

EXT. DESOLATE GAS STATION - NIGHT

Cold.

Quiet, save for the eerie HUM of fluorescent lights.

A hand, cracked with dry skin, clutches a gas nozzle.

In his other hand, the MAN (late 30s) holds a red gas can. He's dressed in an ill-fitting coat. Peeking out from under it is a hospital gown.

His body TWITCHES. Slight contortions. The movement, erratic. Unnatural.

His feet are bare and freezing on the cold concrete. His pants are scrubs. His face mostly obscured by a SURGICAL MASK, which frames his eyes.

Those eyes stare intently, watching the liquid pour from the nozzle into the can, REVERBERATING as it sloshes around.

He stares at it.

Stares.

Like he's falling into a trance.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A dark room. A soft light spills in from an adjoining bathroom, illuminating the frame of a woman lying in bed.

She rests on her side, back to the bathroom, dressed for sleep, but not sleepy. She stares. Vacant, or perhaps, troubled.

This is ANNA MEFFORD (late 30s).

Has a face that shows its age and a figure that bore a child or two.

We hear the sound of BRUSHING TEETH coming from the bathroom.

Stepping out of the bathroom is LOGAN MEFFORD (late 30s). He clutches his TOOTHBRUSH in hand, the toothpaste foam still in his mouth.

He looks at Anna. Her back to him.

LOGAN
You picking up Lilly tomorrow?

ANNA
Yes.

Logan thinks for a second and then shakes his head.

LOGAN
Can't believe you let her stay over
on a school night.

ANNA
She promised they'd go to bed at a
reasonable hour.

LOGAN
Yeeeah, promises, promises.

He goes back to brushing his teeth and heads back into the
bathroom.

LOGAN (O.S.)
She even have clothes?

ANNA
She'll borrow some from Becky.

We hear the SINK RUNNING.

LOGAN (O.S.)
(not hearing her)
Hmmm?

ANNA
She's gonna borrow some from Becky.

Logan steps out of the bathroom. He wipes at his mouth and
then shrugs his shoulders.

He looks back to Anna.

LOGAN
You given anymore thought to taking
her out?

ANNA
She'd hate it.

Logan's brow furrows.

Beat.

LOGAN
Another school got canceled last week.

Another beat.

ANNA
There's always dangers.

LOGAN
Yeah, but there's necessary ones, and unnecessary ones.

She finally rolls over and faces him.

ANNA
You gonna tell her?

He eyes her for a moment.

LOGAN
You're with me on this, right?

They stare at one another for a moment.

Finally, she gives a slight nod.

ANNA
Let's let her at least finish till the break.
(beat)
Okay?

He nods.

She rolls back over, turning her back toward him.

Logan flicks off the light and then slides into bed next to her.

He wraps an arm around her and snuggles up against her. She grimaces and gives a sort of GRUNT, voicing her displeasure in the affection.

Logan pays it no mind.

LOGAN
Good night.

He kisses her on the cheek and rolls over.

She stares straight ahead.

ANNA
Good night.

Her eyes still face ahead. Her jaw tightening.
Logan lets out a sigh.

LOGAN
Can't imagine being one of those
parents.

OVERLAP: A PHONE RINGS.

INT. PROSSER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The PHONE RINGING rests on a cluttered desk of papers and files. Sifting through the paperwork is a man. Dress shirt. Tie hanging loose. Sleeves rolled up. He works with a passion and zeal.

This is DANIEL PROSSER (late 30s).

He gives the phone a curious look and then answers it.

PROSSER
Daniel Prosser.

A female voice belonging to MARIAN WITMORE (30s) answers.

MARIAN (O.S.)
How did I know you'd be working late
today?

Prosser furrows his brow, he checks the caller ID. Doesn't recognize the number.

PROSSER
Who is this?

MARIAN (O.S.)
Work, work, work, just keep busy.

He recognizes the voice.

PROSSER
What do you want Marian?

Long beat.

MARIAN (O.S.)
Oh, nothing.

Beat.

PROSSER
Why are you calling me?

We hear a heavy SIGH on the other end.

MARIAN (O.S.)
I dunno.

Long beat.

PROSSER
I got your gift.

MARIAN (O.S.)
My gift?

PROSSER
Came in this morning.

MARIAN (O.S.)
(remembering)
Oh shit.
(beat)
Forgot I did that. Sorry.

PROSSER
It's fine--

MARIAN
(softly)
I'm sorry. I've... been in a bad
place lately...

PROSSER
(softly)
I know.

MARIAN (O.S.)
Just, throw it away, okay?

PROSSER
I did.

Beat.

PROSSER (cont'd)
Are you okay?

MARIAN (O.S.)

No.

(beat)

Are you?

Prosser shrugs his shoulders.

PROSSER

I'm alright.

MARIAN (O.S.)

Really?

Beat.

The BEEP BEEP of a call waiting can be heard.

PROSSER

Look, I gotta go, I have a call on the other line.

