

APOGEE

Written by

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Logline: In 19th century Massachusetts, the search for a missing girl brings a priest and her parents to the site of a horrifying ritual and their hands in causing it.

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TITLE CARD: MASSACHUSETTS, 1825

1 INT. CHURCH, JACOB'S OFFICE-NIGHT

1

It is dark, a single candle flickers and trails smoke up into the air. JACOB(early 30s) sits on the floor leaning back against his bed, a bottle clenched in his hands. Across the room, someone POUNDS on the door.

2 INT. COVERED WAGON-DAY

2

The wagon is shadowed, the CLOPPING of hooves mixes with the drone of CICADAS outside. Jacob slumps in the back, asleep, dressed in black clerical garb.

A large bump in the road wakes him up, disoriented.

3 EXT. COVERED WAGON-DAY

3

JACOB (O.S.)  
Mr. Adler, where are we?

Driving the wagon is CHARLES ADLER(early 40s), sat beside his wife, LEANNE ADLER(late 30s). A mule and a horse pull the wagon through the wooded trail, morning mist hanging in the air.

CHARLES  
On our way to the farmstead, Vicar.  
Won't be long now.

Behind the couple, Jacob pulls back the flap on the wagon to look out, recoiling at the light.

JACOB  
Right. Well, lord willing we'll  
find dear Ruth quickly.

LEANNE  
How could she have come all the way  
out here just by herself?

CHARLES  
Those damned heathens and the  
vagrants they take in. Probably  
picked her up while she was alone.

JACOB  
Mm, a possibility, I'm sorry to  
say. If she was in as fragile a  
state as you said.

CHARLES

They'll get their due for what  
they've done, mark my words.

Charles' grip tightens on the reigns. Leanne eyes him, concerned.

JACOB

Mr. Adler, we must focus on finding  
Ruth above all else, and let the  
Lord sort out this group's penance.

LEANNE

This group, you've spoken to them  
before, Vicar?

JACOB

Just to one of them once. Came by  
the church back in... April, I  
believe. Seemed harmless enough.

CHARLES

(muttering)

And now here we are.

LEANNE

(whispering)

*Charles!*

4

EXT. HILL-DAY

4

The wagon crests a large hill that breaks up the misty woods. Behind them in the distance lies a quiet New England town. Ahead of them is a flat area of land carved out of the woods.

5

EXT. APOGEE FARMSTEAD, ENTRANCE-DAY

5

The cart ambles out of the woods to a wide piece of land. A simple wooden fence borders the perimeter. The road leads to a gate with a sign above reading 'APOGEE.'

The cart stops.

CHARLES

This is it.

The land beyond the gate is farmed, with several patches of tilled soil. Down the road are a farmhouse and a barn.

Jacob pokes his head out.

JACOB  
Doesn't seem to be anyone about.

CHARLES  
With how much talk about this place, thought there'd be a dozen at least.

LEANNE  
Maybe they're all still asleep? Or just inside?

JACOB  
With no one to keep watch? The gate's already open.

Charles hits the reigns and the cart moves through the gate.

As they head down the road towards the buildings, much of the grass is overgrown. The tilled soil is weedy and unkempt. By the barn, a skinny goat eats at the grass, a loose rope lead dangling from its neck.

The cart stops at the farmhouse. It's got two stories, all the windows that can be are opened. The door is cracked ajar.

CHARLES  
Wait here, Leanne. Vicar?

JACOB  
Coming.

Charles and Jacob leave the cart. Jacob squints as his eyes adjust to the harsh sunlight. Charles pulls something out from under the driver's seat, a musket.

JACOB (CONT'D)  
Mr. Adler I really don't think that's necessary-

CHARLES  
They have my *daughter*.

Jacob puts his hands up and allows Charles to take the lead. Leanne watches from the cart, eyes scanning their surroundings. The goat watches from the barn, chewing on grass.

JACOB  
 They may also be armed. Best not to  
 alarm them.

Charles gestures to the door. Jacob's expression flattens for a moment before he takes a breath and smiles, the persona of a kindly Vicar taking the lead.

