out. It gets hot and heavy. Beatrice pulls off her
 top.

She helps Dalton remove his shirt. A large bandage over his
 gut.

She pushes Dalton down onto the bed, he winces.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
 Sorry.

She unbuckles his pants.

DALTON
 What are you doing?

BEATRICE (O.S.)
 Just relax.

Dalton tosses his head back in ecstasy.

DALTON
I don't deserve this.

BEATRICE
Shh. We need to heal.

Dalton teeters between ecstasy and guilt. After a beat he pulls Beatrice off and fastens his pants.

DALTON
I cheated on you. You should be angry, not...

Beatrice fights back tears, pulls back on her blouse.

Beatrice retreats into an adjoining bathroom--

DALTON (CONT'D)
Beatrice--

SLAMS the door.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Dalton fills a glass with water. Chugs. Peers through a window at the Oak tree for a beat.

He looks to the-

WASTE BIN. Pops open the lid.

The black obsidian shards. He reaches for the largest.

BEATRICE (O.S.)
Dalton?

DALTON turns to face her, he grips a shard of glass.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

DALTON
I wish I could stay.

BEATRICE
So what's the problem?

DALTON
You're not Bea.

BEATRICE
You're confused.

DALTON
I deserve to be tormented, not
happy.

BEATRICE
Put the glass down, Dalton.

DALTON
I wish I could say that I'd never
hurt you, but we both know that's
not true.

Tears stream down Beatrice's face.

DALTON (CONT'D)
I wish I could change it. Change
myself. Change what happened. But I
can't. I can't live in a lie. As
much as I want to.

BEATRICE
You're scaring me.

Dalton shuffles forward, but Beatrice blocks his path.

DALTON
Step aside!

BEATRICE
You're not well.

DALTON
I have to do this.

BEATRICE
I forgive you okay? Just put down
the glass.

DALTON
I don't deserve your forgiveness.

BEATRICE
That's not for you to decide.

DALTON
You're not real.

BEATRICE
Dalton!

MAX (O.S.)
What's going on?

Max clutches his 'Coy Dog' stuffed animal nearby.

BEATRICE
Nothing bug, go back to bed.

DALTON
Move.

BEATRICE
No!

DALTON
Don't make me do this!

Max starts to cry.

BEATRICE
Drop the fucking glass!

Max's cries intensify.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
It's okay, bug.

Dalton tries to push past Beatrice, she grabs his arm.

DALTON
Let go!

BEATRICE
Drop it!

They struggle. Dalton pierces Beatrice in the gut.

She looks to Dalton in horror. She clutches her stomach, blood seeps between her fingers. She collapses.

Max wails.

DALTON
It's not real.

Dalton snaps his eyes shut.

DALTON (CONT'D)
It's not real. It's not real!

MAX SOBS. Dalton opens his eyes. It certainly looks real.

Beatrice lies in a bloody heap. She weakly reaches out to Max.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Release me, dryad!

Max clings to his mother. Drops the 'Coy dog' stuffed animal in the growing pool of blood. Blood soaks the terry cloth.

Dalton flees to the--

EXT. FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

He clutches the bloody glass shard in his quaking hand. He charges the Oak tree.

Dalton attacks the Oak tree with ferocity. He struggles to pierce the bark.

He stabs. Again and again. His hand sliced into a bloody mess.

DALTON

Release me!

The glass chips and breaks away, but Dalton does not relent.

He strips away the outer layer of thick bark. Continues his assault.

DALTON (CONT'D)

FUCK!

Dalton shuts his eyes, plunges the glass shard deep into the Oak with a scream.

He opens his eyes and he--

INT. MOTHER TREE HOLLOW - DAY

Dalton stands before the no longer pulsing 'Heart' of the Mother tree, the obsidian blade plunged deep within.

Dalton scans his surroundings:

The Dryad lies nearby, she clutches a wound in her gut, green sap 'blood' oozes.

The MOTHER TREE QUAKES. WRETCHED CREATURES CREAK and WAIL.

EXT. MOTHER TREE - DAY

Dalton steps outside.

