

"IN THE MOUTH
OF
MADNESS"

by

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FOR EDUCATIONAL
PURPOSES ONLY

"The dark spot by the road that you might
not notice at all is, you see, the
beginning of everything."

--Sherwood Anderson

"It is the tale, not he who tells it."

--Stephen King

ON A HUGE PRINTING PRESS

high-tech mechanical nightmare. Hundreds of moving parts JAMMING together in furious synchronization. DEAFENING, and hypnotic.

CLOSE ON THE PRESS

Kicking out paperback book covers, one after another. Dozen after dozen.

ON THE COVERS

as they're automatically stacked. We can read the embossed front cover. An eye-catching graphic of a black church against a cloudy sky, above which read the words, "THE HOBBS' END HORROR, by SUTTER CANE."

ON THE BACK COVERS

as they kick out of a different press. They all promise but one thing. "COMING SOON FROM SUTTER CANE - 'IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS.'" Over and over again.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK FACILITY FOR THE CRIMINALLY INSANE - NIGHT

It's raining, HARD. Thunder BOOMS as an occasional flash of lightning reveals disturbing glimpses of the structure's oppressive steel and concrete facade. An AMBULANCE, SIREN BLARING, tears up the road towards the entrance.

CUT TO:

INT. MAXIMUM SECURITY WING, NURSE'S STATION - NIGHT

A lone NURSE crouches over the night's reports. A MURMURING beyond her ward's double doors suddenly catches her attention. SOFT at first, it grows LOUDER as its source approaches.

It's a VOICE. A man's VOICE.

A SCREAMING VOICE.

ON THE DOORS

A they EXPLODE INWARD. The nurse is startled as three struggling figures pile in front of her desk. Two huge GUARDS are dragging a fighting, frenzied MAN to his final destination. The man is tied up in a straight-jacket and has his face covered in a bizarre combination of mask and muzzle. Spit flies from the mask's airhole as the man SCREAMS.

Guard #1 SLAMS some papers down on the nurse's desk.

GUARD #1

(to nurse)

Trent, John J. He's---

The man suddenly goes berserk and sends a hard kick to Guard #1's groin. The man starts to run off.

GUARD #2

Where you going fucko?

Guard #2 clotheslines the man and bounces his head off the desk. Guard #1 recovers and slides the papers back towards the nurse. The nurse takes a long look at the man, who's still stunned.

NURSE

(to guards)

Take him to number nine.

She leans over her desk and watches as the guards drag the man off down a long corridor.

ON THE CORRIDOR

Each side is lined with cell doors. Each door features a small, barred window. The guards drag the man to the last cell at the end of the corridor. The man starts to come around as Guard #1 produces a huge, RATTLING keychain and unlocks the cell door.

ON THE MAN

as his head stirs and we see his eyes focus on what's in front of him.

ON THE CELL

as the door CREAKS open. A grim, yellowed padded affair. A single light bulb dangles from the ceiling, a sagging cot sits in a corner.

ON THE MAN

as he starts to shake. The guards notice.

GUARD #1

Uh-oh.

GUARD #2

Get him in.

MAN

(letting loose)

NOOOOOO!!! NOT MEEEEEE!!!!

He grips the sides of the cell door as they try to force him in. They finally succeed as the man goes flying forward, RIPPING a piece of the door frame off with him. Guard #1 pulls off the mask as the man goes in, then SLAMS the door behind him.

ON THE CENTER WINDOW

as the man's face comes SMASHING UP against the bars. We see it for the first time. It belongs to JOHN TRENT. A face aged beyond its thirty-four years by sheer, stark terror. Jet black hair hangs in sweaty clumps around his forehead. Dried spit decorates his chin. Tears stream from his icy blue eyes.

TRENT

WAIT!!! HEY!!! SORRY ABOUT THE BALLS!!! IT WAS A LUCKY SHOT!!!

ON THE GUARDS

as they ignore Trent and walk away, nodding goodnight to the nurse as they go.

ON TRENT

still SHOUTING.

TRENT
I'M NOT INSANE!!! HEAR ME!!!
I'M NOT INSANE!!!

Patients in the surrounding cells begin to join in.

OTHER PATIENTS (O.S.)
(various cries)
ME NEITHER!!! - I'M NOT IF
HE'S NOT!!! - IT WAS ALL A
MISTAKE!!! - OH YES!!!

ON THE NURSE

Agitated at the NOISE. She flips a switch on a control panel and LIGHT MUZAK begins to filter into the cells.

ON THE CORRIDOR

as it FILLS with the MUZAK. The patients quickly QUIET DOWN as the light muzak version of "SATISFACTION" PIPES out over hidden speakers.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CELL - NIGHT

Trent sinks slowly down the side of his door as the other patients begin to SOFTLY SING ALONG with the MUZAK. A demented lullaby.

OTHER PATIENTS (O.S.)
...he can't be a man 'cause he
doesn't smoke, the same
cigarettes as me...

Trent listens for a moment, then runs his hands through his hair. Hangs his head. Total despair.

TRENT
(beat)
God...not the Stones too...

CUT TO:

INT. YARBROUGH'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

YARBROUGH, the facility's director, nervously watches DR. WRENN read Trent's file. Wrenn is a tall, thin man in his late forties. Yarbrough is a short fat man in his late fifties. Yarbrough fidgets as Wrenn reads. We notice a government I.D.. card pinned to Wrenn's shirt.

WRENN
(reading to himself)
Admitted last night.

YARBROUGH
Yes...during the storm.
(beat)
How did you get here so fast?

WRENN
(snaps the file shut)
We've been monitoring all admissions through police and paramedic channels. This one fit the symptoms.

YARBROUGH
(uncomfortable)
You think he's one of...them?

WRENN
(rises, smiles)
That's what I'm here to find out.

Wrenn SNAPS the file shut and starts walking towards the door, Yarbrough follows. He stops Wrenn before they exit.

YARBROUGH
(nervous)
Things must be pretty bad out there, to bring in you fellows.

Wrenn just stares at him, refusing to offer the reassurance that Yarbrough seems to crave so deeply.

WRENN
(beat, thin smile)
Take me to him.

CUT TO:

INT. MAXIMUM SECURITY WING CORRIDOR - DAY

Wrenn and Yarbrough walk towards Trent's cell.

WRENN

Has he made any requests?

YARBROUGH

Just one. Nothing dangerous. A single black crayon.

Wrenn considers this, then he notices the MUZAK. This time it's "YELLOW SUBMARINE."

PATIENTS (O.S.)

(softly)

...a yellow submarine, a yellow submarine...

Yarbrough notices Wrenn's reaction.

YARBROUGH

They seem to like it. Classics especially.

WRENN

Of course.

They arrive at Trent's cell. Yarbrough unlocks it. He opens the door. Both men react to the sight before them.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CELL - DAY

The entire cell is covered in crudely sketched crosses. There are crosses on the walls, the floor, the ceiling, everywhere. The bed, the chair, even the bed frame. Hunched in one corner, putting the last cross in the last bit of space with the last piece of whittled crayon, is John Trent. He's free from the straight-jacket.

Wrenn motions Yarbrough to leave, then lays a clean handkerchief down on the crayon covered chair and sits down.

WRENN

John...?

TRENT

(without turning around)

Hang on...

Trent finishes the last cross and spins around. There are crosses all over him as well, head to toe.

TRENT
(happily)
What's up?

Trent hops up onto his cot.

WRENN
My name is Dr. Wrenn,
John...I'm here to try and get
you out.

TRENT
(gestures towards
the crosses)
After all my redecorating? I
think I'll stay.

WRENN
I have a guard with a pair of
swollen testicles who swears
you wanted out of here last
night.

TRENT
That was last night. Today
I'll take my chances in here.

WRENN
(looking around)
I see. The crosses are a nice
touch. They'd almost have to
keep you in here once they saw
these...wouldn't they, John?

TRENT
You have a smoke?

Wrenn slowly hands him a cigarette. Trent puts it in his mouth. Wrenn stares at the crosses covering Trent's face. Wrenn becomes distracted by them.

TRENT (CONT.)
Does it light itself?

WRENN
(snapping out of
it)
Sorry.

He lights Trent up.

TRENT

(beat)

You're waiting to hear about
my "them," aren't you?

WRENN

Your what?

TRENT

My "them." Every paranoid
schizo has one. A "them," a
"they " an "it?" Stalking and
spying. You want to hear about
my "them?"

WRENN

I want to know why you're
here.

TRENT

(beat, stares at
Wrenn)

Things are turning to shit out
there, aren't they?

WRENN

(slightly put
off)

Let's talk about you.

TRENT

How many psychos have you seen
this week, doc? How many had a
clue?

(beat)

I have a clue.

WRENN

Tell me about it.

TRENT

(shrugs, leans
back)

Why not. I'll talk...because
you want to hear it.

WRENN

(satisfied)

Good...that's good.

Wrenn takes out a microcassette recorder and turns it on.

WRENN (CONT.)

You mind?

TRENT
 Couldn't give less of a
 shit...

WRENN
 Then let's begin.

TRENT
 I'm...was, an insurance
 investigator. For a firm in
 the city, usually checking out
 phony claims, fraud, the
 usual. This all started with
 the disappearance...
 (off Wrenn's
 look)
 ...the Sutter Cane
 disappearance.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

INT. ATLANTIC INSURANCE OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON A NERVOUS, OVERWEIGHT, MIDDLE-AGED MAN

His fingers tremble as he tries to light a cigarette. We can tell his breath stinks just by looking at him. Sweat drips down at least two chins before finally coming to rest on his tie, which passed loud two decades ago.

A pair of rock-steady hands REACH IN and light the cigarette for him.

TRENT (O.S.)
 Nervous, Mr. Paul?

We REVEAL John Trent, leaning against the desk that Mr. Paul is sitting in front of. Another man, ROBINSON, sits behind it. Trent is clean, attractive, confident. Light years away from the man we know from cell number nine. He's doing what he likes doing best, catching people in a lie.

MR. PAUL
 (heavy Queens
 accent)
 What the fuck I got to be
 nervous about? You told me
 "come down and sign some
 papers", I come down to sign
 the papers. I sign the papers
 I get the check.
 (scared)
 Right?

Trent just stares at Mr. Paul, who begins to grow more and more uncomfortable. After what seems like an eternity, Trent responds.

TRENT

Usually, yes, that's the way it goes. It's just that I have a few final questions to ask you about the fire.

MR. PAUL

More questions!? I answered all your goddamn questions!

TRENT

Of course you have, and you've been damn cooperative. Atlantic Insurance appreciates it. My friend Robby here appreciates it.

(to Robinson)

Don't you Robby?

ROBINSON

(sarcastic)

Immensely.

TRENT

(back to Mr. Paul)

All we need you to do is clear up a little argument Robby and I seem to be having. You see, Robby here claims that you burned down your warehouse on Northern Boulevard.

MR. PAUL

(enraged)

What!? That's horseshit! My whole stock was in that warehouse! My whole life!

TRENT

Calm down Mr. Paul, because that's just what I told my friend Robby when he made such an outrageous accusation.

Mr. Paul calms down.

TRENT (CONT.)

Thing is though, Robby and I have been friends for a really long time. So I couldn't let something like this come between us. Could I?

(beat)

Could I?

MR. PAUL

(unsure)

No...

TRENT

I'm glad you understand. I thought you would, that's why I knew you wouldn't mind if I checked your story out with your wife.

MR. PAUL

(sees it coming)

My wife?

TRENT

Yes, you see we had these nagging pictures of your wife tooling around town wearing articles which you claimed perished in the fire.

Trent throws a package of photos into Mr. Paul's lap.

TRENT (CONT.)

And you know what else? When I went to speak with her, she was more than eager to tell us what really went down.

Especially after I showed her the pictures of Miss Rosa. Who seems to be wearing even more of the articles which you claimed perished in the fire.

MR. PAUL

(dazed)

Miss Rosa?

Trent throws another pile of photos into Mr. Paul's lap, then leans in quite close.

TRENT

Two words of advice my friend.
If you're going to pull a
scam, don't make your wife
your partner. And if you do,
don't fuck around behind her
back.

Trent smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. MIDTOWN COFFEE SHOP - DAY

CLOSE ON A PLATE GLASS WINDOW

overlooking the busy street outside. Inside, we HEAR the
BUZZ of the heavy lunch crowd.

ROBINSON (O.S.)

That was beautiful Johnny-boy,
you have the best nose for
shit in the business.

