

EXT. CORN FIELD - DAY

The intense BUZZING of summer insects and the SONG of songbirds. A birds eye view of a bucolic mid west farming landscape, corn field, blue skies, sunshine, a FARMER PLOUGHING a nearby field with a TRACTOR, grain silos and a hay stack. A MAN with a horse. A clapboard house with a strawberry field, a woman's hand picks strawberries; a WOMAN lying in grass, lazing...

OPENING CREDITS...

INT. DINING ROOM/HOME - NIGHT

Next to book shelves and an upright piano, with sheet music on the stand - CHOPIN. There is also a dining room table with leftovers from an abandoned meal - strawberries and cream.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

MONTH LATER - a warm night, the MAN is asleep with the same WOMAN, now pregnant, no sheets on the bed. The MAN is restless and wakes. A distant RUMBLING, indistinct - the MAN swings his feet off of the bed and goes to the window, anxious.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

The MAN is in his shorts, sweating, putting a plug in the bath and turning on the taps as far as they will go. The WOMAN appears in the doorway in a nightdress and leans against the door frame watching, blearily, cradling her pregnant belly.

WOMAN.

Why are you taking a bath?

MAN.

I'm not.

The WOMAN takes off her nightdress and goes to the bath.

WOMAN.

You'll sleep better.

He looks at her, surprised she's misunderstood.

MAN.

I'm not! Put your clothes back on.

She sees he's looking out the window now - there's an eery rose-colored glow of distant fire through the glass - and distant shouts and screams...

(CONTINUED)

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WOMAN.

What is it? What's happening?

END OF FLASHBACK:

TITLE: THE ROAD.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAWN

A MAN of about forty and a BOY of ten are asleep, camped on a tarp under a rock ledge, the blackened chasm of a burnt valley spread out below. It is the same man seen earlier - but ten years older, thinner, malnourished, with a thick beard. They are both emaciated and exhausted, their faces and hands coated in grime and soot from the burned, blackened landscape around them. Ash falls on the tarp, which is bright synthetic blue, the only color in sight.

The MAN is woken by something, he instinctively reaches out to touch the BOY, his hand rests on his chest and rises and falls with each of the sleeping BOY's breaths.

There is a low RUMBLE, the ground starts to TREMBLE and the BOY wakes.

BOY.

Papa? (NO REPLY.) Papa?

MAN.

Shh. It's okay.

BOY.

What is it, Papa?

They listen as it grows NEARER and LOUDER, everything SHAKING, tree roots GROANING and SPLITTING, until it passes between them with a ROAR like a subway train right beneath them. The BOY is now clinging to the MAN and crying, his head buried against his chest in fear.

MAN.

Shh. It's all right. It's all right. It's gone.

BOY.

What was it, Papa?

MAN.

It was an earthquake.

EXT. ROAD - DAY *

In the burnt, barren landscape, through swirls of soft ash and smoggy air the MAN appears dressed in a filthy old PARKA with the hood up, a knapsack on his back, pushing a rusted shopping CART with a bicycle mirror clamped to the handle and the BLUE tarp now covering it's load. The little BOY, similarly dressed with a KNAPSACK on his back, shuffles through the ash at his side - like Depression-era Dust Bowl homeless. *

There is a flicker of lightning over head, then more, but no thunder. *

MAN. (V.O.) *

The clocks stopped at one seventeen one morning. There was a long shear of bright light, then a series of low concussions. *

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE/ CRACKED ROAD - DAY *

Broken asphalt, the earthquake has caused a large FISSURE to open up ALONGSIDE the road, with a sheer drop. *

THE MAN and THE BOY edge past burnt trees and scrub. *

MAN. (V.O.) *

Within a year there were fires on the ridges and deranged chanting. The screams of the murdered. By day the dead impaled on spikes along the road. *

EXT. LAKE - DAY *

They trudge past a vast lake filled with dead trees... *

MAN. (V.O.) *

I think it's October but I can't be sure. I haven't kept a calender for 5 years. *

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - DAY *

They truck along with the trolley through the fog, the ghostly shapes of dead trees on either side and the shapes of barren mountains in the background... *

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAN. (V.O.)

