

Seasons of Wither

An Original Screenplay
by
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FADE IN:

EXT. FOOTHILLS OF THE SMOKY MOUNTAINS - MORNING

(Opening scene is accompanied by a music track: "Everything" by Lifehouse.)

A serene lake is nestled in the foothills of the Smoky Mountains. In the pre-dawn light the color is muted: a cool light blue, almost monochromatic.

Tendrils of mist move slowly off water smooth as glass, and disappear like lost ghosts onto semi-barren trees on the shore.

It is Fall.

Although the trees are not completely bare, the stillness of the air, the chilly light, and overcast sky suggest the winter snows will be here soon.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOTHILLS OF THE SMOKY MOUNTAINS

A sequence of wilderness shots paint a picture of quiet tranquility and animals that have already settled in and have prepared of the oncoming winter.

The final shot is of a bird hunkered sleepily down in a tree, when the sound of a nearby branch cracking and falling startles it into flight.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOTHILLS OF THE SMOKY MOUNTAINS - AERIAL VIEW

Following the point of view of a bird's flight over the mountains, we see small homesteads and farms cut into the foothills at irregular distances, seeming to be islands to themselves in the vast expanse of the wilderness.

A small town comes into view. It is not much more than a few rough buildings huddled together along the road winding through the mountains. There is a small empty park with a statue and flagpole at one end of town.

The view turns more spectacular as we approach the mountains, and we see even fewer homes set into the rocky and sloped terrain. The road curves sharply and twists back onto itself as it navigates the mountainside.

A plateau comes into view. The land here is hilly and heavily wooded, with picturesque clearings, and is graced by a stunning view of the mountainside.

In the distance a lone man is seen walking away from a small hill in a clearing, and we descend.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOMESTEAD "WITHER'S HILL"

The bird lands on a tree on the hilltop, and we see GREGOR WITHERS walking away in the distance along a worn path. In the foreground, the area at the top of the hill appears to be well tended: here the underbrush and grass are manicured in comparison to the surrounding untouched wilderness.

Granite markers in the earth and a small cross stand silently in the morning light.

CUT TO:

EXT. GREGOR'S CABIN

Gregor approaches a small cabin in the woods. An area of the property has been carefully cleared away to reveal the majestic vista of the mountain; otherwise, the property is hidden and quite secluded.

The cabin itself is small, slightly larger than a work shed, but appears to be well cared for. It features a small covered porch facing the view of the mountain.

Gregor opens the door and goes inside, only to return moments later with a collection of ODD LOOKING TOOLS in his hands. He places the tools on a small WORK BENCH on the porch, and begins sorting through them and putting some into a rough CANVAS SACK.

The sack is placed on a WOODEN CART beside the porch, and Gregor sits on the steps. He removes an ancient POCKET WATCH, winds it, and quietly regards the mountain.

Gregor appears to be in his late 60's or early 70's. Deep-set lines and angular features make his face appear as craggy and strong as the mountain itself.

Weathered skin and unkempt grey hair, fairly long for an old man, round out his features. Although not cleanly shaven, he does appear to take the time to shave at least once a week.

After a few minutes Gregor frowns, looks at the watch, snaps the cover shut, and shoves it into his pocket.

GREGOR

Not yet, Molly... Not just yet.

Gregor stands up with a weary sigh, takes up the handle on the wagon and starts walking toward the mountain.

CUT TO:

INT. SAMANTHA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

(Music fades to environmental sounds, and a radio playing rock music somewhere in the background.)

Several PHOTOS of an old country style home in the wilderness, all with a picturesque mountain in the background, are scattered on top of a stack of real-estate contracts.

SAMANTHA CARRIONE picks up one of the pictures and regards it. In another age, she would be called a "handsome" woman, as her wide-set eyes and dark full eyebrows lend her face a somewhat masculine aspect. Long blonde hair is haphazardly pulled into a ponytail that trails halfway down the back of her WHITESNAKE CONCERT T-SHIRT.

As she looks at the photo longingly, we can see the first two inches of hair on her scalp is a light brown from where it has grown out.

SAMANTHA

Here, this is it.

She hands the photo to DENISE ADAMS, a pretty black woman also in her mid-30's, who lives in the apartment next door.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

Soon as I saw this place, I knew it was the one.

Denise glances at the photo, but spends more time appearing to watch Samantha closely.

DENISE

Still can't believe you bought this place without even going there in person. Nice lookin', though.

Denise hands the picture back, and Samantha tucks the pile of photos and contracts into one of the boxes on the counter.

The apartment appears mostly bare, although there is still some furniture and items left.

DENISE (CONT'D)

You sure you know what you're doing, girl?

Samantha pauses for moment considering a smart-ass comment, then shrugs.

SAMANTHA

God, I hope so!

Samantha and Denise continue packing the remaining items as they talk.

