

L'APPEL AU VIDE

by

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INT. ASH GROVE POLICE STATION - NOON

The police station is quiet. The few people there, are working quietly at their own desks. A younger officer, MICHAEL, stands outside a cell, watching a group of high school seniors sitting inside. Among them is an innocuous looking girl, LENA (17). She waits inside, apparently unbothered, smoothing out wrinkles on her school shirt.

NOAH (40), her father, a tall, well-built man, Chief of Police in Ash Grove, bursts into the station and Michael gets up to meet him.

NOAH
Where is she?

MICHAEL
Sir, maybe you should...

Noah brushes past him and walks to the back of the station. He freezes, noticing Lena inside. She calmly meets his gaze, the betrayal etched across his face. Noah looks away, trying to hide his disappointment and anger, scanning over the other children.

MICHAEL
We found them trying to break down
the door to PASTOR DAVIS's office.

Noah turns away from them to Michael.

NOAH
You saw Lena do this?

MICHAEL
They've confessed. They claim the
pastor was involved in some kind of
coverup.
(he sighs)
It's almost Satanic, the nonsense
these kids believe in nowadays...

NOAH
(frowning)
Don't use that word. It doesn't mean
anything.

Noah glances back at Lena, frustrated. She is still watching him. This isn't the first time Lena has gotten in trouble, and he has no idea what to do.

NOAH
Let them go. They're stupid kids.
Spend two minutes online and you
think everyone is evil.

Lena scowls. Noah looks away again. Michael expected this response, he knows Noah is just defending his daughter.

MICHAEL
(exasperated)
Sir, you can't keep doing this. If
there's no consequences, they'll
just do it again and again.

NOAH
(he snaps back)
I'm not putting kids in prison.

Noah meets his gaze for a moment, until Michael gives in.
He motions to Noah's office window.

MICHAEL
The pastor is still here.

NOAH
Fine.

He gives a last look towards Lena. She glares at him.

INT. POLICE STATION (NOAH'S OFFICE) - NOON

Noah walks into his office where Davis is waiting, sitting comfortably, opposite Noah's chair in casual clothing. He has a sad, sympathetic expression, though Noah can't tell if it is genuine.

DAVIS
(muttering, but directed
to Noah)
I worry for the children, for we are
all children of God.

NOAH
What do you want, Davis?

DAVIS
Officer, I believe you care for your
daughter very much.

He speaks in a careful, measured manner. Noah doesn't know where he is going but prepares to swiftly shut down any preaching.

NOAH
Get to the point Davis.

DAVIS
"Whoever spares the rod, hates their
children".

He pauses, waiting for a reaction. Noah slides into his chair and maintains a blank expression.

DAVIS (CONT'D)
You will not be able to keep
(MORE)

DAVIS (CONT'D)
shielding her forever. Next time,
there will be consequences.

NOAH
(getting angry)
Are you threatening-

DAVIS
If she stays on this "social
justice" crusade, her life will turn
to ruin. Is that what you want?

NOAH
Do you think she'll listen to me?
You think I haven't tried?

DAVIS
Then try again. You set her
straight, or the law will.

Noah struggles to find a response. He knows the pastor is right. Davis contemplates for a moment, then decides to let Noah in on his plan.

DAVIS (CONT'D)
There is one other hope.

Noah waits, expectant, hoping.

DAVIS (CONT'D)
The world needs reminding, that He
sees them. That every choice, every
thought they have is being judged...
And after centuries of searching, I
believe we have found a way.

Noah is irritated, but not surprised. Every conversation with the pastor just turns into a sermon.

NOAH
I shouldn't have expected anything
from you.

DAVIS
Officer, you misunderstand.
(leans forward, in a low
voice)
We know how to bring Him here. To
our world. To show everyone.

Noah hesitates. He doesn't believe the pastor, but wants to.

DAVIS (CONT'D)
It might be the only way to save
her.

He nods towards Noah's window. Noah follows his gesture and can slightly make out Lena, still waiting inside the cell. Could this somehow help her? Unconvinced, his eyes snap back to Davis.

NOAH
(dismissive)
You're full of shit.

A slight pause. Davis nods and gets up. He turns to leave the room, but stops at the door.