Each day is more gray than the one
before. Each night is darker -
beyond darkness. The world gets
colder week by week as the planet
slowly dies. No animals have
survived. All the crops are long
gone.

EXT. EDGE WOODS - DAY

A tree falls behind them with a WHUMP and they jump...

MAN (V.O.)

Someday all the trees in the world
will have fallen.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

The MAN forages for petrol, checking the nozzle of the pumps,
rummaging through empty oil cans, he upends a bin to get at
the empty oil bottles.

The BOY picks up a phone on a wall and listens to the dead
earpiece.

MAN. (V.O.)

The roads are peopled by refugees
towing carts and road gangs
carrying weapons, looking for fuel
and food.

EXT. LONG ROAD - DAY

They head down a long straight road towards a dark,
forbidding looking tunnel - a turnpike.

MAN. (V.O.)

There has been cannibalism.
Cannibalism is the great fear.

EXT. CITY - DAY

They emerge before a view of a deserted city-state...

EXT. MALL - DAY

They forage in a deserted mall...

There are skeletons and human bones here and there.

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CONTINUED:

MAN. (V.O.)

Mostly I worry about food. Always
food. Food and our shoes.

CU - the BOY examines the head of a moose mounted on a wall
in a SEARS hunting store.

MAN. (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Sometimes I tell the boy old
stories of courage and justice -
difficult as they are to remember.
All I know is the child is my
warrant and if he is not the word
of God, then God never spoke.

END OF CREDITS/MUSIC.

EXT. RIDGE/ CAMPSITE - (CAMP 2) - EVENING

They are camped high up on the ridge of a mountainside.
There is a camp fire with wet clothes hanging to dry on
sticks beside it.

The MAN is erecting the tarp over string tied between two
sticks stuck in the ground. The BOY is sitting lighting a
lantern using the scavenged oil inside the makeshift tent,
his shadow stark against the illuminated tarp.

BOY.

Now you can read me a story.

He gets out a BOOK and looks at the pictures in the
lamplight.

The MAN reads him a story...

EXT. RIDGE/CAMPSITE - (CAMP 2) - NIGHT

The MAN awakens bathed in firey light as if the sun has come
out. There is pale gray snow all around him with a quivering
orange glow. He gets up to investigate, looks to the line of
trees up the ridge where a FOREST FIRE is burning, CRACKLING
in the distance. He stands staring at the fire, the warmth
and light moving him, enlivening him and not frightening him
at all. The BOY has got up and appears at his side, yawning.
He looks at the sky at a single gray SNOWFLAKE drifting down.

BOY.

It's snowing!

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CONTINUED:

MAN.

It's like it used to be when the
sun came out.

The BOY catches the snowflake in his hand, surprised.

EXT. ROAD/PLAIN - DAY

They travel along the road through drifting wood smoke, smoke pouring off the ground like mist and thin black trees burning like candles on the snowy ridge.

They reach a spot where fire has crossed the road melting the tarmac. Their feet stick in the molten tarmac, it sucks at their shoes and they stop. Just ahead they see a set of foot prints in the tar and study them.

BOY.

Who is it?

MAN.

I don't know.

The MAN looks through a pair of BINOCULARS and sees: A stooped figure up ahead, a DYING MAN dragging one leg slightly, limping along. He stops and stands uncertainly, then continues. The BOY sees him too.

BOY.

What should we do Papa?

MAN.

We're all right. Let's just follow
and watch.

BOY.

Take a look.

MAN.

Yeah. Take a look.

EXT. ROAD/HILL - LATE AFTERNOON

The DYING MAN is getting slower and slower as they climb a slope, following, until he finally stops and simply sits in the road. The BOY hangs onto the MAN's coat anxiously as they approach.

POV BOY - the DYING MAN is burnt, his clothing scorched and skin black with soot. One eye is burnt shut and his hair is a nitty wig of ash. His shoes are bound with wire and coated with road tar.

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As they pass by the DYING MAN looks down, averting his eyes. The BOY keeps looking, unable to take his eyes off him.