DENISE

C'mon Sam, seriously! 50 acres out in the middle of nowhere... You've never lived more than 2 blocks from a grocery store, job, gas station.

SAMANTHA

I know...

DENISE

What if you got some crazy hicks out there with you?

SAMANTHA

(scowls dismissively)

I can hold my own. You remember that guy at the club last year?

DENISE

(laughs)

Shit... I heard that wrist snap across the ROOM! But he was a clumsy drunk, what if...

SAMANTHA

(suddenly serious)

No, he was an asshole who made some bad assumptions. Just because I can dress up and turn heads when I want to doesn't mean I'm some dainty flower. Underneath you still got a pissed off single Mom who really hates men in general...

Samantha, quick as a cat, grabs Denise by the wrist, twists, and puts a fingertip lightly on Denise's elbow. Denise's expression changes from surprise to pain.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)
 (smiles dangerously)
 ...and remembers just enough
 Taekwondo to be dangerous.

DENISE
 (alarmed)
 Hey... HEY!! Leggo, dammit!

Samantha lets her wrist go, and Denise rubs her elbow.

SAMANTHA
 Hmm?

DENISE
 OK, OK... I got it. But what about
 SNOW, huh? Winding mountain roads
 and snow? You don't...

SAMANTHA
 (exasperated)
 God, you are worse than my MOTHER!

DENISE
 I'm just sayin'...

Samantha holds up a hand, shakes her head, and walks away.
 She picks up some boxes on her way out of the apartment.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX IN THE CITY

A rental truck is backed up to the stairway of an apartment
 complex, and Samantha comes down the stairs carrying several
 boxes and a lamp.

Although the truck fairly large, it looks pathetically empty
 as Samantha adds the boxes and lamp to the other items.

What furniture there is appears to be inexpensive and
 disposable, and Samantha stops to take a mental inventory of
 the contents.

Denise enters the truck with a couple boxes.

DENISE
 You sure you don't wanna take the
 rest of the stuff?

Samantha turns to glance at her, and then looks back at the
 apartment.

SAMANTHA

Nah, I don't. This is all I need.
If you want anything, take it. Or
just let the maintenance guys junk
it. I don't care...

Samantha wipes away dust from her hands, turns to Denise.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

Too many memories there, you know?

DENISE

Yeah... Yeah, I do.

A phone can be heard ringing in the apartment, and both look
in that direction.

SAMANTHA

Swear to God, if that's dickhead
calling again, I'm breaking the
damn machine.

DENISE

(Tentatively)

He really sounded serious the other
day.

SAMANTHA

(bitter)

He's ALWAYS sounds serious. And
threatening. I don't need to listen
to any of his bullshit. Not any
more.

DENISE

I'm just saying that if you got a
wolf scratching around the
henhouse, it's best to know where
he's digging.

Samantha's locks her jaw and looks into the distance.

DENISE (CONT'D)

You haven't listened to any of
them, have you?

After a beat, Samantha stomps down the truck's ramp and back
into the apartment. Denise looks back at the sad array of
cheap Wal-Mart furniture, sighs and shakes her head, then
walks back toward the apartment very slowly.

CUT TO:

INT. SAMANTHA'S APARTMENT

Samantha jabs the button on the ANSWERING MACHINE, which shows that she has 5 missed calls.

CARL
 (voice on machine, getting
 irritated)
 Hey, it's Carl. Pick up if you're
 there... Hello? Pick up the phone,
 Sam... Fine.

Samantha jabs the delete button.

CARL (CONT'D)
 (angry)
 I know you're there. Pick up the
 god damned phone, Sam!

Samantha deletes this one too.

CARL (CONT'D)
 (smugly)
 You should know I've already called
 my lawyer. Legally you can't move
 away unless I agree to it. And I
 DON'T. You will NOT leave town yet.
 Expect to be served papers for a
 court date shortly.

The recorder bounces up from the counter from the force of her hitting the button.

CARL (CONT'D)
 (in a rage)
 Got a truck and packing, huh?
 Better start unpacking the shit
 RIGHT NOW!
 (low and threatening)
 You can go when I SAY you can go,
 until then you aren't going
 ANYWHERE. You ARE NOT taking Amanda
 out of this city.
 (raising voice)
 Legally you can't, and I'll be so
 far up your ass with lawsuits and
 lawyers you won't be able to fart
 without an OK BY ME! Swear to God,
 I'll slash the fucking tires and...

The recorder beeps because the time limit of the message expired.

CARL (CONT'D)

You wanna play with me? Play with ME??!! Fucking answering machines and running out?

(pauses for a beat)

How's this, bitch? I just got back in town and am on my way there RIGHT FUCKING NOW, and I have papers saying that I get custody of Amanda until this shit gets sorted out!

(raising to a scream)

I'll serve you in PERSON you fucking... WORTHLESS... C...

