

DEVIL'S PEAK

Written by

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BLACK SCREEN.

The soft, trickling sound of water.

FADE IN:

Dusk. A desiccated stream bed - a trickle of WATER dribbles through a narrow, cracked canal into a MUDDY POOL.

A scorched swathe of earth - rows of BLACKENED TRUNKS stretching silently into the sky, extending back into the deep recesses of the forest.

A dirt track trailing through dense, misty pines. A green carpet of enormous ferns lines either side of the path.

Running through the forest - pine branches whipping - the loud crunching of dead leaves - short panting breaths - a wisp of WHITE SMOKE. A lithe, dark FIGURE ahead, just barely out of sight.

Faster - smashing through brambles. Light glints off the figure's silhouette - two burning RED EMBERS dodge and weave between branches.

One final burst through the dense brush -

FILLING THE SCREEN: a massive, wet, glimmering, black EYE.

An earsplitting, screeching WAIL pierces the air.

EXT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - ROOF - DAY

The abrasive HISS of STATIC.

A calloused hand reaches up into a cloudless blue sky, clutching a cheap FM radio. A CHIPPER FEMALE ANNOUNCER's voice squawks from the speaker, fading in and out.

CHIPPER FEMALE ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

It's five-oh-clock somewhere
Southwest Oregon....July...lined up
to be another scorcher! But these
smooth.....cool you right down!

Another hand reaches up and gives the radio a smack.

NATALIE (O.S.)

C'mon, you sonofabitch.

CHIPPER FEMALE ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Enjoy...ice cold.....wet and wild
hits of the summer of 1992!

An upbeat pop song plays, garbled by interference.

NATALIE (O.S.)

Come on.

The hand holding the radio comes down, revealing NATALIE BROOKS (F, 40's) in ratty cargo pants. Hair braided neatly back, she exudes an unabashedly practical, no-nonsense air - though her weatherbeaten face hints at her ruggedness.

She's perched on a cinderblock on top of a tiny, dilapidated roof, loose planks scattered all around her.

She twists the TUNER. Each channel gives off more static than the last. She adjusts the antenna - MUSIC pours out of the speakers. Very gently, she brings her hand down...

CRACKLE. It dissolves in a scramble of static.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Screw it.

She tosses the radio behind her. It bounces once and skids off the edge of the roof. CRASH.

Natalie peers after it - shrugs. She slaps a plank down, positions a nail and swings down her hammer.

EXT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - BALCONY - DAY

CLUNK. Natalie drops down onto a wooden balcony, wincing as her left leg hits the ground.

She wipes sweat off her brow as she turns to face the view.

EXT. VALLEY - CONTINUOUS

A wide, sweeping VALLEY rushes out from the cliffside below her. Across the valley, glorious MOUNTAINS stretch up from the earth, their tops catching the golden glow of the first rays of sunset. Birds swoop and sing. Paradise.

EXT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Natalie looks out at the landscape, her face impassive.

The remains of the FM RADIO lie at her feet. She picks them up. A metallic SQUAWK echoes behind her.

DISPATCH (V.O.)
 (very faint)
 Devil's Peak.....Peak...

She whips around and runs to a splintering wooden door.

INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - CONTINUOUS

A shabby room, about fifteen feet square. Long neglected, littered in dust and detritus.

Low furniture hugs the walls. In the room's center stands a waist-high PLINTH with a circular disk mounted on top.

Most noticeable in the space: the enormous windows allowing for an uninterrupted and spectacular 360 degree view.

Natalie dumps the broken radio on the desk, where a large TWO-WAY RADIO gives a CRACKLE. The voice of DISPATCH (M, 50's) comes through - easygoing and direct.

DISPATCH (V.O.)
 Devil's Peak lookout, Sisters
 dispatch. Afternoon fire report
 requested, over. Do you copy?

NATALIE
 (picking up mic)
 Sisters dispatch, Devil's Peak
 lookout - I'm here. Was just
 patching the roof up, over.