Out on the street, we see a city bus HISS to a stop in
front of the coffee shop window. We can see its side
advertisement, a "COMING SOON" ad for "IN THE MOUTH OF
MADNESS", bearing both Sutter Cane's name and the name of
his publisher, "ARCANE PUBLISHING". After a beat or two,
the bus PULLS OUT.

TRENT (O.S.)

You were lucky this time, the
guy's wife liked my eyes.

We PULL BACK to REVEAL Trent and Robinson sharing a booth
and some coffee.

TRENT (CCNT.)

You should train your agents
not to sell policies to
kindergarten con-men.

ROBINSON

Agents? You mean schmucks.
These greedy pricks would sell
auto insurance to blind
drivers if they thought it
could get them a commission.

ACROSS THE STREET, through the window, we can glimpse a
frantic MAN emerge from the office building facing the
coffee shop. Pudgy, balding and short, the man is
disturbing primarily due to the large fire-axe he's
gripping in both hands. Trent and Robinson haven't noticed.

TRENT

Relax Robby, that's why you//
pay me. The human race is
always looking to play an
angle, God bless their crooked
hearts. I'll always be here to
clean up the mess.

While they talk, the axe maniac is making progress. He is cutting a reckless path across the street, swinging blindly. He's heading straight for the shop. Trent and Robinson remain oblivious. After all, this is New York.

ROBINSON

That's good to hear, because I
have a serious mess with
Arcane.

TRENT

Who?

ROBINSON

(troubled)

Arcane. They're a publishing
house, and they're our biggest
account. They just filed a
claim. Could mean millions. I
need you on it as soon as
possible.

TRENT

(brings his cup
to his lips)

What's the claim?

ROBINSON

(as if telling a
secret)

Sutter Cane is missing.

Trent has about half a second to react before the axe maniac comes CRASHING through the plate glass window. He lands squarely on top of Trent's table. Trent splashes coffee all over himself as he and Robinson barely have to time to cringe in their seats.

For an insane instant, all is QUIET, save for a few people scrambling for the exit. We HEAR an APPROACHING SIREN in the distance. The man with the axe glares frantically about, before locking eyes on John Trent.

Trent makes the mistake of returning the stare. He freezes in place.

ON THE MAN

It's his eyes. They're off. Too big, too oily, human, yet inhuman. Slightly out of proportion. The man leans down towards Trent.

MAN
(routine,
surprisingly
calm)
Do you read Sutter Cane?

ON TRENT

snapping out of it.

TRENT
What?

The man suddenly REARS UP and SCREAMS as he raises the axe high above his head. Just before he cuts Trent in half, SHOTS RING OUT and the man crumples to the surface of the formica table. The axe CLANGS to the floor. Trent turns, and sees two city cops outside the shop, one still pointing the smoking barrel of the gun he's just fired.

Trent stares back at the dead man's face. The eyes are back to normal. Trent glances over at Robinson, who's still shrunk back into his seat in shock.

TRENT
(to Robinson)
Who the fuck is Sutter Cane?

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

CLOSE ON A T.V. SCREEN

broadcasting a news report on the violent pandemonium at a city bookstore. People of all ages and races appear to be rioting and battling police shock troops. We can glimpse a display ad for "IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS" in the shop's shattered window.

REPORTER (V.O.)

This was the scene today outside several city bookstores. Bookstores. unfortunat enough to sell out of advance orders for Sutter Cane's "IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS". What is surely the most eagerly awaited event in publishing history.

ON TRENT

Watching. Pouring a tequila shot with shaking hands.

ON THE T.V.

as the news report gives way to the live image of the REPORTER himself. He's sitting opposite a more conservative female colleague, "Crossfire" style..

REPORTER

Today's topic on "Hotseat". Sutter Cane. Harmless pop phenomenon? Or deadly mad prophet of the printed page? When does fiction become religion, and are his fans dangerous?

ON TRENT

as he clicks the t.v. off via remote.

TRENT

Only if you count axes.

He downs the shot.

CUT TO:

INT. ARCANE PUBLISHING - DAY

CLOSE ON AN ILLUSTRATION

Hyper-real. A circle of children in a cemetery, at night. All caught in the midst of transforming into something not human. Something wet, something weird, something with tentacles. A huge shape rises out of the circle, huge beyond belief, suggesting something too terrible to be rendered in more detail. The illustration is all the more disturbing because it looks like a photograph.

Underneath we see its title, "'THE LESSON' by Sutter Cane."

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
Mr. Trent?

PULL BACK

to REVEAL Trent staring at the illustration. He turns towards the RECEPTIONIST, an icy beauty, and we see there are several illustrations mounted along the wall. All are from the works of Sutter Cane. A "HOBB'S END HORROR" standee faces the reception desk.

RECEPTIONIST
Mr. Harglow will see you now.

TRENT
Thanks.

Trent heads for the inner office door. He pauses and turns back towards the receptionist.

TRENT
(nods towards
standee)
Doesn't that give you the
willies?

As the receptionist looks up, Trent sees that she was reading a copy of "THE HOBB'S END HORROR" at her desk. She looks at Trent like he's a retarded child. Trent looks at the book in her hands.

TRENT
Guess not.

She turns away from him as he enters. He just misses the small trickle of blood which suddenly rolls out one of the receptionist's nostrils. She self-consciously dabs at it with a bloody tissue and buries herself back in the book.

CUT TO:

INT. HARGLOW'S OFFICE - DAY

A serious, stately man in his late sixties, HARGLOW motions for Trent to be seated.

HARGLOW
Are you familiar with Arcane,
Mr. Trent?

TRENT

You're insured by the company
I work for. Beyond that,
sorry.

STYLES (O.S.)

(playfully
sarcastic)

Read much?

Trent turns and sees LINDA STYLES enter the room. In her late twenties, she projects a considerable combination of beauty, brains, and impatience. She's wearing the latest designer glasses, which sit on a face topped off by a head of flaming red hair. Trent's immediately attracted to her.

TRENT

(shooting back)

I read a book. Once.

Styles smiles. Trent's eyes follow her as she takes a seat.

HARGLOW

Allow me to introduce Linda Styles, one of our best editors. Linda's been handling one author of ours exclusively for the past two years. Perhaps you've heard of him...Sutter Cane?

TRENT

(playing it dumb)

That horror crap right?

STYLES

(a bit offended)

Sutter Cane happens to be this century's most widely read author. You can forget Stephen King, Cane outsells them all.

HARGLOW

With Sutter Cane we've found that humanity seems to be consistently drawn to the twisted, and freakish.

TRENT

I know, I live in New York.

HARGLOW

(smiles)

Well, I've asked Linda here because she has particular relevance to this situation.

TRENT

Which is what, exactly?

HARGLOW

It is exactly that Sutter Cane vanished without a trace approximately two months ago. The police have turned up nothing.

TRENT

Who was the last person to hear from him?

STYLES

His agent. Cane supposedly sent him a portion of the new book not more than two weeks ago. Plain brown wrapper, no return address.

TRENT

What'd the agent have to say?

Harglow and Styles exchange looks. Trent gets impatient.

TRENT (CONT.)

What?

HARGLOW

You heard what he had to say. Apparently you were there when the poor fellow went a bit...daft in midtown. I believe you saw him shot.

TRENT

(lets the
coincidence sink
in)

You mean that lunatic with axe...that was Cane's agent?

STYLES

Hard to believe, isn't it?

TRENT

Yeah, you'd think a guy who outsells Stephen King could find better representation.

Trent waits for them to laugh. Nobody does.

STYLES

This is no joke Mr. Trent. Cane's books have been rumored to drive less stable readers off the deep end, agents included.

TRENT

How're you holding up?

STYLES

(slight grin)
Just fine.

HARGLOW

Linda's one of the few editors brave enough to take on Cane's work.

TRENT

What's happened to some of the others?

STYLES

(matter of fact)
Severe nausea, migraines, nosebleeds...

TRENT

(not buying it)
Nice, and you think Cane's agent took one look at Cane's latest masterpiece and went axe-happy in broad daylight.
(suspicious)
It'd be a helluva promotion for the new book...great publicity.

HARGLOW

This isn't a hoax Mr. Trent. Surely you believe your own eyes, you were there. Besides, we have no desire to publicize Cane's connection to this...incident. We simply want the man, and the book back. Sutter Cane's franchise represents eighty-percent of our income.

STYLES

We've already delayed the new book by one month. Cane's fans are getting a bit... restless.

HARGLOW

We need to know if Sutter Cane is alive, or dead. Obviously, there's a great deal of money at stake. We're already in the middle of a multi-million dollar campaign.

TRENT

I'll need to see his papers, contracts...

HARGLOW

Impossible. Cane's agent handled all the legal affairs, a total buffer. We don't even know where Cane lived.

STYLES

All we do know is that for a period before the disappearance, Cane's work became erratic, bent. More bizarre than usual. He became convinced his stories were real, not fiction. Then the work stopped coming.

HARGLOW

Read his work Mr. Trent. It will help you get to know him...

STYLES

(smiles)

It might do more than that.

Trent smirks.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Trent browses through the paperback horror section, feeling like the idiot he thinks he looks like. He's surrounded by Sutter Cane merchandise, some of it heralding the forthcoming arrival of "IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS". Trent scoops an armful of Cane paperbacks off the shelf. Titles like "THE THING IN THE BASEMENT" and "THE HOBBS' END HORROR".

LITTLE BOY (O.S.)

I can see.

Trent turns and notices a LITTLE BOY staring up at him. The boy is holding on to a copy of "THE HOBBS' END HORROR". The kid appears feverish, sweaty. He's wearing a pair of oversized glasses held together by scotch tape. His nose is running, and he's got a scab on his chin. He picks at it as he speaks.

TRENT

Excuse me?

LITTLE BOY

(beat)

He sees you.

TRENT

(spooked)

Your parents let you read this stuff?

LITTLE BOY

(as if speaking
to an idiot)

All the kids read it.

Trent flashes an uneasy smile.

CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY STATION - NIGHT

Trent waits for his train to arrive. He paces along the platform. He's carrying a shopping bag full of Cane paperbacks. He stops when he notices that he's standing in front of a subway advertisement for "THE HOBBS' END HORROR". Part of it is peeling away from its frame. The upper right corner is folding over. Just a tiny bit.

Trent steps closer to it. His fingers reach up and grab the corner. He pulls, gently. Peels back a little more. He can glimpse something underneath the ad. A different ad. He can't make out what it's for, but glimpses something shiny, and black. Before he has time to investigate any further, his train PULLS IN.

CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY CAR - NIGHT

~~Crowded~~ beyond capacity. Classic New York rush-hour nightmare. Trent's on his way home, bent around other sweaty, disgusting commuters. Trent is wedged between a FAT, practically BEARDED LADY and a pimply faced teen with a VERY LOUD walkman. Trent opts for staring into space. He's carrying a shopping bag filled with Sutter Cane paperbacks. He notices an oozing wino slouched into a corner seat, staring at him. Trent turns away.

The train comes to a sudden halt as the wheels SCREECH and WHINE to a stop. Everyone, including Trent, is THROWN TOGETHER, SLAMMING into the person next to them. There are ASSORTED GROANS and CURSES.

P.A. (V.O.)
(nearly
unintelligible
N.Y. accent)
Uhhh, attenshun passengers,
sorry for dis delay. We should
be movin' shortly.

Just then, the lights in the car SNAP OFF, plunging everyone into total darkness.

ASSORTED GRUMBLES (O.S.)
Fuckin' city...Get off my foot
you fat bitch...Watch the
umbrella you rat
bastard...What's that smell?

We can STILL HEAR the teen's WALKMAN.

ANOTHER GRUMBLE (O.S.)
...AND TURN THAT FUCKIN' RADIO
DOWN!!!

CUT TO:

EXT. SUBWAY STATION, BAY RIDGE, BROOKLYN - NIGHT

Trent climbs wearily out of the station's underground exit.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Trent approaches an alley and starts to HEAR a steady THUMPING NOISE. He slowly and cautiously peers in as he reaches its entrance.

TRENT'S POV

of a street COP beating a ragged, scrawny teen with his nightstick. There is a spray-paint can rolling around on the ground. Above the kid, freshly painted on the brick wall of the alley, read the words, "I CAN SEE".

The cop senses Trent and looks up at him.

COP
(grunting)
You want some too, buddy?

ON TRENT

Moving on as he HEARS the BEATING resume.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Trent is planted on his living room couch, head buried in one of Cane's books. All his lights are off, save for a reading lamp. Trent's face is a study in disgust, yet he's totally involved in the book.