7 INT. FLASHBACK, CHURCH, JACOB'S OFFICE-NIGHT 7

The POUNDING of the door is even louder, desperate. Jacob stumbles in the low light to the door. He trips.

8 EXT. FARMHOUSE, FRONT DOOR-DAY 8

Jacob reaches for the door. He knocks.

Nothing.

He knocks again. A breeze sweeps over the land and the door slowly drifts open.

JACOB  
 (calling out)  
 Hello?

9 INT. FARMHOUSE, HALLWAY-DAY 9

They peer through the doorway and see a dark, empty hallway. A small layer of dust covers the floor, but footprints are visible.

The far end is illuminated by sunlight through a window. Charles steps through. Jacob follows. They slowly walk down the hallway.

Hanging on one wall is a woven blanket. On the other is the dusty, discolored outline where a crucifix was once mounted.

As they continue down, Charles pokes another door on the left with his gun. It swings inward, a washroom. A candle sits on a shelf, burned down completely, wax dried as it spilled onto the floor. A discolored, rust-red stains the rim of a metal wash basin.

CHARLES  
 This place ain't right.

Jacob rolls his eyes behind him. He wipes a bead of sweat from his brow.

JACOB

Hello? We don't mean to trespass,  
but-

CHARLES

-SHH!

They freeze at the end of the hallway. FOOTSTEPS approach from a staircase. They grow closer.

Charles cocks the hammer back on his musket, Jacob eyes him before taking a step away.

MATTHEW (O.S.)

Please, don't shoot.

Ambling down the stairs is MATTHEW(70s), an old man. He's very skinny to the point of malnourishment. He walks with a cane and barefoot, wearing mostly linens.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

I wasn't expecting visitors. You'll have to excuse the state of the place. I am Matthew. Just Matthew.

JACOB

Matthew, I am Jacob, a Vicar at Lee Falls perish, and this is Charles Adler. We're looking for-

CHARLES

-Where is my daughter?

JACOB

-Ruth.

Matthew thinks for a beat. His eyes are cloudy with cataracts.

MATTHEW

Ruth, Ruth- yes! Ruth. Yes.

JACOB

So she's here?

CHARLES

Where?

MATTHEW

Oh, she's with the rest of the flock. Morning worship should be concluding soon, and they'll be back up.

Matthew walks slowly down the rest of the hallway to a sitting room.

10 INT. FARMHOUSE, SITTING ROOM-DAY

10

Matthew lowers himself into a chair. Jacob and Charles stand.

JACOB

Have you been given watch of the farm while the others worship, Matthew?

MATTHEW

No, no. I'm ill. Too sick to make the journey now.

Matthew taps his cane on the ground and waves a hand over his eyes.

CHARLES

Well where are they worshipping?

MATTHEW

They'll be down in the chamber.

JACOB

And where would that be?

Matthew stares straight ahead. He points his cane toward the window.

MATTHEW

Through the doors in the barn. If you want to meet them there you'd best hurry on. It will be done soon.

They look at Matthew for a beat, then walk out. Matthew continues staring into space.

11 EXT. FARMHOUSE-DAY

11

They walk out to the cart. Leanne is not in her seat.

CHARLES

Leanne?!

LEANNE (O.S.)

Over here! Oh, dear, stop it!

Charles hurries around the cart, gun ready and Jacob following. They round the cart to see Leanne with the skinny goat trying to nibble at her apron.

LEANNE (CONT'D)  
She came right up to the cart. She looked so hungry and I wanted to lead her back and tie her up somewhere.

Charles shoos the goat off.

CHARLES  
You should stay here.

LEANNE  
What about Ruth? Did you find anyone?

CHARLES  
Just an old man, too sick or blind to be any help.

JACOB  
He did point us to the barn, however.

LEANNE  
The barn? Surely we would've heard someone in there? Or they would've come out to see us?

CHARLES  
One way to find out.

Charles approaches the barn, Leanne and Jacob following.

12 EXT. BARN-DAY

12

The tall barn doors are closed, silent. Charles gives one final look over the surrounding property. He readies his musket at the door.

CHARLES  
Vicar.