DISPATCH (V.O.)
 Told you she'd need it. How're
 things lookin' up there, over.

Natalie picks up a RUSTY SHOVEL that lies discarded on the desk. She looks around the decaying cabin.

NATALIE
 Room service is slow - but the
 view's decent.

A laugh echoes over the tinny speakers. She flips open a notebook.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
 Devil's Peak this afternoon:
 temperature fifty-eight, RH is
 thirty-five -
 (squinting at her writing)
 No, thirty-eight percent.
 (MORE)

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Winds are calm, visibility is great above the valley floor through the inversion, and cloud cover is about...five percent. Over.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

Copy, clear visibility. Everything else okay?

Beat.

NATALIE

Affirmative. Everything's great.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

Roger that, Devil's Peak - stay warm up there. Over and out.

Natalie replaces the handset, stares blankly out at the idyllic landscape. The silence is palpable.

NATALIE

Just fucking great.

INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - FIRE FINDER - DAY

Natalie wipes dust off the plinth: an OSBORNE FIRE FINDER.

She fiddles with the thin, slitted piece of metal sticking up from its perimeter. It rotates easily under her touch. She bends down to peer through its narrow opening. A tall pine is visible in the crosshairs.

FLASHBACK - EXT. SISTERS RANGER STATION - DAY

A massive pine tree looms over a stocky WOODEN CABIN at the end of a dirt road. A small sign dangles next it: "*SISTERS RANGER STATION, EST. 1936 - DESCHUTES NATIONAL FOREST*".

Natalie is hitching a long, narrow GREEN BAG to the already-laden saddle of her horse. She fumbles for her strap.

A powerfully muscled woman with close-cropped grey hair hands her the loose end - LENA OWENS (F, late 60's). Looks like she eats glass for breakfast and comes back for seconds.

OWENS

Best thing is to just stay quiet, keep your head down. Heal up a bit.

NATALIE

Bullshit. This is a witch hunt -
you of all people should see that -

OWENS

I do. But you gotta play by their
rules. I'm serious, Brooks. The
agency's not calling for your red
card now, but that could change any
minute. You should know how fast
winds can turn around here.

NATALIE

That supposed to be funny?

OWENS

Just promise - no running off. Keep
it together up there for the rest
of the summer, and I can handle the
heat down here. Oh -

She hands a small black CAMERA to Natalie.

OWENS (CONT'D)

Thought maybe you could use a new
hobby. Good to keep busy.

Owens claps her awkwardly on the arm. Almost a hug.

OWENS (CONT'D)

(under her voice)

Never let 'em get a whiff of blood.

A dour-looking man rides up on a horse: RANGER REED (M, late
20's). His brimming aura of self-importance is so thick it's
almost palpable. He starts cleaning his nails with a large
KNIFE, giving Natalie a strangely harsh look.

RANGER REED

(to Owens)

Sun's going low, Supe. Time to go.

A pink tint to the clouds floating above the dark pines.

BACK TO PRESENT - INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - DAY

The same pink tint graces the distant mountains. Natalie
frames up a shot with the CAMERA. *Snap.*

CRACKLE.

DISPATCH (V.O.)
 All stations, this is Sisters
 dispatch signing out for the
 evening. Have a good night.

The shimmering clouds drift across the red sky.

EXT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - NIGHT

From the outside: a tiny CABIN perched on a towering, rickety frame, silhouetted against the dying light. Dwarfed by MOUNTAINS and the vast expanse of the OPEN SKY, it appears toylike and fragile, its dim glow swallowed by the darkness.

EXT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - BALCONY - NIGHT

No manmade lights visible anywhere. Above: a breathtaking sweep of stars, split in two by a fully visible Milky Way.

In her hand, Natalie holds a BELT with a metal buckle. She fingers the design. Dimly visible along its edge: "WOLF RIVER HOTSHOTS". In its center, a carved image of a wolf in a forested river, howling amidst a blaze of flames.

She dangles it over the edge of the railing. A light breeze ruffles her hair. Deeply peaceful, solitary.

