

RED SPRINGS

an original screenplay by

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FADE IN:

1 EXT. BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS -- SUNSET (MAGIC HOUR) 1

Evergreens dot the soft, rolling peaks, back lit by the setting sun. An infinity of dark corners in the swaying branches. The wind whistles softly. Birds sing.

DISSOLVE TO:

2 EXT. WOODS - NIGHT 2

MOVING THROUGH THE DARK TREES

Branches brush past. An ominous DRONING grows. We are getting closer and closer to the source.

CLOSE ON A JAGGED ROCK

Blood drips from its tip. The rock sits near a BUBBLING creek.

CREEK

The crimson fluid drips into the creek, turning the water **red**.

DISSOLVE TO:

3 INT. PAUL'S CAR - DAY 3

KAREN COOPER sleeps in the passenger seat, reflections of trees passing over her face. Behind the wheel, her husband PAUL regards her warmly.

PAUL

(soft)

Karen?

Her eyes flutter open.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Sorry to wake you. We're here.

Karen looks out the windshield, a faint smile appearing on her lips.

4 EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY 4

A stretch of highway that winds through the mountains. Paul's car makes its way down the highway, passing a sign reading "Welcome to RED SPRINGS - A Peaceful Place to Live."

DISSOLVE TO:

A4 EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

A4

Nestled at the base of the Blue Ridge mountains is the tiny burg of Red Springs. Paul's car coasts down a two lane street, passing storefronts.

CUT TO:

5 EXT. COOPER HOME -- DAY

5

Paul's car pulls in front of the house, a cozy one-story surrounded by woods. A Realtor's sign pokes up from the front lawn.

They step out of the car. Karen takes in the sight of the house with a dreamy smile. There's a fragility about her, we can see it in the unsure way she carries herself. Paul appears at her side. Breathes in the chilly mountain air.

PAUL

Whaddya think?

A beat.

KAREN

I think I want to sit on my new front porch.

CUT TO:

6 EXT. PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

6

Paul drops one more cardboard box onto a stack by the front door. He looks toward the other end of the porch, smiles. He walks to Karen, who's standing at the railing, taking in the view.

PAUL

I don't think I've seen so many trees in my entire life.

He moves in close beside her. Karen smiles knowingly.

KAREN

(teasing)

You really are a city boy, aren't you?

PAUL

Hey, lotta good things in the city.

(thinks)

Uh, museums, for one. Thai food.

KAREN

Smog. Noise.

PAUL

Beautiful women.
(settling closer)
Who startle you with how soulful
they are.

He closes his eyes, his lips brush her cheek. She's chewing that over.

KAREN

I startle you?

His eyes open. Worried he may have said the wrong thing. She's hard to read.

PAUL

(revising)
You... surprise me. I'm not
complaining.

Karen merely nods, resting her head on his shoulder. They lapse back into silence. A beat, then

KAREN

The trees usually have more leaves.
But it's getting late. They've all
fallen.

Paul senses a sadness creeping in.

PAUL

They'll grow back. That's what trees
do. There's always some kind of
life in the woods.

KAREN

How would you know?

He kisses her cheek, tender.

PAUL

I've read books about it.

He pulls her closer, and she lets him. But her eyes are trained on the woods.

WOODS - KAREN'S POV

A breeze moves through the branches. VOICES WHISPER underneath the wind.

CLOSE ON KAREN

Watching with fascination.

DISSOLVE TO:

A6 OMITTED

A6

6A1 INT. PAPER MILL - DAY

6A1

Whirring machinery casts flickers of light from the sun streaming in from the window. A cacophony of factory noise. Paul, in shirt, tie, and hard hat, makes his way down a short catwalk, clipboard in hand. A supervisor, he nods politely to a MILL WORKER who passes him.

He comes to the end of the catwalk and climbs down a few steps, sidling up to a 2nd MILL WORKER observing some fluctuating dials. Paul says something brief and official to him, but we can't make out the words over the din. Getting a response, he heads on. Time to clock out.

