

Imaginary Friend

By

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FADE IN:

INT. HOUSE - KID'S ROOM - NIGHT

A storage bin overflows with toys next to a dresser.

In a pink bed, with a teddy bear in her lap, ZOE HUNTER (5), curly hair, a ray of sunshine with dimples to match, holds a framed photo.

The photo shows Zoe and ABIGAIL HUNTER (6), pigtails and freckles, holding hands.

MICHAEL HUNTER (40), graying hair, broad shoulders, sits on the bed.

ZOE
I Love you, Abigail.

Zoe runs a finger across the framed photo, places it on a side table next to a lamp.

Michael tucks in Zoe, kisses her forehead.

MICHAEL
Night, sweetie. Sleep tight.

ZOE
Good night, daddy.

He flicks off the table lamp, leaves.

KITCHEN

At a counter, HOLLY HUNTER (35), petite, dark circles under her eyes, snuffles as she pours a glass of red wine, sips.

As she gazes through a window, she catches Michael's reflection as he steps up behind her, puts his hands on her shoulders.

She touches his hand with a thin smile.

HOLLY
She would've turned seven tomorrow.

He nods, wraps his arms around her waist in a tight hug.

HOLLY
I just need some alone time. I'll
be up soon.

MICHAEL
Okay. Good night.

HOLLY
Night.

He gives her a smooch on her cheek, leaves.

UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

Michael pauses at a pink door as mumbles and giggles seep through the cracked open door.

As he pushes it, a slice of light expands across the room, illuminates Zoe sound asleep.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Clouds cruise by a full moon.

INT. HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Shelves with books and framed photos.

Holly asleep in a lazy chair, next to a couch. She moans, jerks her head from side to side.

FLASHBACK - EXT. LAKE - DAY

Dark clouds. Rain rips the water surface. Lightening strikes. Thunder roars across the sky.

In the water, a lifeless Abigail in a life jacket, face down.

(O.S.) Holly screams.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

Holly bolts forward, grabs the armrests, gasps for air with wide eyes. Her chest heaves as she covers her face with her hands, stifles sobs.

ENTRYWAY

A half open front door. It creaks as a wind gust hits it.

KITCHEN

Holly steps up to the counter, fills her lungs with air, turns on a faucet, splashes water on her face.

As water drips from her face, her eyes bulge as she peers through the window at Zoe on a sidewalk.

ENTRYWAY

Holly dashes toward the half open front door.

HOLLY
Michael. Michael.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Holly sprints down a driveway.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Silhouetted against a flickering streetlight, Zoe, barefoot, dangles her stuffed animal in one hand.

Michael catches up with Holly.

A wind gust flutters Zoe's curls. She laughs, gestures with one hand, "come here."

HOLLY
Is she sleepwalking?

MICHAEL
I think so.

HOLLY
Should we wake her?

MICHAEL
No. Let's wait and see.

In a quick motion, Zoe turns, hop-skips toward Holly and Michael, stops, gazes at them with glassy eyes and a slight dimple smile.

With a hand to her mouth, Holly kneels, extends her arms. Zoe giggles, tucks her cuddly bear under one arm, rushes away up the driveway.

INT. HOUSE - KID'S ROOM - NIGHT

Zoe pulls the bed cover, hugs her care bear, closes her eyes.

Michael steps up to the bed, flips the cover, lifts Zoe into his arms.

MICHAEL

You're sleeping with us tonight.

Holly picks up the stuffed toy.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

The sun rises, paints an orange glow on the horizon.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

A clock on a wall shows, "7.30am."

Michael pours coffee, sits at a table. Holly drops down in a chair across from him, stares at a piece of toast on a plate.

MICHAEL

You okay, honey?

She lifts her head, nods with a slight smile.

ZOE (O.S.)

Why was I sleeping in your bed?

Holly clears her throat as Zoe paces up to the table with her stuffed animal tucked under one arm.

HOLLY

Daddy and I thought you might be a little bit cold.

As Zoe sits, Holly pours cereal and milk in a bowl, places it in front of Zoe.

ZOE

But my friend had to sleep alone in my room.

Holly and Michael exchange a look.

HOLLY

Your friend? Who's your friend?

ZOE

My best friend.

MICHAEL
Does your friend have a name?

ZOE
No name. Just my best friend,
Zoe shovels a spoonful of cereal in her mouth.

ZOE
Mommy, can --

HOLLY
No talking with food in your mouth.
Zoe puts a hand to her mouth, chews, swallows.

ZOE
Can my friend have breakfast with
us?
Michael sends Holly a slight nod.

HOLLY
Sure.

Zoe slides off the chair, pulls out another chair, waves at a doorway.

ZOE
Come here.
Holly puts down a bowl and a spoon next to Zoe.

ZOE
My friend doesn't like cereal. She
likes blueberry jam on toast.
Holly freezes for a second. Her hands tremble as she picks up
the bowl and the spoon.

MICHAEL
You do understand that your friend
must finish the toast before
leaving the table.
Zoe eyes Michael, turns to the empty chair, nods.

ZOE
My friend isn't that hungry.