The WRETCHED CREATURES SHRIVEL into dust, their host trees drop their leaves.

In moments the mysterious and magical grove transforms into a tree graveyard. Cold and eerie. A deluge of purple leaves fall from the Mother Tree.

INT. MOTHER TREE HOLLOW - DAY

Dalton tiptoes towards the Dryad, she clings to life.

DALTON
You gave me no choice.

DRYAD
You always have a choice.

The Dryad shifts into Beatrice.

BEATRICE
But you chose--

But she can't hold the illusion.

DRYAD
To free him.

DALTON
I freed myself.

ALPHA COYOTE (O.S.)
That you did.

Alpha Coyote lingers in the entry.

He shifts into HUMAN COYOTE. He's adorned in coyote furs and a necklace of fangs. He has the build of a warrior.

Human Coyote marches over to the Mother Tree heart, inspects the carnage with glee.

He rips out the obsidian blade and sheathes it.

HUMAN COYOTE
Impressive. I'll be honest, I
didn't think you'd pull it off.

Human Coyote grips a tendril that feeds into the heart, snaps off a two foot segment. Sap drains from it, leaving what's essentially a hollow stick.

Human Coyote struts over to Dalton and the Dryad.

HUMAN COYOTE (CONT'D)
Hello, Gaia.

DRYAD

Coyote.

HUMAN COYOTE

I told you that death always wins.

Human Coyote slaps Dalton on the shoulder.

HUMAN COYOTE (CONT'D)

You have my gratitude.

DALTON

I didn't do it for you.

HUMAN COYOTE

Irrelevant. Serve me and you shall
fuck or kill whomever you desire.

DALTON

I will never serve you.

HUMAN COYOTE

This is a fleeting offer.

Dalton stands tall. Human Coyote shrugs, impales Dalton in
the gut with the tendril. Dalton grunts and collapses.

HUMAN COYOTE (CONT'D)

Oh. Did I get you in the exact same
spot? Here.

Human Coyote grabs the tendril, RIPS it out.

Dalton gasps and clutches his stomach.

Human Coyote inspects the bloody tendril.

HUMAN COYOTE (CONT'D)

Do you understand now?

Dalton tries to struggle, but Human Coyote overpowers him
with ease. He stabs Dalton in the gut several more times.

On the final stab he drives it through his gut, it protrudes
from his back.

HUMAN COYOTE (CONT'D)

Whether you will it or not, all
shall serve death.

DALTON'S POV

The world is hazy. The light starts to fade.

Human Coyote strides away with a chuckle.

Dryad bleeds out nearby.

DALTON reaches out to her. He's in the--

INT. BACK OF AMBULANCE (MOVING) - DAY

Beatrice takes his hand.

Bandages stymie the blood on Dalton's head injury. A branch is impaled in his gut.

An EMT triages Dalton. The EMT connects a blood transfusion line to him.

Beatrice offers her arm, the EMT transfuses her blood into Dalton.

Dalton feebly reaches out towards Beatrice.

DALTON

Bea. I--

BEATRICE

Save your strength.

Dalton struggles to keep his eyes open as he blinks away fresh blood.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

Listen to me.

DALTON

Am I dead?

BEATRICE

We don't have much time.

Beatrice rests a hand on Dalton's shoulder--

EXT. BEATRICE'S GRAVE - DAY

Dalton stands before the fresh dirt pile, his head wrapped in bandage.

Gaia behind him in a black dress, her hand on his shoulder.

GAIA

You must stop him.

DALTON
Where am I? Bea?

Dalton perplexes at Gaia, realizes where he is and drops to his knees.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Why did you bring me here?

GAIA
Life and death are a balance.

DALTON
Take me back to when Bea was alive.

GAIA
It's too late for that.

Gaia shoves Dalton--

EXT. CITY STREET RUINS - NIGHT

Dalton crashes forward, staggers to his feet.

Buildings burn. Windows smashed. Cars overturned. Banners with symbols identical to the ruins on the obsidian blade.

Gaia leads Dalton through the carnage.

