

# *"Fake"*

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Inspired by the Screenplay  
*The Day the World Ended*

By Lou Rusoff & Roger Corman



Jake was tired. It was all he cared about. He stumbled forward looking for anything at all that showed signs of civilization. He could feel the wind blowing against his face and through the holes in his jumpsuit. One of his boots also squished with every step, was full of blood and sweat and grime from days of traveling non stop through the rocky wasteland. All Jake wanted to do was fall over in a heap and go to sleep.

But he could not do that.

He knew falling asleep out in the open meant horrible death. And anytime he stopped for a moment to catch his breath, to inhale the burning air, the moans of agony would whisper through the winds again. He could hear women and children screaming. He could hear animals yelping in pure pain. He could hear the crashes of cars, trucks, the crumbling buildings. He could hear the loud clap of thunder that had caused Jake to go deaf for almost two days straight.

There were unmoving shadows plastered at the feet of what remained of once tall and proud skyscrapers, engraved like pictures. There were the charred remains of brush along the trails that would crumble to dust with the slightest touch just like the remains of bodies, charred black, the wind blowing pieces of them away, the falkes traveling with the constant dust cloud that settled into the area.

Fuck.

Jake tripped, crawled forward for a bit, coughed, desperately wanted water to soothe his scratchy throat and cracked tongue. But just as before, those sounds cascading around him, made Jake shoot up in a mixture of pure horror and instinct. He had once told himself it was all just a memory, his imagination. But that no longer worked, the memories too powerful, those sounds embedded like some kind of imprinted image.

It made him continue pushing forward, each step heavy, his stride getting smaller and smaller as his arms wobbled back and forth. And soon he found the voices and screams drifting away again making Jake crack the smallest of smiles as he let the silence consume him.

Then his right foot came to a jarring halt, his body tumbling forward, dirt now plastered and cutting into the bare skin along his lower jaw and cheek.

He quickly reached forward, needed to move, did not want to hear the screams again. But instead of finding the typical dry and grainy dirt he had come to expect, Jake found himself clutching on something cold and soft. He found himself almost frightened by the sensation of something that felt similar to thin paper. But it was not paper. It was something Jake had almost forgotten had existed. It was slightly sticky, slightly moist. And the sight made tears drip down from his sore, bloodshot eyes.

It was grass.

What had once been such a mundane color was now the most beautiful color he had ever seen. It was not yellow. It was not the white concrete dust that blew in the wind. It was the purest shade of green he had ever laid eyes on. The memory of every house once having such a beautiful thing growing around them gave Jake the strength he needed to get up and step forward. He found himself laughing for no particular reason, discovered the green was so alien to him that he needed to shut his eyes for a moment. It was so beautiful, so peaceful, so full of life, something that Jake had almost forgotten ever existed.

Almost.

Not quite.

And then he flung his eyes open faster than ever before as he heard the screams and howls slowly catching up to him. There would not be much time until they surrounded him, and Jake ran. No longer did he care about the pain. No longer did he care about his lungs burning in protest. No longer did he care about how dry his mouth was. All he cared about was escaping those whines and hollars that plagued him wherever he went.

He could see trees now, their leaves just as green as the grass. Pine trees too. Rose bushes lined the trail Jake found himself traveling, sunflowers between each bush that reached up for the sky and displayed their utter beauty. Jake wanted to know what kind of place this was. He wanted to know how such life could thrive when everywhere else was the definition of hell. But what did it really matter?

He ran.

And ran.

And ran until something brought him to a complete halt. It was even more beautiful than the grass, the trees, the bushes, the flowers. It was something only the hands of man could build. It was something Jake had desperately wanted to find but had thought were all gone and blown away with the great winds, a distant and fading memory.

It was a house.

The walls were made of wooden logs, the doorway a deep red, the roof black with neatly laid out tiles. The door even held a welcome sign painted in a deep green with white lettering. If this was not a miracle, Jake did not know what was. So he charged forward, the last bit of strength he had thrusting towards the building. Jake found himself smashing into the front door, clawed at the wood, face flat against it. He discovered he had forgotten how to open it, how a door even functioned. But he had to think fast for the sounds were coming. It drove Jake into a frenzy. He had to get in!

Had to get in!

Have to get in!

A knob!