DAVIS
We will call for Him tonight. You
are welcome to join us if you change
your mind.

He leaves. Noah sits alone, drumming his fingers on his desk, staring at the empty chair.

INT. CHURCH - AFTERNOON

Noah stands at the back of the local church watching the head pastor, PASTOR DAVIS, give a sermon to an unusually large congregation. Many of them are older people, almost all above retirement age.

As Davis finishes the sermon, his eyes settle on Noah. Noah tries to hide just how much Davis's plan appeals to him, but Davis sees right through him. He gives a wry smile, and Noah turns and walks out of the church.

EXT. MOUNTAIN LOOKOUT - AFTERNOON (NEXT DAY)

Lena leans over the railing at the lookout, taking pictures of the mountain landscape with a camera. Holding up the camera to one eye, she tries to arrange the scenery across the frame, focused but relaxed. Noah watches from behind, trying to hide his discomfort. He waits for the right moment to convince Lena to give up her tirade against the church.

LENA
Hey Dad, do you think I could get
the church from here with the zoom
lens?

Hmm, probably too far.

Noah, lost in thought, doesn't register her words. She turns around, lowering the camera.

LENA
Dad?

His eyes snap back from the landscape to her.

NOAH
Yeah?

LENA
(short pause)
Are you alright?

NOAH
(shakes his head)
It's nothing.

LENA
(getting defensive)
Are you still mad? About yesterday?

Noah gives a slight grimace. This conversation was on a terrible start.

LENA (CONT'D)
Dad, I've asked around. They've hurt people, I just need solid proof.

NOAH
That's something the police should handle, Lena. Not a bunch of highschoolers.

LENA
(suddenly upset)
Really? You still treat me like a little kid! Why don't you trust me?

His words start to get more heated, laced with desperation.

NOAH
You are a kid. They'll tell you all kinds of things on the internet, make you hate your family, your neighbours. Trust me, you don't know everything, you don't have it all figured out. And I can't help you learn right from wrong if you never listen.

Lena's dismay has turned to anger and defiance. Her father isn't listening to her, this conversation is pointless.

NOAH
Lena, please. Promise me you'll drop this whole "investigation" thing.

Ignoring him, She stalks back up the path towards the car. Noah gives a frustrated sigh. She'll never listen to him. He has one option left.

INT. CHURCH - EVENING

The evening sunlight flickers through the windows, casting long shadows that hug the pillars. An array of wax candles line the walls, throwing more light and shadows across the

room. Churchgoers are seated, scattered amongst the rows of pews, muttering or whispering quietly. They are about to summon their God to this world, physically, completely. Nobody knows what to expect, but they trust the clergy wholeheartedly. There is an air of stillness and anticipation. Noah sits alone at the back of the room, eyeing the vacant pulpit, still unsure but committed to seeing this through.

A figure (PASTOR LEYMAN) moves up to the front and climbs onto the stage. Noah doesn't recognise him. Nervous murmurs ripple through the crowd. He waits for the whispers to die down, then speaks.

LEYMAN

I'm afraid pastor Davis is unwell and couldn't be with us tonight. However, let us not lose heart. For today is a monumental day. Today is the day we change the course of human history! For centuries, mankind has lived with their heads buried in the dirt.

The 'World', does not know right from wrong. The 'World' doesn't think about good and evil. The Deceiver's hand of temptation has spread its grasp over our children. They have been taught to hate their own kin, to love degeneracy and blame others for their own faults. My brothers and sisters, we have fought the darkness valiantly. But so many, have fallen for the lies.

A few cries of approval are heard from the audience as he speaks. Noah nods along with them.

LEYMAN (CONT'D)

The 'World' is infected with corruption. They have forgotten about the Lord, forgotten His will and His way. Fear of Him, no longer keeps depravity at bay.

There are mutters of shared disdain amongst the crowd.

LEYMAN

Brothers and sisters, this is not the way it's supposed to be. They spite us, they persecute us. They hate us, because we know that there is only one way, one truth.

Shouts of agreement from the congregation get louder, and more frequent. Noah shows concern at the growing aggression, but knows he can't back out now.

LEYMAN

It is the time to show them all.