DALTON
What is this?

GAIA
The future. Coyote's new world order.

A SCREAMING WOMAN rushes past, hounded by a group of SAVAGE MEN.

They catch her and pin her to the ground. Encircle her as she screams.

DALTON
We have to help her.

Dalton charges forward, but Gaia grabs his arm, pulls him into--

INT. COYOTE'S THRONE ROOM - DAY

Dalton and Gaia are in a crowd of CHEERING SPECTATORS donned in furs and primitive garb.

Human Coyote sits on a throne of bones. He devours raw meat off a bone and watches with glee as-

TWO WARRIORS fight to the death with primitive weaponry. One is a LARGE WARRIOR with a massive spiked club. The other looks to be a TEENAGE WARRIOR, wiry but quick with a dagger.

GAIA

The distant past, when he ruled for millennia. Long before written word, a time marked by death and chaos.

The Large Warrior knocks the Teenage Warrior to the ground, swings for a fatal blow.

The Teenage Warrior rolls forward, disembowels the Large Warrior with a quick flick of his dagger.

The SPECTATORS ROAR.

HUMAN COYOTE leaps from his throne and marches over to the fallen Large Warrior.

GAIA (CONT'D)

Legends of his dominion were passed down through the generations.

Human Coyote plunges his fist into the Large Warrior's chest, rips out his heart with ease.

GAIA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

The world's religions developed different names for him. Ares. Lucifer. Iblis. Coyote. A thousand names.

Human Coyote offers the Teenage Warrior the still beating heart.

The Teenage Warrior devours the heart to SPECTATOR CHEERS.

DALTON cringes. Gaia rests a hand on his cheek, turns him away from the gore and towards--

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Dalton and Gaia stride forward, the sights and sounds of the prior arena transition into primitive agriculture. WORKERS tend wheat with stone tools. Dalton and Gaia observe.

GAIA

I too ruled. But my people were peaceful. Learning to live with the land, rather than pillaging.

A BAND OF WARRIORS charge forward. Human Coyote and Teenage Warrior among them.

Human Coyote cackles with glee as he slaughters Workers.

He captures a fleeing FEMALE. Pins her to the ground, lust in his eyes.

GAIA (CONT'D)

I could not allow his aggression against my people to go unanswered.

Gaia guides Dalton towards the-

EXT. MOTHER TREE - DAY

The singular large tree. No surrounding grove. Dalton and Gaia watch as-

Human Coyote and his Warriors chases a historic version of Gaia, right past Dalton and the speaking Gaia.

GAIA

He thought I was merely another vessel for his lust.

Human Coyote and the Warriors pin down the historic Gaia, rip off her clothes.

Human Coyote thrusts on top of her, he doesn't notice her shift into the Dryad.

GAIA (CONT'D)

But the power of life is mine, not his.

Roots from the Mother Tree impale Human Coyote and the Warriors. They scream and contort.

GAIA (CONT'D)

I trapped him in his true form. A lowly beast.

Human Coyote morphs into Alpha Coyote, Teenage Warrior into Runt.

Dryad beats and chases away the coyotes.

MONTAGE - CHAMPIONS ASSAULT

-A PRIMITIVE CHAMPION stalks towards the mother tree with the obsidian blade.

GAIA (V.O.)
For thousands of years he failed to
undo the enchantment.

-The Dryad shifts into a BEAUTIFUL WOMAN, kisses the Primitive Champion, he drops the obsidian dagger. Roots from the Mother Tree pierce the Primitive Champion. He transforms into a Living Tree(Wretched Creature).

-In turn, a NATIVE AMERICAN WARRIOR, a CONQUISTADOR, a COWBOY, a CIVIL WAR SOLDIER each approach the Mother Tree.

-Only to be seduced by the Dryad in the form of VARIOUS BEAUTIFUL WOMEN. Each of the Champions are grotesquely transformed into living trees.

-The surrounding grove of Living Trees grows from dozens to hundreds to thousands of trees.

EXT. DRYAD'S GROVE - DAY

Dalton and Gaia stand within the shade of the Mother Tree, the grove at its peak.