His mind clicked into place, remembered the simple function. He reached for it, discovered the bronze knob, twisted it, then found himself tumbling to a hard floor. But this time he did not stumble about. The voices and screams were coming. He had to shut the door, twisted around, then slammed it shut until all his strength was utterly gone. He collapsed on the hardwood floor, felt the wind and the screams knocking just beyond the new barrier between Jake and the outside, and for the first time in a while, Jake felt safe.

When Jake awoke, night had settled outside. He could not see a thing, panicked for a moment, then remembered where he was. His chest pumped wildly, made his whole body tremble as he desperately tried to calm himself. Jake even closed his eyes and counted to ten, could remember his mother teaching him it was the best method to calm himself. It seemed to work. Jake's pulse slowed, breaths following, body returning to normal.

He needed some kind of light, suddenly remembered the cigarette lighter in his pocket. He pulled it out, clicked it twice, and the flame erupted from the nozzle. It did little, but was enough for him to see a wooden table and a chandelier hang over it. Candles lined the chandelier, and Jake stood on a chair to make himself taller, lit the whickes individually. Slowly the room illuminated nicely, and Jake put the lighter away, got off the wooden chair, and studied his surroundings.

He could see three rooms. One looked like a den, had two rocking chairs and a small handmade couch. Aligning the back wall was a large clear sliding door. The other was a kitchen with a white sink and a hand pump faucet. Could there be water? Jake decided to test that first, approached it with eagerness and pumped the handle. Water poured into the sink and Jake found himself screaming with pure joy at how clear it was. He drank some, wallowed in the wetness of it, let it soothe his mouth and throat before he swallowed. Then he shook, began to cry, remembered a time when he wanted to get a drink and that a drink was ready at all times. It was usually made by his mother. Now he had it again, and he drank more, and more, and more until his gut was ready to burst.

Next Jake entered the den, got a good look at the couch, saw a wool blanket neatly folded over the cushions. There was a picture on the wall behind it, one of a family, a mother, father, and little boy with piercing blue eyes. He looked so happy, so full of joy. Jake could remember a time when he was like that... just his his mother and he.

Candles were there as well, and Jake wasted no time lighting them. He snuffled then, realised he was still crying from before, laughed to himself as he looked out the sliding doors. They were almost like two giant windows, and he approached them to see what was out there. He could see grass, the vague outlines of trees, but that was it, and it was all Jake needed to know there was life. He wanted to examine them in the morning, to see if they were the same kind of flowers his mother use to pick during the summer months.

He turned back around, wondered if the family in the picture had owned this place or if it was some kind of summer home. Perhaps they would return? But Jake thought how stupid they must have been to not only want to leave this garden of eden, but also leave the door unlocked.

It was then that Jake noticed a stairway made of stained wood. He approached it and began walking to the second floor. There was not much room up there, the ceiling walls folding inwards to make a triangle, but he could see a large bed with wool blankets and a straw pillow. It looked heavenly, and Jake found himself being drawn to it without much thought. He plopped on top of it and let out an audible sigh, put both hands behind his head, draped his legs off the side. It felt so wonderful to lay on something that was not the hardened wasteland floor, or a makeshift bed created from structural remains.

Then came a knocking from down below, was from the entry door. Jake shot up, ran down the stairs, nearly tripped over his ratty boots. He stopped, looked at the door, saw nothing, decided to remain still. He thought he might have imagined the sound, something from a waking dream, but immediately heard the knocks again, three distinctive pats on the door. Then came the howling wind, then rain. He could hear the water smash against the ceiling like bricks falling from the sky. It made him turned, looked out the den windows and saw thick droplets crash into the ground outside.

Three more knocks.

It must know he was in there, and Jake turned back around, stared at the front door. A flash of lightning illuminated the room in an instant, then the boom of thunder followed causing Jake to hold his ears. He inhaled sharply, the sound echoing in his mind, and he fell to his knees, found himself begging for the noise to go away.

Three more knocks.

Jake gasped, looked up, threw his arms down. He was not mad. What if that was another person like him out there? What if they needed help like he did? But as Jake stood, he got a good look at his hands. From where he had placed them over his hears, he had evidently pulled out some of his black hair. He had not felt it. Perhaps it was in the heat of the moment, but he thought little of it as he moved closer to the door.