She lets out a guttural SCREAM. Birds scatter.

Embarrassed, she shoves the belt away and turns.

Something catches her eye. On a distant cliffside across the valley: a yellow pinprick of LIGHT.

She grabs a pair of binoculars - can't make out much, but the light is yellowish and steady, distinctly man-made.

Another lookout tower.

NATALIE
 Shit.

She lowers the binoculars and stares at the glowing speck.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

A rich and glorious sunrise.

EXT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - DAY

The LOOKOUT TOWER, now visible in daylight, is perched precariously on a wooden platform extending out from a ridge overlooking the valley. Rickety stairs lead up from the platform to a BALCONY that wraps around the cabin.

EXT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - BALCONY - DAY

Natalie adjusts a string of OLD BEAN CANS dangling from a nail in the wall. *Jingle jangle* - they rattle at her touch.

A length of PARACORD trails from the cans, leading away down the stairs.

EXT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - CONTINUOUS

The paracord is wrapped around stakes placed along the tower's perimeter, forming an almost-invisible TRIPWIRE.

Natalie steps over it, walks to a chopping block. She yanks a rusting AXE out of the stump, thumbing its blade dubiously.

A fresh BURN SCAR is visible rippling down her forearm.

She brings the axe down on a log. It bounces back up - she falls. Tossing the axe aside, she limps towards the tower.

INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - CONTINUOUS

She unzips a RED DUFFEL BAG and yanks out a rough metal file.

EXT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - CONTINUOUS

The axe quivers on the chopping block as Natalie grinds away.

She rubs it down with an oily cloth. The edge now gleams.

She raises the axe high, brings it down with expert precision. The LOG cleaves neatly in two.

INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - DAY

A pile of FIREWOOD topples to the floor. Natalie squats before the wood-burning stove, cleaning its interior.

She frowns - reaches deeper. Her hand emerges clutching a badly charred NOTEBOOK.

The floor is scorched and littered with heaps of BURNT WOOD. Looking around, she spots another NOTEBOOK on the ground - in slightly better shape.

She flips it open, and a loose page flutters out.

A sketch of a HOOF PRINT, perhaps a deer's - only curiously, the tip has three toes rather than two. She flips to the cover. In slapdash cursive: "R.S. MURPHY - 1973 SEASON".

INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - DESK - DAY

Natalie sits at the desk, examining the BURNT JOURNALS. She flips to a page dated "JUNE 17th":

" - hotter and drier every day. Hiked down to Suttle Lake to check on water levels - down from last week - "

A few pages forward. "JUNE 30th":

" - smoke activity noticed as of yet, but the summer is young. This will be the second year with less than five inches rainfall - conditions seem prime for an awakening.

Hike to South Sister unremarkable - "

A LARGE BOOK catches her eye. In bold letters on its spine: "RECORD: DEVIL'S PEAK FIRE LOOKOUT."

Photos and messages from previous lookouts. A man with deep-set eyes peers out from one page: "RALPH SAMPSON MURPHY: 1965-1984."

NATALIE

Nineteen years? Jesus.

She flips to a fresh page, writes at the top: "NATALIE BROOKS: 1992".

CRASH. The pen scrawls upwards. Piercing, panicked SCREECHES drift in through the window.

Natalie springs into action, lurching for her GREEN BAG. Thinks twice, pulls out a pocketknife.

EXT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Natalie pokes her head out.

A BARN OWL is thrashing on the railing, its legs caught in the mesh of a wire bird feeder. It flaps in panic, its scream harsh.

NATALIE

Shhh - it's okay. You're safe.

She cuts the wires. The owl's legs pop free.

It cocks a beady black eye at her, lets out a final SCREECH, flaps away.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

(shakily to herself)

You're safe.

INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - NIGHT

Natalie clutches the green bag. Nowhere to hide it. She shoves it under the bed.

A dull THUD. She frowns. Grabbing a flashlight, she peers beneath the mattress. The bag has disappeared.

LATER -

Natalie stands over a charred TRAPDOOR.

