

CHECK THE LOCKS

A Fidgety Folktale by

Eric Larson



CONFIDENTIAL - PLEASE DO NOT DISTRIBUTE

BLACK SCREEN.

We HEAR the CRUNCH AND CRACKLE OF TIRES on a GRAVEL ROAD.

And then: a VOICE. It sounds TINNY and DISTANT -- as if it's playing from a crappy CELL PHONE SPEAKER.

VOICE (O.S.)
Hey, it's me again. Sorry we keep
missing each other.

CUT TO:

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - LATE AFTERNOON

LOOKING OUT THE PASSENGER'S SIDE WINDOW

TALL PINE TREES whip across frame. Between them, we catch an occasional ray of hazy sunlight -- the only peek into the world outside this DENSE WILDERNESS.

VOICE (O.S.)
Blame the dog shit cell service up
there. Small price to pay for the
view, though.

LONG LENS CLOSE ON A CELL PHONE IN THE TRUCK'S CUPHOLDER

A voicemail from "ANDREW" is playing -- the voice we hear.

A small BOTTLE OF PILLS is wedged alongside the phone; the knee of the DRIVER blurred in the B.G.

ANDREW
(from phone)
Anyway. My parents wanted me to
tell you they left some wine in the
basement.

The driver reaches down and picks up the pill bottle.

OVER-THE-SHOULDER SHOT OF THE DRIVER

We see her eyes in the rearview mirror: BLOODSHOT behind a PAIR OF GLASSES. She swallows a handful of pills.

ANDREW (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(from phone; laughing)
Maybe just dust it off first.

Through the front windshield, a DIRT ROAD twists through a JUNGLE OF FERNS. She turns on her HEADLIGHTS with a CLACK.

TIGHT SHOT OF THE STEERING WHEEL

The driver squeezes the wheel. Her skin is CRACKED and DRY.

ANDREW (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 (from phone; gentler)
 Listen... just try to relax. Okay?

TIGHT SHOT OF THE PHONE

ANDREW (CONT'D)
 (from phone)
 This will be good for you.

EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

A SHOT OF THE SKY AS VIEWED FROM THE TOP OF THE CAR

The forest's trees almost form a CANOPY. A SLIVER OF CHARCOAL SKY, center-framed between branches, grows thinner as we move forward -- as the woods grow WILDER.

A LOW, DRONING SCORE fades in, escalating slightly as the sky becomes more obscured.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

LONG LENS CLOSE OF A FERN PLANT NEXT TO THE ROAD

We see the truck's headlights -- blurred in the B.G. -- as it ambles past the plant.

A SWIRLING CLOUD OF DIRT rises in its wake. The particles FALL LIKE SNOW onto the swaying fern leaf.

The SCORE continues to build -- a DREADFUL, OMINOUS TONE.

INT. TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE SHOT OF THE DRIVER'S EYES

They blink once, then SHIFT CURIOUSLY to the right...

LOOKING OUT THE DRIVER'S SIDE WINDOW

Through a SNARLING PATCH OF TREES, shrouded in ENCROACHING DARKNESS, we see...

A SMALL LOG CABIN.

EXT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The truck pulls to a stop in front of the cabin. The driver's door slowly opens, and out of it steps:

ANNA. The driver.

We see her in full for the first time. She's nearing thirty. She takes in the landscape with a suspicious stare.

The SCORE continues escalating. Strings, screeching in a MENACING MELODY, cut in over the low drone sound.

Anna pulls a duffel bag over her shoulder, faces the cabin, then shuts the truck door with a *WHAP-*

-and the score *CUTS OUT*. In its place, quiet forest ambiance.

SUPERIMPOSE IN LARGE YELLOW TEXT: "CHECK THE LOCKS"

Anna LOCKS the truck door. Pulls the handle once. Satisfied, she steps toward the house -- then PAUSES.

She turns back to the car. Pulls the locked door again.

WE BEGIN TO SLOWLY CRAWL TOWARD HER AS SHE...

Pulls the locked door. Then again. And again.

The PULL of the handle begins to form a RHYTHMIC CADENCE.

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

CUT TO A LONG LENS CLOSE OF ANNA'S FACE, HANDHELD

Her face is frozen in a TORMENTED EXPRESSION -- as if she CAN'T CONTROL HER BODY from doing this.