He threw it open before his thoughts and fears could take control. But nothing was there, only darkness and rain. Jake took two steps outside, kept one hand on the door, saw nothing. But before he moved back inside, plastered onto the wooden porch were bare and muddy footprints. He took out his lighter, kneeled down, examined the prints carefully. They were humanoid, but something was noticeably different about them. Jake could not tell what made them different, but a dreadful feeling crept up his spine.

He walked forward, followed the naked prints until they reached the edge of the porch. Then noticed them disappear on the wet grass.

“Hey!” Jake shouted, fell silent suddenly as he remembered what his voice sounded like. It frightened him how cracked and broken his once booming voice had become. Months without speaking to anyone had killed it. “Hello?” He hollered several more times to no avail. Whoever had been here had run off, though the feeling of being watched never left him. Jake chopped it up to nerves and moved back inside.

By morning, Jake had discovered a basement full of canned food. There were noodles, tomatoes, corn, green beans, even some spam. Jake took no time at all to dig into some. The others be damned. He was hungry. He was going to eat, and the flavors nearly sent him into a sensation overload.

The first thing he felt was his jaw cramping up, but it was quick to dissipate as the flavors consumed his tongue. He swallowed and could swear he felt the food traveling into his empty stomach. Never before had he thought spam tasted so delicious, and then he dug into a can of corn, then beans. It was simple, took a knife to open the cans, then peeled the lid back with his thumb and index finger. He had no spoon, did not care to look for one, simply ate with his hands. But who cares? This was food.

While chewing the beans, Jake suddenly noticed something hard swirling about his mouth, could taste a bit of iron. He pinned the object with his tongue and he swallowed the beans, then reached into his mouth and pulled it out. He held it with his left hand, examined it carefully, saw it was stained a yellowish brown.

It was a tooth.

Jake blinked for a moment, then with his other hand reached into his mouth and felt around. He could feel a tender gap between two molars, quickly withdrew the finger to find some blood on it. There was not enough to cause alarm. But he found himself growing annoyed, breathed through his nostrils and he shifted his focus from the molar back to his bloodied finger. His tongue began to probe the gap, but that did not last long as Jake found his stomach growling for more food. He put the tooth down, picked up the beans, and continued to eat.

Jake walked outside. Despite the plant life around him, it was unnervingly quiet. There were no birds chirping, no bugs pestering him. Everything was eerily quiet except for the trees blowing calmly in the wind. It was like the area was void of animal life, and it unnerved Jake. But he kept looking around, secretly hoped to find any sign of whatever had walked on the porch.

No longer could Jake hear the screams and howls and agonizing moans. It was like they had vanished into thin air, and now that it was gone, Jake found himself almost missing it. Things were too quiet here. Things were too still here. Things were just too...

Jake did not know how to continue that train of thought, but could only reminisce about a time before all this had occurred. A time before the shadows became plastered on surfaces. A time before all buildings were flattened. A time before the rivers had dried up and the air became toxic to breathe. And it made Jake chuckle to himself. He had started to think those horrors as a new normal. And that places like this were all a fantasy.

He touched the stem of a rose, careful to ignore the thorns, like his mother had always told him. But he was surprised to find it easy to pull out, felt a slime squish in his fingers. Just beneath the surface of this gorgeous plant was not the green like Jake had come to expect, but a brownish gunk that reeked of decay. Jake threw it down on the lawn, tried one more, found it the same way as the other.

So it made sense now... this place no different than any other.

But dread did not fill Jake like he thought it would. Instead he felt unphased, neither good nor bad. He felt nothing at all, and despite Jake wanting to be scared by this fact, he found he could not.

Nothing.

That itself was an odd feeling.

Before Jake turned to go back inside, something had moved out of the corner of his eye. He turned, looked in the direction where the movement had come, then ran forward, placed his hand on a pine tree. He looked down, saw a footprint in the mud, was the same as those on the porch. That uneasiness had returned, as if something were watching him. He could swear he heard breathing off in the distance, the breaths slow, even, and rhythmic.

In the blink of an eye, Jake found himself running back for the house, his mind racing, his body bursting with energy, his heart pounding in unimaginable fear. Then he was inside, slamming the door shut, skidded to the floor. All was quiet again, the pounding in his ears dissipating, reality coming back. And he pulled his knees into his chest and rocked back and forth, the sensation of closeness with his own body soothing his nerves and relaxing his poisonous thoughts.