Jacob cautiously approaches and grabs one door. He heaves it open and there's a rush of air and dust that blows through the opening.

13

INT. BARN-DAY

13

The barn lies dark and empty. There are some tools lined up against a wall and a small workbench, a loft with some hay, but nothing else.

Charles sweeps the room, it remains silent. Towards the back are a large pair of cellar doors in the floor.

JACOB

Odd place for worship.

Leanne looks over the tools. They're rusty and dull.

LEANNE

It doesn't seem like anyone's been in here in a long time.

JACOB

What if Matthew made a mistake?  
Perhaps they're at a church somewhere? Or gone into town?

Charles sets his gun aside and grabs the cellar doors. He heaves them open. A set of stairs leads down to a dark passage way of dirt with wooden braces lining the walls like a mineshaft.

Jacob looks over Charles' shoulder at the tunnel. He grows uncomfortable. An unnerving HUM emanates from it that the others don't seem to notice.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Are there lanterns?

CHARLES

In the wagon.

Jacob speedily walks out to find it.

14

EXT. FARMHOUSE-DAY

14

Jacob makes his way to the wagon and climbs in the back. After a moment of digging, he comes out with a lantern. He begins to make his way back when another breeze picks up.

He pauses, sniffs the air. He sets the lantern back. He turns toward the house, moves towards it. He goes along to the left of the house and continues, following his nose.

15

EXT. FARMHOUSE, BACK-DAY

15

Jacob follows the smell around to the back of the house. As he rounds the corner, he stops suddenly.

The patchy grass and dirt behind the house is marred by a circle of scorched earth. Jacob approaches. He sees the remnants of charcoal and wood burned black, scraps of cloth and paper flittering in the wind.

At the edges, there are scattered seeds and grain that ants and birds peck at. Petrified vegetables mix with bits of bone, meat cauterized and rock hard lying amongst the ashes.

Jacob looks around, back towards the house. At a back window on the first floor, Matthew stares back at him.

16

INT. FARMHOUSE-DAY

16

Jacob walks through the door and approaches Matthew.

JACOB

What's going on here? That food out there-

MATTHEW

-had lost its purpose. We hadn't the need for it now. Hunger is insatiable, ever-present. Bread and honey only delay the inevitable-

JACOB

Did you do this? Matthew, look at me. Where are the others of your flock?

MATTHEW

They are where they need to be. But, I can't, I couldn't make the journey.

Tears well in his cloudy eyes.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

I understand why they left me. Time grows so short and they had someone to take my place. That sweet girl.

JACOB

Ruth? What have you done with her?

Matthew glares at Jacob's accusation.

MATTHEW

We have welcomed her into our home,  
when no one else did.

Jacob glares back.

JACOB

What are you talking about?

MATTHEW

She told us about you, Vicar Jacob,  
Lee Falls perish. How you scorned  
her! Drunk! Chased her out into the  
cold just as her father had!

JACOB

Lies!

MATTHEW

You did this to her! You shall see,  
Vicar Jacob!

Jacob rushes back out the door.

Matthew collapses into his chair coughing and wheezing.

17

EXT. FARMHOUSE-DAY

17

Jacob hurries out of the house. He makes it to the wagon and tries to gather his thoughts.

LEANNE

Vicar! Vicar!

Leanne comes out of the barn. Jacob straightens up.

JACOB

Yes, Mrs. Adler, what is it?

LEANNE

It's just, Charles gets so impatient- he went down into the cellar doors. With no light. He told me to stay up but, when you weren't back I was worried.

JACOB

It's fine Mrs. Adler. We should go after him.

Jacob picks up the lantern and starts walking towards the barn.

LEANNE

Oh, Charles told me to stay up here, I'm not- maybe I should check in on that old man?

JACOB

-NO! No, he should rest. I'm sure Ruth will want to see you and Charles. He does seem to be... driven in his ways.

Leanne nods and follows him.

18

INT. FLASHBACK, CHURCH, JACOB'S OFFICE-NIGHT

18

The door opens to see RUTH ADLER(late teens) standing in the light rain that pours down. Jacob stands holding the door, bleary-eyed and drunk.

