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THE LAST BOOKSTORE

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FADE IN:

EXT. WHEAT FIELD - AFTERNOON

A line of rusted cans on a fence.

A light breeze. A few bird CHIRPS. It is idyllic. Quiet. Peaceful. Then, suddenly, PING. PING. PING. A barrage of stones knock almost all of the cans off.

VOICE
FIRST TAP!

Four BOYS emerge from the wheat field. They are all 10-12 years old and grubby in the way only tween boys can be. One trots up to the fallen cans holding a homemade slingshot.

This is JACK WELLER, 12. His dark blond hair is scruffy above his freckled nose. His blue-green eyes read curious intelligence beyond his years.

LOGAN, 12, tall and lean squints at the cans.

LOGAN
Nope. I had that.

JACK
Kidding me? That was all me-

MATEO, 11, husky, inspects the only can still standing.

MATEO
This wasn't me, right?

LOGAN
Yeah, Mats. You aim like a goat.

Jack, collects the "ammo" - multi colored rocks.

JACK
Like a goat with mittens.

Logan's little brother GIDEON, a.k.a. "DIGITS" - 10, puts a consoling hand on Mateo. DIGITS is deaf but no one treats him like he has a disability. It is what it is.

He SIGNS something.

LOGAN
(Interpreting, laughing)
"Like a goat with mittens, glasses
and a twitch."

MATEO
I HIT THAT COKE CAN!

Digits patiently shows that Mateo's rocks are yellow. None of the cans have any yellow markings on them.

MATEO
(Signing clumsily)
FINE. I get it, Digits.

Digits and Logan both laugh.

JACK
You just said; "Hurt, Fireman."
You're getting better though.

Frustrated, Mateo kicks a can. An impromptu game of "Kick the can" emerges.

They kick the can with SHOUTS and enthusiasm. Jack kicks it particularly hard into a break in the forest. It PINGS hollowly out of sight and down an embankment. The other three boys look at him, expectant. He sighs and sets off.

Jack makes his way through the shrubbery towards the can. It is lodged next to a HUMAN SKELETON. The clothing nearly disintegrated, the bones bleached and brittle with age.

Jack grabs a stick and pokes the can free. His expression unreadable.

LOGAN (O.S.)
Jack!! Come on!

Jack snaps out of it and begins kicking the can back up the trail. As he walks away, we see the clearing is littered with skeletons. All of them old, decrepit. And this is only the beginning, behind him is a devastated skyline.

It is "Everycity", USA, post-apocalypse.

BLACKOUT

TITLE: THE LAST BOOKSTORE

EXT. DIRT ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

Jack pedals down a rural lane. Corn on one side, a huge field with a wooden gate and a few, healthy COWS on the other. He is in no hurry.

JACK (V.O.)

No... it wasn't zombies. My Mom and Dad say it was "Man". The heart-still-beating kind. To make a long story short- and this is from my parents- who heard the stories from *their* parents- who were there when it happened- with all of them probably editing out the real gruesome stuff. It was what they call an EMP. That's like this huge wave of electronic energy blasted at us like a laser. It blew out all our electricity.

Jack stops at a gate where a COW is leaning his head over, waiting on him. Jack dismounts, approaches the gate and tightens the wire latch that has come loose.

JACK (V.O.)

The attacks were coordinated. As in they blasted us and a bunch of other countries from ships on the ocean and blew up everything electronic. I guess, at that time, people were pretty into their electricity because it all went to hell after that...

He pets the cow and feeds it a handful of grass. He watches it eat. This is second nature to him.

JACK (V.O.)

Did you know that cows chew their food, swallow it into one stomach then barf it up later to eat? Gross, right? Anyway, when all the electricity went out a lot of people freaked out. Some tried to run away, some tried to wait it out, some tried to fix it but most people just lost it. Dad says most of the population had no idea about basic survival.

Jack gets back on his bike.

JACK (V.O.)