Yet not even this could relax him as he ran his hands through his black hair. He discovered more had fallen out into his grasp, some dropping to the floor around him, and Jake screamed in pure horror. He tugged at what remained, it all tumbling down until almost nothing was left atop of his head, and his breathing became fast, shallow, began to hyperventilate, body shaking, body gasping for more air Jake was refusing to let in. He felt suffocated, pulled more hair out, screamed and shouted, cursed himself, cursed the house, cursed this land...

But he thought of his mother, then counted to ten. It forced him to relax. It forced him to remain calm.

Until it was night again.

And the storms had returned.

So did the three knocks.

He sat and watched the door, just staring, listening, no emotions, nothing. It was as if his mind was turning to mush, like the plants outside, no comprehensive thoughts at all. His mouth hung open as the rain poured onto the house with a ferocity, then the three knocks, then the flash of lightning followed by the clap of thunder.

By next morning, the man explored the house more. He looked at himself in the mirror, could see his cheek bones prominently and dark rings under his eyes. He examined himself further, stripped, looked over his body. He noticed the patches of hair on his stomach and chest had also begun to fall out, though it did not surprise him. His ribcage was now protruding prominently, and the man decided he needed to eat more, then looked down at the tattered remains of his suit.

Moving upstairs, he explored the drawers that lined the right wall. It was full of old clothing, mainly t-shirts and jeans. He put them on, noted that they were a little too big but it was better than the wrags he had once worn. It made him feel somewhat human again, if only for a brief moment as he moved into the basement and ate his breakfast.

The meal was the same as the night before: spam, corn, and beans. But today, he found he could not eat as much, though not for his lack of hunger. By the time he had gotten to the beans, his stomach had begun to churn violently, and it screamed out in agony. The man was smart enough to stop, cursed himself, thought he had pushed himself too far.

He patrolled the outside again, though he found his joints aching much faster than the previous day. He decided then that he would not venture far. It was like this until nightfall, and he noted the storm clouds approaching again. It was time to move back inside, and no doubt his little visitor would return to knock on the door. He just readied himself and sat in the same chair as before facing the red door and waited.

As thunder roared, the man found it no longer scaring him as much as the flashes of lightning. It reminded him of the great light that had once blinded all those around him, and also reminded him of just how alone he was now. That blinding light had been the last time he had seen another person. The lightning only brought back the memories of those who were no longer there, even if he had known none of them when the incident had occurred.

The rain was heavy like before, but something was different this time. The man felt himself being watched, what remained of the hairs on the back of his neck standing, an un-nevering chill running up the base of his spine. It forced him to turn in his chair and look out the back window. He could see nothing but darkness until...



A flash.

Lighting.

Eyes.

They peered at him from the darkness, were housed upon a small body that crouched. It was quick, but the man had clearly seen it, stood despite every joint in his body screaming in protest.

Something was there!

Someone?

He rushed for the back doors, slid them open and moved into the rain. It shocked him how warm it was, clothing quickly drenched from head to toe.

He felt bipolar here. He was scared, like before, his mind screaming for him to remain alone and inside. But this was something... living... a chance for contact.

“Hey!” he called over and over again, but nothing was there. He was becoming desperate as he rounded the log cabin and called into the darkness. But there was no answer, no call back, no sign of the life he swore he had seen. And it disappointed him. He had hoped it to be someone, a person he could speak to. Perhaps they were just as lost as he?

But it was wishful thinking.

As the weeks rolled by, the man found himself growing skinnier and skinnier. He rarely looked at himself in the mirror, was afraid of what he would see. By now a lump had begun to grow at the base of his skull, a tumor. That was when he noticed his skin changing its color from pink to a sickly gray, the whites of his eyes turning yellow, blue veins beginning to protrude around his temples. He could practically feel it growing with every passing day, though he knew there was nothing he could do about it. He was also quick to notice the jeans becoming looser and looser, found himself constantly having to pull them up. The food was also not enjoyable anymore. He would eat little, and his body would protest.

His back had begun to arch itself forward, arms drooping more, knees bending. He found the stance more comfortable than standing upright. Even when he sat the man would take this arched stance. He found the more he sat upright, the more his entire body would scream in agony, specifically the joints. Those in his knees, elbows, and wrists had swollen considerably, each tender and housing a sickly blue bruise.

Then the knocking came back... Three distinct knocks at the front door.

Who was this?