The bed lies to the side. The wood of the door has rotted away, forming a gaping hole. She aims her flashlight inside.

A cobwebbed larder hole. A rusting sign: "EMERGENCY PROVISION STORAGE". Her bag rests on top of a thick pile of BURNT WOOD.

NATALIE

(muttering)

Better get a pay bump for this.

She yanks out her bag, and a pile of paper topples in the corner. A thick stack of NOTEBOOKS, all rotting with mildew.

She pushes them aside to reveal a bottle of amber liquid. Sniffs it, makes a face. Whiskey. She swings her light over the hole one final time, and something SHINY catches her eye.

On top of the pile, nestled almost delicately into the wood: a large BLACK STONE.

She lifts it out. It's smooth, but a delicate pattern of swirling, branching lines appear carved into its surface. Fossil-like. One side is rounded, the other flat and rough. It fits satisfyingly in the palm of her hand.

Natalie runs her fingers over the jagged edge. Gleaming in the low light, it looks almost IRIDESCENT.

INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - DAY

Natalie sits at her desk, idly turning the STONE over in her hands.

Her eyes scan the horizon for smokes. Empty. Her leg jitters restlessly, her gaze flicking to the WHISKEY.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

All stations, this is Sisters
dispatch with your morning fire
weather forecast for Wednesday,
July twenty-third: severe winds
will impact central and southern
Oregon this afternoon and evening.
Dry low levels will cause gusty,
erratic winds from four PM onwards -

A SMACK against the window: a branch sliding down the glass. Grey clouds race by in the sky, like the rapids of a river.

EXT. VALLEY - NIGHT

A wild, vicious wind tears through the treetops.

INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - NIGHT

Howling wind, creaking wood. The CRACK of breaking branches. The windows rattle loudly in their frames.

Laundry dangles from ropes along the ceiling. Natalie stands atop a stool, pinning a damp shirt.

CRACK. Natalie starts at the sound, slips off the stool.

She slinks to the bed, pressing her hands to her eyes. Snap - CRACK. The sounds reverberate in her ears.

FLASHBACK - EXT. BURNING WOODS - DAY

Thick black SMOKE - crackling FLAMES - crashing footsteps -

Natalie sprints through the woods - her yellow jacket and heavy-duty smoke mask gleam in the flickering light. An inhuman SCREECH - she trips, falls. A crash behind her - raw fire, smoke-darkened forest -

A powerfully-built man bursts out of the trees: BEN PIERCE (M, 30's). He rips off his mask.

PIERCE

Brooks - we have to move. MOVE!

An echoing CRACK: above Pierce's head, a massive burning BRANCH is separating from a tree -

NATALIE

(screaming)

PIER-

BACK TO PRESENT - INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - NIGHT

Natalie shoots up from the bed.

NATALIE

Fuck this.

Pours herself a glass of WHISKEY. Tosses it back - another.

Her eye lands on the two-way radio. She turns it up. Static.

She adjusts the tuner. Static, static. Suddenly, a DEEP MAN'S VOICE pours out of the speakers, vibrant and clear.

DEEP MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

- hope nobody's out there tonight,
but just in case, here's an oldie
to keep you toasty.

CLASSIC ROCK. Natalie pours herself another glass.

LATER -

Natalie twirls around, weaving between dangling garments. She spills her whiskey.

NATALIE

Sloppy, Brooks! Drop and give me
twenty!

Manages five decent pushups before her face contorts. She races for the door - a powerful GALE whips through the cabin.

EXT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

She throws up over the edge of the balcony. *Jingle-jangle-jingle* - the cans rattle endlessly.

A strange, chirping cry. She peers into the darkness, the wind tangling her hair.

Gleaming at the edge of the woods: two PINPRICKS of red light.

She staggers back, shutting her eyes.

NATALIE

Not real...it's not real...

She opens her eyes. The lights are gone.

The wind gusts powerfully, and she staggers inside.

INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - CONTINUOUS

The room's in tatters, the music jangling harshly. She yanks the RADIO CORD out of the wall, then collapses on the bed.

INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - DAY

Morning. A rapping sound, harsh and fast.

Natalie's eyes open blearily. She's tangled in the quilt.

DEEP MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Hello? Anyone in there?

RAP RAP RAP. *BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM.*

Natalie shoots up, staring at the shuddering door. She picks up her AXE, slowly approaches it.

DEEP MAN'S VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Hey! Anybody home?

NATALIE

Who are you? Why are you here?

DEEP MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Sisters sent me.

Natalie grips the axe tightly as she turns the knob.

Standing at the door is LOGAN TURNER (M, 40's). Lanky and bearded, he exudes a brash, boyish confidence - though there's a sweetness behind his eyes. A tool belt holding a boxy HANDHELD RADIO is strapped around his waist.

He stares at Natalie, who is wielding a massive axe and whose hair looks like several rats have nested in it.

LOGAN

Good morning.

NATALIE
Sisters sent you? Why?

LOGAN
You didn't check-in this morning.
Sent me to make sure you were okay.

He looks past her into the devastated room.

LOGAN (CONT'D)
So...you okay?

NATALIE
What time is...
(squinting at her watch)
Shit! Shit shit, I didn't hear -

She runs to the radio, which sits dead silent. She twists up the volume - no response.

She gives it a hard WHACK. Logan rushes in.

LOGAN
Careful! D'you know how antique
this thing is?

NATALIE
Yeah - antique enough to get my ass
fired. God-fucking-damnit-horseshit-
piece-of-useless-goddamn-trash -

Logan examines it for a moment, squats, then holds up the POWER CORD - still unplugged.

Natalie grits her teeth as he plugs it in. Music fills the air, and a look of surprise flits over Logan's face.

She moves to adjust the TUNER - he reaches out to stop her.

LOGAN
Wait.

He gives her a strangely appraising look - then glances to the empty whiskey bottle.

LOGAN (CONT'D)
You don't want them knowing. Right?

She glares - shakes her head. He opens up the radio, takes a screwdriver from his belt, begins poking around. ZAP.

NATALIE
What are you -

LOGAN
Relax - follow my lead.

Distorted, staticky music filters through the speakers.

LOGAN (CONT'D)
(into mic)
Sisters dispatch, Devil's Peak
lookout - this is Turner. We're
experiencing some pretty strong
distortion - d'you copy us, over?

Garbled speech. Logan pulls the HANDHELD RADIO from his belt.

LOGAN (CONT'D)
(into handheld)
Sisters dispatch this is Turner at
Devil's Peak, do you copy, over?

DISPATCH (V.O.)
Ten-four Turner, we do copy you. Is
Brooks alright, over?

LOGAN
Dispatch, she's fine - storm seems
to have messed up her equipment,
though. Gonna try to patch her up.

DISPATCH (V.O.)
Copy that - glad you're safe, Nat.
We were getting worried down here.

NATALIE
(into handheld)
...Just radio trouble. Been trying
to figure this out all morning.

Logan lazily pulls a small METAL TUBE out of his pocket.

LOGAN
Yeah dispatch, one of her
capacitors looks totally shorted.
Luckily, I always carry a spare.

In no great hurry, he flips over the radio and pulls out a
SINGED TUBE. He discards it and installs the fresh one.

LOGAN (CONT'D)
(into two-way radio)
Sisters dispatch, Devil's Peak on
two-way, do you copy, over?

DISPATCH (V.O.)
Loud and clear. Any smokes?

The day is clear. A few trails of mist from the treetops.

NATALIE

Negative. Just a few water dogs.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

Roger that. Oh - Supe Owens was in earlier. Said she'd be back later today.

NATALIE

...No problem. I'll be here.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

Copy that. Turner - thanks again. Sisters dispatch, over and out.

Natalie puts down the mic, avoiding Logan's eye.

NATALIE

Thanks.

LOGAN

No problem. Storms can get rough up here. First time as a lookout?

