

THE TIME IT TAKES

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*"The child is Father of the man."* - **William Wordsworth**

FADE IN:

INT. CLOSET - NIGHT

DARKNESS.

A high-pitched tone, similar to one's EARS RINGING. This constant HUM or HISS is persistent until it finally begins to fade, as everything does... with time.

The sound is replaced by MUDDLED SCREAMS.

The black gives way to the light as the closet door swings open.

THEO WINFIELD, 8, African American, scrambles up a small foot stool. He is sweating, breathing heavily.

Downstairs, a Man is hollering. A Woman is screaming.

MAN (O.S.)

You dumb ass bitch! You can't even  
keep a fuckin' kitchen clean when  
you sit at home all day doing God  
knows what! Come *here*!

Theo reaches above for a SHOE BOX and fumbles around with the lid. He pops the lid off exposing a .38 REVOLVER. He grabs it.

FEET SHUFFLING downstairs. A SMACK.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Stop!

A CRASH of glass. A YELP from the Woman.

Theo runs away, gripping the .38.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Theo slams the door and locks it.

FOOTSTEPS coming up the stairs. Menacing. Impending doom.

Theo rushes to the back of the room near a desk and curls himself into a ball in the corner. He holds the .38 close to his heaving chest.

The FOOTSTEPS approach, then stop. The doorknob turns but its rotation is blocked by the lock.

Three slow KNOCKS on the door.

MAN (O.S.)  
You know I don't like locked doors  
in my house, boy. Open up.

Theo pushes himself as deep as he can into the wall. Trying to blend in. Trying to disappear.

MAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Open this door Theo or I'll kick it  
the fuck in. You hear me in there?

Theo closes his eyes tight, wishing it away.

Rapid POUNDING on the door.

MAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Open the fucking- - !

A cell phone RINGS behind the door. The pounding stops.

MAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Yeah? What is it?  
(beat)  
Are you kidding me?  
(beat)  
Jesus. Does *anybody* know what the  
fuck they are doing over there?

FOOTSTEPS moving away from the door.

MAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Guess I'm gonna have to.  
(beat)  
Yeah yeah, I'll see you soon.

FOOTSTEPS going down the stairs. A Man grumbling under his (most likely) liquor soaked breath.

Theo opens his eyes, visibly relaxing a little. He lightly runs his hand along the .38, almost petting it. *Thank you.*

A door OPENS and SLAMS SHUT downstairs.

Theo slowly moves in a crouched posture toward a window surrounded by drapes and peaks out, careful not to be seen.

The truck in the driveway starts up; It's headlights blare to life. Theo watches as the truck pulls out of the driveway and speeds away down the street.

He bows his head and takes a few deep breaths. Relieved.

Standing up, Theo's face is suddenly overcome with worry. It's quiet downstairs. Too quiet.

THEO

Mom...

A SHADOW overtakes the room. It seems to rise up from nowhere, almost completely blacking out the light from the desk lamp.

SHADOW (V.O.)

Theo...

\*The VOICE is light, almost airy; Just above a whisper.

Theo goes rigid. He looks at the REFLECTION in the window, nothing but black. He grips the .38 tight in his hand.

SHADOW (V.O.)

You can come with me now... For the time being.

Theo stands frozen in place.

SHADOW (V.O.)

You cannot run from this... But I know you will.

Theo suddenly springs to life - lifting up the window and jumping head first out onto the front lawn.

EXT. FRONT LAWN - NIGHT

The lawn is dully lit by a nearby street light

Theo pushes himself off the ground, still gripping the .38. He stumbles as he tries to run then picks himself back up.

SHADOW (V.O.)

Your body has failed you... It has moved on.

Theo stops. The Shadow partially takes over the street light. He spins around pointing the .38 at whatever is behind him.

Theo's eyes widen. His breath catches in his throat. He points the .38 up, up, up... until it is almost pointed straight above his head.

SHADOW (V.O.)

As they all do... with time.

The Shadow begins to creep up to Theo's feet and starts climbing his legs.

Theo looks down, stunned at this darkness eating him alive.

THEO

Let me go...

The Shadow makes it's way up his chest.

SHADOW (V.O.)

Don't be scared, Theo. No one will know you're gone. Not even you.

THEO

Stop!

The Shadow engulfs Theo's neck and head in a blink of an eye. Theo lets out a shrill YELP.

Before the Shadow consumes Theo's raised arm, he FIRES straight up in the air - The GUNSHOT echoes around the neighborhood.

Just as quickly the Shadow is gone. As is Theo. The .38 drops harmlessly to the ground. The front lawn is given back to the dull street light.

The silence of the night returns.

Nothing to see here.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Theo sits up in bed with a gasp. He looks around the room, breathing heavily, sweating. He scratches his armpit.

The only light in the bedroom is coming from the dull street light through the open window; The drapes flap lightly in the night breeze.

Theo stares out at the fluttering drapes... *odd.*

He gets out of bed and makes his way to a dresser and clicks on the light. He is standing in front of a mirror. He lifts an arm and notices a very fine growth of ARMPIT HAIR starting to form.

Theo itches the area and stares in the mirror at this new addition to his eight year old body. *Weird.*

Regaining his composure, Theo heads toward the window. He sticks his head out - noticing his father's truck is not in the driveway - then spots something ashy-black on the window sill. Soot.

He rubs his index finger over it and looks at his finger where the soot came off. He rubs it between his index finger and his thumb, the soot spreads to both fingers.

Theo wipes his hand on his boxers and sticks his head back out the window. He looks in the opposite direction and spots something lying on the front lawn.

The .38 revolver.

He stares at it...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

The .38 revolver lies on the passenger seat.

Behind the wheel is THEO WINFIELD, now 38. He wears a suit, dress shirt, no tie. He kills the engine.

He unbuckles his seat belt and grabs a NOTE PAD from the passenger seat. The first page reads, '*John Fields Jr. 9 yrs. Parents, John and Darcy - 22 Spring Falls Ave. 3 pm.*'

Theo glances at the clock above the radio. '2:47'. He grabs the .38 and places it in the glove compartment.

He looks around the neighborhood, taking it all in.

Searching...

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Theo rings the doorbell. He looks back over his shoulder at a FOR SALE sign on the front lawn.

After a few moments, the door opens.

JOHN, a middle aged white man that looks every bit as generic as his name, looks Theo up and down.

JOHN  
Mr. Winfield, is it?

Theo nods politely.

THEO  
Yes, but Theo's fine. Pleasure to  
meet you.

Theo extends a hand.

John stares at him for a moment before shaking his hand.

JOHN  
Before you come in, mind if I see  
some ID?

THEO  
Oh, sure.

Theo fumbles through his pocket for his wallet.

JOHN  
Sorry, can't be too careful with  
all that's going on.

THEO  
I understand.

Theo flips open his wallet and displays a PRIVATE  
INVESTIGATOR BADGE with his PICTURE on it.

John looks it over briefly and nods.

JOHN  
Okay. Come on in.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Theo sits in a chair across the table from John, who is  
seated on the couch.

JOHN  
Just for the record, and so we're  
clear... I want you to know that  
I'd rather crawl into a hole and  
die than ask for help from someone.

THEO  
Okay...

JOHN  
I say this so you'll understand how  
important this investigation is to  
us. Calling you to ask for help...  
It wasn't easy for me.

THEO

I understand. And to put your mind at ease, Mr. Fields, missing children is something I take very seriously. It's my business, yes, but I'm passionate about what I do, that's why I'm successful. I have an instinct for this work that most authorities don't possess, and I'm able to use channels that aren't available to men that have to play within the rules, if you get my drift.

John flashes a hopeful smile.

THEO (CONT'D)

Long story short... I get the job done.

JOHN

So I hear. Your reputation proceeds you, that's why I called. But it's nice to see a reputation standing square on the shoulders of the man himself. So how long have you been doing this, Theo?

THEO

Seems like my whole life.

JOHN

The whole, what, thirty three years?

THEO

Thirty eight.

JOHN

Hm. Well I'm glad you made it this far out to see us, especially on a Sunday. It means a lot to me. To us.

THEO

Well as I said on the phone, my schedule was open.

John gives a slight nod.

JOHN

Now before my better half gets back from the kitchen, I wanted to settle the business end of things.

(MORE)



JOHN (CONT'D)

On the phone you said fifty an hour?

THEO

That's correct.

John turns and grabs a sealed MANILA ENVELOPE from behind the couch. He slides it across the table toward Theo.

JOHN

This should cover it. At least for awhile. I think you'll find all appropriate expenses have been accounted for. And then some.

(beat)

Time is money, as they say.

Theo hesitates for a moment then grabs the envelope.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I trust you don't need to count it in front of me.

THEO

No, sir.

Theo tucks the envelope beside him on the chair.

DARCY, middle aged, white, enters the living room holding a mug of coffee.

A SMALL GIRL, 10, follows close behind - She definitely took most of the water from Darcy's gene pool.

Darcy places the mug down on a coaster on the table in front of Theo, then takes a seat beside John.

The Small Girl squeezes in between Darcy and the armrest.

THEO (CONT'D)

Thank you, Ma'am.

Theo takes a small, polite sip and places the mug back down on the coaster.

THEO (CONT'D)

First off let me say I'm sorry for what you all are going through. I know this is a tough time for your family. There's just really no way to prepare for- -

John holds up a hand.

JOHN

You can spare us the pep talk.  
We've heard it all before.

John removes a wallet sized picture from his breast pocket and slides it across the table towards Theo. The picture is face down.

Theo gives John a look before picking up the picture. He turns it around to see JOHN JUNIOR., a 9 year old boy, white, smiling for the camera.

THEO

Spitting image.

JOHN

He is, isn't he?

Theo studies the picture intently.

THEO

Can I keep this?

JOHN

Of course.

Darcy leans toward the Small Girl.

DARCY

Can you go upstairs now so the  
grown ups can talk?

The Small Girl gives a slight nod and gets up off the couch. She approaches Theo.

SMALL GIRL

P-please help us f-find Junior,  
sir.

DARCY

Sound out your words please.

SMALL GIRL

Please... find Junior, sir.

THEO

I'll do my best.

The Small Girl glances back at John, he nods. She leaves the room.

Theo looks back at the picture, studying it. After a few seconds he puts the picture in his jacket pocket. He pulls out his note pad and pen from another pocket.

THEO (CONT'D)

So where and when was the last time you saw... I'm sorry. John? Johnny? John Junior?

JOHN

Junior is fine.

THEO

Where was the last time you saw Junior before he went missing?

DARCY

I put him to bed.

John flashes Darcy a stern look.

DARCY (CONT'D)

Three days ago. He had a headache so I gave him two children's Tylenol and he was out like a light. I checked in on him before I went to bed too and he was just snoring away.

THEO

What time was that last check?

DARCY

Um, around nine I would say? Nine thirty?

Darcy looks at John for confirmation.

John nods.

JOHN

Sounds about right. We're not exactly burning the midnight oil around here.

THEO

So when did you notice he was gone?

DARCY

In the morning. I went to wake him up and he wasn't there. I called out for him, searched everywhere, in the house and out. John came home from work and called the neighbors and walked the neighborhood. There were no signs of him. It was like he just vanished into thin air.

THEO

(To John)

What time did you leave the house  
for work?

JOHN

Six AM. Like usual.

THEO

Everything seem normal? Did you  
look in on Junior?

JOHN

No, never do. And yes everything  
seemed normal. Just another day.

THEO

(To Darcy)

What did his room look like?

DARCY

Like it does everyday. Nothing out  
of the ordinary.

THEO

Has the room been altered in anyway  
since Junior's disappearance?

JOHN

Altered how?

THEO

Has it been cleaned? Or is it still  
the way it was from three days ago?

JOHN

We've had the police in there but  
other than that, I don't know.  
Darce?

DARCY

I haven't cleaned it. Why would I?

Theo nods and makes a note.

THEO

Can I see the room please?

INT. JUNIOR'S ROOM - DAY

Darcy leads Theo into the bedroom.

John stays back in the doorway.

Theo looks over the room - A typical 9 year old boy's room. A single unmade bed. A side table with a lamp. A dresser with an iPad. Toys scattered about. A football. Fortnite posters on the wall.

Theo heads straight toward the window near the back. He looks out into the backyard.

THEO

Has Junior ever used this window to come and go?

DARCY

Not that I know of.

THEO

Does it open from the outside?

JOHN

Not if it's locked, no.

THEO

Was it locked?

JOHN

I think so, yes.

Theo pulls out a pair of blue latex gloves from his pocket. He blows into them to "unstick" them, and puts them on.

He attempts to open the window but it doesn't budge. He flicks the locking mechanism and tries again. It slides open.

Theo runs his index finger along the window sill and checks his glove for residue. Nothing. He closes the window and locks it.

THEO

Is Junior prone to headaches?

Darcy looks at John, who just stares ahead. She turns back to Theo.

DARCY

I wouldn't say so, no.

Theo nods, contemplating.

THEO

Well, I'm sure you've been asked all of this before, but for my purposes, what is Junior like? What kind of kid is he?

JOHN

Well first off, let me just say thank you for not referring to him in the past tense like the cops did. They asked, 'what was Junior like?'

THEO

Yeah, they do that.

JOHN

But I'll tell you what I told them; Junior is a normal nine year old kid. He's happy. Always has a smile on his face. Loves his friends and family. He recently took a liking to football. Told me he wants to be a cornerback. At first I thought he misspoke, I said, 'did you mean quarterback?' And he said, 'no, I want to be a cornerback because the good ones are like shadows, they never leave their man.' To have that level of awareness at that age... he's an impressive kid.

Theo glances down at the football on the floor.