B6 EXT. PAPER MILL - DAY

B6

A whitewashed steel smokestack spews pure white smoke into the atmosphere. Small town industry in the environ-conscious age. The change in weather tells us some days have passed.

PAUL'S CAR

It turns on a side road next to the paper mill, heading into some tree cover.

C6 EXT. COOPER HOME - DAY

C6

Paul's car pulls up in front of the house. Personal touches adorn the lawn and porch. A wreath hangs from the front door.

7 INT. COOPER HOME - DAY

7

Paul comes in the front door, loosening his tie. Long day at work. He stops as something catches his attention.

A trail of brown soil on the carpet, leading into the living room.

He checks his own shoes. No dirt. Shaking his head, he tosses his briefcase on the couch.

PAUL

Karen? I'm home.

A TOILET FLUSH is the response. He heads toward the bathroom.

8 AT THE BATHROOM DOOR

8

Paul knocks lightly.

PAUL

Hun?

No answer. Paul's brow furrows slightly.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You all right?

No response. He takes a step in to listen. A small RATTLE at his foot. He looks down.

HE'S STEPPED ON AN EMPTY PILL BOTTLE

Paul immediately begins to pound on the door.

PAUL (CONT'D)

(loud)

Karen, open the door hun, please!

He tries the handle. Locked. He hits the door with his shoulder. It pops open.

9 BATHROOM

9

Paul bursts into the room. Karen stands above the toilet, empty pill bottles in her hands, candles burning from every nook in the room. She reaches for the flush handle.

Paul reacts without thinking. He rushes to her and roughly grabs her wrists. She barely registers his presence. Tries for the handle again.

PAUL

Stop it!

She looks at his tight grip on her wrists.

KAREN

(flat)

You're hurting me, Paul.

He blinks. Removes his hands.

PAUL

What do you think you're doing?

Karen flushes, watching the pills swirl. Nearly quaking with nervous energy.

KAREN

I can't take these anymore.

PAUL

Honey, they're helping you.

KAREN

They're shit. I- I need to be...
pure.

PAUL

(as to a child)

Karen, we've heard the same thing
from all the doctors--

KAREN

(derisive)

Oh, yeah, doctors, let's listen to them, huh? Think they've got a handle on the whole world. Shit.

PAUL

Look, what do you want me to do? We've tried the meds, the town, this house. If it's all "shit"...

(beat)

What else is there?

Karen looks him in the eye.

KAREN

You really don't see, do you?

He doesn't know what to say. She begins to GIGGLE. She laughs to herself, leaning against the sink. It's an unpleasant sound. A mad sound, at a private joke. Paul watches, disturbed. Helpless.

DISSOLVE TO:

A9 EXT. COOPER HOME - SUNSET (TIMELAPSE)

A9

Ominous shadows envelop the house, as the sun retreats behind the mountains.

DISSOLVE TO:

10 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

10

A STEREO glows softly in the corner of the dark room. A SLOW JAZZ TUNE (ala "'Round Midnight" by Miles Davis) plays at barely perceptible volume.

Karen lies in bed, staring at the ceiling. Paul is fast asleep. There's a noticeable space between the two bodies.

The MUSIC begins to FADE. A BUZZING static issues from the stereo speakers.

Karen feels her eyes drawn to the window. She moves her head, ever so slowly, to look.

WINDOW

Moonlight illuminates the curtains. The silhouette of a MAN fills the window frame.

KAREN

She slips out of bed, her eyes never leaving the man at the window. She holds out her hand, presses her palm against the glass. A beat, and the shadow's hand matches her motion.

STEREO

It emits a feedback SQUEAL.

PAUL

He wakes with a **start**.

PAUL

Karen!

She's gone. The window is wide open. Wind moves through the curtains.

Paul moves to the window.

BACKYARD - PAUL'S POV

Karen walks into the deep woods. Shadows swallow her.

Paul wastes no time, pulling on a jacket.