Samantha rips the machine from the socket and throws it against the wall with a scream of frustration. Shattered pieces fall to the floor in sudden silence. She turns expecting to see Denise, but instead finds AMANDA cowering in the doorway looking frightened and on the verge of tears.

AMANDA

(timidly)

Mommy...?

The anger melts immediately into sadness and shame that Amanda just witnessed this scene. She steps over to her and crouches down, takes her in her arms.

SAMANTHA

(soothingly)

Oh... God. I'm so sorry, baby. Everything is OK... I promise you, everything will be OK.

Denise appears in the doorway, looking worried and tense.

DENISE

(carefully)

Sam, uh... He just pulled up. Down at the end of the street, blocking it. Let me take Amanda next door for a bit.

SAMANTHA

(flat and emotionless)

Yeah, OK. Do that.

(speaking to Amanda)

Mandy, Miss Denise is going to take you over to play at her place for a little while, OK?

Amanda's frightened eyes skip back and forth trying to find comfort in her Mom's face. Not finding it, she grabs on to Samantha and doesn't let go.

AMANDA

No... Mommy, don't stay here! He's gonna hit again... Please!

(crying)

I know a good place to hide. It's a GOOD place! He can't find us there!

Amanda starts tugging at Samantha's arm trying to get her to come with her out of the apartment.

At almost 8 years of age, Amanda looks too old for this kind of display, but these confrontations with her father always seem to make her regress back to a particularly bad time.

Recognizing this, Samantha's chin quivers, but she doesn't move to leave.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

(crying, desperate)

Come on, Mommy! Come ON! We gotta go NOW...

(raising to a scream)

Please!!! Mommy, PLEASE!!!

Samantha puts her hands on either side of Amanda's face and kisses her cheeks, pulls her close.

SAMANTHA

Shhh.... Hush, baby... It's OK.
It's OK...

Amanda calms slightly, breath coming in ragged gasps. She pulls back and watches her Mom's face closely.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

It's all going to be OK. He can't hurt you, and he can't hurt me, I promise. Do you trust me?

Amanda nods her head yes, but holds on tight to Samantha's arm. Samantha looks close into her daughters eyes.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

Do you trust me?

AMANDA

(timidly)

...Yes...

SAMANTHA

OK, then you go with Miss Denise for a little bit. Maybe you can show her that new playground we found last week... Do you remember how to get there?

AMANDA

(nodding)
I remember.

SAMANTHA

(trying to sound upbeat and casual)
OK, great! Why don't you take Miss Denise there, and I'll come down in a little bit?

(to Denise)
Is that OK with you?

DENISE

Sure, of course...

Denise holds out her hand, and Amanda takes it after a moment. They start to exit the apartment, and Denise stops to look back.

DENISE (CONT'D)

Uh, Sam... Do you want me to... uh, want me to call anyone for you?

Samantha considers this for a moment.

SAMANTHA

No, I'll be alright. I'll meet you down there in a little bit.

CUT TO:

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX IN THE CITY

Carl Jeffries steps out of a his prized black BMW, which he has parked across the street leading into the complex where Samantha's apartment is located, effectively blocking anyone from entering or leaving the cul-de-sac.

Black slacks and a tailored blue long-sleeve shirt are in keeping with his manicured appearance and slick-backed dark hair.

The appearance of collected cool is broken by nervous dark, darting eyes and prominent nose that twitches and wrinkles as he mutters to himself, striding down the middle of the street toward the U-Haul truck.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAMANTHA'S APARTMENT

Samantha comes down the stairs, and notes the car blocking the road and sees Carl approaching. Without stopping she sets the box down in the bed of the truck, retracts the loading ramp, and climbs up into the rear of the truck.

Carl changes his approach to walk around the front of the truck and stand by the drivers door, arms crossed. He is holding a set of LEGAL PAPERS in his hand.

After a few agitated moments listening to the sounds of stuff moving in the back of the truck, it is obvious that Samantha is not coming around to get in the drivers seat. He huffs, then stomps around to the rear of the truck, and looks in to see Samantha busy tying the load down with large loading straps.

He looks around, at the apartment, yard, and back to the Samantha.

CARL
Where's Amanda?

Samantha doesn't turn to face him, and concentrates on securing any loose items she finds.

SAMANTHA
She's not here, Carl.

CARL
(ranting)
No shit, she's not here! I can SEE
she's not fucking HERE!

SAMANTHA
(cold and even)
Look, I heard enough of your shit
on the machine today. If you can't
at least be civil, then I've got
nothing to say.

Samantha yanks hard on a buckle that tightens the straps she had been working on.

CARL

Fine. Then I don't need to explain anything, do I? Where's Amanda?

Samantha jumps down off the truck, and Carl crowds into her space.

SAMANTHA

(angry)

Back the FUCK off! I swear to God...

CARL

(threateningly)

What?! Huh? What are you gonna do?

Samantha steps forward, one arm cocked back, and puts her face in his so there is less than an inch between their noses.