BOY.

Papa, what's wrong with that man?

MAN.

He's been struck by lightning.

BOY.

Can't we help him? Papa?

MAN.

No. We can't help him.

They keep walking away and the BOY tugs at the MAN's coat.

BOY.

Papa?

MAN.

Stop it.

BOY.

Can't we help him, Papa?

MAN.

No. We can't. There's nothing to be done for him.

EXT. BRIDGE - (CAMP 3) - EVENING

*

They are camped under the bridge, ash and slurry drift by on the river, a dull sulphur light from the fires glows against the sky. The BOY sits in silence with his back to the MAN.

*

MAN.

There's nothing we could have done.
(NO REPLY.) He's going to die. We can't share what we have or we'll die too.

BOY.

I know.

MAN.

So when are you going to talk to me again?

BOY.

I'm talking now.

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CONTINUED:

MAN.
Are you sure?

BOY.
Yes.

EXT. BARN - DAY

They come to a barn beside the road. They look at each other. *

MAN.
Let's take a look.

The man picks up the revolver and they go inside cautiously.

INT. BARN - DAY

Three pairs of FEET wearing different shoes - a man's shoes, a woman's shoes, and a CHILD's sneakers - hang above three carefully placed chairs.

MAN.
Don't look.

The BOY looks at the ground.

MAN. (CONT'D)
You don't need to see this.

The BOY takes a few steps, exploring, he eyes the empty hay loft but avoids looking at the hanged bodies.

BOY.
There could be something here.
There could be corn or something.

MAN.
No, they ran out of food.

BOY.
Maybe we could find some hayseeds
in the hayloft?

Now the BOY goes over to the swinging CORPSES, oddly curious.

MAN.
It's not what you think. They
committed suicide.

BOY.
What does that mean?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAN.

You know what that means.

The MAN GOES outside while the BOY thinks about it a moment.

EXT. FARM GATE - DAY

They walk away from the eerily silent farm, stopping at an abandoned TRACTOR by a weathered, paint stripped letter box. *

MAN.

Come here.

The BOY goes over and the MAN takes out his revolver, opens the magazine and shows him: two bullets in the chamber.

MAN. (CONT'D)

You see that? Two left. One for you and one for me.

He places the BOY's thumb on the hammer and cocks the pistol. He curls the BOY's index finger around the trigger.

MAN. (CONT'D)

You put it in your mouth and point it up. Like this. Just like I showed you.

He puts the barrel of the pistol in his own mouth until the BOY nods, wide eyed. He takes the pistol out of his mouth and uncocks it.

MAN. (CONT'D)

You got it?

BOY.

I think.

MAN.

Is it okay?

BOY.

Okay.

The MAN puts the gun away and cuddles the BOY close. They set off again.

INT. CLAPBOARD HOUSE - DAY

FLASHBACK - the WOMAN is sitting by the window, staring out at the garden which is barren now, the sky gray but tinged with the same fireglow seen earlier, a film of gray ash covers dead lawn and shrubs and inside the paintwork is grimy and colorless now, a lot of the furniture gone. A pile of broken up furniture and pieces of the piano are stacked up next to the fireplace. In the fireplace the scorched, ashen remains of piano keys. The WOMAN is now heavily pregnant. The MAN sets down chipped old plates and spoons, spoons beans from a pot and sits to eat. *

As the WOMAN starts to eat she winces and freezes with a look of horror, spoon halfway to her mouth. She looks down and sees:

POV WOMAN - water and blood running down her legs. *

WOMAN. *

Oh no. Oh no.

MAN.

It's okay, I'll help you. Just like we said.

WOMAN. *

No no no...

MAN.

I'll heat water. We can do it. *

As he goes out she MOANS in despair.

INT. KITCHEN/CLAPBOARD HOUSE - DAY

The MAN rushes in and opens a drawer in the sideboard. Instead of cutlery it contains a pair of kitchen shears, a bottle of antiseptic, worn but clean towels and a pair of worn out yellow rubber dish gloves, all laid out in readiness.