She breathes heavily. We PUSH CLOSER to her face until it feels uncomfortable; claustrophobic.

CUT TO A CLOSE OF HER HAND ON THE DOOR HANDLE, HANDHELD

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

Finally, she PAUSES -- pulls out her phone -- and SNAPS A PICTURE of the CAR DOOR.

CUT BACK TO LONG LENS, HANDHELD CLOSE OF ANNA'S FACE

She lets out a long breath. Gives a subtle nod in relief.

This is her routine.

INT. 1ST FLOOR HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

TIGHT SHOT OF THE FRONT DOORKNOB

We hear keys jingling from the other side. The door bursts open as Anna (we only see her waist from this angle) shuffles inside. She closes the door behind her. Locks it.

She lingers for a beat -- then begins her routine.

Lock. Unlock. Lock. Unlock.

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

After a few rounds, she snaps a picture of the knob.

INT. CABIN KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

FOLLOW HER FROM BEHIND, HANDHELD

She enters the kitchen. It's small and dimly lit. Thick, off-white drapes cover the windows.

She peels one of the drapes back, inhaling a cloud of dust as a dull beam of late-day sunlight shoots into the room.

WE CONTINUE FOLLOWING HER INTO THE LIVING ROOM-

INT. CABIN LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The same long drapes cover the windows in this room, giving the appearance of GHOSTS STANDING SIDE BY SIDE.

There's a MOUNTED DEER HEAD on the middle wall. A corner bookshelf stacked with OLD HARDCOVERS. Cobwebs everywhere.

Anna curiously approaches the bookshelf. She runs a finger along a row of spines. We see the title of one: "*THE YELLOW WALL-PAPER*" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

She looks down at her feet and frowns. *She's noticed something.*

She slides her foot back across the hardwood floor and sees... a FOOTPRINT. Not hers: a *barefeet footprint*. Made of PALE, CAKED MUD. It's facing the bookshelf. She'd stepped perfectly on top of it by coincidence.

She takes another step back. As her eyes adjust to the darkness, she notices the barefeet footprints form a LINE...

...which leads directly to a door to the porch.

CUT TO TIGHT VIEW OF ANNA'S BOOTS

We TRUCK RIGHT with her feet as she slowly walks amongst the line of footprints to the door. She opens it.

CUT TO ANNA POV OF THE PORCH

We pan left. Then right. The porch is COMPLETELY EMPTY.

EXT. CABIN BACK PORCH - CONTINUOUS

WE FLIP TO CENTER WIDE OF ANNA STANDING IN THE DOORWAY

She looks perplexed. She backs inside and shuts the door. Through the window, we see her futzing with the locks.

We hear: *CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.*

We slowly PULL OUT WIDE and begin to see the ENTIRE CABIN. A sea of GHOSTLY EVERGREENS, and nothing else, surround it.

As we continue pulling back, we hear the sound of Anna's camera phone -- *SNAP!* -- then see her silhouette leave the porch door window.

WE PULL BACK FURTHER. We see the DARK, STILL-AS-GLASS LAKE beneath us. The orange glow from the cabin's windows contrasts against the COLD, BLACK SHADOWS of the quickly darkening landscape.

And then:

We HEAR an EERIE, SLOW-BUILDING TONE: a *tortured choral note*. SCORE turns to SOUND as the note evolves into a WHISTLE...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CABIN KITCHEN - LATER THAT NIGHT

CLOSE UP SHOT OF A WHISTLING TEA KETTLE

MIST SHOOTS out of the NOZZLE. Anna's hand reaches in, turns off the burner, and pulls the kettle out of frame.

CUT TO WIDE SHOT OF ANNA SITTING AT THE KITCHEN TABLE

She stares absent-mindedly ahead. The remnants of a simple dinner lay scattered in front of her: a plate and fork smeared with red sauce, a crumpled napkin. Next to that, a STEAMING MUG OF TEA.

FLIP TO TIGHT SHOT BEHIND ANNA'S HEAD

The back of her head looks almost statuesque. She sits dead still. The only movement: the steam from her tea. The only sound: the light buzzing of cicadas. Hold. Until...

HEH-HEH-HEH! A SOFT, WITCH-LIKE CACKLE FROM OUTSIDE!

Anna SPINS her head toward the noise. Freezes.