THEO

Sounds like it. Did he play football at school or just you know, around the neighborhood?

JOHN

He wasn't playing at school to my knowledge. We would toss the ball around in the backyard at halftime and sometimes he would play on the street with his friends but that's about it.

THEO

What school does he go to?

DARCY

Valley Acres.

Theo makes a note.

THEO

And being nine that would make him in grade four, correct?

JOHN & DARCY

Correct.

THEO

Did you notice any unusual behavior in the days leading up to his disappearance?

JOHN

No, as I said, he is a happy kid.

THEO

Any new people in the neighborhood? Did you see him talk to anybody that may be considered out of the norm?

JOHN

Nothing like that, no. This is a pretty tight community. Everybody knows everybody, type of thing.

THEO

Have you talked to the media at all?

DARCY

God no, that kind of attention's the last thing we want.

THEO

I know it's not ideal, but sometimes it proves useful.

JOHN

Sometimes it doesn't.

THEO

Fair enough.

JOHN

Regardless, the police advised against involving the media at this stage.

THEO

Okay.

Theo makes a note.

DARCY

Is that unusual?

THEO

No. Not necessarily. Not yet  
anyway.

(beat)

I noticed a For Sale sign on your  
front lawn.

John and Darcy exchange a quick look.

JOHN

Yes um, we were planning to move  
before all of this happened.

THEO

Why were you moving?

JOHN

Job offer. But obviously that has  
been put on the back burner now.

THEO

And what do you do?

JOHN

I'm an anesthesiologist.

Theo nods to himself and heads toward the bed. He kneels and looks under it; Dust, some candy wrappers, a RUBBER BALL. He grabs the rubber ball and squeezes it several times.

John watches Theo's hand squeezing and releasing.

JOHN (CONT'D)

That's the ball I used to make  
patients squeeze before they went  
under. You know, the old count to  
one hundred and they barely make it  
to five thing. I brought it home  
for Junior when he was younger...  
used to bounce it around all the  
time. He loved that stupid ball...

Theo nods and lets the ball fall to the floor. He stands up to inspect the bedsheet and spots something. He leans in close.

THEO

Hm. Do you mind if we flip the  
bedsheet over?

DARCY

The bedsheet? Why?



THEO

I want to be sure of something.

Darcy looks at John, who gives a quick nod. She untucks the sheets and flips them. As she does this, Theo notices some BRUISES on her upper arm.

THEO (CONT'D)

Just lay it flat on the bed please.  
Over the blanket is fine.

Darcy drapes the sheets flat over the bed and blanket.

Theo gets close and removes a small flashlight from his pocket. He clicks it on and studies a faded yellow-ish STAIN on the bedsheet.

Theo clicks off the flashlight and pockets it.

THEO (CONT'D)

Did you know your son was going  
through puberty?

Darcy looks stunned; She glances at John.

John's posture immediately straightens; He seems perplexed.

DARCY

He's... nine.

THEO

I've seen it happen younger,  
believe it or not. Sometimes it's  
triggered by an illness... Or abuse  
of some kind. Or both.

JOHN

Whoa. We have never laid a hand on  
him. Ever. Let's get that straight  
right now.

THEO

I'm not pointing fingers here, just  
stating facts. What's Junior's  
medical history like?

DARCY

He's very healthy.

THEO

When was the last time he had a  
checkup?

DARCY

I think about a year ago, or so.  
(looks at John)  
Right?

JOHN

There's nothing wrong with Junior.  
He has no symptoms of anything.  
Never complained.

THEO

That might be the problem... But  
whatever triggered it, your son was  
most likely going through early  
onset puberty. This stain here is  
undoubtedly semen. He might have  
had a wet dream and tried to hide  
it by flipping the sheets.

Darcy inspects the bedsheet, focusing in on the small, dried  
stain. Tears fill her eyes.

DARCY

I-I had n-no idea.

Theo eyes Darcy for a moment then begins taking off the latex  
gloves.

THEO

Not something nine year old boys  
tell their mom's about.

John steps into the room from the doorway.

JOHN

Darce, can you make me a cup of  
coffee please? I want a word with  
Theo for a moment.

Darcy still looks stunned.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Darcy?

DARCY

Yes, n-no problem.

Darcy shakes it off and heads toward the bedroom door. John  
kisses her head as she passes.

JOHN

We'll meet you downstairs.

John waits until Darcy's footsteps dissipate down the stairs then goes and checks the stain. He looks at Theo.

JOHN (CONT'D)

My wife... she um, stutters when she gets rattled. I'm sure you can understand.

THEO

Sure.

John looks back at the stain.

JOHN

How can we be sure it's Junior's?

Theo just stares at John.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I mean, can we rule out an assault here? Darce and I are both heavy sleepers, someone could have...

John closes his eyes for a moment, takes a deep breath.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Should we swab for DNA?

THEO

It wasn't a sexual assault, Mr. Fields.

JOHN

How can you be sure?

THEO

There's no blood for one thing. No forced entry. Plus flipping the bedsheet and taking the time to tuck in the corners after an assault isn't exactly the modus operandi of a predator. More like an embarrassed boy trying to hide something he doesn't understand yet.

John steps toward Theo, his eyes pleading for answers.

JOHN

Then what *happened* to my boy?

THEO

It's too early to tell at this point.

JOHN

Just tell me what you think...  
*Please.*

Theo stares at John for a moment, contemplating. He gives in.

THEO

As of right now I'd say runaway.  
It's been three days yes, but I've  
seen longer. If Junior can find a  
safe place to bunker down or has a  
friend helping out, he could be  
gone for a few more days yet.

John turns away and looks toward the window, hands on hips.

JOHN

It just doesn't make any sense. Why  
would he run? He has a good life  
here.

THEO

Look, I can't rule out that it was  
a sexual assault and abduction but  
as of right now it doesn't seem  
likely. I'll be investigating that  
angle *regardless*, if only to  
eliminate it, but if he *did* run  
away, then he will be back. Like a  
lost dog a child always manages to  
find their way home after the  
reason they left begins to fade. Or  
out of plain necessity. Just takes  
time.

JOHN

Are you comparing my boy to a lost  
dog?

THEO

No, just uh... Just an analogy,  
sir. And a bad one.

JOHN

Anyone ever tell you that you're  
emotionally detached?

THEO

My ex wife, for one.

John snorts a laugh. He turns around to face Theo.

JOHN

Do you own a gun?

THEO

I do.

Theo and John stare at each other for a moment.

JOHN

I trust that whatever you dig up  
out there, you'll let me know  
before anyone else.

THEO

Of course.

JOHN

Even the cops, get my drift?

Theo nods.

THEO

I work for you, no one else. You  
have my word.

John looks back toward the window, gazing out at the yard.

JOHN

Good.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Theo has his back to the front door, the manila envelope  
under his arm.

John stands with Darcy, holding a cup of coffee. Darcy is  
holding onto John's arm.

JOHN

So what's your next step?

THEO

Next step is I start pounding the  
pavement, see what the vibrations  
dredge up.

JOHN

And what's the time line here? What  
can we expect in terms of how long  
something like this might take?

Theo takes a deep breath, considering this.

THEO

Generally, there is no time line. This line of work can be extremely grueling and tedious, and that's when things are going *well*. I basically have to fill in all the blanks that the police skipped over or flat out ignored, and usually there's a ton.

JOHN

That's disturbing to hear. You'd think the first line of defense would be the strongest.

THEO

You'd think. But sometimes the first line of defense is built to fail. It's meant to just... soak up the enemies ammunition.

DARCY

Jesus, we're talking about *children* here. How can things be so... lackadaisical?

THEO

I wouldn't exactly call it *lackadaisical*, but...

(beat)

These missing child cases are a lot like the neighborhood you live in. All the houses look about the same, give or take a few minor details here and there. But inside the homes you have different layouts with different families and different family dynamics. You can't take anything at face value. You have to consider all the inner workings, each cog of the wheel so to speak. The details will always vary if you look close enough.

John and Darcy nod.

DARCY

Do you have any children, Mr. Winfield?

THEO

I do. A daughter.

DARCY

Oh, a lovely girl. How lucky. I bet she is beautiful.

THEO

She is. Thank you.

DARCY

How old is she?

THEO

Eleven.

DARCY

And what's her name? If you don't mind me asking...

THEO

Amber.

JOHN

Huh. Like the alert...

Theo nods politely. His eye catches a CLOCK hanging on the wall - The numbers all seem to blur and blend together.

DARCY

They sent one of those alerts out for Junior not long after we reported it... Dreadful things... I don't think it does any good... Got to think that the kidnapper would get that text too...

Theo remains focused on the wall clock, tuning out Darcy's voice. The entire clock begins to blur.

JOHN

Theo?

Theo blinks several times and looks away.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Still with us?

THEO

Yes, I'm sorry.

JOHN

I said will you be staying in town for the length of the investigation?

THEO  
I will, yes. I'll find a hotel,  
won't be far.

John's hand reaches out towards him.

JOHN  
Well, best of luck. We're counting  
on you.

Theo shakes John's hand.

THEO  
John.

He nods at Darcy.

THEO (CONT'D)  
Darcy.

John opens the front door.

Theo stops in the doorway before leaving.

THEO (CONT'D)  
Oh, one more thing. A reward... Am  
I authorized to offer one for  
information leading to the  
whereabouts of your child?

JOHN  
I would say absolutely. Do you  
think it could help?

THEO  
Never hurts. How much are you  
thinking?

John and Darcy exchange a look.

JOHN  
We could do about five thousand to  
start.

THEO  
That works. Hopefully we won't have  
to use it, but it will catch  
people's attention and get them to  
at least open their eyes, which is  
half the battle.

JOHN  
What's the other half?



THEO

Luck.

INT. CAR - DAY

Theo gets in the car and shuts the door.

He fires up the engine and opens up the manila envelope. He pulls out a stack of CASH, rubber banded together, then drops it back inside.

Something else catches Theo's eye.

He reaches into the envelope and pulls out a WRIST WATCH. He looks it over and notices the hands are frozen straight up and down. He shakes it, but nothing moves.

Theo studies the watch curiously then drops it back into the manila envelope.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE WHITE ROOM - DAY

THEO, 76, with a head full of grey hair, is seated in a chair in front of a window. He stares out at the hills and valley in the distance.

A HAND, black but of a lighter tone, slender, a female, gently rests on Theo's shoulder. There is a WEDDING RING on her finger.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Can you hear me?

Theo slowly nods.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Good. Repeat after me, okay?

(beat)

Chair. House. Apple.

Theo is deep in thought for a moment.

THEO

House... Apple...

Theo's mouth opens but no more words come. He seems to be struggling with something.

The Hand pats his shoulder.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

It's okay.

Theo exhales a breath, frustrated. He shakes his head.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Let it go.

He takes a few more breaths; A sudden peace comes over him as he stares out the window.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

What's your plan for the rest of  
the day?

THEO

To wait.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

For what?

Theo stares out the window for a long while.

THEO

Not sure.

The Hand leaves his shoulder.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

I'll be back to check on you later.

Theo doesn't acknowledge this, he just continues to stare out the window into the valley beyond.

He brings his right hand up and ITCHES the right side of his scalp...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Theo's car is parked in front of a local coffee and donut shop.

Various PEOPLE with their CHILDREN move in and out of the shop holding coffee and donuts.

INT. CAR - DAY

Theo, 38, sips from a coffee cup. He has a laptop on his lap.

On the SCREEN is a database with various search criteria and empty boxes to fill in. He types in 'registered sex offenders'.

A new page loads, showing a MAP of the local area. He gets a hit nearby.

A GPS shows an approximately eight minute drive to the apartment complex of the offender; Reginald Lossman, looking miserable in his MUG SHOT.

Theo places the laptop on the passenger seat and opens the glove compartment. He grabs the .38 revolver and pockets it.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

REGGIE LOSSMAN, 55, dark hair and eyes, picks up a couple bags of groceries out of the trunk of his car.

Theo approaches.

THEO  
Mr. Reginald Lossman?

Reggie locks eyes with Theo and sizes him up.

REGGIE  
It's Reggie. Do I know you?

THEO  
I'm investigating the disappearance of John Fields. Goes by Junior. Nine years old. Wonder if you could answer some questions for me.

REGGIE  
Oh here we go...

Theo pulls out the wallet sized photo of Junior from his jacket pocket.

THEO  
This is Junior.

Reggie looks the picture up and down.

Theo studies Reggie's reaction.

REGGIE  
Alright.

THEO  
Ever seen the boy before?

REGGIE  
Can't say I have.

Theo places the photo back in his jacket pocket.

THEO  
Can you tell me where you were  
three days ago around 9:30pm? That  
would be Wednesday.

REGGIE  
I was home watching TV, not that  
it's any of your business.

THEO  
You seem pretty sure of that.

REGGIE  
Because it's the truth.

THEO  
You didn't go out at all?

REGGIE  
On a Wednesday? No. I work early in  
the morning.

THEO  
What do you do?

REGGIE  
I'm a factory worker.

THEO  
Can anyone else account for your  
whereabouts that night?

REGGIE  
Probably not. I'm a single man who  
lives alone and keeps to himself.  
That against the law?

THEO  
No, but it's convenient.

REGGIE  
I'm sorry, are you a cop?

THEO  
I'm a private investigator hired to  
find the boy. I'm pursuing all  
leads.

REGGIE

Oh, so basically your authority is jack shit. And how am I a lead? Does someone's past constitute a lead nowadays?

THEO

It constitutes a pattern.

Reggie almost laughs.

REGGIE

A *pattern*. It constitutes a blip on the radar for most people you self-righteous asshole. Now why don't you do me a favor and *pursue* your ass on outta here. I got nothing to say to you.