Samantha is a good 3 inches taller than Carl.

SAMANTHA

(low and threatening)

Try my best to break your God-damned jaw and when I lay your ass out.

Samantha stares at him, not blinking. Carl appears a bit surprised, considers, then backs off a step.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

I'm NOT the little girl you knew before.

Samantha grabs the cord, slams down the truck door, punctuating the silence with a loud bang.

She turns to face Carl, hatred and loathing apparent on her face, takes a finger and pulls aside the left side of her mouth to reveal that there are several teeth missing on that side.

Carl looks away.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

What's a matter, can't look at it? I look at it every day.

With each word Samantha leans in closer into his face, and Carl pulls back.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)
(increasing rage)
Every. Fucking. DAY!

The last word is punctuated by Samantha shoving Carl in the chest, pushing him aside. She starts walks around the truck toward the driver's door.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)
I don't forget. I'll NEVER forget.
Neither will Amanda.

Carl, stunned for a moment, snaps back, and grabs Samantha by the arm as she is walking away from him.

Samantha smacks his hand away.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)
DON'T touch me! Ever.

There is an awkward pause as Carl gets his composure. She stares at him.

CARL
For what it's worth, I'm sorry.

SAMANTHA
I'm sorry? Are you kidding me?
After all the crap you put us
through... and all you got is...

(mockingly)
I'm sorry.

She looks down at the papers he's still holding.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)
Don't even think about it. 3 years
of back child support, and leaving
the state after beating the SHIT
out of your ex-wife...

Samantha shakes her head, climbs in the truck, and slams the doors.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)
You already broke every agreement
there was. Save yourself the
trouble, Carl.

Samantha starts the engine, and the truck rumbles to life. She starts easing the truck down the drive onto the road, and Carl walks to keep pace with the window.

CARL

What, you are just the innocent victim here, right? I don't think so!

The truck stops on the road, Carl's car blocking the street ahead.

CARL (CONT'D)

We still got shit to deal with here! Like it or not, it's gotta get worked out FIRST, and you're not gonna run away from that!

Carl pauses, looks at his car blocking the road, looks back at her.

CARL (CONT'D)

I'm not letting you leave. She's my daughter, and she stays until we get this settled.

SAMANTHA

Move the car.

Carl shakes his head. Samantha looks at him for a long moment, then turns away with a sigh.

Sitting in the driver's seat, Samantha looks at the road before her and Carl's car blocking the way, then drops her gaze downward and closes her eyes. She appears to be weighing out her options.

Abruptly, she lifts her head, slams the truck into gear, and speaks while staring at the road.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

I got a 3 ton truck with bad brakes, and manual shift that I am not very good with. I've paid for the insurance so I don't care how much I bang it up.

She turns to look him in the eye.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

And I don't give a crap about your car. You have ten seconds, and then I let the clutch out, and I am not stopping until I get home.

Carl frowns.

CARL
You won't. Don't play me.

Samantha breaks into a devilish grin.

SAMANTHA
10... 9... 8...

CARL
Knock it the fuck off, Sam!

Samantha revs the engine, and the truck suddenly sounds very large, and very heavy. Carl backs away.

SAMANTHA
7... 6...

Carl walks backwards toward his car, yelling back at Samantha.

CARL
Don't fucking threaten me! I not
buying your bullshit bluff! I'll
stay right here all day long if I
have to.

(screams)
You're not going ANY-fucking-
where!!

Carl leans back against his car, appearing confident that she's bluffing and will stop.

Inside the cab, Samantha finishes the count, pops the clutch, and the truck lurches into life, picking up speed.

Carl hears the screaming engine snap efficiently into 2nd gear, sees the truck pick up more speed, and realizes she is not about to stop. At the last second Carl jumps out of the way as the truck smashes into the front corner of the car, crumpling it and effortlessly pushing out of the way.

In the cab, Samantha glances back in the rear view mirror, then grins defiantly as she hears Carl's voice recede in the background.

CARL (CONT'D)
(off screen)
Jesus CHRIST! My fucking CAR!!!
Aarrgghhh!!! I swear I am going to
KILL you, bitch! Look at th....
Gaahhhh!! Dammit...

CUT TO:

EXT. QUIET CITY PARK

Denise is standing by the side of a small merry-go-round filled with small kids. Amanda is already seated and holding onto the rails while a couple stragglers get on. Amanda looks at the ground and seems lost in thought.

Denise smiles in a distracted way, and her eyes glance off into the distance, scanning.

DENISE
OK, hold on tight! You sure you
want to go really fast?

The kids yell, happy to have an adult spinning them.

DENISE (CONT'D)
Really, REALLY fast?

The kids scream in glee, and Amanda is joining them now, darker thoughts lost for the moment. Denise sees this and smiles broadly at the kids now staring up at her.

DENISE (CONT'D)
Alright, here we go!