Jacob blinks as he looks at Ruth. She's out of breath, wet from the rain. Her eyes are red and puffy from crying and her cheek is bruised.

JACOB

Yes?

RUTH

Vicar, I... I need help.

19

INT. BARN-DAY

19

Jacob and Leanne approach the cellar doors, still open. The HUMMING is still there. Jacob looks at Leanne but she doesn't notice.

LEANNE

Charles! Are you there?

Nothing.

JACOB

It must go deep. Do stay close.

Jacob ignites the lantern and steps in.

20

INT. TUNNELS-DAY

20

As Jacob and Leanne go deeper, the HUMMING becomes more prevalent, but softer, quieter, as the sounds of the surface fade away. It's only interrupted by their footsteps on the dirt floor and the creak of the lantern.

JACOB  
Do you hear that?

LEANNE  
Is it Charles?

JACOB  
No, no. Must be the wind.

They continue, soon the lantern becomes the only source of light.

21 INT. TUNNELS-DAY

21

As they move, the tunnel starts to widen. It becomes more natural, the dirt and wooden crossbeams give way to large, uneven rock that's black and glassy like obsidian.

22 INT. TUNNELS-DAY

22

The lantern burns as Jacob and Leanne follow the tunnel.

LEANNE  
Charles! Ruth! What could anyone possibly worship down here, Vicar?

JACOB  
Not the Lord I know, Mrs. Adler.

There's a deep RUMBLE emitting through the tunnel, then the earth around them shakes. Jacob and Leanne try to take cover, pressed against one of the walls. After a few moments, it passes.

LEANNE  
A tremor?

A GUNSHOT echoes through the tunnel. Another tremor.

JACOB  
Mr. Adler!

LEANNE  
Charles!?

Leanne grabs the lantern and rushes past Jacob down the tunnel, Jacob follows. The tremors come again.

23

INT. TUNNELS, RITUAL CHAMBER-DAY

23

Jacob catches up to Leanne in time to see her gasp and drop the lantern. She's stopped just beyond the threshold where the tunnel opens up to a large, dome-shaped chamber.

The walls are the same obsidian-like material. Carved into the walls, spreading from the very top and center of the dome are lines of blue glowing runes in a language completely alien.

The runes divide the dome into eight symmetrical sections, and stemming down from the center is a monolith, a carved stone spire hanging down like a stalactite. The pointed tip is spaced about four feet off the ground.

24

INT. FLASHBACK, CHURCH, JACOB'S OFFICE-NIGHT

24

Jacob stands in the doorway, Ruth stands in the rain.

JACOB

I'm not sure I'm the help you need,  
child. Is your family present?

RUTH

I... no, I've. It's awful, Vicar, I  
don't know what to do!

Ruth weeps. Jacob closes his eyes and rubs his head. He swings the door open.

JACOB

Come in.

25

INT. TUNNELS, RITUAL CHAMBER-DAY

25

Jacob and Leanne stare at Ruth. She's dressed in the same linens that Matthew was. She floats a few feet off the ground with her head bowed.

There are a couple of other people in the room dressed like her, floating like her, each under a different section of the ceiling.

In empty sections, loose rubble has spilled onto the ground and dark, round holes have opened up in the ceiling where the faintest bit of sunlight peaks through.

To their left, Charles stands, holding his musket. Across the room, one of the linen-dressed people lies on the floor, shot dead.

LEANNE  
Charles? Charles, what-Ruth?

Charles turns toward them.

CHARLES  
Leanne, I... He was coming for me!  
I tried to get Ruth down but they  
have her. Them or the devil they  
serve, I don't know. I don't know.

A tear of blood falls down his cheek. Charles looks past Leanne.

LEANNE  
Charles you're bleeding.

CHARLES  
It's a possession. It must be,  
Vicar! Please help her!

Jacob moves forward, but stops, not crossing the threshold. His eyes are glued to the monolith. The HUM is back, louder.

Leanne moves from Charles to Ruth, grabbing at her as best she can but Ruth hangs in the air. Charles looks from them to Jacob to the monolith as blood drips from his eye.