Until the phone RINGS.

TRENT
Ahhh!!!

Startled, Trent sends the book flying into the air. He takes a moment to compose himself, embarrassed that he let the book get to him. He suddenly winces and puts two fingers to the bridge of his nose. He squints his eyes, as if in pain from a great headache.

CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY CAR - NIGHT

All is as it was before, crammed beyond capacity. Only this time, Trent is no longer standing in his old position. This time, Trent finds himself inexplicably cast as the old wino. he sits in the old wino's clothes, slouched in the old wino's seat. The bag of cane paperbacks sit in his lap. He notices that several people are staring at the bag of books. The train suddenly SLAMS to a halt.

P.A. (V.O.)

Uh-h, attentshun passengers,
sorry for dis delay. We should
be movin' shortly.

The lights snap off.

ASSORTED GRUMBLES (O.S.)

Fuckin' city...Get off my foot
you fat bitch...Watch the
umbrella you rat
bastard...What's that smell?

The lights remain off.

CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY TUNNEL - NIGHT

Trent steps onto the tracks, still dressed as the wino.

ANOTHER GRUMBLE (O.S.)

(faint)

...AND TURN THAT FUCKIN' RADIO
DOWN!!!

Trent walks away from the car. He hears a familiar THUDDING SOUND coming from up ahead. He walks towards it. His footsteps ECHO in the darkness.

He reaches the source of all the noise.

The cop from the alley is POUNDING away on the spray-painting teen with an oversized club. The words "I CAN SEE" are spray-painted along the tunnel wall. The cop slowly, agonizingly, rises and turns to face Trent.

ON THE COP

He's all wrong. His face is sallow and grey, the eyes are a wet yellow...oily. His arms hang too low, like an ape's. His mouth is way too big. The man looks all out of proportion. He advances on Trent.

COP
 (distorted)
 You want some too, buddy? //

Trent turns and runs back towards the subway car. He arrives in time to see the PASSENGERS climbing out and starting down the tracks towards him. They all carry axes, and are being led by Cane's axe happy agent. He CALLS OUT to Trent.

CANE'S AGENT
 (drooling)
 It's a good read...

The others suddenly hoist their axes high and begin to CHOP the agent to bits. We can't see it, but we HEAR it. All through it the agent continues to CRY OUT to Trent.

CANE'S AGENT
 (screaming)
 A GOOD READ!!! A GOOD READ!!!
 AHHHHH!!!

The crowd stops, then suddenly turns as one towards Trent. One of them, the FAT LADY from the train steps forward. She's blood splattered.

FAT LADY
 He sees you.

They start after him. Trent backs up in a mad frenzy and SLAMS right into the monstrous cop. He's about to get SMASHED when we:

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Trent bolts awake from his nightmare. Sweaty and scared shitless. He runs a hand through damp hair and sweeps the Cane books off the couch as he sits up.

TRENT
 (shaken up)
 Freaky shit.

CUT TO:

INT. STYLES' APARTMENT - NIGHT

It's late, it's dark. There's an obnoxious KNOCKING at the front door. Styles stumbles towards the door, stubbing her toe on an umbrella stand as she ties up her bathrobe.

STYLES
 (annoyed)
 Alright!

She hits a light switch, chains the front door, then opens it a crack. Trent's there, smiling and holding up a carton of Chinese food.

TRENT
 I got Chinese...

Styles stares at him in disbelief.

CUT TO:

INT. STYLES' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Styles reluctantly munches out of a carton of vegetables as Trent pours her a beer.

STYLES
 How'd you get my address?

TRENT
 Company roster.

STYLES
 Couldn't this have waited until tomorrow?

TRENT
 I can't help it, I get excited when a case starts happening.

STYLES
 You've only been on the case a few days, what could've happened?

TRENT
 The tingling's happening.

STYLES
 The what?

TRENT
 The tingling. I get a tingling in my head when I start putting things together.

STYLES
 (holds up carton)
 Sure it's not the m.s.g.?

TRENT
Positive, that only accounts
for my lockjaw.

Styles smiles. There's a reluctant flirtation going on.

TRENT (CONT.)
I've been reading the books.
Have you ever really looked at
them?

STYLES
Of course, I edited more than
half of them. They all say the
same thing.

TRENT
That our world used to be
inhabited by another race of
beings?

STYLES
(nods "yes")
Beings who eventually lost
their foothold here and were
expelled. Cane's books
chronicle these creatures'
efforts to get back in.
Aside from that, there's not
much else to look for.

TRENT
Unless you look like a
detective. I did, and I think
Cane told us he'd pull this.
He leaves clues about his
vanishing act in every book
including the last one.

Trent pulls out a notebook.

TRENT (CONT.)
(reads from his
notes)
The main guy in the first book
is a painter, talks about
taking a long journey. The guy
in the second book's a writer,
talks about disappearing on
the eve of his biggest
success. The narrator in the
last book even talks about
actually moving into "HOBB'S
END," the town where all the
stories take place.

STYLES

This is what your tingling tells you? That Cane went someplace fictional?

TRENT

What my tingling tells me is that I may be onto another phony claim. "Author disappears into own fantasy world?"

(leans in)

You and I both know what a half decent publicist could do with a story like that. So why don't we cut this short, tell me where Harglow sent Cane to lay low and I'll make sure no one knows you tipped me.

STYLES

(icy, offended)
We told you before Mr. Trent, this is no hoax. We don't need sleazy tricks to sell Sutter Cane books.

TRENT

(hands up)
No offense, it's just that I happen to deal in sleazy tricks.

(beat)

I'm from Brooklyn.

STYLES

(getting up)
That much is obvious. Now if you don't mind, it's late and I have to be up rather early.

She opens the door for him. Trent grabs his carton of food and heads for the door.

TRENT

I will find him.

STYLES

We want you to find him.

Trent stares at her, she starts to get uncomfortable under his scrutiny. Trent breaks it off and suddenly smiles.

TRENT
 (feeling his jaw)
 Maybe it is the m.s.g.

She SLAMS the door in his face.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN STREET - NIGHT

Trent heads for the subway, CHUCKLING to himself, pleased that he rattled Styles.

CUT TO:

INT. STYLES' APARTMENT - NIGHT

She's on the phone, looking out her window. We HEAR Harglow's VOICE on the other end as he picks up.

HARGLOW (V.O.)
 (over phone)
 Yes?

STYLES
 It's me, Trent's getting suspicious.

HARGLOW (V.O.)
 (beat)
 He can't prove anything.
 Whatever he proposes, go along with it.

We HEAR the CLICK as he hangs up.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S APARTMENT - DAY

Trent is sitting on his couch, writing notes into a notepad. There are a few Cane paperbacks littered about. Trent appears to have been up all night. Dark circles sit below his tired eyes. He throws his pen down and leans back, rubbing his face with his hands.

When his hands come away, we see that he's left two black streaks across his face. His pen's sprung a leak. He notices the ink on his hands.

TRENT
 (disgusted)
 Beautiful.

Too tired to clean himself up, he takes out a cigarette and starts to light up. At the last second he notices that he's about to light the filter. He's got the cigarette in backwards. he frowns and turns it the right way.

TRENT
(exhaling)
Where the fuck did you go...?

Trent stares at the Cane paperbacks. He's staring at two in particular. They're laying side by side on his coffee table.

ON THE BOOKS

"THE THING IN THE BASEMENT" and "THE BREATHING TUNNEL".

Their covers...they seem to fit together, like two pieces of a puzzle.

ON TRENT

as he stares at them. He rubs his eyes, leaving more black ink around his face. He looks like a raccoon. He suddenly breaks from his trance and WIPES everything off the table with a sweep of his arm.

Everything except the two books.

He grabs his shopping bag and dumps the other Cane paperbacks out onto the table. He starts shifting them around, turning them over, all with great speed and concentration. He's totally at the mercy of the inspiration that's seized him.

As suddenly as he started, he stops. Sweating, frowning, he stares at his handiwork. Disbelief gives way to a thin smile of admiration.

TRENT

Cute...

CUT TO:

INT. HARGLOW'S OFFICE - DAY

Trent SMACKS a photo blow-up of the book covers down on Harglow's desk. Harglow and Styles look at it over Trent's shoulders.

HARGLOW

We've seen these before...

TRENT

Don't look at them individually, look at them together.

STYLES

(getting it)

It's a map. A map of the town.

HARGLOW

Hobb's End?

STYLES

Now I know why Cane had the artwork done himself.

TRENT

It gets better.

Trent produces a piece of transparent plastic, with a map of New England drawn over it. He lays the transparent map over the book cover map and there's a perfect match of lines.

TRENT (CONT.)

See. Hobb's End isn't on the real map, but they match up anyway.

(points down at it)

Like it or not, Cane's book covers put Hobb's End in the middle of New England.

STYLES

You're saying the man went someplace...fictional?

TRENT

It's real. A real place in a real state.

HARGLOW

Yet it appears on no ordinary map?

TRENT

No new map, but maybe it's on some old ones. There are plenty of forgotten towns across America. My money says Cane's having a good laugh in this one.

HARGLOW

How can you be sure?

TRENT
 I need to go to be sure.
 (leans in)
 You sure you want me to go?

HARGLOW
 We have nothing to hide Mr. Trent. We desire only our fair share if Cane is dead, or our property if Cane is alive. Go with our blessing, and I'm sure you won't mind Linda accompanying you on your expedition?

Trent smiles at Styles, she remains blank. He then turns back to Harglow.

TRENT
 It's your party.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY HIGHWAY - DAY

Trent's rental car speeds out of New York.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CAR - DAY

Styles is firmly strapped in, Trent's driving has her on edge.

STYLES
 Can't you slow down?

TRENT
 Only if I grab a cigarette.
 Here, take the wheel.

A startled Styles grabs the wheel as Trent fishes in the glove compartment for a pack of cigarettes. He fishes amid crumpled up bags of potato chips.

STYLES
 (white knuckled)
 I don't drive much.

TRENT
 (lights up)
 I'd never know.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY HIGHWAY - DAY

We see the car swerve in and out of lanes as Styles steers.
HORNS HONK.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Trent drives by darkened farms along a two lane black-top.
The road is deserted.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CAR - NIGHT

Styles is asleep. Trent's at the wheel. He's trying to
manage a road map. Disgusted, he tosses it in the back.

He suddenly reaches over, pops the glove compartment, and
withdraws a small air-horn. The kind annoying assholes take
to sporting events. He aims it at Styles and after a brief
deliberation, BLOWS IT. The LOUD HONK rocks the car. Styles
bolts awake and SCREAMS.

STYLES
WHAZZIT!? WHAT!?

Trent tosses the horn into the back seat.

TRENT
We're lost.

Styles stares at him open-mouthed. Who is this guy? She
reaches into the glove compartment and pulls out a bag of
chips. She starts BEATING TRENT with it.

STYLES
Couldn't you just shake me?!
Asshole!

Chips are flying.

TRENT
Enough, enough! Even steven.

Styles drops the bag, and picks a chip off Trent's
shoulder. She pops it in her mouth.

STYLES
We're lost because there's no
such place as Hobb's End.

TRENT

We'll see.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Trent's car speeds through the country landscape. It feels alien. Too much quiet, too many stars.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CAR - NIGHT

Trent is trying to play nice.

TRENT

Listen, you really like working on Cane's stuff?

STYLES

You really like busting people?

TRENT

I bust frauds and phonies, and yeah, I love it. Everyone's looking to get over on someone, I like being there when the shit goes sour.

STYLES

How admirable.

TRENT

We were talking about you. How'd you get hooked up with Cane in the first place?

STYLES

I'd been a fan since high school. I like being scared...Cane's work scares me.

TRENT

Why? It's not real.

STYLES

It's not real from your point of view, and right now reality shares your point of view. What scares me about Cane's work is what might happen if reality shared his point of view.

TRENT

How can reality share a fictional point of view?

STYLES

Reality is nothing more than what we tell it to be. Sane and insane could easily switch positions if the insane were to become the majority. You'd find yourself locked in a padded cell wondering what happened to the world.

TRENT

That would never happen to me.

Trent is starting to get weirded out by the darkness, the surrounding QUIET, and the eerie tone this conversation is taking.

STYLES

It would if you realized everything you ever knew was gone.

TRENT

It'd be pretty lonely, being the last one left.

STYLES

It'd be horrible.

TRENT

And you like that?

