

"ASCEND"

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FADE IN:

EXT. MOUNTAIN LAKE - DAY

The glassy surface reflects a MAJESTIC CABIN nestled in forest shadows. A late summer day, whirling breezes crackle through swaying trees.

A GIRL (13), feet apart, knees together, fishes from the dock below. Her pole droops, the line loose.

Overdressed for a warm day, her wide-brimmed straw hat partially conceals sunscreen streaks in contours of her face.

A trout leaps, SPLASHES. A moment later, her line tightens, she YANKS the pole, fights feebly, the line goes loose again.

She reels in to inspect her bait, jabs and shakes her finger, quick to suck out the pain. Then recasts and waits quietly.

An emaciated MAN (33) emerges from the treeline behind her and pauses to admire the view. His disheveled appearance contrasts starkly with the surrounding beauty.

He reaches into his jacket and withdraws a strange object.

Surprised, the Girl SPINS at the sound of JINGLING metal.

MAN

Hell of a view, huh?

He slowly saunters out onto the dock, pulls back a hood to reveal a face of hardened leather, eyes like cloudy marbles.

MAN (CONT'D)

Don't mean to trouble ya none. Just reminds me of an ol' picture from when I was young. Had a girl, just like you.

(reminiscing)

Norman Rockwell, the famous painter. Heard of him? Hm? No, suppose not.

He stops midway to her. His eyes drift down:

MAN (CONT'D)

Ya missed a spot...

She follows his gaze to where a reddish-pink sunburn has bloomed across her forearm. She jerks her sleeve down.

MAN (CONT'D)

Don't play games with the sun, else that pretty face will end up ugly like mine.

(off her silence)

Cat got ya tongue, girl?

Head bowed slightly, she stares back stone-faced.

MAN (CONT'D)  
Or maybe ya just stupid.

Her hand tightens around the chair's arm.

MAN (CONT'D)  
Damn shame. Good long time since I had  
someone to talk to.

GIRL  
I'm not stupid. What's that?

Her eyes fall on the object in his hand, a MECHANICAL PUZZLE  
of dangling chains and bolts.

MAN  
This? Just some silly puzzle.

GIRL  
Not like any puzzle I've seen.

MAN  
(stepping closer)  
'Cause it's special. Gotta get this  
piece here to the other side there, see?

He manipulates it as she watches with considerable interest:

MAN (CONT'D)  
My daughter had better handle on it than  
I do. Maybe it's me that's stupid, huh?

GIRL  
Can I try?

MAN  
That depends...

GIRL  
On what?

MAN  
On what. Well...

A SHRIEK, possibly a dying animal, echoes through the valley.  
Both glance in its direction. He moves in closer to whisper:

MAN (CONT'D)  
Ya out here by yourself?

She looks away in careful consideration.

MAN (CONT'D)

Nice spot, but don't be fooled. Ain't no place for a girl all alone, night or day.

GIRL

I'm not alone.

MAN

(looking around)

I'd say it kind of looks like you are.

GIRL

I got friends at that house. They'll be back any minute.

MAN

That cabin there? Now that ain't true 'cause I just come through it and there weren't no one home.

She swallows hard. His eyes wander from the taut fish stringer in the water, to a BACKPACK under her chair, to the leather KNIFE sheath poking out beneath her pant leg.

MAN (CONT'D)

How many you catch today anyway?

GIRL

None. So far.

He walks past her to the end of the dock. He lifts the stringer and reveals several fish, along with his grin, several teeth short of a full set.

MAN

Funny how similar ya both are. Don't much look alike, but ya share them same lyin' habits. Was my job to see she learnt her lessons, my daughter 'n all.

(drops the fish)

Now why couldn't ya just gone and told me the truth?

GIRL

(stands)

Excuse me, mister, I really should --

He SHOVES her down, her pole CLATTERS across the dock. He kneels and places his hand firmly on her knee.

MAN

Where ya friends at? One's lookin' after ya. 'Cause they ain't in that cabin...

She skulks under his menacing glare.

GIRL  
Mister. Where's your daughter?

MAN  
Ain't none of ya damn business --

She LURCHES for her ankle -- he grabs her wrist and TWISTS -- she WINCES in pain --

MAN (CONT'D)  
Whoa, now! What ya got there?