The worst, though, were the "Blighters"- well, that's what they're known as now. They saw "The Darkening" as a way to take. And they took and killed and burned.

He passes an abandoned makeshift campsite. Tattered tents and age-old gear strewn about. Most covered with leaves and dust.

JACK (V.O.)

Mom says the world could have recovered if everyone hadn't freaked out and the Blighters took control of the cities. It's okay enough for us though- we're "Landers". We stay far enough away from the old cities and mind our business.

Jack turns up a rutted driveway towards a modest but intact old farmhouse. This is the WELLER farm. It is home.

As Jack pedals up the driveway, something hits him in the cheek. He stumbles off his bike with a yelp. Touching his cheek- he grimaces and looks around.

JACK

BECKETT!!! YOU'RE SO DONE!!!

A blonde head peeks up behind a corral, giggles and takes off. This is BECKETT "BECKS", 9, Jack's younger sister, nemesis and best friend - though they won't admit it.

Jack tears off after, pausing only to pick up some "ammo" from a nearby pile of horse poop. There is YELLING as the horses, cows, goats and pigs look on in mild curiosity.

CUT TO:

INT. WELLER FARMHOUSE - SOON AFTER

Beckett, screaming gleefully, tears into the house with Jack on her heels. The home is warm and rustic, BOOKS and personal touches everywhere.

BECKETT

MOMMOMMOM! Jack's gonna kill me!

A WOMAN, late 30's, emerges from another room. She is AVERY WELLER, "Mom" and lovely in a natural way, though slightly tired looking.

AVERY

YOU GUYS! QUIT!

Jack chases Beckett around a table.

JACK
She nailed me with turds again,
Mom!

AVERY
Becks - don't throw turds at your
brother. Jack, you finish your
chores?

JACK
(Glaring at Beckett)
Yes.

Avery stares at him.

JACK
...MOST. But-

AVERY
Go.

Jack slinks out the door. Beckett grins triumphantly and follows Avery into...

INT. WELLER KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The walls are lined with shelves FILLED with jarred spices, herbs and dried roots. All labeled meticulously. Avery resumes cooking.

BECKETT
I asked him to go shooting and he
DITCHED me! He and all his stupid
friends. They are too scared to
take me cause stupid Logan KNOWS
I'm a better shot than-

AVERY
How about your chores?

Beat.

BECKETT
...How about 'em?

Avery stares.

BECKETT (CONT'D)
UGH! I HATE CHORES! All the time,
every minute- "Chores"! ALWAYS! I
can't even do anything but chores!

Avery cooks. Lets her tire out.

BECKETT

I MEAN - I am ALWAYS DOING CHORES.

AVERY

I know. It's horrible, right? How you guys are safe and well fed and have to take care of the eight thousand animals you begged us to keep? Awful. I mean, if I were you, I'd just run off to eat garbage with the Blighters. Now that's living. Stupid chores. In fact-

She throws down her knife and starts stomping and throwing a "hissy" fit. Beckett just sighs. This is standard.

AVERY

I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW UNFAIR IT IS! I HATE COOKING AND EATING AND SLEEPING IN A WARM BED! UGH- I HATE IT- I WISH I COULD JUST HANG OUT AND THROW TURDS AT MY BROTHER! WHY CAN'T I JUST THROW TURDS!!?

A tiny smile threatens Beckett's face. She gets up, resigned.

BECKETT

Fine. But this? Is not over.

A tall, rugged man enters. He is REESE WELLER, 30's. "Dad". He's handsome in a writer-turned farmer way.

REESE

(To Avery)

You wanna throw turds again, honey?

AVERY

Yep. All day.

Beckett sighs and exits. Avery starts to rise, struggles. Reese helps her up.

REESE

You okay?

AVERY

Just... getting old.

REESE

What's that? Can't hear you over your clacking dentures, Ma.

Avery throws a carrot at him. She resumes cooking.