STYLES

I like the idea of it, and so do about sixty million other readers.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

The car drives down a different, less formal two-lane road. The car is surrounded by pitch blackness.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CAR - NIGHT

Styles is driving while Trent sleeps. She drives carefully. She squints to make out what's ahead. Not satisfied, she FLICKS ON the car's brights. The highbeams SNAP ON. SOMETHING is eerily illuminated on the road up ahead. It's moving fast, towards the car.

As it passes, Styles sees that it's a BOY on a bicycle. He rides erratically, panicked. Styles looks at his receding figure in the rear-view mirror.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT/LATER

The car drives on.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CAR - NIGHT

Styles is sleepy behind the wheel. She wipes moisture from the inside of the windshield.

STYLES' POV

A figure is approaching. As it gets nearer, Styles recognizes it as the same boy on the bicycle. This time, as he passes, she catches a quick glimpse of his face.

He has an old man's face. A face driven insane by sheer terror, capped by hair that has turned totally white. In a flash, he's gone.

STYLES

(rocked)

Oh my God...

TRENT

(stirs)

What's up?

STYLES

I saw...I saw a...

TRENT

A cow, a sheep, a pig, what?

STYLES

Never mind. It was nothing.

TRENT

Yeah? Well tell me when it graduates to something.

Trent rolls away and goes back to sleep. Styles drives on. She rubs her eyes. A few seconds pass. Then it happens, and it happens fast.

STYLES' POV

The boy is right in front of her!

ON STYLES

She GASPS and hits the breaks. The car SKIDS and SWIPES the boy, knocking he and the bike to the ground. Styles SKIDS to a stop and Trent wakes up.

STYLES

It just became something!

Styles is already getting out.

STYLES (CONT.)

Something impossible.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

Trent and Styles race towards the boy. He lies face down, the bike next to him. Trent reaches out and turns the boy over. The boy's face is a bizarre study in contradictions. He's no more than ten, yet appears seventy. He has blood trickling out of one eye and one nostril, and his mouth appears a bit too large, just like the cop from Trent's dream. This is not lost on Trent.

When the boy SPEAKS, it's a voice that matches his face.

BOY

(tragic)

I can't get out, it won't let me out...

The boy suddenly breaks away from Trent and grabs his bike. He peddles off before Trent can stop him. After a beat, Trent turns to Styles and sees that she's shaking.

TRENT
 (puts an arm
 around her)
 Hey, it's okay, he's alright.

STYLES
 (preoccupied)
 No, he's all wrong.

TRENT
 C'mon, they probably all
 inbreed out here...

She lets him lead her back to the car. She can't tell him what she's thinking. Not yet.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

It's hot, the car sits parked. Trent and Styles are out in the open, stretching their legs. Trent stares at his maps in frustration.

TRENT
 It should be right here.

Styles looks off the hill towards a small valley.

STYLES
 Let's go home.

She turns towards him.

TRENT
 (looking at the
 map)
 Bastard fooled me...

Styles suddenly grabs her head, as if a sharp pain hit her. She HEARS a slight but sharp BUZZING SOUND. It goes as quick as it came as she turns away again. She GASPS when she faces the valley.

STYLES' POV

The town is there now, where only a few moments ago there was nothing but empty land.

ON STYLES

Walking backwards, away from the edge of the hill.

STYLES

Trent...

Trent comes over, and frowns.

TRENT

What?

TRENT'S POV

of the small valley. There's nothing there. No town. Not a hint of what we know Styles just saw.

STYLES (O.S.)

Give it a minute.

ON TRENT

as he's about to reply. The BUZZING SOUND suddenly hits him. He grabs his head at the bridge of his nose, and shuts his eyes for a second. A small trickle of blood escapes one nostril. When he opens his eyes again, his mouth drops open as he stares out over the valley.

TRENT'S POV

The town is there now. For both he and Styles.

ON TRENT

turning to Styles for some kind of answer.

STYLES

I've been reading the books longer, they took a while to have an effect on you.

He doesn't understand. She puts a finger to her nose. Trent takes the cue and puts his own finger to his nose. Sees the blood.

TRENT

Big deal...
 (blots at his
 nose with a
 cloth)
 ...so we didn't see it the
 first time.

STYLES

Or weren't ready to see it.

TRENT

I'm always ready.

He starts walking back towards the car. He sees Styles
 hesitate.

TRENT (CONT.)

C'mon. Don't you want to find
 the truth?

He gets in and starts it up. Styles finally joins him,
 taking a last look at what they're about to drive into.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOBBS' END - DAY

Trent's car cruises down main street. It's a small town,
 with both buildings and vehicles in sad shape. It looks and
 feels like a town that's moved on. Cars lay abandoned on
 the street, some appear to have run into buildings. Doors
 hang open. Something happened here.

Upon close inspection, the very architecture seems to meet
 at angles that hurt the eye. Everything's off center.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CAR - DAY

Trent and Styles check the place out.

STYLES

It's exactly as he described
 in the books.

TRENT

(pulling over)
 Great. Where did he write we
 could find him?

CUT TO:

EXT. HOBBS' END MAIN STREET - DAY

Trent parks the car and he and Styles get out. They start walking up the block, carrying their travel bags.

TRENT
(looking around)
We missed a big party...

Trent nods towards the derelict cars. Styles glances over, but SUDDENLY HEARS a distant GIGGLE. She turns back.

STYLES' POV

About a few blocks down. A group of children, about six to eight, chase an emaciated dog across the street and into an alley.

ON STYLES

as she reacts and grabs Trent.

STYLES
Look!

Trent turns, just as the kids vanish into the alley. He sees nothing.

TRENT
What?

STYLES
You didn't see them? You didn't hear them?

TRENT
Hear who?

She stares at him, then takes a look around.

STYLES
Forget it. How do we start asking about Cane?

TRENT
By finding someone to ask...

STYLES
(leading him)
There's a hotel up this street.

TRENT
How did you know that?

ON THE PICKMAN HOTEL

as Trent and Styles turn the corner. Trent stares up at the modest three story boarding house, then back down at Styles.

TRENT
(suspicious)
I thought you've never been here before?

STYLES
I haven't. But I've read about it...
(points to hotel)
...this place. So have you. In the last book.

Trent looks up at the hotel's sign.

TRENT
(recognizing it)
Oh yeah, the hotel from "Hobb's End Horror".

They start to head in.

TRENT (CONT.)
This must be the town he based the book on.

CUT TO:

INT. PICKMAN HOTEL - DAY

Trent and Styles enter. The lobby is deserted.

TRENT (CONT.)
That would explain why he'd come back here.

Styles isn't listening. She walks in, talking out loud to herself.

STYLES
There should be three paintings behind us. Pastoral scenes, peaceful.

Trent turns. Sure enough, there are three innocuous paintings hanging over a quaint country couch. Cows graze in the first one. A boy plays with his dog in another, and two lovers stroll by a creek in the third.

TRENT

(unimpressed)

You have a better memory for Cane's detail than I do.

They approach the front desk. She steers him away from a spot on the floor.

STYLES

Watch out, the boards are loose there.

Trent looks at her funny, then taps the boards with his foot. They tilt up and shift, CREAKING with looseness. Styles RINGS the bell at the desk as Trent joins her. MRS. PICKMAN, an extremely cute old lady, appears out of the front office and smiles warmly at the out-of-towners..

MRS. PICKMAN

Can I help you folks?

TRENT

(adopts friendly style)

Sure hope so. Me and the missus here are on our way to Boston. Thought we'd take a break in your famous hometown.

She smiles as she hands him a pen. Styles just stares at her, disturbed.

MRS. PICKMAN

(puzzled)

Famous?

TRENT

(as he signs)

Sure, what with the whole Sutter Cane thing and all.

MRS. PICKMAN

Sutter who?

Trent looks at her.

TRENT

I heard he was from around here? Comes back to visit now and then.

MRS. PICKMAN

Don't know anybody named Cane,
nobody passes through here
much anymore. Let me get you
your keys...

TRENT

Don't you need a deposit?

Mrs. Pickman just stares at him, and suddenly BURSTS into LAUGHTER. Laughter that is just a bit too loud, a bit too hearty, and goes on a bit too long. Trent smiles weakly.

MRS. PICKMAN

(laughing,
shaking her
head)

City folk...

She heads into the office.

TRENT

(reacting)

Okay...

Styles turns and stares at the paintings on the far wall.

ON THE PAINTING

of the cows grazing. Just for an instant. Just for a heartbeat...it looks like one of the cows moved.

ON STYLES

Reacting.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT AND STYLES' ROOM - DAY

Trent is arguing with her as they unpack their bags.

TRENT

We are not living inside a
Sutter Cane story!

STYLES

This town is a Sutter Cane
story!

TRENT

The town inspired the stories,
not the other way around.

STYLES

(pulls out a
paperback of
"THE HOBBS' END

HORROR)
This place, that woman,
they're all in here!

TRENT

(laughs)

The Mrs. Pickman in the book
is a lunatic who ends up
chopping her husband into cole
slaw. The woman we met
downstairs isn't capable of
anything worse than dipping
her dentures in her husband's
beer.

STYLES

(beat, scared)

Trent...what if Cane's work
isn't fiction? What if he's
been a reporter all along?

TRENT

(beat)

You want a report, here. This
is reality.

(knocks on table)

Hear that? Reality. If what
you're saying is true, there
should be a black church out
here with an upside down cross
on its steeple.

Trent crosses towards the window and **FULLS** the curtains
open.
There's nothing but scenery outside.

TRENT

See? Reality.

Styles gets up, crosses to the window on the other side, of
the room.

STYLES

You didn't read closely
enough. The view was from the
east.

She PULLS the curtains to her window aside, revealing, off in the distance, the black church. Just as it appeared in Cane's cover illustrations.

ON TRENT

Reacting.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON A PAGE

of "THE HOBBS' END HORROR". We HEAR Trent READ ALOUD the passage we can see.

TRENT (V.O.)

"This place had once been the seat of an evil older than mankind and wider than the known universe."

TILT UP OFF THE PAGE

and we REVEAL the BLACK CHURCH, about thirty yards ahead.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLACK CHURCH - DAY

Trent, walking with book in hand, and Styles approach the church.

TRENT

You've got me reading this thing like a fucking guide book...

Styles isn't listening, she's looking around, mostly behind her. She ~~knows~~ something's really wrong with this place.

STYLES' POV

of the streets behind her. The group of children race by again, off in the distance. Still chasing the emaciated dog.

ON STYLES

as she hurries to catch up to Trent.

TRENT

We're wasting our time, we're supposed to be asking about Cane...

STYLES

...you'll have someone to ask in about two seconds.

As if on cue, a speeding station-wagon suddenly comes SCREECHING around a corner and heads straight for Trent and Styles. Trent and Styles leap out of the way as the car heads straight for the black church and comes to a stop in front of the decayed yard.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHURCH YARD - DAY

EIGHT MEN scramble out of the car. Some hold shotguns. They gather at the foot of the path which leads to the church's huge double doors. A large, burly BEARDED MAN steps up and SCREAMS.

BEARDED MAN

(at the church)

CAAAAAANNNNNNEEE!!!

ON TRENT AND STYLES

as they react to the name. They start running up towards the church.

TRENT

(getting pissed)

How did you know?

She doesn't answer.

ON THE BEARDED MAN

as he FIRES a SHOT into the air.

BEARDED MAN
GIVE 'EM BACK!!!

A sudden SOUND from the church commands everyone's attention. It's a HORRIBLE GRINDING NOISE, as if the gears of a great and terrible machine were BUCKLING into themselves. The mob takes a step back. A frightened WEASEL cowers behind the bearded man.

WEASEL
See what ya did!

The bearded man stares at the church. The door OPENS. Everyone FREEZES as a WIND STARTS TO WHIP UP. Trent and Styles arrive but stay a few feet behind the mob.

TRENT
(grabs her arm)
How did you know?

Again, she doesn't answer.

ON THE DOORS

as a small boy of about five appears in the doorway. Angelic.

ON THE BEARDED MAN

as he reacts.

BEARDED MAN
(recognizing his
child)
John? Johnny boy...come to
daddy...

ON THE DOORS

as they start to FLAP in the wind. They start BANGING LOUDLY against their frame as they swing OPEN and SHUT in the breeze. The boy just stands there, allowing the doors open and close in his face.

BEARDED MAN
(screaming)
JOHNNY!!!

The bearded man starts charging towards the doors. He stops dead when the doors SLAM OPEN to reveal not the boy, but SUTTER CANE in the doorway. In the boy's place as if by magic.