The WOMAN appears at the door, blood running down a leg.

WOMAN. *

We don't have to.

MAN.

Well, I think we probably do.

WOMAN. *

What kind of life is this?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAN.

It's life. It's the only thing left.

He takes the WOMAN back into the other room. *

INT. DINING ROOM / CLAPBOARD HOUSE - DAY *

TERRIBLE SCREAMING. The WOMAN lies on the dining room table SCREAMING as she has her first contractions. The MAN is wearing the rubber gloves, one gloved hand resting on the WOMAN's leg, about to deliver his own baby. He wipes his brow and leaves a smear of blood as the SCREAMING goes on. *

WOMAN. *

I can't.

MAN.

It's coming.

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. TRAILER HOME - (CAMP 4)- EVENING *

Inside a badly damaged trailer home, one wall half fallen off, a pan of water boils on a small fire. The BOY sits shivering in a blankets as he eats beans from a tin, scraping around for the last one or two. The MAN opens his knapsack by the fire and produces a packet of COCOA. He fixes a cup of cocoa for the boy. He hands the BOY the cup of cocoa and as the BOY examines it and drinks, the MAN surreptitiously pours himself a mug of water and sits blowing on it. The BOY realises the MAN has left him all the cocoa. *

BOY.

You promised not to do that.

MAN.

What?

BOY.

You know what, Papa. I have to watch you all the time.

MAN.

I know I'm sorry.

BOY.

If you break little promises you'll break big ones. That's what you said.

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CONTINUED:

The MAN relents, pouring the hot water back into the pan and taking some of the BOY's cocoa into his own cup. The BOY wipes his finger around the inside of the empty bean tin and licks his finger.

MAN.

Watch your finger.

BOY.

You always say that.

MAN.

That's because you always do it.

The MAN spreads bits of a worn out road map on the boards and studies them.

BOY.

What are you doing?

MAN.

We have to keep moving. We have to go south to the coast.

BOY.

Why?

MAN.

It'll be better at the coast.

BOY.

Why?

MAN.

Because we're going to freeze here. *

He picks up the map pieces carefully. *

EXT. TURNPIKE - MORNING *

The MAN and the BOY truck along the blacktop. *

At the crest of a hill they come to FADED BILLBOARDS advertising MOTELS and stop. The BOY notices a sign in the distance, which has words painted over a faded advertisement: odd, nonsensical, Biblical ramblings about "bones" and "the dead." The MAN follows the BOY's gaze and reads: "BEHOLD THE VALLEY OF SLAUGHTER - JEREMIAH 19:6." *

MAN.

Do you remember your alphabet?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BOY.

Yes.

MAN.

Can you read that? *

BOY (SCRUTINISING IT.)

No.

MAN.

Good, let's go. *

The MAN takes out a large REVOLVER, cocks it in readiness and places it on the tarp as they move. The BOY eyes the MAN nervously, eyes the gun and they move off. *

EXT. TURNPIKE, TUNNEL APPROACH - DAY *

They trudge along the turnpike towards the opening of a deep, black tunnel and the BOY suddenly comes to a stop, increasingly upset, unable to face the yawning mouth of the tunnel. *

BOY. *

I can't, I just can't... *

MAN. *

There's no other way. *

BOY. *

We could go over. *

MAN. *

We can't take the cart over. *

BOY. *

We don't know what's in there. *

MAN. *

There's nothing in there. It's just the same as it is out here. Okay? *

BOY. (BEAT. VERY RELUCTANT.) *

Okay. *

The boy sticks close to the MAN's side. The man has the revolver in his belt now and his parka unzipped, ready as they nervously walk towards the mouth of the tunnel. *

INT. TUNNEL - DAY

The MAN has his arm around the boy as they push the cart cautiously ahead, acutely aware of all that's around them. They pass footprints in the dried sludge on the ground. Ash and litter blowing about and a handful of MUMMIFIED DEAD REFUGEES appear along the sides of the tunnel, sitting and lying on camp stretchers, their bags and supplies long since looted. They are shrivelled and drawn like latterday bogfolk, shoeless, a couple of men, a woman a small child and a DOG.