NATALIE

You're a lookout, too?

LOGAN

Didn't I say?
(pointing at a far cliff)
Green Ridge tower. Wouldn't normally expect them to fill a post this late in the season - especially not Devil's Peak.

NATALIE

First time for everything.

LOGAN

Must be because of the drought. They tell you to keep an eye out for campers? No one's supposed to be out here, permit or not -

NATALIE

They told me.

LOGAN

Good. We're on critical right now - that means the highest alert possible.

(MORE)

LOGAN (CONT'D)

Already been one big fire this season - only ten miles down from here, near Diamond Lake -

NATALIE

I know.

Uncomfortable silence.

LOGAN

Right. Guess I should head out.

NATALIE

Guess so.

(spotting his RADIO on desk)

Hey -

She holds it out, but he waves it away.

LOGAN

Keep it.

(proudly)

It's a BK handheld modified with an Icom ham transmitter - slapped it together myself. Transmits at frequencies outside the permitted citizen's band - but I won't tell if you won't.

He winks with attempted charm.

NATALIE

Already have a portable.

She points to her FM radio. It lies in pieces on the desk, its antenna sticking up sadly.

LOGAN

Guess you'll be needing another. This thing goes for fifty miles - plus it transmits on near-private frequencies, so if you wanna chat without every ranger hearing...

NATALIE

Why would I want that?

LOGAN

(shrugging)

Dunno. Lot easier than hauling my ass back here, though - if your two-way "breaks" again.

Natalie rolls her eyes, but accepts the HAM RADIO.

LOGAN (CONT'D)
Frequency and volume dials are on
top, PTT's on the -

NATALIE
I know how to use a radio.

Logan's eyes flick to the shattered one on the desk.

LOGAN
Sure. Just keep it tuned to fifty-
seven-point-four megahertz.
(opening the door)
Probably won't see you - but if you
need anything, just call. Natalie,
right?
(extending his hand)
Logan.

She grips his hand formally. He smiles.

LOGAN (CONT'D)
(bad French accent)
Au revoir, Natalie.

He leaves, and Natalie shuts the door with a relieved sigh.
Her gaze falls on the ruined room.

NATALIE
Shit.

MONTAGE - NATALIE GETS HER SHIT TOGETHER

-- She throws open all the windows. Fresh air surges in.
-- She sweeps charcoal, dust, and dead mice out the door.
-- She shoves the HAM RADIO and BLACK STONE into the desk
drawer.

EXT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - BALCONY - DAY

Natalie is swinging a metal casing around on a chain: a sling
psychrometer. Her eyes are glazed over - on autopilot.

She looks out over the valley, does a double take.

A plume of thick, WHITE SMOKE rises over the treetops.

INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - DAY

Natalie spins the metal along the FIRE FINDER's perimeter. She peers through the tall piece, targeting the smoke in its crosshairs.

She blinks. The plume is gone.

NATALIE

What...?

She moves to the window. No trace of smoke. She frowns.

EXT. DEVIL'S PEAK TRAIL - DAY

A dense pine forest. Ferns curl up from the base of the trees in a rich, green carpet. Only dim, dappled light penetrates the thick canopy of needles above.

Natalie crunches down a rocky trail.

EXT. LAKE CAMPSITE TRAIL - DAY

She walks along a narrow dirt path, lined by closely packed greenery. Glimmers of light peek through the dense brush: sun reflecting off water.

EXT. LAKE CAMPSITE - CONTINUOUS

Natalie emerges into a wide clearing on the edge of a lake.

In the center of the clearing is a FIRE PIT, over which dangles a cooking pot. Two TENTS are pitched near the pit.

NATALIE

Hello?

(silence)

Deschutes forest patrol here - you guys are gonna have to pack up.

No response. No one emerges from the tents.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Hey - anybody here?

A pair of boots sits neatly outside one of the tents. The front flap is half-open, tugging lightly in the breeze.

She reaches out and unzips the tent.