CUT TO:

11 EXT. WOODS -- NIGHT 11

Paul shines a flashlight through the trees, walking in the direction he saw Karen head. A creek BUBBLES down the length of the forest. No sign of his wife. He stops, listens. That dark DRONING just ahead. He follows the sound.

12 EXT. CLEARING -- NIGHT 12

Paul emerges into a clearing. He stubs his toe on something, curses. He points his flashlight at the ground.

A RING OF STONES

In the middle of the bare earth, piles of stones are arranged in a circle. Blood lines the outer edge, revealed in the flashlight's beam.

ON PAUL

Going cold at the sight. He looks around, frantic now.

PAUL

Karen!

TREES

His flashlight beam bounces off the branches.

KAREN (O.S.)

Paul.

He turns, spotting her now in the shadow of two trees.

PAUL

You're hurt.

KAREN

Yes.

Paul takes a step toward her.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Don't!

He stops at the edge of hysteria in her voice. Offers an outstretched hand.

PAUL

Karen, please. Come back to me. I love-

KAREN

Don't say it.

As she steps into the moonlight,

KAREN (CONT'D)

Don't say it like it's going to make it all better.

We see blood dripping from her arms. Paul goes ashen.

PAUL

Oh God...

Without another word, he rushes to her, ripping a strip from the bottom of his shirt. He tries to wrap the wounds on her left arm.

PAUL (CONT'D)

We've got to get you to a hospital--

KAREN

Shh...

With her right arm, Karen reaches up to touch his face. A drop of blood from her fingers smears on his cheek.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Just let me do this, Paul.

He's still frantically trying to cover her wounds, shaking his head.

PAUL

No. No! Jesus, babe, this won't solve anything!

KAREN

This is all that's left.

There's an odd serenity in her response. Paul looks into her eyes. He's crumbling.

PAUL

You've still got me.

Karen shakes her head, sadly.

KAREN

You can't just kiss me and make me wake up.

Her eyes drift to the circle of stones.

KAREN (CONT'D)

It doesn't work that way.

Her expression glazes, the voice dying in her throat. Paul touches her face, looking for a response.

PAUL

Karen? Talk to me.

Nothing. She's virtually catatonic, her eyes tethered to the circle. He follows her gaze.

STONE CIRCLE

The DRONE of dark energies pulses, coming from the stone circle.

CLOSE ON PAUL

He can hear it, too. The reality of the moment dawns on him. His eyes flick from the circle to his wife. He breathes in.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Okay.

He walks slowly to the circle, fearful but determined. He crouches down, picking up a razor-sharp sliver of stone.

Karen watches him as he pulls up his sleeve. With ritualistic calm, Paul raises the stone to his arm. He locks eyes with Karen. She sees the insane devotion there.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I see now.

KAREN

(barely audible)

No...

Paul doesn't hear her. He grits his teeth, and slices his arm with the stone. His blood drips onto the jagged rock we saw in the beginning. The DRONING drowns out all other sound.

Karen's eyes roll up in her head. Her husband is there to catch her. He falls to his knees, his wife unconscious in his arms.

CUT TO:

13 BLACK

13

PAUL (V.O.)

I would die for you.

KAREN (V.O.)

But I'd rather you live for me.

DISSOLVE TO:

14 INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

14

Warm sunshine plays off the walls of the living room. Paul and Karen sit on the couch, in each other's (freshly bandaged) arms. Paul nods, smiling.

PAUL

I can do that, too.

They kiss with renewed passion. Then break, eyes tethered to each other.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You still surprise me.

Karen smiles. Pecks him on the lips.

KAREN

Let's get out of here.

She hops up, heading for the mirror on the opposite wall. Paul watches her with a lopsided grin. Whatever happened in the woods must have worked. She's like a new woman.

PAUL

Where do you want to go?

In front of the mirror, she preens, full of purpose.

KAREN

Anywhere. I want to see the world,
experience things.

Satisfied, she smiles at herself.

IN THE MIRROR

We see the silhouette man in the reflection. His skin gray
and slick, he's smiling blackened teeth. The ominous DRONING
rises.

MAN

(inhuman)

Through new eyes.

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

END