GAIA
Until you.

DALTON
I released him.

GAIA
It was inevitable.

EXT. RAINFOREST - DAY

Deforestation. A bulldozer blows down massive trees.

GAIA (V.O.)
My power has waned.

EXT. COAL POWER PLANT - DAY

Smoke stacks cough out black smog that chokes the atmosphere.

GAIA (V.O.)
I was dying. As all life must.

EXT. FOREST FIRE - DAY

Huge sheets of ice crash into the ocean. Massive tidal waves.

GAIA (V.O.)
But death is not the end of life.

EXT. DRYAD'S GROVE - DAY

The grove at its peak. Beautiful greenery surrounds the massive Mother Tree.

Dalton and Gaia stand in the shaded glory.

GAIA
Merely part of the cycle.

DALTON
How could I possibly stop him?

GAIA
Don't you understand? You were never his champion.

Gaia shifts into Dryad.

DRYAD
You're mine.

She impales her arm through Dalton's gut.

INT. MOTHER TREE HOLLOW - DAY

Dalton jolts awake.

DRYAD lies dead. Root tendrils extend from her arm into Dalton's gut.

DALTON lifts his shirt.

Small roots have stitched together his injuries. The flesh around the heart tendril has sealed. A small sapling grows from the tip of the tendril.

Dalton struggles to his feet, looks to the lifeless Dryad and tries to shake her awake.

DALTON
Hey! I'm not your champion.

The Mother Tree CREAKS and CRACKS.

EXT. DRYAD'S GROVE - DAY

Dalton staggers out of the Mother Tree hollow.

Dalton shuffles back as the Mother Tree COLLAPSES, it SHAKES THE GROUND on impact.

A large branch on the Mother Tree contorts and bends into what looks like a hand with a pointing finger.

The trees in the direction of the finger bend and shift to reveal a passage.

Dalton peers at the pathway in hesitation. He sighs and treks towards the opening.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Dalton reaches the end of the dead tree corridor.

He's met by a wall of vibrant reds, yellows and orange on the autumnal trees.

Dalton scans his surroundings, uncertain what to do next.

The trees begin to SHAKE and RUSTLE. The branches again bend and shift into a passage.

Dalton chuckles in disbelief.

He continues forward.

As he passes the trees they SHAKE back into formation, covering the path from whence he came.

Dalton looks back at his concealed origin. Then forges ahead.

LATER

Dalton has worked up a sweat. The trees continue to reveal a path, and then return to their position as he passes.

He spots something up above the tree canopy.

The crane.

Dalton swells with emotion. He lets out a cry of relief and hastens ahead.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Work has progressed. Slabs of concrete with piped leave ins. Presently there's no sign of any workers.

The trees near the edge open to reveal-

Dalton stumbles forward. The trees close behind him.

Dalton drops to his knees, he takes it all in.

DALTON

It was all a dream.

Dalton looks down at the tendril in his gut with the sapling growing from it.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Shit.

Dalton clambers back to his feet. Teeters towards the road.

HUMAN COYOTE'S LAUGHTER.

Dalton turns to face as--

HUMAN COYOTE emerges from the trees, twenty meters away.

HUMAN COYOTE

She brought you back.

Human Coyote and Dalton square off.

HUMAN COYOTE (CONT'D)

It's been so long since I'd been able to gut someone. It felt nice.

The bushes behind Human Coyote RUSTLE, the pack of coyote emerge.

HUMAN COYOTE (CONT'D)

They've lived as beasts for so long they've forgotten how to be men.

Human Coyote creeps forward. Dalton slowly backs away.

HUMAN COYOTE (CONT'D)

I am a gracious god. Kneel before me and you shall bed any woman you lust. Kill any man that causes you grievance. All that you desire, shall be yours.

DALTON

You can't give me what I desire.

HUMAN COYOTE

You desire your life. Kneel! Or
your fate is in the belly of a
coyote.

Dalton contemplates. But then drops to his knees.

HUMAN COYOTE (CONT'D)

Crawl over here like the dog you
are.