Denise pull the rails hard to the sound of kids laughing. As the rails whip by faster, she grabs and pulls, and the laughter turns into screams of joy as the merry-go-round spins at dizzying speed.

Denise looks up to see the UHaul truck pull into the parking lot and stop in an empty row of parking spaces. The driver's front bumper is badly bent inward, and the fender is crumpled.

DENISE (CONT'D)
(to the kids)
OK, that's all I got! Hang on!

Denise walks away from the merry-go-round, and goes over to the truck where Samantha is climbing down and looking at the damage to the truck.

Denise stops beside her.

DENISE (CONT'D)
Are you alright?

Samantha crouches down to push on a part of the fender that looks in danger of rubbing the tire. It doesn't move.

SAMANTHA
Yeah, I'm fine...

She grins up at Denise.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)
Can't say the same for his car,
though.

DENISE
(surprised laughter)
Oh, I bet he was PISSED!

SAMANTHA
All I heard after I hit it was him
screaming, so I looked back to see
him stomping around in a circle
yelling.
(beat)
You know what it reminded me of?

DENISE
(considers, then brightly)
Yosemite Sam?

SAMANTHA
(laughing hysterically)
YEAH! He just... he...

Samantha tries to mime him stomping around, but is laughing too hard. She covers her mouth with her hands, and the laughter rolls on uncontrollably.

DENISE
Oh my God, girl... You are too
much!

Denise's smile falters as she realizes the laughter is sounding too edgy, now forced. After a few moments Samantha's hands move to cover her eyes as the laughter slowly turns into sobbing.

Denise put her arms around her and Samantha buries her face, still in her hands, into Denise's shoulder. They stay this way for a long moment.

DENISE (CONT'D)
He deserved it. Surprised you
didn't run him over too.

Samantha snuffles and nods her head.

SAMANTHA
(muffled through her
hands)
I tried to... but the steering
sucks.

Denise barks out a laugh and pulls away.

DENISE
Sam! I.. Holy SHIT!

Samantha wipes her eyes, looks back at Denise sheepishly.

SAMANTHA
(sniffs)
I really did.

At this, they are both are laughing again when Amanda comes running up and wraps her hands around Samantha's legs.

AMANDA
Mommy... Is he gone?

Samantha puts her hand on Amanda's hair, smooths it out.

SAMANTHA
Yeah, baby. He's gone now, and he won't be back.

Amanda notices the bumper of the truck, looks up.

AMANDA
(worried)
Did he try to break the truck?

Samantha reaches out and pats the hood of the UHaul, and smiles at her.

SAMANTHA
No, Honey. He can't break this truck. I hit his car with it. Not him, just his car.

AMANDA
Really? Cool!

DENISE
(shocked)
Amanda!

AMANDA
Well, it's TRUE!

DENISE
OK, why don't you go get your things from the table? I'm sure your Mom wants to get going now...

AMANDA
OK.

Amanda runs off to collect her things, and Samantha and Denise look after her.

DENISE

You got a great little girl there,
Sam. For what it's worth, I think
she's lucky to have you as a Mom.

SAMANTHA

Thanks... That really means a lot.

Samantha wipes her face, pulls back her hair, and takes a deep breath.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

This was the worst part, right? It
all gets easier from here?

DENISE

That's supposed to be the plan,
right?

Amanda runs back carrying an arm-load of stuff.

SAMANTHA

Here, give my your things and give
Miss Denise a hug goodbye, OK?

Amanda hands her things to Samantha, and Denise crouches down to give her a long hug.

DENISE

You make sure you take care of your
Mom, OK?

AMANDA

I will.

DENISE

(conspiratorial whisper)
Remember, she's all grown up and
poopy, so you gotta make sure she
remembers to have fun too.

AMANDA

(whispers back)
I will, but I think she can hear
us.

Amanda looks up at Samantha, who is smiling down at them.

SAMANTHA

Mmmm hmmm... Poopy, huh?

AMANDA
 (to Denise)
 I gotta go!

Amanda pulls away, and climbs up into the truck. Samantha and Denise regard each other a long moment, and then embrace.

SAMANTHA
 Thanks for everything. I couldn't
 have done it without you.

DENISE
 Oh, stop sucking up. Yes, you could
 have. I'm not dumb, you know.

Samantha pauses, looks back at Amanda, now waving through the window.

SAMANTHA
 She needed you, and you were always
 there when she did.

DENISE
 Well OK, I'll take that.
 (beat)
 I'd tell you to keep in touch,
 but...

Denise shrugs, and looks at Samantha.

SAMANTHA
 Yeah...

There is a long pause while Samantha looks uncomfortable.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)
 I'll let you know when we get
 there.

DENISE
 Sure... Just, when you get time you
 know? I'd like to know how you're
 making out and all.

SAMANTHA
 (trying to be light and
 upbeat)
 OK Mom, I'll stay in touch with
 you.