He slides out her sheathed blade, curiously turning it as he stands. Metal gleams in the sun.

MAN (CONT'D)  
Ya gon' stick me with this?

Rattled, she shakes her head.

MAN (CONT'D)  
Well, don't I look stupid now.

He peers at trees across the lake with growing agitation.

MAN (CONT'D)  
Ya know nothin' of the evils in them woods, girl. And here I'm tryin' to protect ya...

GIRL  
From what? I don't understand...

His gaze into the trees is trance-like. After a moment:

MAN  
No. Don't expect ya would. Look, no question we got off on the wrong foot. But ain't no girl worth helpin' if I gotta keep one eye open at night --

The Man's eyes glaze over -- he LUNGES with the knife -- YANKS her hair back exposing her neck --

MAN (CONT'D)  
-- Maybe I can save ya yet.

SPLASH! The Man turns toward a disturbance in the water as his feet are YANKED from under him -- he reaches out and SLAMS down hard on his chest --

Stunned, he JERKS toward the dock's edge --

CLAWING, he hooks her ankle -- she lands HARD on her backside and slides with him --

She BREAKS from his grasp as he slips under the water --

She jumps up, creeps to the edge, and peers in.

Another SHRIEK, her anxious eyes scan the landscape. Closer.

Two GASPING figures break the water's surface -- she backs away as the STRUGGLE quickly submerges.

She approaches the murky water again and falls to her knees.

GIRL

Dad!

Distressing silence follows for what seems like eternity.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Dad...?

An arm BURSTS from the water and SLAMS down on the dock. She LEAPS up and backs away --

The Man hauls himself up, GASPING. Thick, red liquid oozes over and between planks. He staggers to his feet, blood bubbles from his mouth --

The Man reaches into his jacket, a crimson stain creeps across his shirt. He JERKS the Girl's knife from his chest. It drops and CLATTERS across the planks.

MAN

(frantic breaths)

Leave... now. They'll do... much worse.

He FALLS to her feet, jerks erratically, then lies still.

EMERGING FROM THE WATER behind her, DAD (43), athletic and exhausted, crawls to shore in a spring suit. He hauls a net full of crab behind him.

DAD

Alex... Where is he?

ALEX (GIRL)

Dad! Right here! He's not breathing.

In shallow water, Dad falls onto his back, breathing heavily.

Alex RUSHES toward him, reddened eyes welling with tears.

DAD

I'm fine. Go. Get your things.

She dashes back around the Man's body to retrieve her pole and fish from the end of the dock:

DAD (CONT'D)  
He hurt you?

ALEX  
Uh, I-I don't think so.

Dad takes deep breaths, recovering:

DAD  
We did good. Traps were full. Any luck?

Alex frees the clasp, YANKS the fish from the water:

ALEX  
No. Just yours.

DAD  
Damn it, Alex, I said to check the bait.

ALEX  
(to herself)  
But I did...

Dragging the fish behind her, she pauses near the Man's body. She retrieves her knife and wipes blood across his jacket.

She contemplates, then hastily removes the puzzle from his pocket. She shoves it in her own and rushes to shore.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Dad...

Alex drops her things next to Dad's LIGHT BLUE BOOTS. She jumps into the water and drags the crab net to shore:

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Dad, he said "they"...

He sits up quickly. She fights back tears:

ALEX (CONT'D)  
He said, "They're gonna do much worse."

Then all at once her emotions BOIL over:

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Dad, what just happened?!

With a quick FLUTTER, the dock splinters with a CRACKING THUD -- an arrow TREMBLES, impaled in the wood --

Alex DROPS instinctively into the water --

Dad BOLTS to his feet -- sprints over and lifts her FORCIBLY by the arm --

DAD  
Get to that cabin!

She BREAKS from his grasp and turns for the net -- he stops --

DAD (CONT'D)  
Leave it! COME ON!

She falls in next to him as they SCRAMBLE toward the cabin.

Another fleeting HUM -- BARK EXPLODES as an arrow impacts a tree a dozen feet away --

They close in on the

MAJESTIC CABIN

that has fallen into severe disrepair --

Dad TUGS open a door under the deck, stands aside. She RACES through, he follows, and locks the door behind them.

REQUEST A PASSWORD FOR THE FULL VERSION