LATER

The clock on the wall shows, "8.30am."

Holly folds her hands on the table. Michael rinses dishes at the counter.

HOLLY
First the sleepwalking. Now the
imaginary friend.

Holly shakes her head.

HOLLY
Why the toast and blueberry jam?

MICHAEL
Don't know. Maybe a way for her to
cope with the loss of her sister.

HOLLY
You think bringing Zoe to the
cemetery is okay? I can call mom to
baby-sit.

MICHAEL
Zoe asked to come with us, so let's
see how it goes. Keep a close eye
on her.

HOLLY
Okay, we'll talk about this later.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Holly places a ceramic teddy bear next to some flowers at a gravestone marked, "Abigail Hunter, October 10, 2016 - October 20, 2022."

She steps back, kneels next to Zoe and Michael.

Tears trickle down Holly's face. Michael clears his throat as his eyes well up. Zoe squeezes her stuffed toy.

ZOE
Happy birthday, Abigail.

EXT. PARK - DAY

A pond fountain squirts water high up in the air.

On a bench, Holly wipes ice cream off Zoe's mouth. Michael hands Zoe her cuddly bear.

Zoe swings her feet. Her dimples perk up. She slides off the bench, dashes toward the pond.

HOLLY

Zoe.

Holly gets off the bench, takes a few steps.

HOLLY

Zoe, stay out of the water.

At the water's edge, with her stuffed toy tucked under one arm, Zoe swings the other arm back and forth with a handgrip like, "holding hands."

Holly and Michael stare at Zoe.

INT. HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Michael pours a glass of wine, hands it to Holly in the lazy chair.

KID'S ROOM

Zoe wraps both arms around her teddy bear. She yells at her shadow reflected on a wall.

ZOE

You can't have Bear.

She stomps her foot.

ZOE

Bear is mine.

She marches across the floor, out the half open door.

An eerie silence.

A different shadow on the wall. It moves. It disappears.

FAMILY ROOM

In the lazy chair, Holly's eyelids grow heavy. On the couch, Michael sips wine.

Zoe stomps toward Michael, drops to her knees across a coffee table from him.

MICHAEL

What's wrong?

ZOE

My friend wants Bear.

MICHAEL
Does your friend have any toys?

Zoe shakes her head.

MICHAEL
Why not share some of your other
toys with your friend. She's your
best friend, right?

Zoe eyes Michael, gets on her feet, hurries away.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Fog rolls past the flickering streetlight. Michael dumps a
garbage bag in a trash can.

INT. HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Daylight seeps through half open blinds.

Holly's eyes flutter open. She grabs her phone off a side
table, taps it, yawns. As she turns, her eyes go wide.

HOLLY
Zoe.

UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

Holly swings open the pink door, stares at an empty bed.
She descends the stairs.

HOLLY
Zoe.

Her eyes go wide at an open front door.

HOLLY
Michael. Zoe's gone.

ENTRYWAY

Two steps from the bottom of the stairs, Holly stumbles, hits
the floor face down. She shakes her head, wipes her bloody
nose with the back of her hand as Michael pulls her up.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Holly and Michael burst out the front door, dash down the driveway.

HOLLY

Zoe. Zoe.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

On a trail, Zoe huffs and puffs with her teddy bear tucked under one arm as she hurries past shrubs and trees.

The trail curves, runs across a creek.

Zoe stops, squeezes her stuffed animal, swallows hard. She dips one foot into the water.

ZOE

Wait for me.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

An empty street.

MICHAEL

Zoe.

Holly drops to her knees, sobs. Michael kneels next to her.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

In the middle of the creek, Zoe steps onto a rock, slips, loses her balance. She falls face down in the water as her care bear floats downstream.

On the trail, Holly stops, out of breath, yells.

HOLLY

Michael.

She points to the creek.

Michael slides down a steep slope, leaps into the water, scoops up the teddy bear.

HOLLY (O.S.)

Zoe's?

MICHAEL

Stay on the trail. I'll search the creek.

He squeezes the stuffed animal, wades up the creek.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Fog nestles along a shoreline. A few early birds chirp their morning ritual. No breeze. Not a single leaf rustle.

An eerie calmness.

Holly and Michael rushes to the top of a slope, stop. They link arms as they gawk at Zoe at the shoreline below. Holly presses the cuddly bear to her chest.

With curly wet hair, Zoe stands at the water's edge with one arm slightly angled out from her hip with her hand in a grip, "like holding hands."

Zoe eyes an obscured reflection in the water. As the fog lifts, the reflection shows Zoe and Abigail holding hands.

Holly and Michael drop to their knees.

HOLLY

What's she doing?

Zoe's handgrip loosens as Abigail's reflection fades.

ZOE

I love you, Abigail.

Michael wraps his arms around Holly.

MICHAEL

I think ... she's saying goodbye.

Holly's eyes well up.

HOLLY

Zoe.

Zoe whips around, runs into the arms of Holly and Michael.

They kneel next to Zoe. Holly hands her the care bear. Michael wriggles out of his coat, wraps it around Zoe.

They stare across the dead calm water.

FADE OUT.