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FADE IN:

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Shiny walls and floors, institution-white. DARNEL, 50s, salt and pepper hair, goatee beard, kind face, leads LYLE, 12, blonde, pale, fragile appearance, along a long hallway.

An arrow points the way. A sign reads: PSYCHIATRIC OBSERVATION - RESTRICTED ACCESS.

They reach a locked and barred door.

DARNEL
I need you to be prepared.

LYLE
Prepared for what, exactly?

Darnel stops walking, rubs his beard.

DARNEL
What do you remember of your mom?

LYLE
I don’t know... I remember a little bit, things. I liked her hugs, the way she smelled. She was nice, I think.

DARNEL
There are a few things I have to tell you. You might hear stuff too. Most of it’s lies, remember that.

LYLE
So, some of it is true?

Darnel reaches for Lyle’s hand, grips it firmly.

DARNEL
Understand something. Your mother thought she’d lost you. Forever.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

SUPERIMPOSE: FIVE YEARS AGO

EXT. BACKYARD - SWIMMING POOL - DAY

A bright sunny day, Lyle, 7, dive-bombs into the water, squeals with delight.
DARNEL (V.O.)
She blamed herself.

VICTORIA, 30s, blonde, perfectly coiffed, in a business suit, paces poolside, cell phone in hand. The conversation’s making her agitated, distracted. Water flies up into her face.

VICTORIA
Stop that! I’m on the phone.

She kicks a toy truck out of her path. It balances precariously at the edge of the pool, wheels spinning.

LYLE
Watch, Mama -

Lyle flies around the corner, leaps into the air. His toe clips the wheel of the toy truck, he falls backwards, a sickening thud, his head smacks the concrete lip of the pool. In slow-mo he goes under.

Unconscious. Lyle’s body drifts to the bottom of the pool.

SERIES OF SHOTS:
1. Victoria, still on her cell, spots Lyle, screams M.O.S.
2. Paramedics rush in, perform CPR, stretcher him away.
3. Lyle, hooked up to a chest-tube and ventilator.
4. Victoria and Darnel at the hospital, bedside vigil.

INSERT: NEWSPAPER HEADLINE

Swimming Pool Accident –
Five Year Old Son of Prominent Physician Comatose.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Victoria, wan vacant expression, stringy hair, red-rimmed eyes sits across from Darnel. Darnel stares back at her.

DARNEL (V.O.)
We were a mess. Both of us.

Victoria pushes her chair away, walks into

LYLE’S BEDROOM

Picks up his sweater, holds it to her face, breathes in its scent. Sunlight hits the window. A perfect imprint of Lyle’s small hand can be seen on the pane. Victoria gazes at it, breathes onto the glass, condensation forms.
She presses her own hand onto the glass, leaves her own larger imprint next to his.

Grief suddenly overwhelms her, she cries out, slumps to the floor, sobs. She stops crying suddenly, wipes her eyes, smooths her clothes, strides into the

KITCHEN

    VICTORIA
    I’m going back to work.

    DARNEL
    Good.

    VICTORIA
    Here. At home.

    DARNEL
    Okay...

    DARNEL (V.O.)
    A few days later she seemed different, strangely buoyant. Something had changed, as if she had a new purpose. She threw herself into her work.

BEDROOM - NIGHT

Darnel sleeps. The clock on the bedside table reads: 4:03 am.

    DARNEL (V.O.)
    Some days I wouldn’t see her at all.

Victoria slips under the covers, stares up at the ceiling.

    DARNEL (V.O.)
    The important thing was she was back in the land of living. At least, that’s what I thought.

FRONT DOOR - DAY

A revolving line of delivery men trudge up and down the pathway lugging various sized packages, Styrofoam boxes, marked Fragile, some with BioHazard, and Poison symbols.
DARNEL (V.O.)
I knew never to ask what she was working on. Your mother was pre-eminent in the field of genetics and biochemistry. Her work was always cloaked in secrecy.

BASEMENT - DAY
A couple of bare bulbs hang from the ceiling. Victoria switches them on. Dim light does little to illuminate the dank and dingy space - no windows, but a large open area.