The MAN stares at the group.

The BOY stares at the small child and then at the mummified DOG, transfixed. The MAN puts out his hand for the BOY to take - the BOY takes his hand and the MAN moves him on.

MAN.

Just remember that the things you put into your head are forever.

BOY.

But you forget some things don't you?

MAN.

You forget what you want to remember and you remember what you want to forget.

EXT. TUNNEL EXIT AND TURNPIKE - (CAMP 5) - EARLY MORNING

The MAN and the BOY are asleep inside an abandoned car amongst a line of other abandoned vehicles littering the turnpike.

INT. ABANDONED CAR - (CAMP 5) - EARLY MORNING

Now the BOY's hand rests on the MAN's chest as he sleeps. The MAN breathes stertorously, wheezing a little and the BOY'S small hand goes up and down on his chest.

Suddenly the MAN wakes and rolls onto his side, listening, the revolver lying beside him. He slips his hand onto the revolver and raises his head slowly. He looks around - nothing but the sound of a distant DIESEL ENGINE. He looks at the BOY fast asleep. When he looks back at the tunnel he sees a nightmarish vision:

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POV MAN - Exiting the tunnel, shuffling through the ash, a group of HOODED MEN, some in gas masks and filthy biohazard suits, slouching along, coughing, casting their heads from side to side and swinging clubs and lengths of pipe - a ROAD GANG. The MAN listens to the sound of a DIESEL TRUCK behind the gang. *

MAN.
Quickly. Quick...

The BOY jolts awake as the MAN shoves his pistol in his belt, grabs the boy by the hand. They slide out of the car and crouch on the ground, the BOY is frozen with fear. *

MAN. (CONT'D)
It's all right. It's all right but we have to run. Don't look back. Come on.

Their backpacks are still left in the back of the car... *

MAN. (CONT'D)
Run... run...

The flat bed truck RUMBLES into view, MEN from the GANG standing on the flat bed looking around, some holding rifles. The BOY falls and the MAN pulls him to his feet with such force he lifts him clean off the ground and has to dangle him back down again.

MAN. (CONT'D)
You okay? It's all right... come on...

They rush down the embankment into the trees alongside the turnpike. *

EXT. TURNPIKE UNDERPASS - DAY *

They run through the woods. The truck is heard in the background, the motor missing and SPUTTERING, coils of black diesel smoke coiling through the woods. The motor dies with a flapping RATTLE and there's SILENCE. *

The MAN and the BOY crouch in frozen silence, the Truck now on the overpass nearby, dangerously exposed to the view of the Gang. They listen to the GANG TALKING and raising the hood of the truck. *

The MAN puts his arm around the BOY and draws his pistol as they see the truck begin to roll, the GANG pushing it... but it coughs and stalls again. *

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The MAN sees one of the GANG MEMBERS coming down the embankment, unbuckling his belt. He is emaciated, in dirty blue overalls and a gas company cap, and has a long beard cut square at the bottom and a bad tattoo of a bird on his neck. He doesn't stop, just keeps coming, closer and closer until he's just feet away, almost on top of them. He unzips his pants and takes a piss. As he stands pissing his eyes roam around - at any moment he could look to the side and see them crouching there. *

The MAN is wide-eyed, gun ready, eyes darting from the GANG MEMBER to the BOY to the GUN. The GANG MEMBER rolls his shoulders and exercises his neck... he looks down and studies the steam coming off his piss. *

The MAN silently trains his pistol at the head of the GANG MEMBER who, as if by instinct, rolls his head around and looks right at him.

MAN.

Just keep it coming.

The GANG MEMBER sees the gun and stops pissing, looks back at the truck, zips his fly.

MAN. (CONT'D)

Don't look at them. Look at me. If you call out you're dead. Where you from?

GANG MEMBER.

Does it matter? Where you from?

MAN.

What's the truck running on?

GANG MEMBER.

Diesel fuel.

MAN.

Where d'you get that?

GANG MEMBER.

I don't know.

MAN.

You don't know, huh?

The GANG MEMBER just stares, not answering.

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