Dalton hesitates, but then gets on all fours. His hand sinks
into the tilled soil, he feels something.

He brushes away the dirt, his wedding ring.

He finds his resolve, slides the ring on and stands tall.

HUMAN COYOTE (CONT'D)

There's no honor in death. Only the
void awaits you.

Dalton doesn't budge. Human Coyote shifts into Alpha Coyote.

ALPHA COYOTE

Have it your way.

Alpha Coyote YIPS and YAPS. The PACK OF COYOTE charge.

Dalton flees.

Alpha Coyote observes from his position.

The pack of coyote close in.

Nowhere to run, Dalton turns to face death head on.

RUNT breaks ahead of the pack. Reaches Dalton first. Spins
and faces off against the other coyote.

The pack of coyote GROWL and SNARL.

Runt stands his ground in defense of Dalton.

BETA COYOTE (the next largest after Alpha) lunges forward.

Runt is smaller, but quicker. A whirlwind of furious SNAPS
and SNARLS.

Beta chomps on Runt's hind leg. But Runt gets a grip on
Beta's throat scruff.

Dalton swoops in with a swift kick to Beta's ribs.

Beta YELPS and tumbles.

Beta staggers back to its feet. Retreats for the woods.

The pack of coyote follow, save Runt.

DALTON

Thank you.

Alpha stalks forward. Runt faces him with a growl.

DALTON (CONT'D)

You've done enough. Get out of here.

Runt looks back at Dalton.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Go on.

Runt takes off towards the woods.

Alpha shifts back into Human Coyote. His eyes track Runt.

He flings his obsidian blade-- Drops Runt with a YELP.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Bastard!

Human Coyote strides over to Runt, a brief glance of mourning, then retrieves his blade.

HUMAN COYOTE

I don't normally enjoy consuming
the heart of a coward, but for you
I shall make an exception.

The ROAR of a DIESEL ENGINE and the distant CRUNCH of GRAVEL.

A SILVERADO comes around the bend and rolls into the construction site.

Dalton dashes towards the truck.

DALTON

Help!

The SILVERADO GRINDS to a HALT.

FOREMAN BUCK climbs out of the cab. Regards Dalton with apprehension.

FOUR WORKERS hop out of the bed of the truck.

FOREMAN BUCK
Shit, Dalton, that you?

Dalton races up to the Silverado.

DALTON
You have to-- We have to--

FOREMAN BUCK
Holy shit!

Buck notices tendril that protrudes from Dalton's gut.

FOREMAN BUCK (CONT'D)
The fuck happened to you?

DALTON
It's a long story.

FOREMAN BUCK
Did he do that to you?

HUMAN COYOTE strides towards the Silverado.

DALTON
We have to get out of here.

FOREMAN BUCK
Hey! Stop right there, Tarzan.

Human Coyote maintains his pace.

HUMAN COYOTE
Kneel before me and I shall spare
your wretched lives.

Buck looks to the group of WORKERS.

FOREMAN BUCK
Contener a la pendejo.

THE FOUR WORKERS move to intercept. One clutches a WRENCH,
another a HAMMER.

The LARGEST WORKER takes the lead.

LARGEST WORKER
Stop.

Dalton watches in horror as-

Largest Worker reaches out to restrain Human Coyote. Coyote snatches his wrist, snaps his arm at the elbow.

Largest Worker screams in agony. Coyote jams a hand into his mouth, RIPS OFF HIS JAW.

Largest Worker crumples in a gruesome pile.

WRENCH WORKER swings. CONNECTS to Coyote's chest with a THUD.

Human Coyote is unfazed.

He disembowels the Wrench Worker with his obsidian blade.

HAMMER WORKER SMASHES Human Coyote on the temple.

Human Coyote breaks his leg at the knee with a swift kick. Rips away the hammer.

The LAST WORKER flees in terror.

Coyote flings the hammer at the Last Worker, it embeds in the back of his skull.

Hammer Worker groans on the ground. Human Coyote silences him with a SKULL CRUSHING STOMP.