CHARLES (CONT'D)  
This thing must be the source of  
it!

As he goes near it, a pulse of energy shakes the cave, and they watch as one of the other hovering people rise towards the ceiling.

When they're about to hit it, it opens up and another tunnel forms, a path is dug straight upwards through the rock. Leanne SCREAMS in horror and pulls harder at Ruth.

Charles recoils from the pulse but continues, ready to slam the butt of his musket into the rune-carve stone.

CHARLES (CONT'D)  
(muttering)  
Blessed Michael the Archangel,  
powerful in his holy light, guide  
us as we repulse the attacks and  
deceits of the devil-

He strikes the stone.

26

INT. FLASHBACK, CHURCH, JACOB'S OFFICE-NIGHT

26

Jacob sits at his desk chair and reads from a bible as Ruth sits in a chair, drying her tears and hair. Jacob's eyes keep flickering from the book to Ruth to the door and window.

JACOB

-and cast him into the bottomless  
pit. As smoke is driven away, may  
thy mercy... descend upon us.

Jacob looks up at Ruth.

RUTH

As great as our hope in thee.

JACOB

Amen.

RUTH

Amen.

Jacob shuts the book. He looks at Ruth. Ruth hides her face in her hands. He sets the bible on his desk, then just sits there.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I can't, I can't marry that man.  
He's older than father but he says  
I'll be taken care of... But he'll  
want children. Sons.

Jacob nods dumbly and smothers a hiccup.

JACOB

Perhaps it won't be so bad. New  
York will feel like the center of  
the world, you'll want for nothing-

RUTH

I've had nothing!

Jacob shuts up. Ruth is shocked at herself.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I-I'm sorry, Vicar. Lord, forgive  
me, I'm just so... lost.

Jacob moves to sit on his bed. There's a KLINK- his foot hit the bottle on the floor. They both look at it, then each other.

27

INT. TUNNELS, RITUAL CHAMBER-DAY.

27

Charles strikes into the stone, the rifle's frame begins to splinter. Blood trickles from both his eyes.

CHARLES

Guide my hand, oh Lord, as I drive  
ye unclean spirits! Infernal  
invaders!

Leanne keeps holding onto Ruth. Ruth begins to ascend as Leanne holds on.

LEANNE

Charles, Vicar Jacob, help me!

Jacob is frozen to the spot as the monolith pulses again.

28

INT. DREAM SPACE

28

Jacob stands as he had in the chamber, but everything around him is a dark void. The only sound is the HUM and WHISPERS that emanate from the darkness around him. The words whispered are utterly alien, he trembles, knowing he cannot hope to comprehend them.

Ruth's voice echoes through space.

RUTH (V.O.)

Vicar, are you... well?

29

INT. FLASHBACK, CHURCH, JACOB'S OFFICE-NIGHT

29

Jacob looks at Ruth before his eyes lower to the floor. His hands rest stiffly in his lap.

JACOB

The rain's stopped. I believe you  
should be on your way.

Ruth's heart drops.

RUTH

But, but it's so late? Isn't there  
somewhere here I could stay? I can  
work in return-

JACOB

-Your father will be looking for  
you at first light, if not already.  
The further away you get, the  
better.

RUTH  
But, where will I go?

Jacob's hands curl into fists.

JACOB  
Perhaps you should have considered  
that before you left.

RUTH  
Vicar, please, I-

Jacob stands.

JACOB  
-GET OUT!

30 INT. TUNNELS, RITUAL CHAMBER-DAY.

30

32 Jacob's nose starts bleeding. Charles is screaming, so is 32 Leanne. Ruth is just a couple feet from the ceiling. The rock above her begins to crumble and part. Leanne dangles from Ruth's waist.

Ruth's head lolls back, facing upward as she ascends. Leanne falls. She screams and there's a CRUNCH as she hits the ground. She rolls onto her back, in pain, bleeding from the head, her ankle bent unnaturally.

Charles drops his musket, the frame mangled and broken. He resorts to pounding against the stone with his bare fists, screaming madly, incoherent. His eyes bleed even more.