Reggie picks up the last grocery bag from the trunk.

Theo catches a glimpse of its contents - Various bags of candy and a few boxes of strawberry fruit roll-ups.

THEO

Got quite the sweet tooth, huh?

Reggie slams the trunk shut with his forearm. He starts walking toward the apartment's front doors.

Theo follows.

THEO (CONT'D)

You are aware that I can question your neighbors and your place of employment to confirm your story, right?

REGGIE

Go ahead, I got nothing to hide.

THEO

Well if you do, I'll find it.

REGGIE

Yeah yeah, eat shit rent-a-cop. Now stop following me.

Theo holds his hands up in mock surrender and stops following.

THEO

You have a good day, Reginald.

REGGIE

Fuck off.

INT. CAR - DAY

Theo gets behind the wheel and shuts the door. He grabs the laptop off the passenger seat and begins typing.

His cell phone BUZZES.

Theo reaches into his jacket and grabs his cell phone. He checks the SCREEN.

*'EMERGENCY ALERT Local PD activate AMBER ALERT. Victim is Riya Saheed, female, age 10. Suspect is Asim Saheed, male, age 42. Vehicle is a silver Honda Civic plate #ARBV 646. Last known location West bound 406. If observed please call 911.'*

Theo shakes his head and goes into his text messages. He clicks on the contact 'Amber'.

On the screen is various messages from Theo to Amber; (*Hoping to see your face sometime soon, miss ya; Just message me so I know you're ok; Did your mom take your phone away?*) - none have received responses, or have even been read.

Theo writes up a quick text, sends it. It reads, 'love ya'. He stares at the screen, focusing on the 'Unread' label underneath the text bubble...

A sudden, high-pitched tone - The constant HUM or HISS of EAR'S RINGING.

Theo closes his eyes and opens his mouth, clicking his jaw to be rid of it. He brings a hand up to cover an ear.

The sound persists.

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

AMBER, 11, storms down the hall toward her bedroom.

Theo is close behind.

AMBER

I don't care!

THEO

Of course you don't care. You messed up. Not caring is a great way to save face.

AMBER

Look who's talking!

THEO

Just stop for a second.

AMBER

Fuck off!

THEO

Hey!

Amber spins around as she reaches her bedroom door. She has tears running down her cheeks.

Theo stops pursuing.

AMBER

I *hate* visiting you! I can't *breathe* around here! Once I leave I'm not coming back! I'm staying with mom... for good!

Theo looks stunned by this outburst.

Amber hurries into her bedroom and SLAMS the door shut. A lock CLICKS.

Theo takes a moment to collect his thoughts. He carefully moves up close to the bedroom door.

THEO

What happened to you, huh? What happened to my girl? Where did she go?

CLOSE ON the crack between the door and the floor - LIGHT emits from within. Amber is CRYING softly.

Then, a swift SHADOW overtakes the light as fast as a blink, followed by a high-pitched YELP beyond the door.

THEO (CONT'D)

This is just a stage that you're going through, you know that right? You're going to get out of it.

Silence.

Theo lowers his head, defeated. He turns around and goes back down the hallway.

The bedroom door opens. Theo turns around.

Amber is standing just outside the door. Her tears are completely dried, she looks stoic.

Theo stares at Amber with a slight look of bewilderment.

THEO (CONT'D)

Who are *you*?

Amber stares back at him blankly.

AMBER

I'm bleeding.

THEO

What?

Amber just stares.

Theo takes a second to realize what she means.

THEO (CONT'D)

Oh...

AMBER

I better call mom.

BACK TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

The high-pitched tone begins to fade out.

Theo blinks several times and scratches at his earlobe until the sound is gone completely.

He looks down at his cell phone and stares at the 'Unread' message under the 'love ya' conversation bubble.

He sighs.

Theo turns off the phone and pockets it. He grabs the laptop and brings up a graphic creation program. He frames the page in the middle of the screen and writes the word, '**MISSING**' at the top...



INT. PHOTOCOPY STORE - DAY

Theo walks in with a small POSTER in his hand. He places it down on the desk.

The poster has '**MISSING**' along the top with Junior's blown up picture from the wallet sized photo underneath.

Below the picture is: '**REWARD** \$5,000 for any information leading to his whereabouts and safe return to his family.

It is followed by: *John Fields Jr. (Responds to "Junior") Age: 9 Last Seen in his home at 22 Spring Falls Ave, on the night of Wednesday, April 11th. Gone the next morning. Any information regarding this matter will be considered strictly confidential. Please call... (Theo's phone number).*

A male CLERK, 30, glances at the poster. A SMALL BOY, 10, is seated on a stool behind the desk, watching - There is a clear resemblance between the two.

Theo slides a couple bills alongside the poster.

THEO  
Fifty copies.

CLERK  
Color or black and white?

THEO  
Color.

The Clerk nods and takes the poster and the cash.

Theo glances at the Small Boy.

THEO (CONT'D)  
Your son looks a lot like you.

The Clerk flashes Theo an annoyed look and heads toward the back.

THEO (CONT'D)  
Sorry, your brother?

CLERK  
I'll be back shortly with your copies, sir.

Theo watches him leave. He turns to the Small Boy and shrugs.

The Small Boy gets off the stool and quickly follows the Clerk to the back.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

The parking lot is empty aside from Theo's car.

Theo grabs a MISSING POSTER from the stack of fifty and some tape from the passenger seat. He closes the door.

He looks at the school then focuses his attention on the football field beyond.

After a few moments, he turns his attention to the swing set in the playground... And the two people on the swings.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

Theo approaches two Teenagers, DELSIN (boy) and HARLEE (girl); Both are pale skinned and dressed in all black, Goth-style. Appear to be approximately 15 or 16. Delsin seems to be wearing more make up than the Harlee.

Both look sullen and sad, swinging back and forth slowly without much effort. They barely acknowledge Theo's presence.

Theo grabs a poster and offers it to the Teens.

THEO

Hey guys. I'm looking for a missing child, goes to school here. Grade four. Wondering if you might have seen him recently.

Delsin perks up for a moment and looks at the poster; His hopeful expression immediately drops as soon as he sees the picture.

DELSIN

Nope.

Theo turns the poster towards Harlee; She doesn't even glance at it.

HARLEE

No.

THEO

Well do you mind if I leave this here with you anyway? Maybe you can ask your friends if- -

Harlee snatches the poster from Theo's hands.

HARLEE

Yeah, sure.

She immediately tosses it away.

HARLEE (CONT'D)  
We'll get right on that.

Theo watches the wind take hold of the missing poster and blow it away.

THEO  
Nice.

DELSIN  
Just get lost, dude. Let us swing here in peace, okay?

THEO  
You two usually hang around public schools on Sunday afternoons?

Harlee rolls her eyes.

HARLEE  
Okay, you got us.  
(points toward the street)  
Your kid went that-a-way. You should probably go after him.

Delsin leans in toward Harlee.

DELSIN  
It's not even his... The kid was white.

Harlee stifles a laugh.

THEO  
Something funny?

DELSIN  
Dude look, you got bigger problems than some missing white kid, okay?

THEO  
How so?

HARLEE  
You're just as lost as we are, aren't you? And you don't even know it...

DELSIN  
How old are you anyway? Like *thirty*? Shit.  
(MORE)

DELSIN (CONT'D)

I'll kill myself if I'm your age  
and still wandering around  
aimlessly.

Theo shakes his head and walks away.

THEO

You two have a nice day. Enjoy your  
swing set.

EXT. TRAGEDY WALL - DAY

Theo's pace slows as he approaches, not believing what he's  
seeing. He holds a couple missing posters in his hand.

The tragedy wall is a wall filled with MISSING POSTERS of  
children, and it is filled to the brim. So much so, some  
posters have been taped over others.

Theo looks it over slowly; The various faces of CHILDREN gone  
missing all seem to blend together. The ages range from 10-14  
and is generally an even mix of boys and girls.

At very top of the wall, spray painted in black, is the  
phrase '**HaVe yoU sEEEn My Child?**'.

Along the bottom of the wall, flower's are scattered about  
along with, more disturbingly, several BABY DOLLS; Their  
faces worn away by the elements.

Theo proceeds to tape two of Junior's missing posters to the  
wall, partially covering the ones that seem the most aged.

He grabs his pen from his pocket and underlines "Age: 9" on  
each of the posters he put up.

EXT. TOWN, ICE CREAM PARLOR - DAY

Theo tapes a missing poster up on the brick siding of an ice  
cream parlor.

Beside him, CASSIE, 40's, and a GIRL, 10, both look through  
the window at the many advertised flavors.

GIRL

Ooo, that one looks good. Can we  
get some ice cream?

CASSIE

No, I need to watch my weight.

GIRL  
But I don't.

CASSIE  
You will.

GIRL  
Just a little?

CASSIE  
I said no, let's go.

Cassie steps away from the window and holds out a hand.

The Girl begrudgingly peels herself away from the Parlor window and sidesteps Cassie. She begins jumping up and down and throwing her arms wildly over her head, laughing.

GIRL  
I want to run around and scream!  
And break windows! And eat ice  
cream alllllll day long!

She breaks out into a random song and dance.

Cassie notices Theo watching.

CASSIE  
She doesn't get out much.

Theo smiles and studies Cassie's face. He looks down at the WEDDING RING on her finger.

THEO  
You look a little familiar... Do I  
know you?

CASSIE  
I have no idea. You tell me.

Theo just stares.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
Must have one of those faces.

Cassie smiles politely and goes and grabs the Girl's hand.

CASSIE (CONT'D)  
That's *enough*. We're in public. Now  
behave yourself.

The Girl motions for Cassie to lean down toward her. She cups her mouth and whispers something in Cassie's ear, eyeing Theo as she does.

Cassie shakes her head no, glances at Theo, and pulls the Girl up the sidewalk.

Theo finishes taping up with the missing poster and goes in the opposite direction.

EXT. TOWN, PIZZERIA - DAY

Theo puts up a missing poster and moves on.

DWAYNE, 40's, a muscular man, yanks a CHUBBY BOY, 12, by the hand up the sidewalk toward the Pizzeria.

Theo offers Dwayne a missing poster.

THEO

Good afternoon, sir. I'm doing an investigation on a child that went missing in the area several days ago. I was wondering if- -

Dwayne holds up a hand.

DWAYNE

No thanks. I can't help you.

THEO

Can you just take a look?

Dwayne shakes his head no and yanks the Chubby Boy forward.

Theo watches as they pass.

DWAYNE

*Keep up.*

CHUBBY BOY

I'm tired.

DWAYNE

You're always tired. Look at you, you're disgusting. You're a disgusting obese freak.

Theo steps in front.

THEO

Hey, hey... easy.

DWAYNE

Mind your business, buddy.

THEO

I would say abusing a child *is* my business, *buddy*.

DWAYNE

Is it? By the way you're stalking around this place alone with your stack of posters, I would say you have *plenty* of business to attend to. And none of it involves me or the kid. Now if you don't mind...

Dwayne steps around Theo and pulls the Chubby Boy along.

Theo watches them go. He looks around town at the various PEDESTRIANS with their CHILDREN going about their day.

He spots a surveillance CAMERA on a pole across the street. The camera moves around, watching. Maybe searching...

Theo looks across the street and locks onto something - A HOMELESS MAN in an alleyway seated by a dumpster.

EXT. TOWN, ALLEYWAY - DAY

The Homeless Man, 70, already has his cup outstretched, rattling around the loose change inside it as Theo approaches.

HOMELESS MAN

Spare a buck or two, mister?

THEO

No change on me, sorry.

HOMELESS MAN

I take Visa and Mastercard as well.

The Homeless Man chuckles and breaks out into a coughing fit.

THEO

I may have five thousand dollars for you though.

The Homeless Man cups a hand behind his ear.

HOMELESS MAN

I'm all ears.

THEO

I was wondering if you've seen this boy around town the last few days.

Theo flips a missing poster around to show him.

HOMELESS MAN  
You an undercover dick?

THEO  
No, actually I'm a- -

The Homeless Man holds up a hand.

HOMELESS MAN  
Lemme guess. Judging by the suit...  
businessman?

THEO  
Yes and no.

HOMELESS MAN  
Hey, what's the difference between  
a businessman and a missing poster?

THEO  
I don't know.

HOMELESS MAN  
Nothing. They're both frequent  
fliers...

Theo just stares.

HOMELESS MAN (CONT'D)  
Frequent... fliers... Get it?

THEO  
It's not really a flier.

HOMELESS MAN  
It's a joke... Christ, you should  
try searching for your sense of  
humor while you're at it.

THEO  
Sir, I just need to know if you've  
seen this boy or not.

The Homeless Man studies the missing poster for a moment and  
shakes his head.

HOMELESS MAN  
No, he doesn't look familiar.

THEO  
You sure?



HOMELESS MAN

I have five thousand reasons to wish he did.

Theo returns the poster to the stack.

HOMELESS MAN (CONT'D)

You're a P.I. aren't you?

THEO

Yes.

HOMELESS MAN

Knew it. I used to be one too.

THEO

Oh yeah?

The Homeless Man reaches into his dirty jacket pocket and pulls out a private investigator BADGE.

He shows it to Theo - The picture would resemble the Homeless Man if he was showered and clean shaven and many years younger.

Theo studies the badge and nods.

THEO (CONT'D)

Must have been a lifetime ago.

The Homeless Man pockets the badge.

HOMELESS MAN

Yeah, fuck you too.

THEO

What happened?

HOMELESS MAN

I guess I never really found my path in life... Call me a lost soul. Maybe that's a common thread amongst us... searchers.