Delivery boxes are stacked up at the bottom of the staircase.

BATHROOM
Victoria removes a Spider Man toothbrush from a rack, plucks strands of hair from a hairbrush, empties fingernail clippings from a matchbox, all of it goes into ziplock bags.

Rummaging through clothing she pulls a Mickey Mouse t-shirt stained with old blood from the bottom of a pile, seals it in an airtight bag.

BASEMENT - DAY
A vinyl record spins on an old turntable, classical music plays softly in the background.

The space has been transformed. Fluorescent lights installed, shelves erected, laboratory benches, high powered lamps, microscopes, petri dishes, phials, scalpels, Bunsen burners.

A garish looking 3D anatomical plasti-figure sits prominently in one corner, half of its ‘organs’ disassembled.

Victoria wears a white lab coat, speckled with blood and viscera. Crouched over a bench, she painstakingly segments brain tissue, then tweezers paper thin slices onto a slide.

She moves to another bench, peers into a microscope.

INSERT: Time lapse photography of human cell division.

A broad smile lights up Victoria’s face.

SUPERIMPOSE: NINE MONTHS LATER
Classical music now booms from speakers. Specimen bottles and their dubious contents jiggle on shelves.

LIVING ROOM
The television is on, sound muted.

Darnel sits in front of his laptop, a website page open to: Reversible Coma: Treatments, Prognosis, Side Effects.

DARNEL (V.O.)
We never gave up on you.

The music stops. Darnel looks up from his laptop, the silence is disconcerting. He looks to the floor below him.

VICTORIA (O.S.)
Darnel!

BASEMENT - TOP OF STAIRS
Darnel, pauses on the top landing.

DARNEL
Problem, darling?

VICTORIA (O.S.)
(calmy)
Would you please come down here. I have something to show you.

BASEMENT - BOTTOM OF STAIRS
Victoria stands at the entrance to the room.

VICTORIA
Some of this may come as a shock.

Darnel takes a step forward. Victoria pushes him back.

VICTORIA
(brimming with excitement)
Not quite yet.

DARNEL
What then?

VICTORIA
I didn’t want to tell you until I was sure he would survive, but -
Victoria backs into the room, arms spread wide to conceal the front of a large glass tank. She finally steps aside.

**DARNEL**

He? Survive? Who... What the hell are you talking about, Victoria?

**VICTORIA**

We can finally be a family again.

She guides Darnel to the front of the tank. He crouches. A jaundiced and hideously deformed fetus squats upright in brine. It's near full term, legs splayed in a frog pose, bulging eyes, skullcap partially exposed, tongue lolling.

**DARNEL**

Ugh! What the...?

**VICTORIA**

I've been working with stem cells, actually they're specialised human cells derived from stem cells, fibroblasts to be exact –

Despite himself Darnel looks again, horrified, yet fascinated.

**VICTORIA**

You're looking at the first human baby grown entirely in vitro.

Victoria speaks fast, an excited manic look on her face.

**VICTORIA**

First I had to isolate the different cell strains for the specific organs, then flip a genetic switch in the DNA to create various organs. The organ cells were then assembled to create a living human embryo. Isn't he amazing?

Darnel gulps, looks as if he might lose his lunch.

**VICTORIA**

He's growing like a weed now. A little stunted, I grant you, but –

Darnel peers into the bath. The fetus rocks on its haunches. A tiny limb bursts through the water, thumps the glass.

Darnel lurches backwards.
VICTORIA
Calm down. It’s just an electrical impulse.

DARNEL
(overlapping)
Jesus! It’s alive.

VICTORIA
‘He’, Darnel. His name is Francis-Lyle. And yes, he is alive. No-one can ever replace our Lyle, but Francis is the closest thing to him.

Darnel scowls at Victoria. She ignores him.

DARNEL
What’s the muck around him?

VICTORIA
An artificial gestational sac, mostly water, electrolytes, proteins, lipids, phospholipids, urea - simulated amniotic fluid.

Darnel turns to face an entire wall of shelves housing large capped specimen jars. Fetuses in formaldehyde in various stages of development, and organs: heart, brain, liver – all with deformities, tumorous growths, malformations.