ON SUTTER CANE

Genius. Maniac. Neither human nor nightmare. Caught in the middle. He's halfway to literally becoming his work. He scares the shit out of you.

ON TRENT AND STYLES

reacting.

TRENT

Cane?

ON THE DOORS

as they suddenly SLAM SHUT so fiercely that the door CRACKS. At the same time a pack of jet-black, muscular Dobermans emerge from behind the church and charge the mob.

ON STYLES

as her eyes widen and she starts pulling Trent away. They begin to run as the dogs dig into the mob. We HEAR SHOTS being FIRED but no dogs go down.

ON TRENT AND STYLES

running. They look back and when they turn to look forward again they STOP DEAD in front of an eerie little GIRL. She's suddenly appeared right in front of them and has a small trickle of blood coming out of one eye. Her teeth seem too large for her mouth. She bears that slight "out of proportion" look that signals advanced Cane exposure.

Styles is a study in dread, as if she knew who and what this girl represents.

STYLES

(frightened)

Who are you?

GIRL

(chilling)

The end.

She runs away to join her friends who continue to chase the emaciated dog.

ON TRENT

He's had enough.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT AND STYLES' ROOM - DUSK

Trent is packing, furiously. He SLAMS clothes into his bag as Styles rants around him.

STYLES

You can't leave. Not now!
We've seen Cane!

TRENT

Good, my job's over. No pay-off, Cane's alive.

STYLES

But what about the new book?
Our policy covers the book as well.

TRENT

Fuck the book. You want it?
You get it. I'm not helping anyone who's been holding out on me.

STYLES

What's that mean?

TRENT

It means tell me how you knew about that mob?

Styles hangs her head.

TRENT

(angry)

Can't bullshit a bullshitter, can you? Good, because I'll tell you how you knew. Because this whole thing is staged, that's why! You, Harglow and Cane are putting me through this so I can go back and blab to the National Enquirer about Cane's "haunted town." Help you sell a few more million copies.

STYLES

You're wrong!

TRENT

No I'm not. And before I leave I'm going to get someone in this town to come clean, and then we're going to dismiss your bullshit claim.

STYLES

You're wrong. I know you're wrong.

TRENT

(yelling)
How am I wrong!?

STYLES

(yelling)
Because you're right!

TRENT

I'm wrong because I'm right?

STYLES

(defeated)
You're half right.
(beat)

This was a hoax. We did send Cane away as a publicity stunt. To Florida! But he never showed up. Three weeks ago we realized he'd vanished for real. Harglow sent me with you to make it look good.

TRENT

Only we weren't supposed to find anything.

STYLES

That's right, and that's why I know what we're seeing is real. We didn't stage any of this...the boy on the bike, the church, that little girl...it's all happening for real. And it's all in the book. That's how I knew.

TRENT

You're lying. I read the books, there was nothing about any mob, any little girl.

STYLES

Not in the old books Trent. In the new one. Cane described the girl, the mob, the boy on the bike, when he pitched me "In the Mouth of Madness." No one knew what was in it except me...

TRENT

(disturbed)

And Cane's agent.

(beat)

What's it about...the new one?

STYLES

It's about the end. To everything. And it starts here, in this place. With an evil that returns and takes over Hobbs' End, piece by piece, starting with the children.

TRENT

How do I know you people haven't paid this town to act out Cane's fantasies? More phony fun n' games?

STYLES

You can't know, only I can, and I know it's happening for real. Just like he always promised.

TRENT

It's fiction Linda. Fiction.

STYLES

(urgent)

You've got to check the paintings Trent, the ones in the lobby...and check the cellar. Do it!

Trent stares at her.

CUT TO:

INT. PICKMAN HOTEL - DUSK

Trent comes down into the lobby. No sign of Mrs. Pickman. Trent pulls out a cigarette and starts approaching the three paintings. He lights up as he stares at them.

ON THE PAINTINGS

They're different, in a subtle, disturbing way. The cows grazing in the first painting now appear sickly, with runny, infected eyes. The grass seems more brown than green. One cow seems to have sprouted larger teeth.

The boy playing with his dog in the second painting appears less joyful, more frightened of his pet. The dog itself is larger.

The two lovers strolling by the creek appear unchanged, until you notice that their eyes seem a bit more recessed into their faces. There also seems to be something rising out of the water behind them. All the paintings seem to be acquiring that hyper-real quality of Cane's book covers.

ON TRENT

Staring at them. He moves forward and pulls one slightly off the wall, checking behind it. He steps back and takes a few drags off the cigarette as he continues to regard the paintings.

TRENT

(to himself)

Nice try.

MRS. PICKMAN (O.S.)

No smoking please...

Trent turns and sees the old lady. She smiles. She's changed a little bit as well. Her eyes are red and puffy and she doesn't seem to blink. He can only see her from the waist up, everything else is hidden behind the front desk. Trent HEARS a FAINT SCRATCHING NOISE coming from behind the counter.

MRS. PICKMAN (CONT.)

...it bothers my husband.

TRENT

No problem, I was just leaving. Just stopped to admire the art.

MRS. PICKMAN

Beauties, ain't they?

TRENT

Sure are. Ms. Styles told me you did them yourself. Have you known each other long?

MRS. PICKMAN

(confused)

Ms. Styles? Oh! The pretty young thing you came in here with. I don't know her at all, does she know me?

TRENT

(trying to trip her up)

She claims she does.

(gestures towards the paintings)

So you're not responsible for those?

MRS. PICKMAN

Hell no.

TRENT

(noticing her eyes)

Well you've got a great place here. Must be a chore to keep clean. You look like you've been up for hours.

MRS. PICKMAN

(even)

Been reading...

TRENT

Me too...thought I'd take a
break, go for a walk.

MRS. PICKMAN

(smiles)

Good idea...

Trent tries to peer over the counter, to see what's making the faint SCRATCHING NOISE. Mrs. Pickman politely steps forward, blocking his view. Trent smiles uncomfortably, nods goodnight, and exits. As soon as he's out the door, we SWING AROUND and REVEAL the rest of Mrs. Pickman behind the front desk.

We see Mr. Pickman lying on the floor, handcuffed to his wife's ankle. He's nude, and totally emaciated. He also looks to be about a hundred years old. His leathery skin stretches over brittle bones. He's covered in black and blue marks.

The scratching is coming from his long fingernails SCRAPING his wife's meaty calf in a vain effort to put up some resistance. We only see this for a few brief moments.

MRS. PICKMAN

Hush.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT AND STYLES' ROOM - DUSK

Styles is trying to use the phone. It's not working. Nothing but STATIC. She puts it down, and as she does so, she stares at her copy of "THE HOBBS' END HORROR."

She picks it up. Starts flipping through it. She stares at the book's cover. The black church. She turns it over, and sees the announcement on its back cover; "COMING SOON FROM SUTTER CANE - 'IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS'".

She turns towards her view of the black church.

CUT TO:

INT. LOCAL BAR - NIGHT

Smokey, smelly. A jukebox DRONES ON in the background amid various CONVERSATIONS. Trent sits at the bar, writing in a little notebook.

ON THE NOTEBOOK

Trent's written a few notes:

"HOBB'S END..."

-people...(paid off)

-paintings...(rigged)

-Harglow/Styles/Cane...(fucked)

BULLSHIT!!!

ON TRENT

Looking over his notes.

BEARDED MAN (O.S.)

You a writer?

Trent looks up and over and we REVEAL the bearded man from the church mob sitting right next to him. The bearded man has a bandage around one hand and a few nasty scratches across his face.

TRENT

No. I'm from Brooklyn.

BEARDED MAN

Then take a hint mister,
leave. This ain't no tourist
town.

Trent takes a look around. Several men from the raiding party are seated at tables around the bar. They all seem sickly, pasty. Infected. Cane's gotten to them.

TRENT

(leans in,
smiles)

How much is Cane paying you
guys?

BEARDED MAN

Cane is a dead man, been one
since he started messin' with
the church. Now something's
come leaking out...took the
little ones first. He read his
book to them, they brought it
home to us. Took some of us
sooner than others.

(warning)

Don't let it get to you. Don't
look at it. Just get out.

Trent looks around, lights up a smoke.

TRENT

(smiles)

You guys are good. You, the woman at the hotel...really, really good.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Styles is making her way towards the black church. She walks past shattered store windows and abandoned cars. She notices that the street is somewhat littered with spent rifle shells. A child's ball suddenly rolls up to her and stops at her feet. She freezes.

A little BOY of about six starts to approach her. She squats down and picks up the ball. He's wearing shorts and a t-shirt. As he comes closer, he appears to suffer from the same disease as the previous little girl ("The end").

He's all out of proportion. Eyes, teeth, limbs. Nothing fits. His eyes are so big that we can make out crisscrossing red veins in the whites.

BOY

Give it.

Styles hands him the ball.

STYLES

Where do you live?

BOY

With you.

STYLES

(frowns)

Who takes care of you?

BOY

You do.

He suddenly runs off. Styles rises, HEARS the WHIMPER of a dog behind her and spins around. She comes face to face with the little girl ("The end") and her friends. They've apparently caught the dog, because it stands to one side, and it's missing a leg.

The little girl and several of the other children have small spots of blood on their faces and clothes. The little girl has bits of dog hair stuck around her mouth and when she smiles, she reveals teeth that are now pointed.

GIRL
You're our mommy. And do you
know what today is?

Styles starts backing out.

GIRL (CONT.)
Today is mommy's day.

Styles turns and runs in the opposite direction. Towards
the church.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT AND STYLES' ROOM - NIGHT

Trent searches the room and bathroom for Styles.

TRENT
(slams bathroom
door)
Shit!

He tries the phone. Doesn't work.

TRENT
Of course.

He sits on the bed, deciding how much time he'll give
Styles to come back before leaving without her. His eyes
wander to the book. He picks it up. Opens it.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLACK CHURCH - NIGHT

Styles stands before the doors. She notices an inscription
carved into one of them. She reads it aloud.

STYLES
(reading)
"Let these doors be sealed---

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT AND STYLES' ROOM - NIGHT

Trent reads to himself from "THE HOBBS' END HORROR."

TRENT
(reading)
---by our Lord God, in His
year 1788, and let any who
dare enter--

CUT TO:

EXT. BLACK CHURCH - NIGHT

Styles continues reading.

STYLES

---this unholy site be damned
forever."

CUT TO:

INT. BLACK CHURCH - NIGHT

It's dark. Wrecked. Empty. Styles enters and walks among the decayed pews. She heads over to a staircase which leads to the steeple tower. She starts to climb it.

ON THE STAIRS

Styles climbs slowly. She reaches the top, and finds a trapdoor leading upward into the steeple attic. She pushes on it. It won't budge. She stops as she HEARS what sounds like FAINT TYPING coming from the other side of the door. She pushes again, and it cracks open. She peers in.

STYLES' POV

of the attic. It's a very small, dark room. Hardly any bigger than a huge closet.

ON STYLES

as she lets the door close. A SOUND suddenly comes from above the door. The TYPING again, only this time it escalates into POUNDING. It stops as quick as it started. Styles opens the door again and looks in.

She's suddenly PULLED UP and carried through the door with tremendous unseen force. It SLAMS shut behind her.

CUT TO:

INT. STEEPLE ATTIC - NIGHT

Bigger now, bigger than physics would allow in a space as small as the tower. Bare, dark. Far off in one corner there's a steel table, with a steel chair, and a typewriter sitting on top. The table is illuminated by an unseen overhead light. Cane sits in the chair, facing Styles, who rises from the floor about five yards away.

CANE

Linda...nice to see you again.
You can edit this one from the
inside looking out.

Cane starts typing again.

STYLES

(approaching)

Cane?

Styles draws nearer and we HEAR her footsteps fall in rhythm with cane's typing. As if he's making her move forward.

CANE

I started with the children
Linda, because they're quick
learners. They took it to
their parents, and their
parents spread it amongst
themselves. Now they're all
becoming...

Styles is almost upon him, she can still only see him from the front. She's starting to HEAR a SQUISHING SOUND.

STYLES

(terrified)

Becoming what?

CANE

(looks up)

What I've already become...

Styles come close and looks behind him as Cane rises. We SWING AROUND to REVEAL that Cane's got a whole other front facing out from where his back should be. He's two different halves, facing opposite directions! The half that now faces Styles is decidedly not human.

CANE

(distorted)

One of them!

The Cane-thing points at a corner. A BLARING COLLECTION of alien CRIES suddenly FILL THE ROOM, followed by gusts of wind.

ON STYLES

She looks.