Denise fixes her with a stare, and looks both serious and resigned.

DENISE

Don't make promises you can't keep,
alright Sam?

Samantha looks down.

DENISE (CONT'D)

I'm just sayin' when I cross your
mind sometime, take the time...
That's all.

SAMANTHA

I will. I won't promise, but I will
remember that. OK?

DENISE

Good enough.

Denise hugs Samantha one more time.

DENISE (CONT'D)

Have a safe trip, and take of
Mandy. I know you two are going to
have a great life up there.

Samantha nods, a little choked up. She climbs up into the truck, starts the engine, and slowly pulls away while Denise stands there and waves.

CUT TO:

INT. UHAUL TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

Samantha concentrates on driving and getting the truck out onto the highway, and Amanda is staring out the side window. Samantha glances over at her a couple times, and after a bit turns on the radio. The station is playing soft hits of the 90's.

Amanda looks over at the radio, frowns, then looks at Samantha who smiles at her, then nods.

Amanda reaches over and changes the station several times, apparently looking for something specific. Not finding it, she tunes it to a modern pop station, and leans back in the seat.

Samantha gets the truck up to cruising speed on the interstate, and relaxes in her seat.

SAMANTHA

Say goodbye to the city...
Mountains here we come!

Samantha looks over at Amanda, who offers an uncertain smile.

AMANDA

I'm gonna miss my friends in school...

SAMANTHA

I know you will. But you'll make new friends there.

AMANDA

Yeah, but it's not the same.

Amanda props her head in her hand and looks out the side window again.

There is an awkward pause. Samantha leans in toward Amanda.

SAMANTHA

(enticingly)

It just might be better, you know.

Amanda turns to look at her, skeptical yet intrigued.

AMANDA

Yeah? Like how?

Samantha settles back into her seat, smiling at Amanda's piqued interest.

SAMANTHA

(brightly)

Lots of ways! We're going to live by a huge mountain, and have all kinds of places to explore. We'll get snow in the winter...

AMANDA

(interrupting)

Real snow? You mean like we could make a snowman kind of snow?

SAMANTHA

(laughing)

Yep! What else... We have lots of land, so we can have a barn and some animals.

AMANDA

What kind of animals?

SAMANTHA

Oh, maybe chickens and goats. We'd have to have some dogs, too.

Samantha pauses to look at Amanda, who looks like she is thinking this over.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

I also thought that since we have so much land, we should get some horses...

Amanda jumps.

AMANDA

No way! Really???

SAMANTHA

Uh huh! We can build a pasture, and have some nice stalls in the barn. What do you think?

AMANDA

That'd be so awesome! Can we? Please???

SAMANTHA

Yes, we can. We can do anything we want there.

Amanda is almost bouncing in her seat now, excited. The radio switches to a new Hannah Montana song, and she squeals in delight, reaches over and turns up the music.

AMANDA

Oh my God! I LOVE this song!!

Amanda starts dancing in her seat, and singing along to the song.

Samantha smiles and watches as Amanda start mimicking, with great enthusiasm and almost comic accuracy, every move from the video as she sings.

SAMANTHA

(laughing)

You rock it, girl!

Amanda launches into the second verse with renewed gusto, and Samantha is drawn into the infectious song, and starts singing too.

Samantha tries the moves that Amanda was doing, and Amanda looks at her, frowns with a goofy smile, and shakes her head.

AMANDA

Mmm, mmm... Like this.

Amanda shows her the move again.

SAMANTHA

Like this?

Samantha tries again, looking worse than last time. Amanda watches her in amused disbelief.

AMANDA

(laughing)

Nooo!

Soon she gets it and by the end of the song they are both belting it out, and chair-dancing in sync. The song ends and a slower, sad song comes on the radio.

They look at each other and laugh. Laughter fades into silence, which the radio fills. Samantha sighs, stretches, and watches the road. Slowly both their smiles also fade away into a long reflective look that mirrors the song on the radio, and Amanda once again turns to look out the side window.

Samantha reaches over to stroke her hair. Amanda is quiet long enough that Samantha decides she is not going to say anything more, and pulls her hand back to drive. A moment later Amanda speaks, still staring out the window.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

We'll be safe there, right Mommy?

Samantha stares at the road, searching, and works up a smile.

SAMANTHA

Yeah baby, it's going to be perfect there.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAMANTHA'S HOMESTEAD - AFTERNOON

The U-Haul truck is parked in front of a large rustic country home. A large front porch showcases the simple, yet elegant, carpentry evident throughout. It is obvious that the home with build with much attention to detail perhaps 50 years ago, but has fallen into disrepair.

Paint is cracked, some wood-work appears warped and split, windows are dusty, shrubs are overgrown and wild, and vines are creeping up the walls and porch railings.

The land immediately around the house is cleared, but overgrown, and the homestead is surrounded on all sides by thick forest in brilliant red and gold Fall colors.