INT. TENT - CONTINUOUS

Murky, blue-green light. Sleeping bags, a backpack. Cans of beer, their freshly-spilled contents oozing across the floor.

Natalie carefully zips the tent back up.

EXT. LAKE CAMPSITE - CONTINUOUS

She walks back to the path: a densely forested, narrow bottleneck connecting the lake-locked campsite to the woods.

A few oddly DARK SHAPES stand out against the lush greenery.

EXT. BURNT LAKE TREES - CONTINUOUS

Standing amongst the green foliage, completely CHARRED from top to bottom, are the blackened remains of THREE TREES.

The trees surrounding them appear untouched. Natalie reaches out and scrapes at the charred bark.

CRACK.

NATALIE

Hello?

Silence. She peers into the forest. Nothing moves.

EXT. LAKE CAMPSITE - CONTINUOUS

Natalie approaches the FIRE PIT: a circle of soot-blackened stones. The contents of the cooking pot are burnt to a crisp. She touches the metal, jerks back. Still hot.

A twisted object is melted into the pit. Though deformed, the speakers and frequency monitor of a DESTROYED RADIO are still discernible.

Something on the ground catches her eye.

A FOOTPRINT in the dirt: massive and deep, the size of a dinner plate. The tip of it is cloven, like a deer's hoof print - only it's divided into three distinct cloves instead of two, and much larger than any deer hoof ever could be.

Her eyes widen as she leans closer, inspecting it.

INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - DESK - DAY

The HOOF PRINT DRAWING is spread on the desk as Natalie clutches the dispatch mic.

NATALIE

Negative - no one was there. But all their gear was: tents, bags. A pot of burnt food, still warm.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

Might have heard you coming.

NATALIE

There were burnt trees, too - but no live embers, no spotting - no spread at all. And a radio...completely melted down.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

Huh. Well, the trees were probably lightning strike. Check back tomorrow - if their stuff's still abandoned, we'll be sure to send out a search. And keep an eye out for more smokes.

NATALIE

Ten-four.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

(muffled)

What's that? Oh - stand by, Natalie.

OWENS (V.O.)

Brooks?

Natalie shifts, clutching the mic closer to her mouth.

NATALIE

Owens. Good to hear from you.

OWENS (V.O.)

Heard you slept in this morning. Enjoying the fresh mountain air?

NATALIE

(dryly)

You know I love the slow life.

OWENS (V.O.)
(laughing)
Just wanted to check in - you
settling in okay? Any issues?

Natalie looks down at the drawing.

NATALIE
Nope. All good up here.

OWENS (V.O.)
I'll be in touch soon with updates.
Over and out.

NATALIE
Over and out.

Natalie sets down the mic. Her fingers absentmindedly play
with her HOTSHOT BELT BUCKLE.

With sudden swiftness, she opens the desk drawer, grabs the
drawing and burnt journals, and shoves them all inside. She
shuts the drawer with a decisive SLAM.

INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - NIGHT

Near-total darkness. Crickets CHIRP. An owl HOOTS.

Natalie lies asleep in bed. Her watch gleams in the
moonlight: 3 AM.

From outside, a faint SCRATCHING sound - barely audible.

Silence.

Jingle jangle.

Jingle - CLATTER.

Natalie's eyes open blearily. She looks around, disoriented.

Thump. THUMP.

A low creak - the cabin shudders. Natalie sits bolt upright.

Creak. Thump. THUMP.

Something is climbing the tower.

She shoots out of bed, ducking under the desk with her AXE.

CLACK. CLACK. Slow, hollow FOOTSTEPS on the balcony.

Nothing visible.

Scraaaaaaatch.

Slowly, she peeks up behind the desk at the SLIVER of visible window.

Looming out of the darkness: a huge, glistening BLACK EYE.

Natalie holds in a scream. Carefully, she reaches up and opens the drawer. Her fingers brush the BLACK STONE.

Her hand comes down clutching Logan's HAM RADIO.

SCRAATCH. SCRAAAAATCH. The rough sound of tearing wood.

Curling out from under the door: creeping tendrils of WHITE SMOKE.