Slowly, she stands and approaches the kitchen window, which is still covered in thick drapes. She peels back the drapes and peers into the darkness outside.

CUT TO POV LOOKING THROUGH THE WINDOW

Through the glass, we see a patch of grass subtly brightened by the light from the kitchen. Other than that: BLACKNESS.

CUT TO LONG LENS CLOSE ON ANNA'S FACE, HANDHELD

She stares out the window, wide-eyed. She begins to breathe heavily. She grabs her chest.

She's having a panic attack.

CUT TO CLOSE OF HER HANDS

With a shaking hand, she pulls out her phone-

BANG! She DROPS IT ON THE COUNTER, scartling herself.

ANNA

Fuck!

CUT BACK TO LONG LENS CLOSE OF HER FACE

She scoops up her phone and stares down at it, the BLUE LIGHT FROM THE SCREEN flushing over her cheeks.

CUT TO CLOSE OF PHONE SCREEN

She shakily scrolls through her photos:

- The porch door: *CLOSED and LOCKED*
- The front door: *CLOSED and LOCKED*
- The car door: *CLOSED and LOCKED*

BACK TO LONG LENS CLOSE OF HER FACE

Her breathing slows; her shoulders drop. Her attack appears to subside.

The photos seem to serve an almost MEDICINAL PURPOSE.

CUT TO POV LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW

No movement outside. And then: a *howl*. Then another. A chorus of high, LAUGH-LIKE HOWLS begins to echo across the darkness.

CUT BACK TO ANNA

She emits a relieved laugh. *Coyotes*.

She opens her pill bottle and plops a couple into her mouth. Takes a sip from her mug. Then-

She notices something curious across the counter: a single wine glass.

INT. BASEMENT STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

BLACKNESS.

A door opens; light floods into the void. We see Anna's silhouette at the top of a staircase. She flicks a lightswitch, but it doesn't work.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

With her PHONE FLASHLIGHT turned on, Anna navigates the dark basement. We PAN ACROSS A CORNER and see a messily-arranged CLUMP OF BOXES, each filled with more hardcover books.

She moves on, turning her flashlight in the other direction. There, in the farthest corner, illuminated in the dim, circular glow of the light, is a WINE RACK -- with ONE BOTTLE.

Nervously, she moves through the basement toward the rack.

CLOSE OF WINE BOTTLE

We see Anna's hand, illuminated in the flashlight, extend toward the bottle. In a fast, sweeping motion, she SWIPES the bottle from the rack, half-running back to the stairs, as we-

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CABIN KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

QUICK DETAIL SHOTS:

- The bottom of the bottle is dropped onto the kitchen table
- A drawer is yanked open

- A corkscrew uncorks the wine bottle with a *PLOP!*
- A glass is filled to the brim with RED WINE

CUT TO:

WIDE SHOT OF ANNA SITTING AT THE TABLE, LATER

She tops off her now-empty glass. As she sets the bottle back onto the table, we see that it's nearly empty.

The bottle's label shows a minimalistic sketch of a GODDESS. The goddess's eyes, BLACK, POOL-LIKE HOLES, peer out from under a CROWN OF SKULLS.

The illustration vaguely resembles Anna. Underneath the sketch is the name "OIZEE."

Anna, oblivious, takes a long sip and closes her eyes.

EXT. CABIN - LATER

The night is still. Insects buzz. A LONE LIGHT, on the second floor of the cabin, casts an ORANGE GLOW -- then SHUTS OFF.

INT. 1ST FLOOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

WE MOVE DOWN THE HALLWAY TOWARD THE KITCHEN

It's dark, save for the moonlight. As we push forward, we hear a familiar sound O.S.

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

WE MOVE INTO THE KITCHEN

The wine bottle, now empty, lies in the sink.

WE MOVE INTO THE LIVING ROOM

The long white drapes slightly sway. We move past them and over to the STAIRWELL-

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

UP THE STAIRS-

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

WE TURN RIGHT at the top of the stairs. At the end of the hallway is a CLOSED DOOR-

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

We MOVE TOWARD IT-

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE DOOR.

Anna finishes her routine on the lock. Snaps a picture.

She moves toward the bed with a slight sway. She's buzzed from the wine. She KICKS OFF HER SHOES, then collapses face-first on top of the duvet.