THEO

Who knows.

The Homeless Man breaks out into another coughing fit.

HOMELESS MAN

Damn air around here. Can't hardly breathe.

THEO

You okay?

HOMELESS MAN

Yeah yeah, I'll live.

THEO

Alright then.

Theo turns to leave.

HOMELESS MAN

Hey, has your boy been missing for a long time?

Theo stops and turns back.

THEO

Three days, why?

HOMELESS MAN

It's been longer than that. You do know that, right?

THEO

What do you mean?

HOMELESS MAN

I'm just guessing, based on you being here and all. People tend to search longer than three days before calling in the reinforcements.

Theo is clearly getting annoyed with this conversation.

THEO

Seems like you're generalizing a little.

HOMELESS MAN

Well be that as it may, you're still the only one that can find him. You're the last line of defense... or *offense* in this case.

THEO

What about the cops?

HOMELESS MAN

What about 'em? Ain't no lawmen around here, pal. Useful ones anyway. No help for anyone who can't help themselves first.

(MORE)

HOMELESS MAN (CONT'D)

You think doing these cold calls with those missing posters around town is really going to work?

THEO

It's standard protocol, sir.

The Homeless Man coughs and shakes his head.

HOMELESS MAN

Each one of you rubes is more clueless than the next.

THEO

Are you saying you've been questioned by other investigator's around here?

HOMELESS MAN

No, that's not what I'm saying at all. I'm saying I'm not surprised by your response. Each child gone missing around here is a dime a dozen nowadays. Hell, maybe if I had one of my own I would make a few bucks. Sympathy goes a long way... Stops just short of adulthood though...

The Homeless Man taps an index finger to his temple.

THEO

I see.

HOMELESS MAN

Do you?

THEO

You take care now.

Theo heads out of the alleyway.

HOMELESS MAN

(Calling after)

You too. You'll let me know if you need an 'and one' for the search party, won't ya?

The Homeless Man chuckles to himself and shakes his head.

He coughs.

EXT. TOWN, SIDEWALK - DAY

Theo tapes a missing poster below a push-to-walk button at an intersection. He looks up just as the lights change.

A Woman in a wheelchair, MADISON, 40's, makes her way across the intersection. An ATHLETIC GIRL, 11, walks slowly alongside her.

Madison looks at the Athletic Girl and smiles.

MADISON

Go on, it's okay. Run ahead. Jump around.

The Athletic Girl grins and sprints on ahead across the intersection. She stops by Theo and turns back, sprinting back towards Madison. She repeats this.

Madison watches with mixed emotions; Happy to see the enjoyment, but also kind of jealous in a way.

Madison holds out her hand as she reaches the end of the intersection; The Athletic Girl slows down and takes it.

Theo steps aside, making room.

Madison locks eyes with Theo as she wheels passed.

MADISON (CONT'D)

You dance with who brung ya... You remember that now.

Theo can only manage a nod.

Madison moves slowly down the sidewalk, the Athletic Girl walking by her side.

Theo's cell phone BUZZES to life. He reaches into his pocket and checks the call display. It reads, 'Jessie'. He answers.

THEO

Hello?

JESSIE (V.O.)

(Female voice)

Hey, I heard you're in town?

THEO

What?

JESSIE (V.O.)

Look across the street.

Theo turns to look out across the intersection.

JESSIE, 37, wearing professional business attire, her hair tied back into a ponytail, stands across the street with her cell phone pressed to her ear.

She waves.

INT. CAFE - DAY

Theo and Jessie are seated across from each other at the table. The stack of missing posters is on the table between them.

A WAITRESS, 50's, pours them some coffee.

WAITRESS

Let me know if y'all need anything else.

THEO

Will do, thanks.

The Waitress heads back to the serving counter. She checks on a LANKY GIRL, 12, who is drawing something on a piece of paper.

WAITRESS

If only you put that much attention into your homework... Maybe we wouldn't be where we are right now.

The Lanky Girl rolls her eyes and goes back to her drawing.

Theo stares at the Lanky Girl, then looks at the Waitress. Sizing them up.

JESSIE

So what are you doing here?

Theo snaps out of it and taps the stack of missing posters.

THEO

Missing child. You?

JESSIE

Insurance fraud. Some guy faking his way to free meds and weekly paychecks. Par for the course, I guess. Nothing too exciting. How's yours coming along?

Theo grabs a missing poster and slides it towards Jessie. She examines it.

THEO

Yet to be determined. Missing kid is John Fields Junior. Goes by Junior. Met with the family earlier, got the lay of the land. Been poking and prodding the soil all afternoon.

JESSIE

Dig anything up yet?

Theo shakes his head no.

THEO

Which is strange because the father informed me that this is a tight knit community around here, everybody knows everybody sort of deal.

JESSIE

I can vouch for that.

THEO

Well I'm showing Junior's picture around town and no one acts like they've seen him before. Just blank faces all around.

JESSIE

That's some bad luck.

THEO

Maybe. Or maybe I'm going about this the wrong way. Things around here seem... a little off.

JESSIE

Well you know what they say about tight knit communities... You reap what you sew.

THEO

I suppose. How long have you been here?

JESSIE

Staking out my guy for the better part of a week now. I'm pretty much done. Just dotting the i's and crossing the t's.

THEO

So basically you're milking it.

Jessie grins and makes a small space between her thumb and index finger.

JESSIE

Maybe a little. Still got a few pictures I need to take. It's lucky I saw you actually. Just caught you out of the corner of my eye on the way to the bathroom.

THEO

We have the uncanny ability to keep running into each other, don't we?

JESSIE

I noticed that too. Weird, huh?

Theo sips his coffee and shrugs. He places the mug down.

THEO

I haven't been in this area for years. I grew up fairly close to here but I've always avoided this place like the plague. It's like I'm the opposite of homesick.

JESSIE

Well sometimes you have to leave an area of comfort to find out about yourself. But it's always good to go back, if only to reminisce a little. Or to remind yourself why you left in the first place.

Theo chuckles.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

You planning on going by your old place?

THEO

I may drive by it, but that would be the extent of it.

JESSIE

Bad memories?

THEO

You could say that.

JESSIE

Well if you do you should do more than just drive by. Maybe knock on the door and talk to the owners. I did that a few years ago where I grew up and they let me right in. And let me tell you, touring your childhood home is a *trip*. Nothing seems very special about it, and the scary places that you remember are no longer scary, but it definitely puts things into perspective. You should give it a shot.

THEO

I'll pass.

Jessie shrugs.

JESSIE

Suit yourself, Ebenezer.  
(beat)  
How's your daughter?

Theo fidgets with his coffee mug.

THEO

Wouldn't know, she's been ignoring my calls and texts.

JESSIE

Ah, I'm sorry.

THEO

I don't know if it's her mothers doing or she just doesn't want anything to do with me anymore.

JESSIE

I doubt that's it.

THEO

Who knows... I mean, one day they're your baby girl, attached to your hip and wanting to do everything with you; Then the next day you can't even say hi to them without starting a fight. It's like they go into their bedroom, close the door, and come out a different person.



JESSIE

It's called puberty... You remember that, don't you? It will pass.

THEO

Yeah it passes but then you suddenly grow up and find yourself in charge and expected to make all the decisions. But we know better, don't we? We know we don't really know anything. It's at that moment that you realize the adults you looked up to your entire life are nothing but children themselves. And we're all just making up the rules as we go and passing these rules down as gospel... Fruit from the poison tree, if I ever saw it...

Jessie motions for the Waitress.

JESSIE

Check, please.

Theo makes a face. *Very funny.*

The Waitress looks over at Jessie; Jessie waves her off.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

I get what you're saying, but sounds to me like you need to spend more time on your private life than your private *investigator* life. It can't be healthy. And if these things are really bothering you that much, you *know* it's going to effect your work. So what's the point?

THEO

I actually think it's just the opposite. I think it's helping me.

(beat)

I think I need this.

Jessie studies Theo for a moment and nods.

JESSIE

To each their own.

She sips her coffee.

Theo stares out the window.

THEO  
I need to find this kid.

JESSIE  
And then what?

Theo turns from the window and stares at Jessie. *He doesn't have an answer.*

JESSIE (CONT'D)  
The hardest person to find in this world is yourself, Theo.

Theo considers this.

There is a long moment of silence between the two; Jessie's words linger.

Theo carefully organizes the stack of missing posters.

THEO  
Do you know what a tragedy wall is?

JESSIE  
No.

THEO  
It's a wall where people go to put up missing posters for loved ones who disappeared. Or memento's for the dead. Went by one earlier and it was full of missing children.  
*Full.*

JESSIE  
I would love to say I'm surprised...

THEO  
They are just *kids*, Jessie. What's the point in finding ourselves if we can't protect our own children?

Jessie thinks this over. She grabs a napkin and removes a pen from her pocket. She begins to scribble on it.

JESSIE  
I have a... source, in town.

THEO  
A source?

JESSIE

He has helped me for a long time.  
Maybe he can help you too.

THEO

Okay. Who is this guy to you?

Jessie stops scribbling and looks up at Theo.

JESSIE

I trust him.

Theo nods.

THEO

Fair enough.

Jessie goes back to her scribbling.

JESSIE

He's a bit of an acquired taste but  
no one has more information about  
the comings and goings of this town  
than him. If something about your  
boy popped up on the radar, he  
would've seen the blip. Maybe he  
can point you in the right  
direction.

Jessie turns the napkin upside down and slides it toward  
Theo.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

Drop my name, it could help. Now if  
you don't mind, I still have to use  
the little girls room.

Jessie stands up to leave.

THEO

You should get those adult diapers.

JESSIE

Depends.

THEO

On what?

Jessie laughs and heads toward the washrooms near the back of  
the Cafe.

Theo flips the napkin over - On it is a crude drawing of a  
CLOCK, the numbers only going to nine and spaced out to fill  
the circle. The hands point to the three and the eight.

Theo looks it over, confused. Then he notices something written below the clock - An ADDRESS.

Theo pockets the napkin. He places a couple bills down on the table and leaves.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Theo's car drives up the long dirt road surrounded by trees to an isolated two-story house at the end.

EXT. ISOLATED HOUSE - DAY

Theo, holding a missing poster, knocks on the door and scans the area as he waits.

All is quiet except for the insects BUZZING within the nearby field.

The door opens.

HIRO ITAMI, 50's, Asian, stares back at Theo, sizing him up.

HIRO  
May I help you?

THEO  
Afternoon, sir. My name is Theo Winfield and I'm a private investigator hired to locate a missing child in the area. Was wondering if you might have seen him?

Theo holds up the missing poster for Hiro to see.

Hiro squints at the picture, his neck craning forward as he struggles to make out the details. He looks back at Theo.

HIRO  
No, I'm afraid I can't help you there.

THEO  
Can't or won't?

Hiro stares at Theo, unblinking.

HIRO  
What's the meaning of this visit?

THEO

To see if you know the whereabouts  
of- -

HIRO

But what's the *real* reason? You  
didn't come all the way down that  
road on a wing and a prayer. No one  
does. Who told you about me?

Theo smiles at being found out so easily.

THEO

Jessie sent me.

HIRO

Oh Jessie, yes...  
(beat)  
She really sent you?

THEO

Yes.

HIRO

Hm. What did she tell you?

THEO

Not much. Just that she trusts you  
and that maybe you could help me  
out.

Hiro nods, considering something.

HIRO

Let me see the picture of the young  
fellow again.

Theo hands over the missing poster.

THEO

Name is John Fields Junior. Goes by  
Junior. Been missing for three  
days.

HIRO

Name sounds familiar. Isn't he a  
doctor of some kind?

THEO

That would be the father, yes.

HIRO

Yes, right. That's right.

Hiro stares at the poster, lost in thought.

THEO

So?

HIRO

I've never met the child in this picture, no. But then again, I'm not wearing my glasses so I'm not quite certain of it. Care to come in while I grab them?

Hiro opens the door wider, inviting him in.

INT. ISOLATED HOUSE, HALLWAY - DAY

Hiro leads Theo down a long, dark hallway.

Theo glances up to the second floor, no lights on upstairs, only darkness.

Off to the side, Theo notices a CLOCK ticking away on a table; His vision BLURS as he tries to make out the time.

Beside the clock sits a FRAMED PICTURE of Hiro with a middle aged Asian WOMAN; She wears a pink flower dress and has long black hair. They are embracing, smiling for the camera.

Theo looks closely at the framed picture.

Hiro glances back.

HIRO

My wife, Kairi. She passed many years ago.

THEO

My sympathies.

Hiro waves this off.

HIRO

When your time's up your time's up. It's all part of the bigger plan.

THEO

God works in mysterious ways, doesn't He?

Hiro eyes Theo.

HIRO

I didn't mean God's plan.

THEO

Oh.

HIRO

What is God anyway? Other than  
another word for 'beginning' and  
'end'?

(beat)

This way please.

Hiro shuffles down the hallway and grabs his glasses off another small side table. He puts the glasses on and turns on a lamp, examining the missing poster.

Theo looks toward the end of the hallway - A bright lit-up kitchen, like a light at the end of a dark tunnel. He looks at the walls at the various hung artwork and paintings.

HIRO (O.S.) (CONT'D)

So strange, isn't it?

Theo looks back toward Hiro, who is still looking over the missing poster.

HIRO (CONT'D)

These children... They are here one  
minute then gone the next.

THEO

I know.

HIRO

It's like the world just swallows  
them whole. Like when we eat  
spiders in our sleep... Those  
spiders must not know what hit  
them. They are oblivious. But then  
again... as are we.

Hiro continues to study the poster.