Leanne begins crawling over to the body of the man Charles shot. Above him is the last section of the ceiling without a hole.

LEANNE  
(crying)  
Take me! Spare her, take me! Take  
me! Take me!

Jacob watches as Leanne rises from the floor, yelling, her voice crackling. Charles continues to swing his bloody fists at the monolith, unaware of anything else.

Ruth disappears up into the roof of the cave, rubble falling from the opening. The monolith pulses again, much stronger. The cave shakes as more rubble rains down.

31 INT. DREAM SPACE 31

Jacob stands as the space around him shudders, the alien WHISPERS grow louder, the HUMMING roars in his ears. Jacob clasps his head and reels in pain at the noise.

32 INT. TUNNELS, RITUAL CHAMBER-DAY. 32

Jacob loses his footing. He's shaken out of his vision. Bigger rocks are falling. The chamber quakes and rumbles. Leanne is almost at the ceiling, her mouth agape in a now-silent scream.

Charles gets hit with a falling rock and he falls prone. He doesn't get up.

The falling debris begins kicking up dust. Leanne rises as the ceiling opens up once more. Jacob runs.

33 INT. TUNNELS-DAY 33

Jacob stumbles through the tunnels, quickly plunging into darkness as he leaves the light of the runes in the cave.

There's another pulse, one that knocks him to the floor as he runs through the dark, rubble and dust falling around him. The earth quakes again, keeps rumbling with tremors.

34 INT. BARN-DAY 34

Dust shoots out of the cellar doors as the barn shakes, tools fall and wood creaks and shudders.

Jacob climbs out, his vestments covered in dust, a trail of blood is caked with dust under his nose.

He stumbles away from the cellar doors and out of the barn.

35 EXT. BARN-DAY 35

Jacob emerges from the barn, recoiling from the light. The ground continues to quake. The trees at the edge of the property shudder and birds fly away. The goat bleats and trots around in the grass.

The horse and mule at the wagon whine and rear against their reigns, stuck in place. Jacob crosses the property to them, but stops as he sees shapes hovering above the farmstead.

Eight holes in the earth sit under the eight people that ascend slowly in the air, forming a rough circle.

The sunlight turns their forms into silhouettes as they float, several stories up.

36

EXT. FARMHOUSE, FRONT DOOR-DAY

36

Jacob pulls his gaze away and continues to the wagon. He goes around to the horse and starts trying to undo the hitch and reigns as she bucks and whinnies.

MATTHEW (O.S.)  
ASCENSION!

Matthew limps out of the front door of the farmhouse, grinning madly with his milky-white eyes wide, tears streaming down his face.

Above and beyond the farmhouse, the eight silhouettes in the sky begin to stretch, the forms lengthening and blurring vertically, infinitely.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
ASCENSION! ASCENSION! BRING THE  
VAST HEIGHTS TO THE EARTH AND CAS-!

-BOOM-

The farmhouse is flattened! There's a huge cloud of dust and debris. Jacob is blown off his feet and the wagon goes flying.

CUT TO BLACK.

37

EXT. APOGEE FARMSTEAD-DAY

37

Jacob's ears ring. He's lying on the ground. A broken plank of wood is impaled into the ground next to him.

Dust hangs in the air around him. The wagon sits wrecked on its side farther down the road, the horse spasms on the ground, on top of the mule.

The barn has collapsed, but the farmhouse is *flattened*, crushed in a shallow crater.

Jacob gets to his feet. The people in the sky are gone.

Towards the front entrance of the farmstead, a corner of the fence and a huge clump of trees is flattened and shattered in another crater. More of the craters and dust clouds trail away from the farmstead towards the hill.

Jacob starts walking in a daze toward the road, back the way he came.

38 EXT. HILL-DAY

38

Jacob climbs up the hill, coughing and holding a torn part of his shirt over his mouth as dust blows around.

As he crests the hill he stops. His hands fall to his sides. The world below is trampled.

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

More and more craters form, trailing away from him, crossing hundreds of feet at a time by an unseen, unstoppable force.

Jacob sinks to his knees. He laughs.

CUT TO BLACK.