MARIAN (O.S.)

(skeptical)

A call?

PROSSER

Yeah. Good night Marian.

He clicks to the other line.

PROSSER (cont'd)

Daniel Prosser.

Silence on the other end.

PROSSER (cont'd)

Hello?

Beat.

PROSSER (cont'd)

Hello?

Then a voice. Soft. Female. It belongs to Anna Mefford.

ANNA (O.S.)

... I wasn't expecting a person.

(beat)

This is Anna Mefford...

Prosser reacts to the name, sits up straighter in his chair.

ANNA (O.S.) (cont'd)
... I'm returning your call.

PROSSER
Yes, yes, Mrs. Mefford, I'm Daniel
Prosser I've been assigned to your
claim--

ANNA (O.S.)
(curtly)
I know who you are.

PROSSER
Right, well, I was hoping to schedule
a time to meet with you. Is there a
day that would work best for you? My
schedule can be pretty flexible, so
whatever is most convenient--

ANNA (O.S.)
How about tonight?

This catches Prosser off guard.

PROSSER
Tonight? Um... well, it's going to
take a while and it's already--

He checks the clock.

ANNA (O.S.)
I don't care.
(beat)
I just want this over with. If it's
all the same to you.

Beat.

PROSSER
I can appreciate that Mrs. Mefford.

ANNA (O.S.)
So shall I come by your office?

He considers.

PROSSER
You know where our offices are?

ANNA (O.S.)
Yes.

PROSSER
I'll leave the light on for you.

ANNA (O.S.)
(softly)
Okay.

PROSSER
Oh, one last thing Mrs. Mefford, in
my message I mentioned your cell
phone record. If you could bring that
with you--

She hangs up.

PROSSER (cont'd)
(still on phone)
It would be very helpful to me, and
might expedite all this.
(beat)
Mrs. Mefford?
(beat)
Hello?

He looks at the receiver, frowns, and then hangs up.

INT. BRAVCO INSURANCE OFFICE'S - NIGHT

Elevator doors open and out steps Anna Mefford. She wears a
SURGICAL MASK.

The floor is dark, except for one light that pours out of a
corner office.

She walks toward the light.

INT. CORNER OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Reaching the office she finds Prosser sitting behind his
desk.

He looks up when she enters and flashes a fake courteous
smile.

He's not the least bit bothered by the surgical mask.

PROSSER
Mrs. Mefford.

He circles around his desk and extends his hand to her.

PROSSER (cont'd)
Nice to meet you.

She doesn't shake it.

Prosser knows it's a slight, but he plays it like a health issue.

PROSSER (cont'd)
Don't worry, I have hand sanitizer.

She turns from him and slowly meanders around the office, glancing around at nothing in particular.

Prosser gestures toward a chair.

PROSSER (cont'd)
Have a seat.

Prosser circles back around his desk. She eyes the chair but doesn't sit.

He notices, his professional demeanor seems to subtly shift.

PROSSER (cont'd)
Mrs. Mefford, it's not a slight to me whether you stand or sit, I can assure you that I really, truly, and genuinely don't care one way or the other, but we are going to be here awhile, so you might be more comfortable if you had a seat.

There's a long beat. Finally, she sits.

PROSSER (cont'd)
You can lose the mask too, I don't think we're likely to get infected in here.

She waits a moment, then takes off the surgical mask.

PROSSER (cont'd)
There you go.
(then)
I hate wearing those things, makes me feel like I'm suffocating.

She keeps her eyes staring straight ahead.

PROSSER (cont'd)
First, let me start out by saying, that I am very sorry for your loss.

She scoffs.

PROSSER (cont'd)
I know it must be difficult, and
please understand that I am not
intentionally trying to cause you any
more pain.

ANNA
Your intent doesn't much matter to
me.

PROSSER
Well, it matters to me.

She gives a slight eye roll and looks away. Prosser stares
at her for a moment.

PROSSER (cont'd)
I have a speech. You wanna hear it?

Her eyes flick back his way.

PROSSER (cont'd)
See, most everyone comes in here with
the same attitude. They hate the
situation, they especially hate me,
and they don't miss many moments to
subtly, or not so subtly, express
that. And that's perfectly fine by
me, I don't have a problem with
feelings. Feelings are good. They're
natural. And if I were on that side
of the desk I'd likely feel the same.
I have no problem with feelings.
Unless... they drive someone to
become uncooperative. Then it's a
problem.

(beat)
So I give'em a speech. You wanna hear
it?

She doesn't respond.

PROSSER (cont'd)
I start off by looking at them, right
in the eye, kinda like how I'm
looking at you. And I say, "You've
adequately expressed your
displeasure, it's duly noted. Here,
I'll write it down even -- make it
official."

He grabs a pen off his cluttered desk and writes.

PROSSER (cont'd)
(writing)
And then I write, "Mrs. Mefford" --
just for example -- "thinks... that
I'm an asshole."