HIRO (CONT'D)

You'll have to excuse my old eyes.  
Come, follow me into the kitchen,  
there's better light.

Hiro heads towards the kitchen at the end of the hallway.

Theo follows.

HIRO (CONT'D)

And you can meet Kairi, too.

Theo looks perplexed.

THEO

I thought you said your- -

But Hiro has already rounded the corner.

INT. ISOLATED HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

There is some electronic equipment on the counter, a laptop, a scanner, various cords attached. The laptop shows various numbers and lines rising and falling as if it's tracking some constantly running machine somewhere.

Hiro places the missing poster down on the counter to look at it.

Theo looks around the room, his eyes squinting slightly from the light. He notices something in the far corner...

A lifelike DOLL wearing a pink flower dress stands on a pedestal in a casual position; hand on hip, the other at "her" side. It has realistic long black hair.

The plastic face is eerily similar to Hiro's wife in the framed picture.

HIRO

That is Kairi, my wife.

Theo can't take his eyes off the lifelike Doll.

HIRO (CONT'D)

Not literally, of course. But having her here helps me cope with the loss. They do the same in therapy for parents who have lost a newborn. It helps the healing process and keeps the memory alive. Which is important, wouldn't you agree?

THEO

I uh, guess. It's just... Why would they want to keep the memory *alive*?

HIRO

In my experience, the transition between life and death always benefits long-term if you slow the process of healing, not speed it up. Some things you have to figure out for yourself, unfortunately.



Theo steps up closer to "Kairi" and looks her up and down. His eyes stop at a wedding ring on Kairi's left hand.

THEO

Is that a real wedding ring?

HIRO

It better be for what I paid for it. But yes, it's the same one she wore for twenty nine years. Twenty nine and three quarters actually. Never quite made the thirtieth anniversary.

Theo continues to stare at the wedding ring - His ears start to RING. That high-pitched tone. The constant HUM or HISS. And it's getting louder...

Theo puts a hand to his ear, in pain. His eyes flutter.

HIRO (CONT'D)

Mister Winfield?

THEO

Yes, I'm fine.

Theo stumbles back.

HIRO

I don't believe you are.

Hiro's voice is slowly overtaken by the RINGING...

HIRO (CONT'D)

Theo?

Theo clenches his eyes shut.

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. THE WHITE ROOM - DAY

NURSE PARKS, 46, African American, takes a seat across from Theo, 76, at a table. She places a FILE down in front of her along with a plastic cup full of water and a smaller paper cup with pills in it.

There's a wedding ring on her finger.

She stares at Theo for a moment, kindness in her eyes.

NURSE PARKS

Do you remember me?

THEO  
How could I forget?

Nurse Parks gives him a look.

NURSE PARKS  
Sense of humor is sharp as ever I  
see.

THEO  
Only for you my dear, only for you.

NURSE PARKS  
How's your head feeling? Any  
headaches or earaches?

THEO  
Not that I know of. Ignorance is  
bliss, as they say.

NURSE PARKS  
Who says that?

THEO  
They.

NURSE PARKS  
Who's *they*?

THEO  
No it's... It's a saying...

NURSE PARKS  
Yes I understand but where did you  
hear this saying?

Theo considers this.

THEO  
I don't know. Isn't that saying  
like... general knowledge?

NURSE PARKS  
Just making sure you still have it.

Theo eyes Nurse Parks then grins like he's suddenly  
understanding a joke. He waves his index finger toward her.

THEO  
I can always count on you to get  
the old noodle cooking, can't I?

NURSE PARKS

Does that mean that you recall my last visit?

THEO

Of course. You're like clockwork.

Nurse Parks looks surprised by this, even hopeful. Her eye brows raise.

NURSE PARKS

What do you mean?

THEO

I mean, um... the way you asked that... I'm not sure.

(beat)

Lost my train of thought there. Got derailed I guess.

Theo chuckles and ITCHES the right side of his scalp.

Nurse Parks nods politely and removes a piece of blank paper and a pencil from the file. She uses her left hand to slide the piece of paper and pencil across the table toward Theo.

NURSE PARKS

Do you know what I'm going to ask you to do now?

Theo looks at her wedding ring.

THEO

I didn't know you were married...

NURSE PARKS

Yes, you did.

Theo contemplates this. He furrows his brow as if he's trying to recall a memory.

NURSE PARKS (CONT'D)

Do you know what I'm going to ask you to draw, Theo?

THEO

How could I know that?

NURSE PARKS

We do this every day.

THEO

Oh, I see.

NURSE PARKS  
I'm going to ask you to draw a  
clock.

THEO  
That's it?

NURSE PARKS  
That's it.

THEO  
Then can you tell me about the  
lucky guy who managed to sweep you  
off your feet?

NURSE PARKS  
You got yourself a deal.

Theo grins and grabs the pencil - He begins to draw a rather deformed clock; A circle with all twelve numbers bunched to one side... The hands extend passed the limits of the circle.

He finishes and slides the paper and pencil across the table.

Nurse Parks looks it over for merely a second or two, her poker face barely hiding her disappointment.

She calmly places the piece of paper in the file amongst the many other deformed clocks.

THEO  
So did I pass?

NURSE PARKS  
You passed.

Nurse Parks slides both cups across the table towards Theo.

NURSE PARKS (CONT'D)  
Now down the hatch.

Theo puts both pills in his mouth and downs it with the water.

NURSE PARKS (CONT'D)  
Tongue.

Theo opens his mouth and sticks out his tongue, lending proof that he swallowed the pills.

NURSE PARKS (CONT'D)  
Good. Still want to know about the  
lucky guy?

Theo looks confused.

THEO  
What lucky guy?

Nurse Parks smiles tightly.

NURSE PARKS  
Exactly.

BACK TO:

INT. ISOLATED HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Theo steadies himself against the counter, the RINGING in his ears beginning to fade.

Hiro has a hand on Theo's shoulder as he gives him a glass of water.

HIRO  
Easy there. Are you back with me,  
Mister Winfield?

Theo blinks several times.

THEO  
Yes, uh, my apologies.

He drinks some water.

The ringing dies out completely.

HIRO  
You almost passed out there. Looked  
like you had a severe migraine...  
Do you get those often?

Theo nods and places the glass down on the counter.

THEO  
Every once in awhile.

HIRO  
Would you like some aspirin?

THEO  
No thank you, I'm fine.

HIRO  
Are you sure? I understand how my  
wife can be a bit of a shock to the  
system...

THEO

It's not that. I get these...  
spells sometimes. They come and go  
at random.

HIRO

You sure they aren't triggered in  
some fashion?

THEO

I don't believe so, no.

HIRO

Has the ringing in your ears  
stopped?

Theo perks up a little.

THEO

Yes. How did you know about that?

HIRO

You just mentioned it while under  
your spell.

Hiro makes his way toward the Kairi Doll.

HIRO (CONT'D)

Now if you feel well enough, Mister  
Winfield, would you please approach  
Kairi once more. I would like to  
show you something.

Theo collects himself and approaches the lifelike Doll.

HIRO (CONT'D)

I know having her around is  
unusual, believe me, I know. But as  
you probably guessed I'm a bit of a  
recluse. But I find with Kairi  
here, I'm never alone. At least I  
don't feel that way anyway. I have  
her company and it's free from the  
judgment that you people love to  
dish out.

THEO

You people?

HIRO

Humans.

Theo nods like this is a normal response.

HIRO (CONT'D)  
Would you care to touch her?

THEO  
What?

HIRO  
Go on, just lay a hand on her.  
Anywhere will do.

THEO  
No, I'm okay.

HIRO  
Please.

THEO  
Why?

HIRO  
Indulge me. The arm works well.

Theo stares at Hiro, making sure he's serious. He is.

THEO  
Okay... I guess.

Theo reaches out and places a hand gently on Kairi's arm...

The lifelike Doll TURNS IT'S HEAD toward Theo and BLINKS - He gasps and recoils away.

Hiro watches the numbers and lines on the laptop screen SPIKE, then dip back down.

Kairi is still again. Unmoving.

HIRO  
Relax, young man... She's merely a robot.

THEO  
It moved.

HIRO  
She did, yes.

THEO  
Sorry, it's just... I wasn't expecting it, her to...

HIRO  
Come alive?

THEO

Yeah. That was, uh... a little off putting, I have to say.

HIRO

Why? Because she reacted to your touch?

THEO

No, because it... she seems so... human.

HIRO

So you're put off by humans?

THEO

No... it's not that... It's- -

HIRO

It's because she looks *close* to human but you know she isn't. That reaction you just experienced has a name; It's called The Uncanny Valley. Have you heard of that before?

THEO

No... Can't say I have.

Hiro reaches out and carefully wipes a bit of dust off of Kairi's pink flower dress.

HIRO

The Uncanny Valley is a dip in characteristic emotional response that occurs when we encounter something that is almost, but not quite, human. This develops a sense of unease and discomfort in people that can be mapped. Now, if I were to increase the human-likeness in Kairi the dip would become non-existent, as she would become more familiar to you. But on the other hand, if I were to strip Kairi down to just her bits and pieces and all you saw was metal and gears, guess what? The dip would *still* not exist, as you would now see Kairi as less than yourself, thus not a threat in any way.

(MORE)



HIRO (CONT'D)

It is in the *middle* ground where we find the dip in the relationship between human-likeness and emotional response. Thus... The Uncanny Valley.

Theo nods slowly. *Um, okay.*

THEO

And you came up with this yourself?

HIRO

No no, it was first hypothesized in 1970 by Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori. But I've been studying this phenomenon for years.

THEO

So this... "valley" basically occurs whenever we see a robot that looks too human to be a robot but too robot-like to be a human.

HIRO

Or a doll or someone dressed up as something else... but that's the idea, yes.

Theo studies Hiro for a moment.

THEO

Look, I know you're making a point here... I just am not quite sure what it is.

HIRO

Okay... consider this for a moment. The Uncanny Valley effect also occurs when something transitions from one area to another; Like an inanimate object suddenly moving or "looking" at you, as you just experienced. It's that transition that causes the dip... Or the valley, if you will. It's in the *transition* where things are discovered. Ideas, people, you name it. There's no hiding a sudden change.

THEO

And why are you telling me this?

HIRO  
To see if any of the dots  
connect...

Hiro stares at Theo like he's studying a lab rat.

Theo sighs.

THEO  
You know if you have information  
you want to tell me but can't or  
won't for whatever reason, there's  
other ways to go about it. I'm just  
not understanding what destination  
you want me to arrive at here.

Hiro steps closer.

HIRO  
That's the thing, Mister Winfield.  
I can't take you to the destination  
either. I can only point you in the  
right direction. It's up to you to  
move ahead or stagnate. It's *your*  
journey, and yours alone.

THEO  
So you're... what? Some sort of  
private investigator psychiatrist  
that helps us "see the light" and  
find the missing. Come on...

HIRO  
Label me what you will, I'm only  
trying to help the best way I can.  
And clearly you need it. So do you  
want to consider all options to  
find the boy... or would you prefer  
to keep putting up missing posters  
around town?

Theo looks lost in his thoughts for a moment. He looks down  
at the missing poster.

Hiro watches him intently.

HIRO (CONT'D)  
It's your choice, Theo.

Theo mulls it over. He nods to himself, giving in.

THEO  
So a transition from one area to  
another...

HIRO  
Yes. Life and death... Lost and  
found... The parallel is somewhere  
in the middle...

Theo thinks... searching within himself.

Searching...

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Theo, 8, makes his way to a dresser and clicks on the light. He is standing in front of a mirror. He lifts an arm and notices a very fine growth of ARMPIT HAIR starting to form.

Theo itches the area and stares in the mirror at this new addition to his eight year old body. *Weird.*

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Theo stares at Amber with a slight look of bewilderment.

THEO  
Who are you?

Amber stares back at him blankly.

AMBER  
I'm bleeding.

THEO  
What?

Amber just stares.

Theo takes a second to realize what she means.

THEO (CONT'D)  
Oh...

AMBER  
I better call mom.

BACK TO:

INT. ISOLATED HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Theo locks eyes with Hiro.

THEO  
What about puberty?

Hiro seems genuinely surprised by this remark.

HIRO  
Interesting. What about it?

THEO  
The transition from being a child  
to an adult. Would there be a  
valley there?

Hiro mulls this over.

HIRO  
The valley is more of an emotional  
response to visual stimuli. Puberty  
is physical but obviously has an  
effect on ones emotions as well...  
Hm. I suppose so. I hadn't  
considered such a thing. Where are  
you going with this?

THEO  
I don't know. Maybe nowhere. But I  
look at all these missing children  
around here and... I guess I'm just  
trying to find a link.

HIRO  
And you believe this link is  
puberty?

THEO  
Who knows.

HIRO  
Don't be dismissive of your  
instincts. What leads you to that  
conclusion?

THEO  
The case I have now... something  
about it... something is telling me  
that it is the missing link in the  
chain.

HIRO  
Based on what? A hunch?

THEO  
More than that.

HIRO  
Ah... Experience.

Theo nods slightly.

HIRO (CONT'D)  
Well, I know a boundary when I see it. But follow where it leads you young man. Explore every avenue. Personal experience is the most valuable tool in the world. Do not let it go to waste.

Hiro grabs the missing poster and brings it to the scanner on the counter. He places it face down in the tray and looks back at toward Theo.

HIRO (CONT'D)  
Mind if I scan this?

Theo makes a 'go ahead' motion as he continues to think things over.

Hiro presses a button. The scanner whirs to life.

HIRO (CONT'D)  
Now, the reason I believe Jessie sent you to me, other than to open your mind to possibilities, is that I have quite the extensive database of live feeds from this town's surveillance cameras, along with the most up to date facial recognition software money can buy.