CUT TO A CLOSE, LONG LENS SHOT OF THE NIGHTSTAND

Anna's body, lumped on top of the bed, is blurred in the B.G. We see her pull her glasses from her face, then sloppily drop them, upside down, into focus, onto the nightstand.

We hear her breathing start to slow.

HOLD.

And then-

CUT TO CLOSE OF ANNA'S FACE

Her eyes SNAP OPEN. She gasps. She's now lying on her back. Hours have passed. It's the middle of the night.

She sits up and slowly squints around the room with the confusion of someone awakening, still slightly drunk, in an unfamiliar location. Then: something makes her FREEZE.

CUT TO POV

Standing motionless in a dark corner of the room (almost too dark to make out) is A FIGURE.

IT'S WATCHING HER.

The figure's body is OBSCURED IN SHADOWS, save for its MOUTH, which smiles DEVILISHLY WIDE, its white teeth visible beneath the darkness; and its BARE FEET, illuminated by a pale sliver of moonlight.

CUT BACK TO ANNA

Nearly PARALYZED WITH FEAR, she reaches for her glasses, grabs them, then shoves them onto her face-

CUT BACK TO POV

We see her glasses move up and over frame. As they do, the FIGURE VANISHES.

CUT BACK TO ANNA

She remains motionless. Her breathing intensifies. She grabs her chest. ANOTHER PANIC ATTACK IS IN MOTION.

As she reaches for her phone-

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

The sound of FOOTSTEPS in the hallway! BAREFEET ON HARDWOOD.

Anna, now fully paralyzed, stares at the door. We SLOWLY CRAWL toward the crack on the bottom of it. SOFT, PURPLE MOONLIGHT emanates from the other side.

HOLD.

Anna snaps to; brings her phone to her face. She's seeking comfort. Verification that this is *all in her head*.

From the safety of the bed, she scrolls again through her photos:

- The bedroom door: *CLOSED and LOCKED*

- The porch door: *CLOSED and LOCKED*

She's about to scroll to the next photo when-

PITTER PATTER! PITTER PATTER! PITTER PATTER!

The sound of RUNNING FEET! The footsteps sound almost playful, occasionally triggering a squeaky floorboard.

Anna closes her eyes. Begins to HYPERVENTILATE.

PULL OUT TO A MEDIUM WIDE OF ANNA IN BED

She opens her eyes, then brings her phone back up to her face (we only see the back of her phone from this angle).

She scrolls to the next photo -- *and GASPS*.

She LEAPS out of bed, throwing the phone onto the duvet, slowly backing away from it as if it's CURSED.

CUT TO A CLOSE OF THE PHONE LYING ON THE BED

On screen is the picture of the front door. IT'S NOW AJAR.

In the top corner of the screen, we see a "NO SERVICE" signal.

ANNA (O.S.)
 (whimpering)
 No... No... God, no...

HOLD on the phone.

Suddenly, Anna's hand reaches in and YANKS it out of frame.

After a beat, we hear her open the bedroom door to the hallway. It gives an eerie, Transylvanian *SQUEAK*.

Then: we hear a phone ringing. An OUTGOING CALL.

CUT TO:

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

FOLLOW ANNA FROM BEHIND, HANDHELD

Anna, phone to her ear, walks down the dark hallway. She flips the lightswitch. It doesn't work.

The ringing sound STOPS. Anna holds out her phone: on screen we see a "CALL FAILED" ERROR.

ANNA
 Shit!

She moves forward down the dark hallway, flipping on the FLASHLIGHT on her phone.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

We see the glow of the phone flashlight descending the stairwell. Anna rounds the corner into the living room. She tries the lightswitch. This one also doesn't work.

CUT TO ANNA POV

With the CELL PHONE LIGHT BEAM as a guide, we pan across the living room. Everything is still. We pause and linger on a set of FIRE POKERS near the BRICK FIREPLACE.

CUT BACK TO WIDE OF LIVING ROOM

Anna WIELDS A FIRE POKER from the rack. She looks down at her phone; presses it to her ear. We again hear the RINGING SOUND of an outgoing call. (*This ringing will continue in the background throughout the scene*).

We TRUCK LEFT as Anna walks behind the FIREPLACE. We pass the BRICK WALL and meet her again in the KITCHEN-

We see the HALLWAY LEADING TO THE FRONT DOOR. It's too dark to see into it.