He is waiting for us. The Lord, He is waiting for us to ask, to throw away our pride. Our self-righteousness. He waits for us to abandon our arrogance. We shall ask, and He shall come. He shall reveal his glory to the world, and unveil what is right, and wrong.

He motions for silence. And speaks softly.

LEYMAN

Now, I ask you all to pray with me.

The 'summoning ritual' begins. Everyone acting in unison opens the book in front of them to the first page. The title is crossed out with angry pen marks, replaced with "Deliverance 1:1" scrawled on the page. Words are crossed out, even entire sections hidden with marker, and what remains is a prayer, reminiscent of the beginning of the text, but almost like something new. The priest begins and after the first line, the rest of the congregation starts to chant along with him. Noah mumbles some words, expectantly glancing around for some sign that something is happening.

As they continue to read, the shadows appear to get longer. A wind picks up, audible in the brief silence between verses. Slowly the candles go out one by one, until the only light left comes from the quickly disappearing sun, falling below the window behind the pulpit. The chanting slowly grows in volume.

A thundering crash pierces the air, and it is suddenly so dark that NOAH can't see anything. The chanting stops. There are panicked shouts from the congregation, but their voices slowly fade away until Noah is left alone with the silence.

INT. UNKNOWN SPACE - UNKNOWN TIME

Everything is pitch dark and Noah can't see a thing. Somehow, he knows he is no longer within the church. He waits, heart pounding.

And waits.

And keeps waiting. All he hears is his own barely controlled, panicked breaths, as he drifts in the darkness.

Then, far in the distance there is a tiny speck of light. It grows larger, and he starts to make out some shapes within. A tree, some buildings, something that looks like a person walking. Gradually, the image becomes clearer. Noah can make out a young man in a suit, hurrying along a busy street with a folder clutched to his chest. He slams into an old man, and they both fall. Noah scowls, then suddenly winces as a gash appears on his face. He can feel the pain from the man in the vision. The man gets up and keeps running. The apparition is so clear now, that Noah can see the fear struck across his face, the gash on his cheek, the sweat rolling down his neck.

A second image appears, part of it layering onto the first. A woman clutches a wrench as she stands motionless in an empty garage. At her feet lies a bloody corpse. Noah, receiving the woman's emotions, feels... relieved?

A third, of a father pushing his daughter on the swings. A fourth, of a man gasping for breath, alone in a hospital bed. Another, of a girl surrounded by people as she cuts a cake. Noah can feel their sorrow, their loneliness, their joy, their content. All at the same time.

More images appear, all partially layered upon each other, of people just living their lives. Some fill Noah's heart with warmth, others leave him sick and empty, but for most of them, so many emotions cascade at once that he no longer knows how to feel.

As the images accumulate, they all start to blur together and Noah can no longer distinguish between them, beyond a few clear flashes, a few brief moments he sees from each individual life.

Amongst the cacophony of light, a faint, dark outline appears. Tracing the shape of the lines, he begins to see a humanoid silhouette formed from the amalgamation of images.

Something tugs at his back, and Noah falls away. The light shrinks into the distance until everything goes black.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Noah jolts awake, slamming into the back of his seat. Dark shapes move around the edge of his vision, but he doesn't notice. He hears nothing. His eyes are fixed onto the last page of the book, lying open in his hands. Releasing a slow, shuddering breath, he reads the final line.

NOAH

"We call upon you, Lord, to reveal
the absolute virtues you have given
us, to the world."

But that didn't happen. His hands are shaking. He takes a few more slow breaths.

A piercing scream tears through his senses, followed by a roar of fire. He looks around in horror to find flames climbing up the walls of the church. The congregation was in chaos. Some were stumbling around, knocking pews over. Some sat in silence, their eyes wide and unseeing. Some were clawing at their skulls, screaming.

Noah sees a woman sitting with a vacant expression on her face, as flames raced along her dress.

NOAH

Hey! HEY!

Her desolate eyes meet his own, as he rushes over. She turns away.

WOMAN

(mumbling)

That wasn't Him. It couldn't be Him.

NOAH (CONT'D)

Miss, we have to leave! Miss, can you hear me?

He moves to grab her arm, but his hands pass right through, as if she was a ghost.

NOAH

(shocked, almost afraid)

What...?