This gets Theo's attention.

HIRO (CONT'D)  
So, I'll run your boy's picture through the database, setting the parameters from let's say, four days ago to be safe, and see if I get any hits. Now seeing as you are the investigator hired by the family, it's safe to assume that this is your phone number on the missing poster, correct?

THEO  
Correct. And I actually saw one of those cameras in town... How did you get access to the feed?

HIRO  
They are my cameras.

Theo stares at Hiro for a moment.

THEO  
And the town just let's you put these up?

HIRO  
*Let's* me? There was no resistance. I footed the bill, you see. Gave my time and money quite willingly.

THEO  
Why?

HIRO  
To help.

THEO  
To *help*? That's it?

HIRO  
What other excuse does one need?

THEO  
I mean, that's very noble of you, but quite the sacrifice on your wallet I would imagine.

Hiro waves this off.

HIRO  
Sacrifice empties you at first yes, but it fulfills you later. Indulgence on the other hand fills you but will ultimately leave you empty. You'd do well to heed that advice, Mister Winfield.

Hiro pulls the missing poster from the scanner and hands it back to Theo. He goes to his laptop and hits some buttons.

HIRO (CONT'D)  
The boy's face has been added to the database. The search has already begun.

THEO  
What do I owe you for the trouble?

HIRO  
Nonsense. It's not about money.  
It's my pleasure.

THEO  
You sure?

HIRO  
Positive. Just remember I did you  
this favor and I'll be happy.

THEO  
I'll do that.

Hiro glances at Theo and grins.

HIRO  
Time will tell, won't it? It always  
does.  
(beat)  
Shall I walk you out?

THEO  
No, I can see myself out. Thank you  
for your time and for introducing  
me to... Kairi.

HIRO  
If nothing else I have given you  
quite the story to tell, haven't I?

THEO  
I won't argue with you there.

Theo smiles politely and goes to leave.

HIRO  
Oh, and Mister Winfield?

Theo looks back.

HIRO (CONT'D)  
On your way out... Do not diddle  
daddle.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HOTEL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Theo's car pulls into the lot and finds an empty space.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Theo has his cell phone pressed to his ear.

VOICEMAIL (V.O.)

Please leave your message after the beep.

BEEP.

THEO

Hey Jessie, just came back from the meeting with your *source*.

Interesting guy. I was even lucky enough to meet the robot replica of his dead wife in his kitchen.

Yeah... thanks for that. Anyway, he ended up sort of helping me out.

He's running some kind of facial recognition tracer program I think using the town's cameras to try and locate the child. We'll see what he comes up with. And thanks for the chat earlier, always good to catch up. I'm sure we will run into each other again soon. Until then... take care.

Theo hangs up.

INT. HOTEL, LOBBY - NIGHT

Theo, his closed laptop in one hand, finishes the check-in process at the front desk.

The FRONT DESK AGENT smiles, showing perfectly straight teeth.

FRONT DESK AGENT

Will that be all, sir?

Theo slides the missing poster across the counter.

THEO

One more thing. Can I put this up in your lobby?

The Front Desk Agent shakes his head.

FRONT DESK AGENT

I'm afraid that might be slightly inappropriate.



THEO

For who?

FRONT DESK AGENT

Our guests. May give off the wrong message.

THEO

That you're concerned for a missing child in the community?

FRONT DESK AGENT

That we're involved in any way. Perception is everything in this business.

THEO

Apparently.

Theo grabs his room key and walks out of the lobby.

The Front Desk Agent watches him go.

Just then, a small head pops up from behind a desk. A BOY, 12, looks at the Front Desk Agent and grins with a mouthful of metal.

Braces.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A standard hotel room with a queen sized bed.

Theo sits on the edge of the bed and dials a number on his cell phone. He brings it to his ear.

It RINGS multiple times.

JOHN (V.O.)

Hi, you've reached John Fields. I'm unable to take your call right now, but if you leave your name and number I'll be sure to get back to you as soon as possible.

A BEEP.

THEO

John, Theo Winfield. Just wanted to call and update you on the events of today. Give me a call back if you can. And I'm just letting you know but...

(MORE)

THEO (CONT'D)

no calls at this time should ever go to voice mail. You never know who may be calling. Just a heads up. Anyway, call me back. Talk soon. Bye.

Theo ends the call and falls back on the bed, exhausted. He shimmies himself up onto the pillow and stares up at the ceiling, lost in thought. He unbuttons his shirt.

Before he knows it, he's asleep.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE DARK PLACE - TIME UNDETERMINED

DARKNESS.

Somewhere, a child BREATHES heavily.

Then, a SMALL LIGHT suddenly bounces off the ROCK WALLS - Like a flame, flickering. The walls are smudged with an ashy-black soot.

JUNIOR, 9, wearing his pajamas, is lying on the ground. He sits up and looks around, his breathing rapid.

JUNIOR

I don't want to be here anymore. I want to go home.

Junior's voice ECHOES down a long corridor.

Various CHILDREN'S VOICES whisper back.

CHILDREN (V.O.)

We must stay here, for the time being... For the time being...

Junior covers his ears with his hands.

CHILDREN (V.O.)

Stay here... for the time being...

Junior stands up and moves toward the LIGHT on the rock wall. He places his hands on the wall and begins moving along it - his hand marks cleaning off the soot as he goes.

A SHADOW seems to RISE UP from the ground, almost engulfing the light on the wall.

A familiar light almost airy voice takes over; Just above a whisper.

SHADOW (V.O.)  
If you leave this place, you will  
be lost forever.

Junior stops dead. He clenches his eyes shut.

JUNIOR  
I'm scared.

SHADOW (V.O.)  
The strong stay put. They wait to  
be found, even when backed into a  
corner.

CHILDREN (V.O.)  
Into a corner... Back... The good  
ones are like shadows... They never  
leave their man.

Children GIGGLING.

Junior opens his eyes, filled with tears now.

JUNIOR  
I want to go home.

SHADOW (V.O.)  
When you grow, the soul is  
corrupted. It splits in two. I take  
the innocence and protect it from  
the vile world. I keep it safe,  
until the other half is ready to  
embrace the true self.

JUNIOR  
I don't know what you're saying.

SHADOW (V.O.)  
Therein lies the divide. A pure  
soul is never attached to the  
mature brain. You must stay here,  
for the time being.

CHILDREN (V.O.)  
For the time being... for the time  
being...

Junior wipes his nose and sniffs.

JUNIOR  
My parents will know I'm gone.

SHADOW (V.O.)

You have been replaced. They will not search for someone who is not missing.

CHILDREN (V.O.)

Replaced...

JUNIOR

They will know it's not me.

SHADOW (V.O.)

No. You are still you, just altered by time. People accept the truths presented to them, no matter how jarring the change. With time you grow more intelligent, more aware. But that cannot happen without sacrifice. That sacrifice is time. And when it stops, nothing moves.

CHILDREN (V.O.)

Nothing moves... Nothing moves...

Junior looks around the darkened cave.

JUNIOR

Where am I?

SHADOW (V.O.)

You must lose yourself in order to find yourself. There is no other way, Junior.

Junior gasps at hearing his name and begins to run, keeping one hand on the rock wall. The LIGHT flickers over him as he moves.

The Shadow doesn't seem to move, yet it follows.

SHADOW (V.O.)

You must face the fear. You must wait to be found. If you run, you doom yourself for eternity. In this place, I am your guardian angel.

Junior stumbles but keeps his hand on the rock wall. He gets up and keeps running.

CHILDREN (V.O.)

Stop... Do not leave... Stop...

Junior spots a SMALL OPENING far ahead - The opening is filled with a BRIGHT LIGHT.

SHADOW (O.S.)  
But force me out into the valley...  
and I am the shadow of death.

Junior speeds toward the light.

EXT. CAVE - DAY

Junior bursts out of the opening into the DAYLIGHT and falls to the ground. His eyes squint from the sudden change.

Dust billows out from the darkness of the cave.

Junior gets up and runs.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Junior runs through the trees, occasionally looking behind him as if he's being chased.

He scrambles between the trees.

EXT. THE CLEARING - DAY

Junior emerges from the brush. The sky is blue overhead. He runs full speed towards the middle of the clearing.

Behind him, A SHADOW closes in on the ground; Inching its way toward Junior like a flowing river.

Junior looks back and picks up speed, his face strained.

The river of Shadow catches up and wraps around his legs.

Junior falls to the ground. He struggles as the Shadow works its way up toward his neck. He SCREAMS.

The Shadow quickly enters Junior's throat. The screams are muddled, like his voice has LOWERED a few octaves, then are silenced. The boy's chest heaves for a breath that never comes.

The clearing is overtaken completely by the Shadow.

And Junior is still.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

The HUM or HISS of someone's EAR'S RINGING at full volume.

Theo sits up with a gasp. He is breathing heavily, sweating. He covers his ears and stumbles out of bed.

INT. HOTEL ROOM, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Theo flicks the light switch, the RINGING seems to intensify with the searing LIGHT. His reflection shows the anguish on his face.

He looks at himself in the mirror... his ears are BLEEDING.

Theo turns on the tap and splashes his face with water, putting water in both ears. As he turns his head to the left, he spots some BLOOD dripping from the right side of his scalp.

He ITCHES the wound and stares at his bloody fingers. The bathroom lights FLICKER.

Suddenly, behind him in the mirror is YOUNG THEO, 8 years old.

Theo's breath catches in his throat, he jumps and spins around... nothing is there. He looks back into the mirror - Young Theo stares back.

YOUNG THEO

You never became what you thought  
you'd be, did you?

Theo blinks several times and wipes his eyes.

YOUNG THEO (CONT'D)

You changed... went far off course  
and never found your way back to  
me.

Theo turns around again... nothing. He slowly looks back toward the mirror.

YOUNG THEO (CONT'D)

I'm the small part of you that  
you've buried deep down and tried  
to forget. But I'm still here. You  
just need to find me...

THEO

Where?

The bathroom lights FLICKER. Young Theo is gone from the mirror.

Theo looks at his own reflection, studying himself.  
Searching...

He lowers his head and catches his breath.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Theo opens the curtains and let's the daylight flood into the room. He checks his cell phone for any missed calls or messages. There is none.

He opens up his laptop and checks the local news feeds. Children are still missing, none have been found. *What else is new.*

He pockets the phone and buttons up his shirt.

Before leaving the room, Theo presses his hand into the right side of his scalp and checks his fingers for blood.

There is none.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

Theo stands in front of the local police station. He takes a few steps toward the front door when something catches his eye.

A missing poster is attached to a utility pole with power lines overhead. Theo looks it over.

The missing poster reads, '*MISSING - Reggie Lossman. Age 10.*'. Followed by a picture of a dark haired boy with dark eyes. '*Loves birds and strawberry fruit rolls ups. Favorite color is green.*'.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

Reggie picks up the last grocery bag from the trunk. Theo catches a glimpse of its contents: various bags of candy and a few boxes of strawberry fruit roll-ups.

THEO  
Got quite the sweet tooth, huh?

BACK TO:

EXT. TOWN - DAY

Theo rips the poster off the pole and studies it.

THEO  
Son of a bitch...

He stares at the police station doors, considering his options.

JOHN (V.O.)  
I trust that whatever you dig up  
out there, you'll let me know  
before anyone else.

THEO (V.O.)  
Of course.

JOHN (V.O.)  
Even the cops, get my drift?

Theo makes up his mind and hurries away.

INT. CAR - DAY

Theo looks up something on his laptop. He grabs his cell phone and dials a number. It rings a few times.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)  
Valley View Steel, how may I help  
you?

THEO  
Hi yes, I was wondering if I could  
get some information on one of your  
employees?

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)  
I... may be able to help you with  
that. Who's calling please?

THEO  
This is detective Shaun Emerson.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)  
Oh okay, what kind of information  
do you need, detective?

THEO  
Just need to confirm some dates.  
Name is Reginald Lossman.

The sound of KEYS CLICKING on a computer.



FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)  
Okay I have his information in  
front of me now. Is he in trouble?

THEO  
No no, just wondering if you could  
confirm his shift hours for me on  
Wednesday April the 12th, and also  
Thursday April the 13th, if you  
can.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)  
Sure, one moment please.

More KEYS CLICKING.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)  
Hm. Actually it says here that  
Reginald is on short-term stress  
leave.

THEO  
(Not surprised)  
Really?

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)  
I'm afraid so. He's been off of  
work for about a month now.

Theo nods to himself and clenches his jaw.

THEO  
Okay, thank you very much for your  
help.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)  
Not a problem.

Theo hangs up. He starts the car and kicks it into gear.

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX, LOBBY - DAY

Theo waits in the lobby outside of a locked glass door. He  
looks over the names on the buzzer.

He runs his fingers down the names until he finds, 'R.  
*Lossman - 308*'.

A FAMILY approaches from beyond the locked door. A MAN, a  
WOMAN, A BOY, and a GIRL. They open the glass door to leave  
the apartment. The Man gives Theo a sideways glance.

Theo smiles.

THEO  
Forgot my key.

Theo holds the door for them as they leave. He slips in and shuts the door behind him.

The mechanism locks.

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX, HALLWAY - DAY

Theo knocks three times on a door with '308' on it. He turns his back to the peephole and pretends to look over the missing poster.

A dead bolt CLICKS open.

Reggie opens the door a quarter of the way and peers out.

Theo spins around and barges in, pushing Reggie backward into the apartment. He slams the door behind him.

INT. REGGIE'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Theo shoves Reggie to the floor and puts a knee on his chest. He shoves Reggie Lossman's missing poster in his face.

THEO  
Where is he?