Anna (FIRE POKER in one hand, PHONE in the other) APPROACHES THE HALLWAY and PEERS INSIDE-

INT. 1ST FLOOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

FLIP TO CLOSE OF ANNA'S FACE

She stares past camera, raising her CELL PHONE FLASHLIGHT-

CUT TO POV

Glowing in the FLASHLIGHT BEAM, we see the FRONT DOOR...

IT'S CLOSED.

CUT BACK TO ANNA

A confused look spreads across her face. She slowly approaches the door. Twists the knob...

IT'S LOCKED.

She opens PHOTOS on her phone. On screen, we see a photo of the front door. *IT'S NOW CLOSED.*

Anna squints down at the phone in confusion... then notices something else.

She slides her foot, which is now bare, a few inches back. Beneath her foot, perfectly in line with where she was standing, is a FOOTPRINT. Made of PALE, CAKED MUD.

She slowly turns around and notices a LINE OF BAREFEET FOOTPRINTS, made of the same ghostly material, leading from the front door and back through the hallway from where she came.

The prints lead around the corner into the living room, where a BLOOD ORANGE, OTHERWORLDLY GLOW IS NOW SHIMMERING!

A DREAMY, AMBIENT SCORE fades in.

Anna's expression is horrified.

CUT TO A TIGHT VIEW OF HER FEET

Cautiously, she takes one step toward the MYSTERIOUS LIGHT. Her foot lands perfectly on top of the next print.

CUT BACK TO A TIGHT VIEW OF HER FACE

Her face is almost entirely shrouded in the BLUE DARKNESS of the hallway, save for a sliver of her right cheek, which pulses in the FIERY GLOW from the living room.

CUT BACK TO HER FEET

She takes another step forward.

CUT BACK TO HER FACE

Her face, now even more painted with the BLOOD ORANGE SHIMMER, begins to lose its terror. Her eyes turn vacant.

CUT BACK TO HER FEET

We TRUCK LEFT with her as she takes two more steps forward, matching each step to the prints.

A RHYTHMIC, BANGING DRUM joins our score. It builds violently with each of her steps and the ONGOING RINGS.

CUT BACK TO HER FACE

Her face, now fully engulfed in orange, looks entranced. A STEELY MISCHIEF sparks to life in her eyes.

CUT BACK TO HER FEET

We TRUCK LEFT with her for two more steps.

She drops her phone, which is still searching for a signal.

It lands with a THUD, center-framed, in between her feet. We RACK FOCUS to the phone -- *just as the call is answered.*

ANDREW

(from phone; sleepily)

Hello? Hey, is everything oka-

CRACK! The tip of the fire poker SMASHES DOWN FROM ABOVE FRAME INTO THE PHONE, destroying it in a SHOWER OF SPARKS!

CUT TO WIDE VIEW FROM BEHIND ANNA

The SHIMMERING LIGHT frames her as a PHANTOM SILHOUETTE. Seeing her from this angle makes her look identical to the figure from her room. She drops the fire poker with a CLUNK.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

WIDE SHOT LOOKING TOWARD HALLWAY

THE GLOW is coming from behind us.

Anna rounds the corner from the hallway, trance-like, carefully stepping each foot onto the prints. The prints continue beyond the bottom of frame toward the source of the glow.

Anna slowly steps forward along the prints toward us, looking above camera in the direction of the light. She stops, framed in a TIGHT SHOT.

She peers past camera with a LOOK OF AWE. The ORANGE LIGHT TWISTS and FLICKERS in a COSMIC DANCE across her face.

She pulls off her glasses; drops them to the floor.

Her mouth stretches into a DEVILISH GRIN.

She breaks into a MANIC FIT OF LAUGHTER, TEARS STREAMING DOWN HER CHEEKS, SHOULDERS BOBBING UNCONTROLLABLY, EYES DEAD-FOCUSED ON SOMETHING ABOVE AND BEYOND THE FRAME-

Our SCORE, now with POUNDING DRUMS and COVEN-LIKE SCREAMS, CRESCENDOS FASTER and LOUDER until-

CUT HARD TO **BLACK**.

The SCORE CUTS.

HOLD.

Over the BLACK and SILENCE, we hear:

CLICK.

CLICK.

CLICK.

Then, we SUPERIMPOSE IN LARGE ORANGE TEXT: "**CHECK THE LOCKS**"

ROLL CREDITS.