The homestead gives the impression of a place once lovingly and meticulously cared for, but now has been long forgotten, a faded shadow of it's former beauty.

A dark car pulls up next to the truck, and somewhat heavysset man gets out, retrieves a briefcase from the trunk, and approaches the house.

CUT TO:

INT. SAMANTHA'S HOMESTEAD

Inside the home, wooden walls and ceiling beams accentuate a beautiful stone fireplace. Although in need of cleaning and minor repairs, the space feels immediately inviting and comfortable.

Boxes are scattered sparsely throughout the house, giving the impression that even after unpacking that there will be a lot of empty space.

Samantha is in the kitchen looking through several boxes, and pulling out cleaning supplies. Amanda is sitting cross-legged on the floor looking through the boxes as well, pulling out items and putting them back, a miniature imitation of her mother.

Knocking at the door is heard.

SAMANTHA
(yelling to other room)
Come in, door's open!

Amands stops, and looks toward the other room.

BERT WILLIAMSON enters. He is a heavysset man in his mid 40's, thinning hair and a full beard that is starting to turn salt-and-pepper. He is wearing a small pair of wire rimmed glasses, a comfortable polo shirt and slacks, and has a disarming friendly smile.

He exudes a calm and relaxed demeanor. The first impression most people have is that he will make a great jolly Santa Claus in another 10 years, although his speech still carries some of the edge of a younger and more driven man.

BERT

Good afternoon, Samantha! And where is that pretty little girl of yours hiding? I know she's around here somewhere.

He looks around the room, pointedly not looking in the spot where Amanda is sitting.

Amanda giggles, and Bert turns to grace her with a beaming smile.

BERT (CONT'D)

Ah! There you are!

Bert holds out a small plain gift bag to Amanda.

BERT (CONT'D)

Here you go, a little 'welcome home' present for you.

(to Samantha)

I hope that's OK?

Amanda jumps up, and looks at her Mom. Samantha looks amused.

SAMANTHA

Sure, that's fine.

Amanda takes the bag, and pulls out a small set of field binoculars, holds them up to her eyes and looks around.

AMANDA

Oh... Wow!

SAMANTHA

You didn't have to do that, Bert.

BERT

Well, there are lots of really neat birds and other wildlife here. I thought this might be a good way to watch them without scaring them off.

AMANDA

Can I go outside, Mom? Please??

SAMANTHA

Yes, but just stay on the front porch where I can see you.

AMANDA

OK! Thank you, Mr. Williamson!

Amanda gives Bert a quick hug, and dashes out to the front porch.

BERT
Alright, then...

Bert puts his briefcase on the table, opens it, and removes a large binder and sets it before Samantha.

BERT (CONT'D)
I've got the requisite 10 pounds of
paperwork and contracts for you.
These are your copies.

He pulls out a large sheet of paper, unfolds it.

BERT (CONT'D)
This is a plat map of your land. I
thought we could take a little
drive so I can point out the
landmarks to you.

SAMANTHA
Sounds great!

CUT TO:

EXT. OVERLOOK HILL - AFTERNOON

Samantha and Bert stand on a small outcropping of rock on the top of a hillside near Samantha's property. Amanda stands next to Samantha, holding her hand, and the other is holding the pair of binoculars to her eyes.

The view is spectacular. The mountain dominates the view, and the land below is spread out before them, looking like a valley from this point of view.

Bert holds the map steady in the constant breeze, and is comparing landmarks on the page the view before them.

AMANDA
Oh! I can see our house! Down
there, see the truck?

Amanda lowers the binoculars and points. Samantha shields the glare from her eyes, and squints in the direction she is pointing.

SAMANTHA
I don't... Ah! OK, I see it.

Bert looks also, and finally gets his bearings on the map.

BERT
Great job, Amanda!

The wind flips the map up in his hands again.

BERT (CONT'D)
Here, let's all sit down here so we
can all see the map.

They sit down on the rock, and Bert hands Amanda one side of the map while he hold the other. They all bend over to look at it.

BERT (CONT'D)
OK... This is a really old survey
map, and to my knowledge it hasn't
been updated in decades. It's a
small town here, and unless someone
subdivides their land, they don't
survey it.

SAMANTHA
Aren't they supposed to do that
when property is sold?

Bert shrugs.

BERT
Technically, yes. But, you'll find
that life here is a lot different
from the city. More clannish, if
you will. They take a "if it ain't
broke, don't fix it" look at things
out here.

SAMANTHA
Huh. Alright.

Bert points out landmarks on the map, and then shows them where they are before them.

BERT
Your land is approximately 50
acres, more or less. Of course,
there is a fence line down the
front of the property. You saw that
from the main road.

Samantha nods, and Amanda pulls up her binoculars again and looks at the land.