He moved from his seat and lunged for the door, ripped it open as fast as he could and was greeted by rain and wind. "H... hey!" He found his voice to be cracky and unnerving now. It made him speak little, afraid to hear what it would sound like the next day. But like before, there was no answer. But through the darkness he could feel a presence, though not malignant this time.

Reaching into his jean pocket, he pulled out his lighter and flicked on the flame. It was not much, but enough to illuminate the area. What he saw both scared him and sent him into a state of awe. He could not help but stand there and gasp at the thing crouched before him and cowering against a tree trunk while in the rain getting himself soaked.

It crouched, knees bent up, arms holding them as if in a fetal position. Its skin was a sickly shade of grey mixed with blotches of yellow and green from bruises just under the surface. Its features were almost human, but decayed, reverted back to a primitive state, all except the head. This thing's cranium was bulging, consumed with tumors, was much larger than it should be, similar to an infant's. The thing also breathed through its mouth, the nose possible blocked by some kind of tumor. The man could see it had little for teeth but could not make out the details of its gums or tongue.

Yet it was the thing's eyes that kept the man from running away. They looked so afraid, like a small child being scolded by a parent. They were yellow but the pupils were still a baby blue. He could not place a finger on it, but something about this... thing's... gaze kept him from looking away despite the slight sense of primal fear that washed over him. Those eyes were screaming a mixture of fright and yet pleading from something else entirely. They were familiar yet alien.

They were the eyes of the boy in the family portrait.

What had happened to him?

That was when all his primal urges to flee vanished, and the man found himself crouching lower to get down to its level, and he gestured for the thing.

"Hello," he said, but to no response. The thing did not answer, but seemed to straighten itself slightly. It did not run away, which the man thought was good. He did not want to lose the first thing he had seen alive since the blinding flash.

He gestured to himself. "I'm..." He thought for a moment, could see it in front of him, his mind begging for him to say it.

What was his name?

He could even see it.

J

A

K

E

Yet he could not say it. He had forgotten his name?

All other emotions drained away in an instant. The man stood in pure fear, scaring the creature away. It clambored off into the brush, running like an ape on all fours, gone in the blink of an eye.

But the man could care less. How could he forget his own name? It was his identity, the only thing he really had left from a life long gone. He banged his head with his hand, let the lighter go out, began to scream.

“Come on, man! It’s your fucking name! For god sake!” he called out over and over again, could no longer tell if it was the warm rain dripping down his face or tears. How could he? Had it been because he had not heard it for so long? Because he had not spoken even to himself? Because no one was around? Because he was alone?

He looked back to find the small creature had vanished, was not surprised, knew his sudden and violent actions would have scared it off. It made the man feel hopeless and he slowly turned back around, knees slightly bent forward, arms drooping, back hunched, and walked back inside the house.

From that night on, the man had begun to notice more changes happening within him. He no longer could wear the clothing he had found, the pants so large they would fall as soon as he let them go, the shirts so long they covered him like a dress. He had grabbed his knife to cut the jeans, to make them into something that would fit, but before he could start, he found himself no longer caring. He just let the jeans sit there, let the knife rest beside them.

It became harder and harder to think coherently. He would think of single words like “food,” and, “drink,” and “house.” But that was it. Forming complete sentences was a challenge all on its own, and while it scared him at first, by now he no longer cared, like a switch turning in his brain telling him everything was okay. He no longer cared that he could not remember his own name, or that most of his thoughts were of singular words and not sentences. He no longer cared that all he wore was a long t-shirt that dropped to his bent and bulging knees.

He no longer cared that it hurt to walk upright at all. He no longer cared that in order for him to move he needed to be hunched forward so far he moved as if on all fours. He no longer cared that his stomach had begun to bulge outwards as the enzymes and acids began to erode the lining of his intestines. He no longer cared about the tumors the now protruded from his lower spine, the base of his neck, and now his forehead. He no longer cared about the blue veins that snaked along his neck, stomach, swollen joints, and eyes. Nothing mattered to him at all really.

Except the image of a woman picking flowers. He could no longer remember who it was, just the residual image of her.

He crawled from upstairs, had bitten his way into a can to eat whatever was in it. He had lost two more teeth in the process, his gums now bleeding, but the ache in his stomach was gone. That was all he cared about for the time being.