STATIC from a shortwave radio - Reese crosses to a shelf and picks up a handset.

REESE
Reese here...

STATIC - then:

VOICE
You folks up for company tonight?

REESE
Depends, what you holding?

STATIC.

VOICE
....Uh... Pie? Yep. Apple. You in?

Reese looks at Avery, she smiles and nods.

REESE
Yep.

VOICE
See you in a few.

REESE
Copy that, Ugly.

VOICE
Over and out, Fatty.

Reese crosses to Avery, hugs her from behind as she chops.

REESE
Love you.

Avery smiles.

AVERY
Only slightly less than Willa's
apple pie.

EXT. WELLER HOUSE - DUSK

Beckett waters the pigs, CHATTERING to them the whole time. She takes an empty bucket and walks to side of the house where a bunch of rain barrels are lined up.

FEET stick out from behind the last barrel. She quietly places bucket down and sneaks up.

BECKETT
 (Jumping out)
 BUSTED!

Jack, reading a worn, much read paperback SCREAMS.

JACK
 DAMMIT!

BECKETT
 Oooooo! Telling!

Jack just sighs and gets up. He pockets the book and walks towards a large barn. Beckett follows.

BECKETT
 What book is that?

JACK
 "Brave New World".

BECKETT
 I haven't read that one.

JACK
 I know, it's rated R.

He enters barn. Beckett lingers at door.

BECKETT
 Any T.V. in it?

JACK (O.S.)
 Not really.

BECKETT
 Video games?

JACK
 Nope. But they got helicopters, and
 mind control and human engineering.

He exits the barn lugging a hay bale. Beckett immediately grabs the other side.

BECKETT
 Boring. What's "R" about it?

JACK
 Boy-girl stuff.

BECKETT
 Ohhh- what about cars?

JACK
Not really. But the helicopters are cool.

A loud WHISTLE. They look up and see three riders on HORSES trotting up the road.

JACK
Mateo!

He and Beckett drop the hay and race to greet Mateo and his parents: GARRETT, a good looking Black man in his 50's and WILLA, a red-headed sweet faced woman in her late-40's.

Garrett secures his horse to a post. Beckett hugs him. Helps him unload.

BECKETT
You go fast, Uncle G?

GARRETT
Like the wind, little mama. You tame any dragons, today?

BECKETT
Nope. But I hit Jack with a road apple from across the pasture.

GARRETT
Atta girl.

Mateo and Jack run off as Beckett helps Willa and Garrett carry their stuff inside.

CUT TO:

INT. WELLER HOUSE LIVING ROOM/ LOFT - NIGHT

The adults are seated around a cozy fire in the fireplace, talking by candlelight

UPSTAIRS

Mateo and Beckett play WAR as Jack listens to the conversation downstairs.

BECKETT
I win. Again.

Beckett takes a good-sized pile of Mateo's yellow-painted ammo rocks as payment.

BECKETT
Someone's going rock hunting
tomorrow.

MATEO
...yeah? Well, what if I'm hustling
you? This is my strategy -

JACK
SHHHH! You guys.

Jack is focused on the conversation below. From his POV we see...

Willa is using a stethoscope to listen to Avery's heartbeat and lungs.

AVERY
Well?

WILLA
How are the ribs?

Avery sighs, lifts the side of her shirt. By the firelight the huge, DARK BRUISE is unmistakable. Willa tries to contain her wince.

UPSTAIRS

Jack muffles a GASP. Mateo and Beckett stop and look. Beckett is about to cry out, Jack clamps a hand over her mouth.

DOWNSTAIRS

AVERY
The breathing is harder at night.
My joints are... okay.

WILLA
Listen, I can only do so much with
the Homeopathics. You're drinking
the tea every day?

Avery nods.

WILLA
I haven't seen the exact symptoms
but it's similar to what Junie
describes Frank getting hit with.

Reese tries hard to contain his fear.

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