BERT (CONT'D)

There is also a fence down the left side of the property, so that's pretty clear. The other side isn't fenced, but if you imagine a line from where the front fence ends to here...

Bert points to a spot on the map, then to the mountain.

BERT (CONT'D)

About where that part sticks out on the mountain... That is the right edge of the property.

SAMANTHA

Damn... I didn't realize how big it was. How far back does it go?

Bert turns and grins at her.

BERT

Why, all the way to the mountain, of course.

AMANDA

(in awe)

Whoa...

SAMANTHA

What?? Are you serious?

BERT

Well, let me clarify... To the lower rock face of the mountain. More or less.

SAMANTHA

That's a little vague, isn't it?

BERT

You have to remember that land here was divided up generations ago. Mostly, they used landmarks to define borders.

SAMANTHA

So... Say I want to fence the side of the property? How do I know exactly where the edge of my property is?

BERT

That's the point: There is no exact edge. If you want to put up a fence, you talk to your neighbor and come to agreement on where the line should be.

Samantha looks shocked.

SAMANTHA

You're kidding, right?

BERT

Not at all. That's how it's been in these parts for generations. There are no absolute rules, borders. People rely on each other, talk to each other, help each other out when they need it. Give and take.

He looks amused by Samantha's puzzlement.

Amanda is no longer paying attention to the conversation, and seems very absorbed in something she is watching through the binoculars.

BERT (CONT'D)

That's why there's practically no county staff here for permits, surveys, and such. You want to put a fence between you and your neighbor's land, it's between you and your neighbor. Who better to work it out with?

Amanda interrupts.

AMANDA

How come there's another house on our land?

Samantha turns to look at her.

SAMANTHA

What? What other house?

AMANDA

There, back that way. Near the mountain.

Amanda hands Samantha the binoculars. She looks and sees the small cabin in the clearing, barely visible from this angle. A small stream of smoke is coming from the chimney.

SAMANTHA

That must be on the neighbors property... Wait... No, that's definitely on ours.

(to Bert)

Is that house part of our land?
Does someone live there?

Bert scratches his head, as Samantha lowers the binoculars to look at him.

BERT

Yes. To both questions. That's the cabin that belongs to Carl Wither.

Bert pauses, and notices Samantha's confusion.

BERT (CONT'D)

Didn't your agent go over this with you when you signed?

Samantha frowns, and thinks for a moment.

SAMANTHA

Maybe he did. Honestly, I don't remember, there was so much going on.

I kind of remember him mentioning that we had someone living nearby, but where I come from "nearby" means on the other side of a wall in an apartment... It didn't seem like a big deal to me.

She pauses to remember, then shakes her head.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

Sorry. I don't remember. So he's living on my property? Is he a renter?

BERT

"Squatter" is more likely the better term.

SAMANTHA

What??

BERT

He lives on your land, and you are legally bound not to disturb him.

(MORE)

BERT (CONT'D)

You cannot make him move, charge him rent, limit access to his home, or otherwise interfere with how he conducts his daily life.

Samantha straightens up, squares her shoulders, and her face darkens.

SAMANTHA

How can that be?? I either own the land or I don't, right? And I didn't see his names on any paperwork!

BERT

Yes, you do own the land. But... he was living there beforehand. And apparently before the prior owner too.

Somewhere along the way, and I have no idea how far back, it was drawn into the deed for the land that the owner of that cabin be left alone to live as they may.

Samantha stands up and steps closer to the edge. Bert and Amanda stand as well.

SAMANTHA

This is crazy! I know I can't even see him from our house, but...

I don't see how I can own a piece of land and have someone living on it who is free to do what they want while I pay for and am responsible for it.

I mean, he can do what he wants. On my land! And I'm not allowed to interfere?? I've never heard of anything like this.

Bert steps forward to her, touches her shoulder. She flinches and turns to look at him abruptly. He frowns, pulls his hand away.

BERT

This goes back to the days before there were property deeds.

(MORE)

BERT (CONT'D)

There had to be a way to accommodate people living on the land before it was divided up and sold for the first time.

Some places, like this, you still see it occasionally.

My best advice? Just think of him as a neighbor, not a moocher. There's a lot of land between you.

Samantha turns to stare out over the land for a long while, considering.

Amanda raises her binoculars again to look at the small cabin in the clearing, and sees a mysterious old man walking toward the cabin with what appears to be a dead rabbit in his hand. Amanda sucks in her breath as he stops walking, looks around, then slowly turns to stare directly at her.

Amanda drops the binoculars in shock, finds that she cannot see him with her bare eyes, and frowns.

SAMANTHA

Alright... There is a lot of land there. More than enough.

She turns to look at him again.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

But, I don't like it. Gonna do it, but I want you to know I don't like it.

Bert turns to look off into the distance again.

BERT

Fair enough. Fair enough.

Samantha turn to look at the homestead again, cocks her jaw, and nods to herself.

FADE TO BLACK.