We don't see what she sees, but her reaction makes us glad that we don't. Light suddenly hits her face and her hair BLOWS BACK. She opens her mouth to scream but no sound comes out. In a second it's over and the light is gone.

ON CANE

as he GRABS Styles and pulls her close.

CANE

(distorted)

The secret of my success. All those stories of horrible, slimy, things trying to get back in...

(pulls her closer)

...they're all true.

He starts dragging her to his table.

CANE

I'm letting them in Linda. They gave me the power to make my stories real, and now I'm writing our world into theirs.

He seats her in the chair, HARD, and forces her to look at his manuscript.

CANE (CONT.)

And here's the instrument of their homecoming. What you've come looking for. The new bible. Fiction becomes reality...and reality becomes a memory. Read it Linda...and learn the true nature of your existence.

ON STYLES

as Cane forces her head down into the pages of "IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS." This time she SCREAMS, for a long time. Blood shoots out of burst vessels in her eyes as she stares at the manuscript.

STYLES
(screaming)
I CAN SEEEEEE!!!

CUT TO:

EXT. BLACK CHURCH - NIGHT

The steeple against the sky, barely visible. Black on black. Styles' CRY ECHOES OUT.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT AND STYLES' ROOM - NIGHT

Trent has fallen asleep on the bed. A KNOCKING at the door wakes him up. He sits up, looks at his watch, then heads for the door. He opens it. Styles is there, sweat-soaked and bloody. She collapses into Trent's arms the minute the door swings open.

TRENT
(stunned)
Linda! Linda!

He carries her to the bed. She's catatonic. He runs into the bathroom and comes back with a wet wash-cloth. He starts to wipe her face. The blood comes off and she appears to have no visible wounds.

TRENT
(to himself)
Where the hell did the blood
come from...

Styles eyes snap open and she starts to grab at Trent.

TRENT
It's okay, jeezus, where the
hell did you go!

STYLES
(frenzied,
between breaths)
I'm losing me, I'm losing me
John...help me. I'm losing me!

Her arms grab his back, her knuckles are white.

TRENT

Linda, what did they do? What happened!?

STYLES

(crazed)

I saw the book. Don't read it John, don't look at it! He's opened the door, it's already started...I looked, and now I'm losing me. Tell me I exist, tell me I'm real!

TRENT

Of course you're real. You're here and you're safe now, you're with me.

STYLES

(screams again)

I'm losing me!!!

Trent lays her down on the bed.

TRENT

Stay here, don't move. I'm just going to see if I can find a phone that works...

Trent rushes out of the room.

CUT TO:

INT. PICKMAN HOTEL - NIGHT

Trent races into the lobby and frantically searches for a phone. He can't find one. He SLAPS his hand down on the BELL but no one appears.

TRENT

C'mon you old bitch...

He steps around the desk and into the back office.

CUT TO:

INT. BACK OFFICE - NIGHT

Trent finds a staircase leading down into the basement. He HEARS a WHACKING SOUND, and follows it down.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Trent comes down. The WHACKING SOUND is stronger in the dark basement.

TRENT
Mrs. Pickman?

Trent makes out the outline of a swinging bulb and grabs its chain. He pulls it. The light goes on.

TRENT'S POV

of Mrs. Pickman's silhouette. It seems to be impossibly perched on some sort of tentacles. The silhouette suggests something totally alien is going on beneath Mrs. Pickman's waist. The silhouette is whacking away at something with an axe. We glimpse another, frail silhouette waving about madly. The unfortunate Mr. Pickman.

CLOSE ON MRS. PICKMAN

We only see her face, which is for the most part human, except for the familiar "out of proportion" look. She swings her insane gaze towards Trent.

MRS. PICKMAN
(smiles)
You want some too, buddy?

Trent stumbles back, hitting the stairs and falling. He can't believe what he's seeing.

TRENT
(weak)
You're fake...

MRS. PICKMAN
(coming at him)
I'm HUNGRY...

CUT TO:

INT. PICKMAN HOTEL - NIGHT

Trent races up towards his room, not noticing the paintings.

ON THE PAINTINGS

All three have now totally transformed. The cows grazing have now become tentacled creatures ripping the ground away to reveal human bodies underneath. The boy has now stopped playing with his dog and started eating it, and the lovers have become half-human, half "Cane-things" and have started a three-way with the things that's crawled from the creek.

All the paintings look like photographs from life.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT AND STYLES' ROOM - NIGHT

Trent BURSTS in. Styles is not there, but there are deep long gashes in the walls. Trent POUNDS on the bathroom door. He's still in shock.

TRENT
WE'RE GOING! NOW!

STYLES (O.S.)
Too late...

TRENT
(frenzied)
C'mon! No time for this
shit!!!

Trent HEARS her GIGGLE, and he notices that something is leaking out from underneath the bathroom door. Brackish water. There are tiny, slimy, salamander-like things swimming in it.

TRENT
Linda, please...

Trent backs away from the door. He looks out the window.

TRENT'S POV

of the three legged dog crossing the street down below. We HEAR the SOUNDS of CHAOS and DESTRUCTION from all over the town.

ON TRENT

Scared. He HEARS the bathroom door CLICK open. Styles enters the room. Her feet SQUISH on the wet rug. Trent has his back to her. She SPEAKS in SOBS. She speaks with difficulty.

TRENT

Linda...if this is phony, you
got me good. Now let's go
home.

STYLES (O.S.)

We are home...

Trent starts to turn. He sees Styles.

His reaction sends him back with such sudden force that he
SHATTERS the window he's been standing in front of.

ON STYLES

We see half her face first. Normal. Then she turns. The
other half is not normal. It's clenched, out of proportion.
It hangs off her skull like raw meat. The eye is totally
rolled back in its socket.

A tear drips from one eye, a drop of blood from the other.

STYLES

(tortured)

I'M LOSING MEEEEEE!!!

Trent approaches her, but she SMACKS him away.

STYLES

Read the book John, it's
easier when you know.

She comes at him.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Trent is thrown through the door. He comes SMASHING into a
wall as bits of wood and plaster fall around him.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Trent comes racing out of the hotel and into the street. He
takes a few breaths but soon focuses on the SOUNDS around
him. It's an ORCHESTRA of INSANITY. CRIES and SCREAMS rise
to a ROAR. The streets may be empty, but the SOUNDS coming
from within the buildings reveal where the people are, and
what they're doing.

They're changing. Becoming. From the SOUNDS of it, it's a painful process. Trent throws his hands over his ears and runs towards the nearest shelter.

CUT TO:

INT. LOCAL BAR - NIGHT

Trent rushes inside and SLAMS the door shut. The SOUNDS STOP. He hangs his head. The bar is dark, but we can see that it's a wreck. Beer and liquor flood the floor, and there are dozens of gashes and scratches on the walls.

BEARDED MAN (O.S.)
You still here?

Trent jumps and turns towards the voice. He can make out the bearded man sitting against a far wall. His clothes are in rags and a large chunk of flesh is missing from his cheek. Torn or bitten out.

BEARDED MAN (CONT.)
Busy night. Been busy since
Cane come, started messin'
with the church.

TRENT
(losing it)
Special effects, hidden
speakers, you people are pros,
I'll give you that...

He struggles to light a cigarette. Can't get it done.

BEARDED MAN
The thing I can't remember is,
what came first? Us or the
book?

Trent explodes and hurls a beer mug at the bearded man. It SHATTERS above his head. He doesn't care.

TRENT
(screaming)
WE ARE NOT LIVING IN A SUTTER
CANE STORY!!! YOU PEOPLE ARE
EITHER PHONIES, PSYCHOS OR
BOTH! THIS IS NOT REALITY!!!

BEARDED MAN
Reality's not what it used to
be.

TRENT
 (pained)
 God this place makes my head
 hurt.

BEARDED MAN
 (sympathetic)
 Hey...

Trent looks away.

BEARDED MAN (CONT.)
 No really...c'mon.

Trent slowly looks up.

BEARDED MAN (CONT.)
 See this?

The bearded man points at his wound with the tip of the
 shotgun he's been holding. He lets the edge of both barrels
 rest against the open surface.

BEARDED MAN (CONT.)
 This was done by a five year-
 old...my five year old. She
 did me after her mom did her.

Trent looks on in horror as the man's eyes start to glow
 yellow.

BEARDED MAN (CONT.)
 (thickly)
 You're alone.

Trent HEARS a RIPPING SOUND behind the bearded man's back.
 It's followed by a WET SOUND. A SLITHERING SOUND. Two
 tentacles emerge from the bearded man's back, even as his
 features grow more disproportionate. The tentacles SMACK
 the floor like grounded fish as the bearded man looks at
 Trent with an apologetic expression. His hand goes to the
 trigger.

TRENT
 Don't.

BEARDED MAN
 I have to, he wrote me this
 way...

The bearded man pulls the trigger. The BLAST ECHOES through
 the room. He slumps over dead as his tentacles break off
 and slither into separate corners of the room.

Trent stumbles through the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Trent runs straight into a powerhouse SMACK delivered by Styles, who starts descending on him. About half a dozen changing townspeople and a few of the kids are behind her. They all appear out of proportion.

Trent rises as Styles GIGGLES. He BELTS her hard and she goes out like a light. He starts dragging her to the car, away from the mob.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CAR - NIGHT

Trent opens it up and flings Styles' inside. He slips in behind the wheel as the mob staggers towards him. He stares at them, frozen, not believing what he sees.

TRENT

(shuts his eyes)

One and one is two...two and two is four...

Having regained some control, he opens his eyes and searches for the car keys. He can't find them. He HEARS a GIGGLE to his side and looks over.

Styles JINGLES the keys in front of her, before popping them down her throat. Trent lunges for her and sticks his hand as far into her mouth as it will go. She fights with him as the mob gets closer.

Trent takes a look out the window and sees them getting closer. He BELTS Styles again, and goes to work on the steering column. He pulls a screwdriver out of the glove compartment and HACKS at the column until the casing comes off. All the while the mob gets closer.

Trent starts to hotwire the car, just as one of the kids puts their face against the closed driver-side window. At this point the kid looks more like something you'd find at the bottom of the sea than anything human. Trent stares at the face for just a moment, before STARTING the car and TEARING OUT.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

Trent's car rolls down the bumpy road.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CAR - NIGHT

Trent mumbles to himself as he goes.

TRENT
 Never leave the city, why
 don't I learn...

STYLES (O.S.)
 (weakly)
 Are we leaving?

TRENT
 (reassuring)
 We're already home.

STYLES (O.S.)
 Don't leave me.

He doesn't answer.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

Trent drives on.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CAR - NIGHT/LATER

Trent wipes the foggy moisture off the inside of the windshield. It's grown foggy outside.

TRENT
 (pissed)
 Where's the fucking highway?

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

Trent slows the car to a stop in front of an isolated phone booth. He gets out and heads for it. He stops and looks around. No telephone poles. The booth isn't connected to anything, yet it's lit from inside.

TRENT
 (to himself)
 Call triple-A, call the cops,
 call mom...

He LAUGHS to himself. He starts checking his pockets for change. He stops when he HEARS a SQUEAKING behind him. He lets the change DROP to the ground as he slowly turns around.

Coming at him from down the road is the white haired boy on the bicycle. The boy pedals fitfully past Trent, who merely looks on in silence. The boy continues down the road until he vanishes into the darkness.

Then the phone in the booth begins to RING. Trent stares at it, backing away.

STYLES (O.S.)

He's got a job for you...

Trent turns and faces a fully transformed Styles, who crawls towards him like a crab on the ground, arms bent back at impossible angles.

This is too much, Trent finds himself stepping on her to get back to the car. Once he does, he TEARS OUT.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CAR - NIGHT

Trent drives on behind a face of stone. He lights a cigarette and lets it dangle out of the corner of his mouth. He starts to play with the radio dial. All he gets is STATIC.

TRENT'S POV

of the road ahead. Stark, bare.

ON TRENT

as he BOLTS UP. The cigarette drops into his seat and burns him. He stares ahead in disbelief. He SCREECHES to a stop.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOBBS' END MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Trent has pulled back into the town. The mob awaits his arrival. Trent TEARS OUT in reverse and backs out of town, leaving burnt rubber.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CAR - NIGHT

Trent panics. /

TRENT
A few bad calls, a few wrong
turns...

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

Trent's car speeds along.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CAR - NIGHT

Trent speeds by the boy on the bicycle.