HUMAN COYOTE

Oh, how I have missed this--

BANG! Foreman Buck opens fire.

The bullets RIP through Human Coyote, but just as quick the injuries HEAL.

Buck UNLOADS his PISTOL as Human Coyote strides forward.

CLICK. Out of bullets.

Dalton backs away from the slaughter.

Buck unsheathes a knife. Plunges it into Human Coyote's chest.

He bisects the blade down Human Coyote's sternum, the flesh splits but RESEALS just as quick.

FOREMAN BUCK

The fuck are you--

Human Coyote yanks away the knife--

SLICES BUCK'S THROAT. Blood gushes.

Buck claws at his neck and collapses.

HUMAN COYOTE shifts his attention to-

DALTON waves his arms in surrender.

Human Coyote marches towards him.

Dalton drops to his knees.

HUMAN COYOTE

So you desire your pathetic life
after all?

Human Coyote rests a hand on Dalton's head.

Dalton stares down in defeat, as Coyote speaks Dalton stares
at the small sapling that grows from the tendril in his gut.

HUMAN COYOTE (CONT'D)

Do you finally understand the
inevitability?

DALTON

I do.

DALTON rips the tendril from his gut, blood and sap ooze from
the wound.

Human Coyote perplexes, but before he can react Dalton drives
the tendril into Human Coyote's crotch.

Human Coyote laughs. Dalton coughs up blood.

Human Coyote reaches for the tendril, but suddenly spasms.

The tendril explodes to life, roots plunge from the sapling
into Coyote's flesh.

Human Coyote's veins bulge as ROOTS ERUPT through his flesh.

A GRISLY EXPLOSION OF GORE AND ROOTS. Human Coyote is
pulverized as the sapling grows into a tree.

Where once Human Coyote stood. A SMALL NEW MOTHER TREE grows.

The ROOTS DIG DEEP into the earth.

Dalton watches in astonishment as additional saplings burst
forth from the earth.

The roots continue to spread throughout the construction
site, they envelop Foreman Buck and the Construction Workers
in a green glow.

The CONCRETE SLAB CRACKS AND SPLITS as saplings burst forth.

In a matter of minutes the entire space transforms.

The concrete slab and tilled earth--

Replaced with a bed of fresh saplings.

Dalton smiles at the magical sight.

Then faints from blood loss.

BLACK.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Dalton blinks awake. The familiar BEEP of a heart rate monitor.

He scans his surroundings. NURSES and DOCTORS bustle about outside the room, nothing out the ordinary.

Dalton lifts his hospital gown, bandages encircle his gut.

Dalton looks outside his window, the top branches of a tree sway in the wind.

FOREMAN BUCK (O.S.)

You're awake.

DALTON

What happened?

Foreman Buck approaches from the hallway.

FOREMAN BUCK

I found you at the construction site.

DALTON

Coyote.

FOREMAN BUCK

The ones that killed the deer?

DALTON

No. The man. The god.

FOREMAN BUCK

I'll go get the doctor.

DALTON

You don't remember?

FOREMAN BUCK
 I remember driving to the
 construction site...
 (reflecting)
 And then finding you passed out.

DALTON
 He killed you.

Foreman Buck chuckles and heads for the exit. He pauses.

FOREMAN BUCK
 Ya' know Yates is livid. I just
 gotta ask. How the hell didja do
 it?

DALTON
 Do what?

EXT. ROAD TO CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

A prius rolls down the gravel path.

INT. PRIUS (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Dalton grunts in mild pain as he drives.

EXT. TREE GROVE - DAY

The former construction site, still overgrown with young trees.

The Prius whirs to a stop at the edge of the grove. Dalton struggles his way out of the vehicle.

Dalton spots a bulldozer parked nearby.

Dalton limps along through the trees until he reaches the--

NEW MOTHER TREE

It stands tall, a meger reflection of its former glory, but impressive nonetheless.

Dalton gazes in awe. *It was real.*

FOOTSTEPS. Something approaches. Dalton spins to see--

DALTON
 Gaia?

GAIA

Dalton.