He pounds a period with a flourish.

PROSSER (cont'd)
And I use profanity just like that,
it's disarming and unexpected.
Creates a rapport. And then I hold up
the paper to them.

He holds up the paper.

PROSSER (cont'd)
And I say, "There. See? Official. I
got it. Message received."
(then)
Now, I'm sure you think that's a bit
of silly theatrics, but, some people
do actually find it endearing. More
importantly, it makes the point. You
can hate me. It doesn't change a
thing. I'm used to it. In fact, the
better I do my job, the more people
tend to think I'm an asshole. I make
a good living being hated, and that
doesn't bother me one bit, and do you
want to know why?

She doesn't respond.

PROSSER (cont'd)
Because when it comes to my job the
only thing I care about is the truth.
Now, I'll admit that I may have used
a technicality to my advantage once
or twice, but technicality is just
the truth with specificity. And
that's what I'm after, the truth. And
sometimes -- many times, more times
than you'd think, the truth is hated.
But it's the truth.
(beat)
I want to know what the truth is Mrs.
Mefford, good or bad, I want to know
what really happened to your husband.
(beat)
Will you help me do that?

She looks back at him.

ANNA

Are you done with your speech yet? I don't care what you tell yourself -- it's your job. I get it. It's a weasel job. Ask me what you need to ask me and let's get on with it.

Prosser leans back in his chair. He nods.

PROSSER

Alright.

He pulls out a digital tape recorder from his desk drawer, and pushes aside some papers to make room for it.

PROSSER (cont'd)

(cleaning up the desk)

Sorry about the mess, I wasn't expecting to do this tonight.

He sets the recorder down.

PROSSER (cont'd)

I'm going to need this to be on the record. May I record this session?

Anna gives a slight nod.

PROSSER (cont'd)

I'd like a verbal acknowledgment.

She eyes him.

ANNA

It's fine.

PROSSER

Great.

He hits record.

PROSSER (cont'd)

Daniel Prosser, Bravoc Insurance, interview of Anna Mefford, spouse of Logan Mefford, policy number...

He looks down at a form.

PROSSER (cont'd)
 (reading)
 ... five, four, eight, seven, five,
 two, seven, eight, one, five, eight.
 (to Anna Mefford)
 Could you state your name for me?

ANNA
 Anna Mefford.

PROSSER
 Your husband was Logan Mefford?

ANNA
 Yes.

PROSSER
 Okay. And can you state your address?

ANNA
 4285 East Marigold Ave, Celmont
 California. You need the zip?

PROSSER
 That's fine, we've done our due
 diligence.
 (then)
 Now Mrs. Mefford, the concern that we
 have in regard to your claim pertains
 to the unusual nature of your
 husband's death. Obviously no policy
 covers suicide--

ANNA
 He didn't commit suicide.

PROSSER
 Well, that's the question.

ANNA
 I sent in his medical files.

PROSSER
 Yes. I have those...

He sifts through his stack of papers.

PROSSER (cont'd)
 ... I have it... right here.

He puts on reading glasses and reads from a paper.

PROSSER (cont'd)
 Parsistus pupulus felxi.
 (changes
 pronunciation)
 Felxi? Felxi -- I can never pronounce
 this thing. The parasite, basically.

He grabs a copy of an MRI and holds it up to the light. The scan shows an image of a human brain with a large dark mass -- a CREATURE -- resting on the brain.

He lingers on the image, almost a moment too long.

PROSSER (cont'd)
 (softly)
 Nasty things.

ANNA
 Have you known someone who's had it?

Prosser looks to her. A quiet moment.

PROSSER
 Everyone's known someone.

ANNA
 Then you know what it does.

PROSSER
 (as if by rote)
 The symptoms are fever, nausea, headaches, mental confusion, memory loss, ataxia, protrusions around the base of the skull or neck, hallucinations, seizures, and... most typically... death. Usually within twelve days of the first presenting symptom.

She arches her eyebrow and leans in close.

ANNA
 But, do you know what it does?

He weighs the question a moment.

PROSSER
 Yes, I know what it does.

ANNA
 My husband was not in control. I think that should be plainly obvious.

PROSSER
 Unfortunately it's not.
 (then)
 Did your husband ever have suicidal
 tendencies?

ANNA
 What the hell is a suicidal
 "tendency"? Did he kill himself
 before? No.

PROSSER
 Did he attempt to kill himself at any
 point?

ANNA
 No.

PROSSER
 Was he recently depressed, or did he
 have any reason to want to harm
 himself?

ANNA
 No.

PROSSER
 No reason?

ANNA
 No.

Prosser thinks for a moment and rubs at his chin.

PROSSER
 Well... he was recently diagnosed
 with an incurable, deadly brain
 parasite. Would that not be a reason
 for depression?

She glowers.

ANNA
 No.

PROSSER
 No?

She eyes him.

ANNA
 That's what you think?