He sat with his knees up to his chest on the couch overlooking the backyard. It was warm outside, the clouds clear, the grass still a vibrant green. The sun shined upon the flowers perfectly, showing their vibrant shades of blues, reds, and yellows. They blew side to side with the wind, a gentle breeze keeping the air from becoming stale or uncomfortable. And the more he watched them, the more he wanted to go outside and be with them.

He could see the woman now, her face smiling as she picked away at her garden. He was no longer sure who this was, but his mind kept her image fresh and he could all but see her actually standing there. It often relaxed him, thinking of her before he would close his eyes and let sleep take control of his body. It was having that same effect now. But he wished he had remembered her name, who she was, why she was always a presence in his ever receding mind.

With little effort, the man climbed down off the chair and slid open the back doors, shutting them behind him. He breathed through his nose, loved the smell. The more the man stayed outside, the more he wanted to remain there. The inside was too difficult, too surrounded by weak memories that caused only anger and confusion now. The outside had none of this. Not here.

As he crawled his way towards the front yard, he stopped, found he was no longer alone as the thing from before had reared its head again. It watched him curiously. The man treated it the same way, just watching. It had been months since they had last seen each other, and now the other thing seemed no longer afraid or startled. It just sat there on all fours, just as the man, and looked at him as if trying to piece together some kind of puzzle.

The man crawled forward to get closer, decided to take the initiative. He wanted to say something, perhaps like before, but found only a weak and incoherent sound had escaped his cracked and blue lips. But that was okay. Language no longer mattered to the man just like it no longer mattered to the creature before him. To his surprise, the thing seemed to respond to this call, did not get close, but moved in with cautious steps.

Both of them stared at each other, no malice in their eyes or features, and for the first time in a while, the man felt at ease. He felt calmed at knowing something else was here with him, and he believed the creature felt similarly.

They never got close to each other, but every day they would appear from the bushes to around the front yard where nothing in particular would happen. Every time, the man would envision the woman from his mind, then go back to his little den he made of brush, twigs, and leaves. It was comfortable enough for him, the house now all but a memory. It was a place he did not want to return to, a place he quietly feared. It was not the presence of the house, more of its interioris. The man actively avoided the windows so he would not either see himself nor the contents within. Though one day he happened to spot a reflection, and he could no longer recognize his own self.

This was unlike the other creature who would crawl along the porch awkwardly on its hind legs, then knock on the door three times. The thing seemed to do this every night without avail, as if expecting someone new to open the doors.

Every night it would storm, but the man did not care. He liked the rain now. He welcomed the warm water and loved the sensation over his tumor filled skin. But one night was different. It was not just the standard flashes of lightning and claps of thunder that permeated the area. This time, the man was startled awake by the sound of something running, something moving up the main pathway which lead to the house.

He crawled forward, was quine to stay low to the ground, did not want to be seen, sensed danger. The other one was nowhere to be found, but he could see an upright figure moving forward. It ran fast, much faster than anything the man had seen in a while. He kept his eyes pinned on it, the figure making its way for the house. It clawed at the door, then reached the handle, and stumbled inside.

The man was unsure of what to make of this, but moved back to his den, could no longer sense immediate danger. He laid down and fell fast asleep thinking of the woman he always did.

By the following night, the man was curious once again, hearing the sounds of shuffling, the familiar gape of the other creature. He reached forward, moved the brush out of his way and saw the thing up on the porch on its hind legs. It was knocking on the door, three distinct taps echoing against the never ending stream of rain. And then the thing moved along the porch, and crawled its way back into the brush.

As the house door opened, the man sensed danger, ducked quickly, then saw someone standing there, a small light in his hands. It was much brighter than he had expected. But he could see who it was in the doorway, someone he thought he would never see again, someone he had hoped never to see again.

It was another man... fully clothed... standing upright... Human.

And in the back of his mind, he could barely remember that he was once like this. He was once bipedal, knew what it was this new individual controlled and wielded. But it was all just a fleeting memory. It was there, and now it is gone.

All he could do was sit still, knees to his chest, and try to remember who he was, and what he was. But only one thing kept coming back to his mind over and over again, and he found himself whispering. It was not to anyone, more to himself, as if he needed to hear it said aloud in order to believe it.

“I am Jake.”

There was no meaning to the words, only the sounds. Yet once they were said, Jake felt better about things, though he did not know why.

He then crawled back to his den, thought of the woman picking the flowers, and fell asleep.