DALTON

Are you... her?

GAIA

Who else would I be?

DALTON

I thought you were-- What are you doing here?

GAIA

I had to see it. It's magnificent. It breaks my heart that they're going to bulldoze it all down again. How did it happened?

DALTON

You don't know?

Gaia looks at him, perplexed.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Coyote exploded when I stabbed him with the mother tree tendril.

GAIA

What are you talking about?

DALTON

You're not the dryad.

GAIA

The what?

DALTON

Forget it. My head is still a little foggy.

GAIA

I have to confess something. I googled you. I'm sorry about your wife. Why did you lie to me?

DALTON

Because I'm a piece of shit. And I deserve to be hated.

GAIA

Well, I don't appreciate being used as a tool for self loathing.

DALTON

You're right, I shouldn't have done that.

GAIA

What happened, it wasn't your fault.

DALTON

It was. It was and I have to live with that. I don't know if I can, but I don't have a choice.

GAIA

What will you do?

Dalton looks to Gaia, and then up at the Mother Tree.

EXT. YATES SKYSCRAPER - DAY

The BUSTLE of the CITY. CAR HORNS. PEDESTRIANS. The building towers above it all.

Dalton climbs concrete steps towards a massive vestibule.

INT. GLASS ELEVATOR - DAY

Dalton clutches a red folder as he ascends. The city visible behind him.

Passengers enter and exit as the elevator rises up above the surrounding buildings.

Dalton's the final passenger when the elevator DINGS open at the top floor.

INT. YATES OFFICE - DAY

Mr. Yates sips whiskey at his desk constructed from a massive redwood segment. Hanging behind him is a gigantic painting of a wolf howling at the moon.

Dalton peeks his head in the room. Mr. Yates beckons him with a wave.

Dalton tip toes over to the desk. Mr. Yates points at a chair, but Dalton stands tall.

MR. YATES

Sit.

Dalton relents and takes a seat.

MR. YATES (CONT'D)

You want to tell me what the hell is going on over in Utah? As I understand it, an entire grove of trees have popped up seemingly overnight.

DALTON

That about surmises it.

MR. YATES

You had something to do with this?

Dalton nods.

MR. YATES (CONT'D)

What an absolutely idiotic way to commit career suicide. Buck said it'll delay us three weeks at most.

Dalton flings the red folder across the deck, it slides to a stop against Mr. Yates' whiskey glass.

MR. YATES (CONT'D)

What's this?

Dalton just stares.

MR. YATES (CONT'D)

(flips through the folder)
CGP revoked?
New species of tree?
What the hell is this?

DALTON

Any path to victory.

Mr. Yates chews on his words thrown back in his face.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

A Prius rolls down a small concrete path. Comes to a stop.

Dalton helps Max out of the rear, who looks to be about FOUR now.

BEATRICE'S GRAVE

The dirt has settled and shoots of young grass blanket the plot.

Max clutches his 'coy dog' stuffed animal, Dalton lays a fresh bouquet of flowers at Beatrice's headstone.

MAX

I love you, mommy.

Dalton places a supportive hand on Max's shoulder.

Max steps forward, rests the 'coy dog' stuffed animal next to the flowers.

MAX (CONT'D)

He'll protect you.

Dalton hugs Max.

DALTON

Thank you. Could you give me just a moment? Don't go far.

Max nods and takes a couple of steps back.

Dalton rests a hand on Beatrice's grave.

DALTON (CONT'D)

Bea. I should have told you a thousand times, but I never did. I'm sorry. I'm sorry for taking you for granted. For destroying our family. And I'm sorry that when I needed to fight, I ran away. I promise, it will never happen again.

Dalton looks to Max, waves him over. Max charges into an embrace with Dalton.

DALTON (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Max.

The two hug for a beat. Dalton shepherds Max towards the Prius.

MAX

Goodbye, mommy.

They climb inside the Prius. The 'coy dog' is left guarding the gravestone.

EDGE OF THE GRAVEYARD

A coyote watches from a cluster of trees as the Prius whirs away.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END