The now horrific Styles is riding on his backseat, LAUGHING
and having a great time.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

Trent's car swerves as he races by them.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CAR - NIGHT/LATER

Trent tries to drive through what appears to be a dense
fog. He clears the moisture away and strains to see out the
windshield.

TRENT'S POV

as the fog clears. He's driven into Hobb's End again. This time the dogs charge him.

CUT TO:

EXT. Hobb's End Main Street - Night

Trent's car pulls a sharp u-turn and SCREECHES away.

CUT TO:

INT. Trent's Car - Night

Trent drives on, sweaty and about to crack.

CUT TO:

EXT. Rural Road - Night

Trent's car races by the boy again, only this time Styles is riding the bike alone and chasing the boy out in front of her.

Trent pays them no mind.

CUT TO:

INT. Trent's Car - Night

Trent drives on, bored. Expecting the inevitable.

CUT TO:

EXT. Hobb's End Main Street - Night

Trent pulls into the town. The mob awaits.

CUT TO:

INT. Trent's Car - Night

Trent draws a bead on the mob and smiles as he prepares to run them down.

Styles has other plans. She suddenly APPEARS right in front of Trent's car. Out of reflex more than anything else, Trent SWERVES to avoid her.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOBBS' END MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Trent's car SKIDS out of control and SLAMS into a nearby parked car.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CAR - NIGHT

Trent's head collides with the steering wheel, knocking him out.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

EXT. BLACK CHURCH - NIGHT

The dogs sit outside, with the children.

CUT TO:

INT. BLACK CHURCH - NIGHT

A confessional booth sits against one wall. In front of the pews.

CUT TO:

INT. CONFESSIONAL BOOTH - NIGHT

We're on Trent's side. He sits there, trying to light a cigarette. Shadows from the booth's partition fall on his face. He wipes matted hair away from his eyes. Cane's VOICE comes through from the other side of the booth.

CANE (O.S.)

Do you want to know the
problem with places like this,
with religion in general?

TRENT

Do tell.

CANE (O.S.)

It's never known how to convey
the anatomy of horror. It
seeks discipline through fear,
yet doesn't understand the
nature of creation. No one's
ever believed it enough to
make it real. The same cannot
be said of my work.

TRENT

You have a point?

CANE

I think you know it. Cynics such as yourself are my flock. Your desire to "be there when the shit goes sour" is shared by most of humanity. A humanity that's been waiting for its true master to arrive. To make all this...real.

TRENT

Your work isn't real. This is something else.

CANE (O.S.)

What is it?

TRENT

(desperate)

Mass hysteria, psycho fans, you came out here and founded some kind of cult.

CANE (O.S.)

I came out here and found something that used to only exist in my imagination. You need my book to see it, and once you see it, you become it. All those years thinking it was just my dreams, not realizing they were telling me what to write.

TRENT

They did a shitty job.

CANE (O.S.)

You sound calm for a man who's seen what you have tonight.

TRENT

(unsteady)

All I have are my eyes, and I have to believe them. I'll sort this shit out later, but right now I have to believe my eyes.

He starts to fall apart.

TRENT (CONT.)
 (voice rising)
 They're my fucking eyes, AND I
 HAVE TO BELIEVE THEM!!!

Trent takes a deep breath and calms down.

TRENT (CONT.)
 Your books suck anyway...

CANE (O.S.)
 You must try my new one. The
 others have had quite an
 effect, but this one will
 drive you absolutely mad...

TRENT
 So I hear.

CANE (O.S.)
 It prepares you, makes you
 ready for the change. It's
 worked wonders here, we've had
 a very successful test market.
 Now it's ready for the world.
 It's bound to a best
 seller...I'm very, very
 popular. Let me show you
 something.

Two thick arms SHOOT THROUGH the partition and grab Trent
 by the neck. They SLAM Trent's head against the partition
 frame.

CUT TO:

INT. STEEPLE ATTIC - NIGHT

Trent comes to in the steel chair. A bare arm reaches out
 of the darkness and applies a damp cloth to his forehead.
 Trent bolts up and starts to focus amid all the dark space.

STYLES (O.S.)
 You promised not to leave me.

TRENT
 Linda?

STYLES (O.S.)
 You broke your word.

Styles rears up.

STYLES
(distorted)
He hurt me...

Trent's eyes harden, he ignores the last comment.

TRENT
Where's cane?

STYLES

Who?

TRENT
Sutter cane.

STYLES

He's finishing...

She steps aside and REVEALS Cane at the table. He's in human form, and he's typing. As he write, a RIP in reality appears behind Cane and grows wider by the stroke.

STYLES (CONT.)
He's letting them ALL back
in...

The rip gets bigger. Trent rises and fights his way towards the table against the fierce wind coming from the rip.

CANE
(pulls paper out)
All done...

(points to rip)
"THE MOUTH OF MADNESS."
(holds up book)
Yours to deliver John...

TRENT
(shouting)
What!?

CANE
I'll be joining my new
"publishers", in there. You'll
have to take this back to the
world for me. It's what you
do...

TRENT
"What I do!?"

CANE

You still don't realize...my book doesn't replace your world, it becomes your world. You only work in it.

TRENT

No, I know what's real. I KNOW WHAT I AM!

CANE

(starts to change, smiles)

You're what I write, nothing more. Did you think my agent chose you by accident?

Trent reacts.

CANE (CONT.)

He read about you John, in this book. He knew you would be the one to deliver it to the world. To make what's happened here, happen everywhere. He tried to stop you.

ON TRENT

mind reeling. He thinks back to the agent charging the coffee shop.

TRENT

I'm not a piece of fiction.

CANE

(leers)

I think...therefore you are.

(holds up the book)

You're in here John, read it if you don't believe me.

The rip grows wider, and the inhabitants of the other side start to come across. We can tell by the light and SOUND.

CANE (CONT.)

(distorted)

Spread the word.

Cane picks Trent up and HURLS him out the window.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Trent comes flying out of the steeple, bounces off the roof, and lands hard on the ground. He painfully gets to his feet and looks up at the steeple.

ON THE STEEPLE

It EXPLODES in blackness. A blacker than black darkness leaks out of the aftermath, and starts swallowing everything around it. We can HEAR the SAGGING of wood and the GRINDING of glass and metal as the darkness begins to eat away Hobb's End.

It comes straight for Trent. Everything in its path turns grey and crumbles at its touch.

ON TRENT

as he starts to run from the cloud. We HEAR his heartbeat.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Trent makes a run for his car, with the darkness on his heels. He gets in and TEARS OUT.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

Trent's car speeds by as the darkness eats everything behind it. Animals caught in the cloud SOUND different once they're inside. More bestial. We HEAR other things inside the darkness as well. Alien things.

ON TRENT

as he drives away. He takes a fevered look back, and panics when he sees the darkness right behind him. Trent looks forward and freaks when he sees the tree he's about to it.

TRENT

Shit!

ON THE MANUSCRIPT

of "IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS" on the front seat, pages fly by as the car rolls along.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

Trent's car skids and SLAMS into the tree.

ON TRENT

as he SMASHES against the steering wheel, ~~again~~. He goes out.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

Beautiful country afternoon. The sun reflects off the cracked windshield of Trent's car. Trent's slumped figure begins to stir inside.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S CAR - DAY

Trent slowly sits up. Groggy, hurt. He puts a hand to his head. He draws a deep, painful breath. He COUGHS out an exhale. He opens the door and climbs out.

TRENT

(rubbing his
head)

One too many times...

CUT TO:

EXT. TRENT'S CAR - DAY

Trent has some initial trouble dealing with both standing up and the glare from the sun. After a few seconds he manages both.

He surveys the wreck. The car's front end is crumpled. The tree he hit bends ominously over the car. Trent watches as it CRACKS and falls forward. It CRUSHES what's left of the car. After a few seconds, Trent turns away and starts walking towards the main road.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

Trent walks along, dazed and lifeless. He stops when he HEARS a sudden SQUEAKING. The SQUEAKING of a bicycle. Trent turns and sees a kid approaching. Trent's relieved to see that it's a normal kid on a normal bike. He flags the kid down.

TRENT

Hey kid.

The KID, about ten, pedals up to Trent. He has a knapsack full of rolled up newspapers.

KID

You want a paper?

TRENT

(beat)

I'm a book. I thought I was from Brooklyn but I'm actually a book. A horror novel. One that drives people insane and turns them into monsters.

KID

(beat)

Uh...that's great. Listen, umm, you been in an accident or something?

TRENT

(beat)

Yeah.

KID

Want me to get somebody?

TRENT

No thanks. Just tell me which way's the highway.

KID
Straight up.

The kid starts to pedal away.

TRENT
Hey kid!

The kid stops and turns back.

TRENT (CONT.)
You ever hear of Hobb's End?

The kid shakes his head "no."

TRENT (CONT.)
Thanks.

The kid pedals off. Trent starts to trudge towards the highway.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - LATER

Trent walks on, tired and sweaty. An unlit cigarette dangles out of his mouth.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - LATER

Trent tries to thumb a ride. A truck pulls over. Trent gets into it.

CUT TO:

INT. TRUCK CAB - NIGHT

Trent sits next to a jovial, three-hundred pound TRUCKER.

TRUCKER
Where ya headed?

TRENT
(matter of fact)
New York.

TRUCKER
Really? What do you do?

TRENT
(matter of fact)
I'm a book, a horror novel.
You're in it too, everyone
is...

The trucker looks at him.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The truck SCREECHES to a halt. When it leaves again, Trent is left standing on the side of the road.

TRENT
Gotta stop saying that.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT.

A cheap dive off the highway.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S ROOM - NIGHT

Trent's lying on the bed, fully clothed. All the lights and the t.v. are on. Trent suddenly picks up the phone, starts dialing a number.

CUT TO:

INT. HARGLOW'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The phone RINGS, but the office is empty.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S ROOM - NIGHT

Trent HANGS UP. He heads for the bathroom.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Trent stares at himself in the mirror as the shower runs. His face is older.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S ROOM - LATER

Trent's in bed, sleeping. All the lights and t.v are still on.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL LOBBY - NEXT DAY

Trent walks through the lobby. He appears more together, a little cleaned up. The DESK CLERK, a pimply faced teen, calls out to him.

CLERK

Mr. Trent!

Trent heads over to the desk.

CLERK (CONT.)

Package for you sir.

The clerk places a manilla envelope on the desk in front of him. Trent eyes it, suspicious. It bears his name, but no return address.

TRENT

No one knows I'm here.

CLERK

Someone does.

Trent and the package exit the lobby.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S ROOM - DAY

Trent sits before the package, smoking a cigarette. He stares at it. A KNOCK on the door startles him.

TRENT

What!?

MAID (O.S.)

Housekeeping.

TRENT

Not now.

Trent HEARS the footsteps of the maid FADE AWAY. He picks the package up. Starts to open it. He pulls out the contents.

It's Cane's manuscript of "IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS."

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Trent charges towards the front desk and grabs the startled clerk by the collar. Trent holds up the manuscript.

TRENT

(tight)

Who delivered this?

CLERK

I don't know...

TRENT

WHO!?

CLERK

I don't know! I wasn't here last night.

TRENT

Who was!?

A large, muscular MAN appears from the front office and heads towards Trent.

MAN

I was, and I didn't see shit, so let the boy go.

Trent drops the clerk and charges out of the lobby.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S ROOM - DAY

Trent burns the manuscript in the bathroom. He sets off the SMOKE ALARM. He's careful to keep the pages turned away from his face.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

A large tour bus rolls by.

CUT TO:

INT. BUS - DAY

Trent is seated at a window seat, next to a prunish OLD LADY with bright orange hair. She's in the middle of some erratic monologue. Trent's trying to ignore her.

OLD LADY

I remember New York during the depression, people think they have it bad now, you should have seen the Bowery back then. Bodies piled two, three feet high off the gutter...

As she speaks, her VOICE FADES until Trent HEARS nothing but SILENCE. He looks at her mouth moving. He hangs his head against the window.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The bus rolls on.

CUT TO:

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Everyone but the driver is asleep. The interior lights are off. The only illumination is provided by the strobe of the passing traffic and lamp posts.

ON TRENT

as he stirs awake. He turns towards the old lady and finds Cane in her place. The Cane-thing actually.

CANE

(distorted)

Wait until you get to the end
John, the irony will kill you.

Trent CLAMPS his eyes shut. Wishing the hallucination away. He opens them, and Cane is still there.

CANE (CONT.)

I'm not going anywhere. I'm
God now, you understand?

TRENT

God's not supposed to be a
hack horror writer.