He staggers backwards, and crashes into Leyman. He turns around and the pastor grabs his shoulders. Noah tries to pull away.

NOAH

What the hell is going on?

LEYMAN

(eyes wide)

HIS JUDGMENT IS CLEAR! WE HAVE ALL
FALLEN SHORT OF HIS GLORY.

NOAH

No! That can't be right. We did everything you said...

LEYMAN

WE CANNOT SEE AS HE SEES. WE CANNOT
KNOW AS HE KNOWS.

(in a trembling whisper)

It's all too much. We must beg for
mercy.

NOAH

(shaking his head)

This isn't right. This isn't-

Leyman's fingers dig into Noah's shoulders.

LEYMAN
(unhinged)
WE MUST PRAY!

NOAH
Get off!

A burning beam comes crashing down from the ceiling, barely missing them both. Leyman's hands fall through Noah, and he backs away in terror.

Noah makes his way to the doors of the church, dodging more falling debris. Everyone he passes has lost their minds, and his attempts to help are ignored. A final look at the destruction behind him, and he steps through the doors.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CHURCH - NIGHT

Noah runs across the open field before the church. Tall shadows dance around the growing inferno behind him. A silhouette appears in the dark, standing still, turned towards the burning building. It's Pastor Davis. This is all his fault. Noah uses the growing anger to momentarily mask his fear.

NOAH
You never knew the "truth", you
fucking liar!

Davis tries to keep up a calm, self-assured demeanour, but it isn't very convincing. He never expected *this*.

DAVIS
Officer, are you alright? I-

Noah grabs the collar of his shirt and shoves him. His voice quavers.

NOAH
You promised! You said that this
would help her!

DAVIS
(unsure)
This was supposed to happen. "Fear
of the Lord is the beginning of
wisdom".

NOAH
What the *fuck* do I tell her now?
That I was wrong about *everything*
I thought I knew?

Davis tries to speak. He shakes his head in disagreement, but doesn't know how to respond.

NOAH

Look. Look at what you did.

He turns Davis towards the church, now fully engulfed in flames.

DAVIS

(mutters, looking away)

They couldn't handle the truth.

Noah realises why Davis skipped the ritual. He regains some of his confidence, and his voice drips with disdain.

NOAH

You were afraid to be wrong. To find the real truth you didn't want to see. That's why you ditched us.

DAVIS

(defensive)

No, no, I care about the truth.

"He is the way and the truth and the life."

He recites those words like a practiced mantra. Noah releases Davis, who hurries up towards the church. His phone starts ringing. It's Lena.

LENA (V.O.)

Dad! Are you ok? I saw the fire, where are you?

Hearing her voice, fear begins to creep back across his face. His anger has burnt out and he is left back in a state of turmoil and confusion.

LENA (V.O.)

Dad, talk to me, what's going on?

Noah's unfocused eyes watch the distant fire grow. Fragments of the vision still play in his head, layered over the current scene.

NOAH

(as if talking to himself)

It'll be fine. It'll all make sense.

He doesn't know if he believes his own words.

LENA (V.O.)

(worried)

Did something happen?

NOAH

It all went wrong. I saw everything. He punished me... my ignorance.

LENA (V.O.)
I don't understand...

Hey, you should come home. Maybe we
can talk about it?

NOAH
No, I can't...

He glances around, distracted. A siren peals in the
distance, but it is much too far away.

LENA (V.O.)
Ok. Ok, give me a moment, I'll be
right there.

NOAH
No! I'm fine, just...

He can't handle the thought of his daughter seeing him the
way he is, this emotionally vulnerable, this unsure of
himself. Lena is startled and takes a moment to respond.

LENA (V.O.)
Dad, I know I'm just a stupid
17-year-old, but you can talk to me.
You don't need to have it all
figured out. *Nobody* has it all
figured out.

A brief silence. Then Noah responds, resigned.

NOAH
I saw all of it, Lena. And what's
really good or evil, it doesn't make
sense anymore.
(beat)

LENA (V.O.)
Do you trust me?

NOAH
Yes.

LENA (V.O.)
Then come home. We'll get through
this together.

Noah nods. He turns away from the blazing church, from
pastor Davis, and walks down the field.