DARNEL
Oh, Jeez. What the hell is all this?

Darnel buries his face in his hands.

VICTORIA
I had a few teething troubles in the beginning. Some organs didn’t exactly flourish in isolation. I was forced to improvise. Graft some of the organs onto existing ones...
Francis’s voice box, for example -

Victoria points to a smaller bottle on a lower shelf, a gelatinous double-flapped mass of flesh.

VICTORIA
He might not be able to verbalise as well as you or I, but... His brain stem posed some problems too -
DARNEL
Its brain?

Victoria bites her lip. For the first time she looks worried.

The fetus squirms, its chest rises and falls erratically. It makes little O’s with its mouth, looks like a fish gasping for air. An unhealthy looking froth bubbles to the surface.

VICTORIA
Look at him. He wants out. He can sense the gestation period coming to an end. Soon he’ll be able to exist unaided in the outside world.

DARNEL
Kill it.

VICTORIA
What?

DARNEL
You have to get rid of that... That thing. It’s an abomination.

VICTORIA
Over my dead body -

DARNEL
Quite possibly, yes. If someone finds out about this -

Anger flares on Victoria’s face.

VICTORIA
Is that a threat? I must say, I expected you to be a little more receptive, more -

Darnel grabs Victoria’s shoulders, shakes her.

DARNEL
Have you completely lost your mind?

VICTORIA
It’s a miracle what I’ve done here... I’m a pioneer. I haven’t even told you the best bit.

DARNEL
There’s a best bit?

Darnel laughs, his chuckle verging on hysteria.
VICTORIA
Francis has a lot of Lyle’s DNA.

Darnel’s mouth drops open in shock.

END FLASHBACK.

BACK TO SCENE:

Darnel ruffles Lyle’s blonde hair.

DARNEL
She made a mistake. Good news is the doctors say she’s making progress. All goes well she can probably come home soon.

Darnel inserts a keycard into a lock on the door.

DARNEL
Seeing you will make all the difference.

The door clicks open, they walk through. Another few yards, another door. Darnel inserts his keycard again, they enter.

PADDED CELL

Lyle hides behind Darnel’s trouser legs. Darnel reaches around, grabs his arm, pushes him forward.

Victoria sits in a rocking chair, cradling a baby, its face concealed in dirty swaddling.

DARNEL
(whispers in Lyle’s ear)
It’s alright, I promise.

VICTORIA
Come on darlin’, meet your baby brother.

Lyle takes a few steps towards Victoria, inches closer. Peers into the swaddling. Nothing, just an empty stained blanket.

A sigh of relief, then, his smile turns to terror when –

An arm juts out from the blanket, a gnarled hand seizes Lyle by the throat, lifts his body from the floor.
A face emerges, cavernous mouth yaws, razor sharp fangs descend from cleft mouth, spiked finger-nails gouge at Lyle’s eyes, rip chunks from his cheeks. It finds a major vein.

Arterial blood sprays onto the white padded walls and floor. Lyle thrashes wildly, his head snaps back. A squelching sound, then, his tongue lands, plop onto the floor.

SUPERIMPOSE: TWELVE MONTHS LATER

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Lyle’s eyes open, he jolts upright in bed, tentatively feels his tongue. Sunlight streams through an open window, a curtain flutters in the breeze. He gets out of bed, pads into the KITCHEN

Coffee percolates, eggs and bacon sizzle on the stove.

LYLE
Dad...?

Darnel enters the room, a smile on his face. He bends, kisses Lyle on the forehead.

A loud thump from under the floor. Lyle’s eyes go wide.

DARNEL
Mom’s in the basement, fixing something or other. Here -

Darnel piles eggs and bacon onto a plate, passes it to Lyle.

DARNEL
Take this down to her, will you? You and I both know she can be like a bear with a sore head if she hasn’t eaten.

He laughs. A louder thump underfoot. Lyle looks terrified.

DARNEL
What? Jeez, kiddo. What’s the matter? Cat got your tongue?

Lyle opens his mouth to scream, but no sound comes out.

FADE OUT.