CANE

(smiles)

You'll never know unless you read the book. But maybe I can help you believe. Look around when you wake up. Did I ever tell you my favorite color was blue?

ON TRENT

as he wakes up for real. His eyes widen as he looks around.

TRENT'S POV

of the bus. There's blue everywhere, where there was none before. The old lady's hair is now that decrepit shade of blue old ladies seem to favor. The inside of the bus is blue. Everyone's got a blue shirt on. Even Trent's gray jacket is now blue.

ON TRENT

SCREAMING.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The bus rolls to a stop on the highway's shoulder.

CUT TO:

INT. BUS - NIGHT

The driver and the old lady are trying to calm Trent down. Trent has his hands dug so far into his seat that he's torn the upholstery. He's starting to look like the man we know from cell number nine.

DRIVER

Relax buddy, you're awake now.

Trent starts to settle down. He's actually crying.

OLD LADY

Don't cry, it was just a bad dream...

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The bus rolls back out into traffic.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW ENGLAND STATE MUNICIPAL BUILDING - DAY

People hustle in and out of the official building.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE - DAY

A packed and smokey floor deep within the building. A sweaty fog of irritation hangs over the crowded group of people waiting in various lines.

Trent is at an information counter engaged in a tense debate with the short, flabby middle-aged WOMAN manning the counter. She sports a crown of poorly coiffed blue hair.

WOMAN

Are you deaf and dumb sir?

Trent smiles and takes a drag on his cigarette. He's tempted to blow the smoke in the woman's face but resists it.

TRENT

Look, miss. I was there. In the town. In that town. There were people there. Homes, stores.

WOMAN

I don't doubt that. What I'm telling you for the tenth time is that it couldn't have been called Hobb's End. There never was, is, or shall be any such place by that name in this state.

Trent stares at her.

WOMAN (CONT.)

Ever.

CUT TO:

INT. DIFFERENT BUS - NIGHT

Trent sits way in the back, keeping an eye on the other passengers. He leans his head back. He starts to GIGGLE.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE - DAY

The bus speeds towards New York. It enters the Lincoln Tunnel.

CUT TO:

INT. PORT AUTHORITY BUS BAY - DAY

Trent's bus pulls into a space and HISSES to a stop. Passengers begin to disembark. Trent steps out, looking rumpled but stable.

CUT TO:

INT. PORT AUTHORITY BUILDING - DAY

Trent makes his way through the building towards the street. As he walks, he becomes aware of the numerous derelicts and mental patients lining either side of the building, slumped in garbage.

Trent becomes uneasy. Some of the derelicts are flat out staring at him. Trent's walk slows. Reluctantly, he starts to stare back as he passes them.

Each one is more gruesome than the last.

One has chalk white skin lined with red sores.

One has grey and sallow skin, another has sunken eyes and a distended mouth. A third woman is the worse yet. She's balding, revealing a scalp covered with scabs. She LAUGHS to herself, and every muscle in her face is clenched. She looks too much like Styles.

ON TRENT

as he starts to shake. He backs right into a TRANSIT COP and the cop's German shepherd.

COP

You alright man?

The dog starts to sniff Trent. Trent looks down at the dog, and when he looks back up, the cop has become Cane in uniform.

CANE

(distorted)

Read it.

Trent attacks the cane/cop.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORT AUTHORITY - DAY

Trent is dragged into a police car by three officers, including the one he attacked.

CUT TO:

INT. PRECINCT HOUSE - NIGHT

Trent stands before the desk sergeant, receiving his belongings back. Trent pockets his stuff and walks out. He notices several of the officers reading "THE HOBBS' END HORROR" as he goes.

CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY STATION - NIGHT

Trent's standing on a subway platform. Other commuters give him a wide berth. For a moment, Trent seems like he's contemplating suicide. He steps closer to the platform, but finally backs away. He turns back towards the wall and notices an ad for "THE HOBBS' END HORROR." It's the same ad he's seen before. The one with the corner peeling away.

He pulls on it again, and this time it starts coming off, REVEALING the ad beneath it. It's an ad for "IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS". It features his own face, running in terror from the black church.

The shiny black piece he glimpsed before is his own hair. Trent stares at it. No one else seems to notice. He and the book are finally one and the same.

Madison Avenue says so.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRENT'S STREET - NIGHT

Trent approaches his building.

TRENT'S POV

He catches a glimpse of some freak selling Cane books off a street stand ala "Dianetics."

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Trent is awake in his bed.

DISSOLVE

INT. TRENT'S APARTMENT - DAY

Trent's in exactly the same position, and he's awake. He hasn't slept at all.

CUT TO:

INT. TRENT'S KITCHEN - DAY

Trent is making some coffee. He pours himself a cup and turns towards the table. He drops the cup and it SHATTERS on the floor. Trent freezes.

Sitting on the table, mixed in with the mail, is a manilla envelope. The one from the motel. The one with Cane's manuscript in it. Trent picks it up.

He slowly peers inside. After a second he CLAMPS it shut and throws it in a rage across the apartment. It lands behind the couch.

Trent turns away from the table and goes to the sink. He lets some water run into his hand and brings it up to his face. He runs it across, then turns back to the table.

The envelope is back, sitting as neat as a pin on top of the mail. Trent stares at it, on the edge of a breakdown. He snatches it up and starts TEARING it into a million pieces.

He takes the pieces and exits the kitchen.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Trent rides down in his building's elevator. The other passengers give him a wide berth.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

Trent throws the pieces into the building's furnace.

CUT TO:

INT. HARGLOW'S OFFICE - DAY

Trent is seated in front of Harglow's desk. Harglow is standing, facing Trent.

HARGLOW

That's quite a story. If you were an author, I'd publish it myself. Do you believe it?

TRENT

If I don't. what's my option? That I'm crazy? I'm not crazy.

HARGLOW

You've heard the rumors about the effect Cane's books have had on certain readers.

TRENT

Linda told me...

HARGLOW

Yes...the woman you claim we sent with you, even though I know we sent you off alone. Why wouldn't I remember her?

TRENT

(smiles)

She was written out.

HARGLOW

(beat)

All I'm trying to say is...maybe Cane's books had an effect on you.

TRENT

(not buying it)

Any maybe I never destroyed the new book.

HARGLOW

Well, that's how I know what you're saying isn't true.

TRENT

(sits up)

What are you talking about?

HARGLOW

You delivered the book three days ago. To me personally. You found it in his uptown office. It's already in galleys.

Harglow steps aside, REVEALING a bound galley of "IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS." Harglow smiles. Is he one of them?

TRENT

(sweaty)

Have you...have you read it?

HARGLOW

(sheepish)

I never read Cane's work...haven't got the stomach for it...

TRENT

Don't publish it. Even if everything I've told you is total loony tunes, I know that book will drive people crazy...

HARGLOW

(greedy smile)

Let's hope so, I've already licensed the film rights.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. CITY - DAY

Assorted shots of the city.

RADIO (V.O.)

The newest, and presumably posthumous work of Sutter Cane hit the stands today at number one on the best seller list. "IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS" is expected to break all previous publishing records...

DISSOLVE:

EXT. MIDTOWN BOOKSTORE - DAY

People on line to buy Cane's book.

RADIO (V.O.)

On the local scene, police are at a loss to explain the outbreak of violent crime among the city's clergy...

We MOVE IN on the window display jammed with copies of "IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS." A figure appears in the window's reflection.

RADIO (V.O.)

(different
broadcast)

The mayor has called an emergency meeting of law enforcement and medical agencies to discuss an apparent epidemic of paranoid schizophrenia...

We REVEAL the figure to be Trent. A different Trent. Unshaven, dirty...crazy. He looks like a derelict. He's wearing a long, filthy trenchcoat.

A CUSTOMER emerges from the bookstore. He's carrying a copy of "IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS." He reads while he walks, and he bumps into Trent.

TRENT

Like it?

The customer looks up. He's got a blood tear running down one cheek.

CUSTOMER

Love it.

TRENT

Good.

Trent opens his coat, revealing a huge fireaxe.

TRENT (CONT.)

Then this shouldn't be a surprise.

Trent swings the axe down, CLEAVING the man's chest open. He then goes to work on the store window. In the background we HEAR people SCREAM. SIRENS approach.

END FLASHBACK

INT. TRENT'S CELL - NIGHT

Wrenn leans back in his chair and regards Trent. Trent exhales a cloud of smoke, then stamps the butt out on the floor.

There's a long pause before anyone says anything.

TRENT

It's spreading out there,
isn't it?

WRENN

(still blown away
by the story)
Just because you know the
symptoms doesn't mean your
story is true.

TRENT

There's only one true story
now, and he's writing it.

WRENN

But I know I'm real, not a
character in a living book.

TRENT

How would you know? Unless you
were the one writing?

WRENN

(beat)
John, my daughter reads Cane's
books...she hasn't mutated, or
murdered anyone...

TRENT

Maybe she was one of them
already.

WRENN

One of what?

TRENT

The original owners. They're
back. We only rented.

WRENN

(beat)
I'll come back John, I
promise. I want to help you.

TRENT

No hurry, it's safer in here
now. It'll get worse out
there...

WRENN

Why?

TRENT

Any species can smell its own
extinction. In ten years,
maybe less, the human race
will be a scary bedtime story,
for their kids. A myth.
Nothing more.

Wrenn stares at him, then exits.

CUT TO:

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Wrenn walks away with Yarbrough.

YARBROUGH

(anxious)

Did he have anything to say?

WRENN

(shaking his
head)

He was useless. Thinks he's
fiction, and that Sutter
Cane's causing the epidemic.

YARBROUGH

(beat)

Do you read Sutter Cane?

Wrenn declines to answer.

CUT TO:

INT. LONG ISLAND RAILROAD TRAIN - NIGHT

Wrenn sits, looking out into the night. He turns away from
the window and stares at his fellow passengers.

Several of them are reading Cane's new book. Their eyes
appear glassy and wide. Weird smiles and expressions. Wrenn
starts to feel uncomfortable.

RADIO (V.O.)

Another thirteen dead in what appears to be a random murder spree across the tri-state area. In an unrelated story, nothing new on the outbreak of cannibalism in the nation's capitol...

Wrenn rises and moves to another car as the broadcast FADES OUT. The people reading the book turn and watch him go.

CUT TO:

INT. WRENN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Wrenn is having a cup of coffee. His WIFE is cleaning off the kitchen counter. A CRASH startles Wrenn. He turns to his wife and sees that she's dropped the coffee pot. It's shattered on the floor.

WIFE

(weird, giggly)
I'm so clumsy lately...

As she says this, she SCRAPES her fingernails against the surface of the floor, creating a HIGH-PITCHED SCREECH. Wrenn winces.

WRENN

Honey, please...

CUT TO:

INT. STATE FACILITY - NIGHT

Trent is seated in a chair in the rec room, watching t.v. We HEAR a news announcer give his report.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Multiple stabbings marred a family reunion in New Mexico...

Trent stares at the t.v., unimpressed.

ANNOUNCER (CONT.)

More on that after this special report on the Sutter Cane phenomenon...

One of the guards changes the channel by remote. Another PATIENT, a small, wiry man sits down next to Trent. He's got a copy of "IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS." He shows it to Trent.

PATIENT
You want it when I'm done? /

TRENT
No...I'm waiting for the
movie.

Trent starts to LAUGH. The patient next to him joins in.
Soon, the whole room is LAUGHING.

CUT TO:

EXT. STATE FACILITY - NIGHT

The LAUGHTER ECHOES OUT over the grounds.

CUT TO:

INT. WRENN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Wrenn gets ready for bed. He washes his face, then dries
it. He looks at himself in the bathroom mirror.

ON THE MIRROR

We can see his wife in the mirror's reflection. She's in
bed, reading. Reading Cane's book.

ON WRENN

as he heads into the bedroom.

WRENN
(to himself)
Damn Trent...

CUT TO:

INT. WRENN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Wrenn crosses the room and climbs into bed next to his
wife. He stares at her.

WRENN
Like the book.

She nods.

WIFE
Almost done.

Wrenn rolls over, facing away from her.

WRENN
(tiny bit
nervous)
Feeling okay?

WIFE (O.S.)
Of course.

Wrenn closes his eyes. He HEARS a SUDDEN GIGGLE.

WIFE (O.S.)
Darling...

WRENN
What?

The lights in the room go out. But we see Wrenn's wife's eyes glow in the dark. We HEAR something move...somewhat wet.

WIFE (O.S.)
(distorted)
I can see...and it's
beautiful.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END