Reggie looks stunned.

REGGIE  
What?

THEO  
Your name is on this missing poster! Why?

REGGIE  
I don't know what you're talking about.

THEO  
Strawberry fruit roll ups, Reggie!?  
I called your work, you fuck.  
You've been on stress leave for a month. So I'll ask again...  
Where... is... the boy?

Reggie focuses in on the missing poster again.

REGGIE

That's an old one. It shouldn't be there anymore.

Theo throws the missing poster at Reggie's face. Reggie brings his hands up to protect himself.

THEO

How about John Fields Junior? Where the fuck is *he*, Reggie? I know you know!

A small WHIMPER from the other room.

Theo looks toward the sound. He removes his .38 from his pocket and points it at Reggie's face.

REGGIE

Don't shoot me!

THEO

Then don't move.

Theo stands up, keeping the gun trained on Reggie, and slowly moves toward the other room.

INT. REGGIE'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - DAY

The door opens with a CREAK. Theo looks in.

There is garbage everywhere around the bed. Candy wrappers, water bottles.

In the corner of the room is a large DOG CRATE. Inside the crate is the BOY, 10, from the missing poster.

The Boy is hunched over and staring at Theo with a blank face.

Theo storms back to the living room.

INT. REGGIE'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Theo rushes toward Reggie, who is still cowering on the floor.

REGGIE

I... I was gonna let him out, I swear! He only goes in there when I step out- -

Theo boots him in the face. He gets on top of him, lands a punch - BLOOD spurts out of Reggie's nose.

Reggie holds his nose with one hand while trying to keep Theo at arms length with the other.

REGGIE (CONT'D)  
So I don't lose him!

Theo shoves the .38 in Reggie's mouth.

THEO  
Give me a reason I shouldn't blow a  
hole through the back of your head  
right now...

Reggie MUMBLES some words. Theo pulls the .38 out of his mouth.

Reggie starts to whimper and cry. Theo puts the .38 to Reggie's temple.

REGGIE  
Because it's me in there! It's *me*!  
He's my child. I mean, he's *me*...  
don't you see?

Theo turns the .38 around and pistol whips Reggie several times, drawing more blood. He grabs hold of Reggie's shirt and rips it off his body.

He turns Reggie around so he's on his stomach, grabs both of his hands, and ties his wrists behind his back with the shirt. He notices a BIRTHMARK on Reggie's lower back.

Theo heads toward the bedroom and pockets the .38.

Reggie whimpers and coughs up some blood onto the floor.

INT. REGGIE'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - DAY

Theo approaches the dog crate cautiously.

THEO  
It's okay, son. It's okay...

The Boy recoils and curls himself into a ball in the back of the crate.

Theo lifts the latch and opens the door.

The Boy quickly darts out passed Theo like a scalded dog and scampers into the living room.

Theo follows.

INT. REGGIE'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY

The Boy runs to Reggie and cuddles up to him on the floor. He sees Theo approaching.

BOY  
Leave us alone!

Reggie looks back at Theo.

REGGIE  
See? We are one. We are the same.

Theo stands over a tied up Reggie and the Boy. He shakes his head.

THEO  
What have you done to this poor kid?

REGGIE  
Nothing, I swear. We belong together.

THEO  
Ever hear of Stockholm syndrome, Reggie?

Reggie WHISPERS something to the Boy. The Boy lifts up his shirt and shows Theo his back.

REGGIE  
Look at our birthmarks, man. Just look.

Theo notices both birthmarks are the same, only the Boy's is a little smaller. He stares at both birthmarks, his features softening a little.

REGGIE (CONT'D)  
You don't know where you are, do you? Have you taken a good look around town? Everyone has a kid. Everyone. Don't tell me you didn't notice.

Theo thinks this over and shakes his head.

THEO  
No... No, not everyone.

REGGIE

Well if they don't then they are looking... or they are lost. Have you found your kid yet?

THEO

Junior?

REGGIE

No, *your* kid. You're here because you need to find yourself. Don't you see that?

Reggie coughs and spits up a wad of blood. The Boy watches Reggie with concern.

THEO

I only see one thing, Reggie... a sick man who likes children more than he should. *That's* what I see.

Reggie shakes his head no, incredulous.

REGGIE

All those lost children... they are in the cave, at the bottom of the valley... Just waiting to be rescued.

THEO

The valley?

REGGIE

You know which one. *That's* where Junior is. *That's* where *you* are.

THEO

No, I don't know which one. Why don't you educate me, Reggie?

Reggie struggles to turn himself onto his side. He cranes his neck up to look Theo in the eye.

REGGIE

Ask yourself what you've seen so far since you've been here. You want to be educated? Do the math. It adds up if you open your mind.

Theo removes the .38 from his pocket and lets it hang lazily at his side.

The Boy looks away and buries his face in Reggie's chest.

THEO

Tell me where Junior is you piece of shit. No more games.

REGGIE

Why are you doing somebody else's work for them? It doesn't accomplish anything if you find what someone else is looking for. We all have to find our own child. Our *inner* child. Whoever hired you should know that.

Theo kneels down and begins to untie Reggie's wrists.

The Boy moves away from Theo.

THEO

Let's say I believe you, okay? Which I don't. But let's say I do. Then what? I'm supposed to believe I'm stuck in a place where everyone's inner child is literally with them at all times? And *visible*? You say do the math, but how does that compute?

Theo takes the shirt off Reggie's wrists. Reggie reaches out grabs the Boy.

REGGIE

(To Boy)  
It's okay, don't be scared. Stay with me.

The Boy settles a bit.

Reggie sits up and turns his attention to Theo. He wipes some blood off his face with his forearm.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

We all see what we want to see, man. It's that simple. I don't see anyone's child except my own anymore. It's the lost souls, the people like you, who see them all.

THEO

Why?

Reggie shrugs.

REGGIE

Maybe it's part of the journey. Our entire lives we are searching for something. Then we find it and what do we do? We start another search. Set another goal. We want what we can't have. That's all it is.

Theo removes his cell phone with his free hand. He brings up an app and shows Reggie a MAP of the local area on his phone.

THEO

I'm gonna get to the bottom of your bullshit. Tell me where this cave is. Point out on this map the location of the valley. If you lie to me, I will be back.

Reggie looks over the map.

REGGIE

It's been awhile since I've been there but... yeah.

He points to a spot on the map.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

It's around there.

Theo nods and stands up. He begins to dial a number.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

THEO

Calling the authorities and getting the child out of here.

Reggie pulls the Boy close and hugs him.

REGGIE

Really? After all I just told you?

THEO

I can't take the chance.

REGGIE

This isn't even your case. We're not any of your concern.

THEO

You are now.



Theo brings the cell phone to his ear. A BUSY SIGNAL. He tries again, same result.

He looks at the phone - *what the fuck?*

REGGIE

What did you expect? The calvary to come and break down my door? I'm not lying to you man, *think*.

Theo hangs up and pockets the cell phone. He points at Reggie.

THEO

Don't you fucking leave this apartment, Reggie. And God help you if you harm that child while I'm gone.

REGGIE

Why would I ever harm myself?

THEO

Whatever. Lay one finger on him and I'll personally neuter you and lock you in that dog crate for the rest of your miserable life, we clear?

Reggie nods. The Boy hugs Reggie tight.

Theo pockets the .38 and leaves.

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX, HALLWAY - DAY

Theo shuts the door behind him.

He stands in the hallway and hangs his head. He takes a deep breath.

REGGIE (O.S.)

(Muddled)

I know you're scared. I'm sorry.  
I'm so sorry.

BOY (O.S.)

(Muddled)

Why didn't he believe us?

REGGIE (O.S.)

(Muddled)

Everyone has to find their own way.

Theo leaves.

INT. CAR - DAY

Theo slows the car to a stop and shifts into the Park. He scans the area - Trees on each side.

He rubs his tired eyes, thinking...

SMALL GIRL (V.O.)  
P-please help us f-find Junior,  
sir.

DARCY (V.O.)  
Sound out your words please.

DARCY (V.O.)  
I-I had n-no idea.

JOHN (V.O.)  
My wife... she um, stutters when  
she gets rattled. I'm sure you can  
understand.

Theo opens his eyes, connecting the dots...

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

Delsin leans in toward Harlee.

DELSIN  
It's not even his... The kid was  
white.

Harlee stifles a laugh.

THEO  
Something funny?

DELSIN  
Dude look, you got bigger problems  
then some missing white kid, okay?

THEO  
How so?

HARLEE

You're just as lost as we are,  
aren't you? And you don't even know  
it...

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN, ICE CREAM PARLOR - DAY

GIRL

Ooo, that one looks good. Can we  
get some ice cream?

CASSIE

No, I need to watch my weight.

GIRL

But I don't.

CASSIE

You will.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN, PIZZERIA - DAY

DWAYNE

*Keep up.*

CHUBBY BOY

I'm tired.

DWAYNE

You're always tired. Look at you,  
you're disgusting. You're a  
disgusting obese freak.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN, ALLEYWAY - DAY

Theo studies the badge and nods.

THEO

Must have been a lifetime ago.

The Homeless Man pockets the badge.

HOMELESS MAN

Yeah, fuck you too.

THEO  
What happened?

HOMELESS MAN  
I guess I never really found my  
path in life... Call me a lost  
soul. Maybe that's a common thread  
amongst us... searchers.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN, SIDEWALK - DAY

Madison locks eyes with Theo as she wheels passed.

MADISON  
You dance with who brung ya... You  
remember that now.

INT. CAFE - DAY

WAITRESS  
If only you put that much attention  
into your homework... Maybe we  
wouldn't be where we are right now.

The Lanky Girl rolls her eyes and goes back to her drawing.

BACK TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

Theo looks out toward the trees.

JESSIE (V.O.)  
The hardest person to find in this  
world is yourself, Theo.

Theo nods to himself. He looks at his GPS and sees he's close  
to his destination; Although to get there it requires some  
off-road travel.

He turns off the engine and gets out.

EXT. FOREST EDGE - DAY

Theo stands at the edge of the forest, staring in... like  
he's hesitant to enter.

REGGIE (V.O.)  
You're here because you need to  
find yourself. Don't you see that?

After a few moments of deliberation, he steps into the trees.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Theo pushes various branches aside as he makes his way through the foliage.

Trudging on, a slight WHIRRING noise catches his attention. He looks up.

High up on a tree is a surveillance CAMERA. It rotates back and forth, searching...

Theo stares at the camera for a moment, stunned at this piece of technology amidst nature. He moves on toward what looks like a clearing ahead...

A twig SNAPS. Quiet FOOTSTEPS - They follow Theo from a distance.

EXT. THE CLEARING - DAY

Theo steps into the clearing surrounded by trees. Blue sky above. He looks around and spots something straight ahead. He moves slowly toward the center of the clearing.

Theo approaches what he saw. A dead body. Junior.

Junior is wearing pajamas. His skin is a pale blue. His eyes are closed.

Various insects BUZZ incessantly.

Theo takes a deep breath and kneels down. He shakes his head.

He reaches out and lightly places a hand on Junior's arm.

THEO  
I'm sorry.

Theo dials a number - The phone rings and rings then goes to voice mail.

JOHN (V.O.)  
Hi, you've reached John Fields. I'm  
unable to take your call right now,  
but if you leave your name- -

Theo hangs up, looking frustrated, confused. He looks down at Junior and cocks his head to the side.

Junior's head seems to be slightly turned at a different angle then when he first looked at him. *He moved.*

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. ISOLATED HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Theo reaches out and places a hand gently on Kairi's arm...

The lifelike Doll TURNS IT'S HEAD toward Theo and BLINKS - He gasps and recoils away.

BACK TO:

EXT. THE CLEARING - DAY

Theo stares at Junior's body with wide eyes. He reaches to feel for a pulse...

His cell phone RINGS.

He looks at the screen, '*Unknown Number*'. He answers.

THEO  
Hello? John?

HIRO (V.O.)  
Hello, Mister Winfield.

Theo is unable to speak.

HIRO (V.O.)  
I'm calling to let you know that my database search has run it's course. I have some information regarding your missing child.

Theo's eyes lock on Junior's dead body in front of him. Seconds pass.

The insects BUZZ. The WIND blows through the trees.

THEO  
What kind of information?

A pause on the other line.

HIRO (V.O.)  
 Perhaps you'd like to turn around  
 and talk to me personally?

Theo slowly stands and turns around.

Hiro is standing at the edge of the clearing. He pockets his cell phone and slowly shuffles towards Theo.

Theo hangs up and places both hands in his pockets.

Hiro stops a few feet away. There is a long silence.

THEO  
 You followed me.

HIRO  
 Didn't need to. You saw my camera...

THEO  
 And you just... what? *Happened* to be in the area?

Hiro shrugs.

HIRO  
 I have to keep an eye on you, Theo.

THEO  
 Why?

HIRO  
 It's like I told you before... I'm here to help.

Hiro glances passed Theo toward Junior's dead body.

HIRO (CONT'D)  
 I see you've found what you're looking for. And fairly quickly too, I might add.

This barely registers to Theo. He just stares at Hiro.

THEO  
 Why... the *fuck*... are you here?

HIRO  
 You're just full of surprises, aren't you? But, I suppose, some people can't be predicted with one hundred percent accuracy.  
 (MORE)

HIRO (CONT'D)

(beat)

They aren't machines, after all...

Hiro grins and snaps his fingers.

Theo slowly turns to look at the body - Junior's head is back in its original position.

He slowly looks back at Hiro.

THEO

No...

HIRO

Anybody would move heaven and earth to find their child, Mister Winfield. But sometimes that's not where they are. Sometimes you have to go deeper. You have to be willing to search every corner of hell, and the child you get back might not be the one you lost.

