

## ***The Other Side of Darkness***

by Alicia Kirk

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**Starring Christian Bale, Sally Hawkins, Jared Leto, Michael Fassbender and Lupita Nyong'o**

In rural Mississippi Gina (Sally Hawkins) is worried about her ten year old son, Cain, with husband Russ (Christian Bale). Cain has been acting up lately, getting more violent towards his younger brothers and sisters. A few trips to the ER have put Gina and Russ on the radar for possible child abuse, a fact that reached Russ' parole officer, Garrett (Jared Leto) is using to harass Russ as much as possible. Russ used to think of himself as a soldier in the war to separate the races, and his roots in white supremacist activities haven't faded enough for Garrett, who thinks Russ is exactly the kind of racist hillbilly that gives Mississippi a bad name and that the best place for him is back in prison.

Gina is afraid that in a few more years, Cain will be too big for her to physically control. Cain's school has tried to expel him but because of state education mandates, they can't kick him out until he has another place to go. The local school is K-12 and there isn't another one for 50 miles. The Principal has offered Gina one last hope, he'll agree to keep Cain in school as long as she and her husband will take their beleaguered son on a weekly trek to the Big City for family counseling. Gina convinces Russ to attend by giving her own ultimatum, if he does not do all he can to help their son, she will leave him to care for all their kids on his own; maybe after he treats enough cuts, bruises, and broken bones of the smaller kids he'll start to realize the threat Cain poses as he gets bigger and stronger every day.

In the Big City, Gina and Russ are underdressed and out of place in a professional environment. Their family psychologist is Ronda (Lupita Nyong'o), bright and friendly, no matter how horrible the story she hears, she remains warm and contemplative. After two sessions she asks to see Gina and Russ separately from Cain and broaches an explosive theory, that Gina and Russ are both violent people and part of a violent culture, and it's possible their son's behavior will adjust depending on the model they set. Gina and Russ are both immediately angry and defensive, at which point Ronda brings up the elephant in the room, the seemingly incendiary truth that Gina and Russ are white supremacists. An unexpectedly brilliant moment of candor actually calms them all down so they can talk openly. Gina and Russ acknowledge they used to be active in the cause and the movement but got caught up with the kids and holding multiple jobs, they don't have a passion for it, but it is their social circle. Ronda offers no judgment but asks them to be open minded about the effect that circle has on Cain.

Gina and Russ keep seeing Ronda and are surprised to find themselves less frustrated when dealing with each other and

their kids. Seeing Cain utilize Ronda's coping skills for dealing with his anger make them proud of their progress as parents, and revives a dedication to their marriage they had almost lost before seeing Ronda.

Garrett keeps tabs on Russ, waiting for his parolee to inevitably fuck up and get himself put back behind bars where he belongs. He finds out Ronda is treating Gina and Russ and tries to get information from her, but gets nowhere. He's frustrated that Ronda thinks she's helping this family and doesn't realize she's putting herself in danger. He aggressively details the crimes Russ has done time for along with many others where there wasn't enough evidence to make an arrest. Garrett has crime scene photographs of young children, victims of a bombing during a Martin Luther King Jr. Day Parade. The bomb was filled with chunks of metal covered in rat poison, the poison intended to make it impossible for victims blood to coagulate and ensure their death. Ronda is disturbed by the pictures, but more so by Garrett's drive to take Russ down.

Russ and his best friend Diesel (Michael Fassbender) go to a white supremacy rally as an excuse to go camping for a few days, drink and tell stories with old friends they haven't seen in a while. It's clear that the passionate ones are mostly kids in their early 20's, while Russ, Diesel, and their buddies drink and talk and laugh their asses off, never once speaking of the ideology that is tattooed on their skin. Late that night, Russ and Diesel have one last beer together before going to bed. While drunkenly bonding over their friendship of the ages, Russ shares about his newfound happiness with Gina. He's done seeing other girls, messing around on the mother of his children seems wrong now, somehow. Russ can't believe it, but his kids might not end up coming from a broken home. After all the crazy lunatic things he's done in his life, he actually might make it to the other side where he can think of himself as a good man without the sneaking suspicion that couldn't be farther from the truth. Diesel says he's happy for him, agrees that Gina is a great woman, and stares into the fire after Russ has gone to sleep.

Gina is working the checkout at Walmart when Diesel confronts her. She barely gets him out of the store before he's yelling at her and slapping her across the face. He chases her to the parking lot and corners her between two cars. He's furious that not only has she stopped returning his calls or his texts, but that she's reunited with Russ. Gina shouts at him and calls for help. Customers from the parking lot pull Diesel off of her as he's punching her face and dislodging her jaw.

Garrett corners Cain after school and tries to get the kid to admit he's seen his father beating up his mother. Cain refuses, so Garrett tells him that Russ beat Gina up at the Walmart, and when he sees his mother's face he can think again about protecting his psychopath of a father.

Ronda is at the hospital with Gina when Russ arrives. She mediates a painful session where Gina tells her husband the

## POOP READING

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truth, all of it, the drunken affair she had with Diesel last year, her attempts to break it off with him always slowed down by his threats against her and her kids. Russ isn't angry but consumed by guilt. He takes responsibility for letting their family fall apart and opened the door for Gina and Diesel with his own infidelity. Ronda is concerned Russ will attack Diesel, but he is done with acting like a young punk who doesn't see the bigger picture. He doesn't want to go back to jail and he doesn't want to be the role model that sends his own kids to prison either.

Late that night, Russ carefully changes the bandages on Gina's face and sets her up in bed with water and pain meds and the tv. He's going to sleep on the couch so she'll be more comfortable. Russ is sleeping when Cain goes to see his mother and ask her what happened. Gina hugs her son and tells him not to worry, she promises him this is the last time, and drifts off into percocet dreams. In her dreams she sees her life with Russ, the times he's beaten her up, and the times he apologized, a cycle that went around and around. Then she sees Cain, angry and punching, now her son is the one who is attacking her. Gina wakes up with a start. She runs down stairs, calling for Russ to wake up, screaming for Cain to wait, Russ opens his eyes and sees his wife rushing across the room when Cain pulls the trigger. The BLAST rocks the house, sends Cain flying and a spatter of blood and brain across Gina. And Russ stares at the great nothing, forever unknowing that he didn't make it to the other side.

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