She flips on the radio. It emits an earsplitting SCREECH of distorted static.

Outside, a tearing WAIL rips through the air - unearthly and harsh, like rocks scraping against glass.

NATALIE

Go away - I'M ARMED, GET THE *FUCK*
AWAY!

The radio shrieks. Another harsh WAIL from outside.

A distant *crunch* of dirt.

Silence.

Natalie stands there, shaking. She grabs the TWO-WAY RADIO.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Dispatch! This is Devil's Peak, do
you copy?

(static)

Hello? *Does anybody copy?!*

No response.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Goddamnit. DAMNIT.

She rips out the GREEN BAG, pulls out a gleaming RIFLE.

EXT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Natalie clutches her gun. The balcony is empty - the CANS lie on the ground. Her eyes search the woods - too dark to see.

A loud SCREECH - movement - she whirls -

A barn owl ruffles its wings, staring down the barrel. It screams once more before flying away.

She exhales deeply, turning. Freezes.

A deep GOUGE runs down the length of her door. It's oddly curved, ending with a swirling flourish. At the bottom, a black SMEAR - almost like a handprint.

Natalie rubs a finger along it. The blackness comes off on her skin, like soot.

INT. DEVIL'S PEAK TOWER - NIGHT

A chair is wedged under the knob of the door.

Natalie is shoving anything she can reach into her duffel. She picks up the camera. Owens. Dangles it over the bag.

Can't quite do it.

NATALIE

DAMNIT.

Hurls her bag to the ground.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Keep it together, Brooks.

The HAM RADIO catches her eye. She hesitates - snatches it. Checks the frequency: 57.4 MHZ.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Logan? Logan, do you copy?

INT. GREEN RIDGE TOWER - SAME

Darkness. Logan lies in bed. A radio crackles.

NATALIE (V.O.)

Logan!

His eyes snap open. He fumbles at the nightstand.

INTERCUT RADIO CONVERSATION

LOGAN
 (sleepily)
 Natalie? What's...are you okay?

NATALIE
 D'you get bears? At your tower?

LOGAN
 ...What? Can you repeat -

NATALIE
 Bears - has your cabin ever been
 attacked by a bear?!

LOGAN
 ...It's four in the morning.

NATALIE
 I know, but someone...something
 just tried to break in, so I wanted
 to - never mind. Go back to bed.

LOGAN
 Wait wait wait - shit. No, never
 had a bear, or...what happened?

NATALIE
 I woke up when my tripwire...I
 heard scratching at the door, and
 this...*screech*...but that might
 have been the owl...

Natalie sinks down on the bed, rubbing her temples.

Logan wanders to his desk, littered in CASSETTE TAPES. The
 rest of his cabin is too dark to see.

LOGAN
 Did you see it? The bear?

NATALIE
 No. I...I didn't see anything.
 (beat)
 But there's this claw mark on the
 door, and there was this - this
 soot stain below it - and smoke,
 coming in under the door...

LOGAN
Smoke?
 (beat)
 The claw mark...could it have been
 from a knife?

NATALIE

...What?

LOGAN

Maybe...one of the campers?

NATALIE

(suspiciously)

How'd you know about them?

LOGAN

I heard you talk to dispatch.
Public channel, remember? Maybe
they were pissed you told them to
get lost, wanted to freak you out.

NATALIE

I...yeah, guess it could've been...

Logan looks out at the distant spark of Natalie's cabin. A decision forms in his eyes.

LOGAN

If you want, I could head down to
the site with you tomorrow. If that
would...if that'd help.

Natalie looks at the BLACK WINDOWS pressing in around her.

NATALIE

Alright. Yes. Thanks.

EXT. LAKE TRAIL - DAY

Natalie and Logan crunch silently down the trail. Natalie looks hollow-eyed - like she hasn't slept a wink.

LOGAN

Where you from?

NATALIE

Ripplebrook.

LOGAN

That's just north of here, right?
Ever been to Eugene?

NATALIE

Yep.