(beat)

But what's a little short-term delusion if it means long-term happiness?

Theo shakes his head.

THEO

You're... replacing the children, aren't you?

Hiro just stares at him.

THEO (CONT'D)

The uncanny valley... You're... making them into those, those robots. Like your wife.

Hiro takes a cautious step forward.

HIRO

You seem pretty worked up, Mister Winfield. And you're rambling. Looks to me like you haven't slept very much. Perhaps those nightmares of yours have placed themselves square in the way of a good night's rest...

THEO

No... I'm not... This isn't that.



HIRO

So what is it then? You're saying I'm replacing dead children with... what? A droid? A robotic version of a living breathing child? Technology is advanced Mister Winfield, but not *that* advanced.

THEO

I'd say it *could* be, in the right hands. And yours seem pretty capable.

HIRO

That's quite the gap you're trying to bridge.

THEO

You could replace the children and have them return to their families, and the changes wouldn't matter, would they? As you said, nothing is one hundred percent accurate. You could use the emotional changes of puberty to mask these differences. To explain them away.

Hiro stares at Theo for a moment.

HIRO

If what you're saying is true, how do you explain poor Junior there? What is *he*? A failed experiment?

Theo glances behind him at Junior's body.

Theo's ears begin to RING, lightly at first, but building.

Theo scans the area - A FLASH near the edge of the clearing; An 11 year old AMBER appears by the forest, but just for a moment.

Theo blinks his eyes several times.

THEO

What did you do to me? To those children?

HIRO

Focus. If what you say is true, how is it the parents are not noticing that their children are being replaced? How could that *possibly* be?

Another FLASH of Amber near the outskirts of the clearing.

Theo stares off into the trees.

THEO

Maybe they don't want to notice. We accept the truth we are presented... We make excuses to justify that truth. We turn a blind eye.

Hiro takes another step forward.

HIRO

Go on.

THEO

When our child changes, we accept it... Because we love them unconditionally.

The RINGING is more intense now. Theo cringes.

HIRO

Yes, keep that thought process alive. What is it telling you?

THEO

My daughter... Amber, she... she never was the same after she went through puberty. She was... altered, in a way. Something in her was lost.

Hiro steps up to Theo.

HIRO

What was lost, Theo?

THEO

Innocence.

HIRO

Yes. And perhaps a certain... clarity of thought?

THEO

She no longer viewed the world in the same way.

HIRO

Where there was once blue skies and sun now was clouds and overcast.

Theo nods slightly.

HIRO (CONT'D)

Then from the clouds and grey skies  
came the darkness of night. Stars  
in the sky forever connecting  
images until the light burned out  
and they vanished into the black...  
Forever.

The RINGING intensifies. Theo closes his eyes in pain.

HIRO (CONT'D)

That's called aging, my friend. And  
all it does is take and take from  
you. I know this all too well. But  
what if what was lost is still  
around somewhere, and can be  
recovered? What if we can retake  
what was taken and safeguard it?

Hiro reaches up with both hands and places them firmly over  
Theo's ears. The RINGING stops.

Theo looks amazed.

He removes his hands.

HIRO (CONT'D)

What if we could stop the aging  
process?

Hiro motions Theo to bend down closer to him. *He has a  
secret.*

Theo complies.

Hiro places a hand on Theo's shoulder and leans towards his  
ear.

HIRO (CONT'D)

Or what if it's all in your head?

Theo stares at him.

HIRO (CONT'D)

Like Junior is.

Theo's eyes widen. He turns around... Junior's body is gone.

Theo spins back around and is suddenly still, like he went  
into shock. Then we see why...

Hiro pulls out a NEEDLE from Theo's arm; The plunger is all the way in - Whatever contents were in the syringe are now in Theo's bloodstream.

Hiro yanks out the syringe and stares at it.

HIRO (CONT'D)

The procedure is called 'The Eternal Needle', and it is now complete. Now all you have to do is think, Mister Winfield... and remember what was lost.

Theo stumbles backwards. He wobbles on his feet. He keeps himself upright, but just barely. He glances at Hiro with utter confusion in his eyes.

HIRO (CONT'D)

Don't fight it.

(beat)

Just let go...

Theo stumbles again. The field SPINS out of control. He reaches out for something to grab hold of but nothing is there... He falls to the ground with a thud.

Hiro kneels down by his side.

Theo looks up at him with BLURRY vision.

HIRO (CONT'D)

Time heals all wounds, my friend. I am not your enemy. I'm just here to help.

(beat)

But first you must help yourself.

Theo passes out.

DARKNESS.

INT. THE DARK PLACE - TIME UNDETERMINED

Theo sits up with a gasp. He looks around, breathing heavily.

The only light bouncing off the soot filled rock walls comes from the flicker of a nearby FLAME.

THEO

Hello?

Theo's voice ECHOES for what seems like forever.

Then a familiar light airy voice; Just above a whisper...

SHADOW (V.O.)

There you are... What took you so long?

Somewhere, Children GIGGLE.

Theo tries to locate the voice in the dark but can't. His eyes settle on a TORCH lying on the ground ahead, a dim FLAME flickering.

Theo spots something by his side - The manila envelope. He picks it up and opens it. He pulls out stacks of rubber banded PAPER SCRAPS.

On the paper is little sections of CLOCKS hand drawn with pencil. Hundreds of them, ripped up into pieces.

SHADOW (V.O.)

The flame must grow strong before it can truly be extinguished.

Theo crawls toward the torch and picks it up with his free hand. He drops a stack of paper into the flame of the torch. Then another. Another.

The flame grows strong and bright.

Theo takes in his surroundings - A cave, surrounded by walls of soot filled rock. The ceiling is low, like he is too big for the space.

Theo stands, slightly crouched, and makes his way toward an opening in the rock wall up ahead.

SHADOW (V.O.)

You must lose yourself in order to find yourself, Theo. There is no other way.

CHILDREN (V.O.)

No other way... Other way... Other way...

SHADOW (V.O.)

Do you remember me?

A SHADOW rises up the rock wall in the flickering light.

Theo stops in his tracks. He looks around with the torch lighting his way.

THEO  
I remember that voice.

SHADOW (V.O.)  
And yet you are not afraid anymore.

THEO  
You kidnapped me, didn't you? When I was just a child. Or not *me*, but part of me. My innocence.

SHADOW (V.O.)  
It isn't kidnapping. No... More like... suppression.

THEO  
Why am I here?

SHADOW (V.O.)  
Because it's your time to remind yourself who you truly are.

CHILDREN (V.O.)  
Who you truly are...

SHADOW (V.O.)  
Everyone's time comes, and this is yours.

THEO  
But I was sent here. This man he... drugged me.

SHADOW (V.O.)  
They are helping you.

THEO  
They?

CHILDREN (V.O.)  
They... They...

Theo spins around, trying to pinpoint the children's voices.

THEO  
Where are those children?

SHADOW (V.O.)  
There are no children.

Theo continues towards the opening in the rock up ahead.

SHADOW (V.O.)  
Do you know why you die, Theo?

Theo holds up the torch higher.

SHADOW (V.O.)  
So you can be forgotten.

CHILDREN (V.O.)  
Forgotten...

SHADOW (V.O.)  
This is also why you grow. So you  
can forget what you know. The  
clarity of childhood cannot be  
carried over to adulthood without a  
gap in time. The mixture would  
be... combustible.

CHILDREN (V.O.)  
Boom... Boom!... Boooooooooom...

The Children GIGGLE.

SHADOW (V.O.)  
Murderers. Rapists. Psychopaths...  
They do not know of the gap. And  
never will.

Theo reaches the opening in the rock wall. He tilts the torch  
forward but all that's revealed is more darkness.

SHADOW (V.O.)  
You must first be prepared to live  
in the abyss. You must know misery  
before you can know happiness. You  
must lose yourself...

THEO  
To find yourself. I get it.

The Children GIGGLE gleefully.

SHADOW (V.O.)  
I am simply the in between. The  
keeper of innocence. The protector.  
My purpose is to make sure  
everything stops... for the time  
being.

CHILDREN (V.O.)  
For the time being... the time  
being...

Theo steps forward, further leaning into the opening with the  
torch held out in front of him.

THEO

And what happens when I bring light  
into the darkness?

SHADOW (V.O.)

Why don't you find out?

CHILDREN (V.O.)

Find out... find out...

The Children GIGGLE some more.

Theo takes a deep breath... then steps into the darkness. It swallows him whole.

INT. THE ABYSS - TIME UNDETERMINED

The flame of the torch looks like a match lit in an open field at night; It is engulfed by black, almost rendering it pointless.

Theo breathes heavily, his heartbeat racing as he steps cautiously through the dark, a hand outstretched in front of him like a blind man. He listens.

No more voices. No sound at all besides his own hurried breaths and echoing footsteps.

He moves himself forward, his outstretched hand feeling for anything to grasp onto. Finally, he runs into something.

Theo feels the DOOR in front of him. He tilts the torch downwards and spots the doorknob. He tries it. It is locked.

He turns his hand into a shaky fist and, after some hesitation, KNOCKS on the door slowly three times.

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK.

MAN (V.O.)

You know I don't like locked doors  
in my house, boy. Open up.

Theo gasps at the familiar voice and looks around. DARKNESS.

MAN (V.O.)

Open this door Theo or I'll kick it  
the fuck in. You hear me in there?

Rapid POUNDING on the door - The door shakes on its hinges.

Theo looks at his hand... *he didn't knock.*



MAN (V.O.)  
Open the fucking- - !

The RING of a cell phone pierces the blackness like a dagger.

Theo fumbles around and pulls out his cell phone; The lit up screen reads, '*Theo Winfield*'.

After a few more rings, Theo finally answers the call. He brings the cell phone to his ear... and listens.

The silence is deafening - And it stays this way for several seconds. Then...

YOUNG THEO (V.O.)  
Mom...

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

SANDRA, 33, African American, backs away into the corner, scared.

SANDRA  
Theo, please...

Theo rushes toward her and SMACKS her, hard. She flies back into the counter, dishes fall. A crash of GLASS.

Sandra drops to the floor, cowering. She WHIMPERS.

Theo stands over her, eyes blazing.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Theo's room when he was a kid.

Young Theo, 8, is standing rigidly at the window, staring outside. He has a .38 revolver in his hand.

Theo looks around, confused. The torch in his hand is gone. He stares at his younger self for several moments and approaches from behind slowly...

As he does, his shadow overtakes the room - It seems to rise up from nowhere, almost completely blacking out the light from the desk lamp.

THEO  
Theo...

Young Theo vanishes into thin air. The bedroom window suddenly opens.

The RINGING in the ears is back, full volume.

Theo freezes in place, his breathing heavy, his face strained from the noise. He reaches a hand out towards the open window sill...

EXT. FRONT LAWN - NIGHT

Young Theo stumbles and tries to get back up.

Theo closes the distance quickly, his SHADOW larger than life and engulfing Young Theo in a blink of an eye.

A YELP.

A GUNSHOT rings out...

INT. THE ABYSS - TIME UNDETERMINED

The RINGING is almost unbearable now - The entire area seems to VIBRATE with it.

Theo reaches a hand out into the black, the torch the only source of light. He reaches out, further and further, until...

A SMALL HAND grabs hold of his. Theo grips the small hand tightly and pulls it toward him, revealing a SMALL ARM.

Then, Young Theo is pulled into the light of the torch - He looks terrified. Theo drops the torch and instinctively wraps his younger self in a hug, holding on for dear life.

The torch lights up the cave and the rock walls around them. It illuminates the floor - Nothing but ash and soot.

SHADOW (V.O.)

Let the flame of memory burn  
bright. Let it breathe. Let it  
*live.*

The RINGING reverberates around the cave, shaking it like an earthquake. Young Theo buries his face in Theo's chest.

The CHILDREN GIGGLE.

Theo looks straight up.

THEO

Stop!!

And the ringing stops.

Everything is still. All is quiet. The transition is jarring.  
The Uncanny Valley.

Theo scans the cave. Young Theo slowly opens his eyes.

A large SHADOW on the wall appears to shrink as it nears the torch.

SHADOW (V.O.)

Don't ever let go of each other.

The Shadow vanishes.

Theo and Young Theo look around, speechless.

The torch is extinguished.

DARKNESS.

EXT. CAVE - DAY

The entrance to the cave is quiet. Everything is still.

Seconds pass.

Theo and Young Theo emerge holding hands from the dark just outside the cave entrance. They look around, disoriented.

They turn to face each other... searching each other's faces.  
Gaining recognition. An unspoken understanding.

*We are one.*

EXT. THE CLEARING - DAY

Theo and Young Theo walk hand-in-hand toward the middle of the clearing.

They stop as they come across the area where Junior's body was - It is now littered with all the MISSING POSTERS from the tragedy wall. There are hundreds of them scattered about.

Young Theo let's go of Theo's hand and steps into the middle of the pile. He looks around at all the faces.

YOUNG THEO  
All these boys and girls... they  
all still need to be found?

Theo steps up close to Young Theo.

THEO  
I think so.

Young Theo kneels down and studies a poster.

YOUNG THEO  
So if I needed you to find me...  
Who do you need to find you?

THEO  
I don't know. I'd like to think  
finding you is enough.

YOUNG THEO  
But you need someone to look after  
you too. I know you do. So who is  
it?

Theo looks over the many missing posters. He leans down and  
picks up the missing poster for John Fields Junior.

THEO  
The child is father of the man, as  
they say...

Young Theo looks at Theo, confused.

YOUNG THEO  
What?

THEO  
Nothing.

Theo drops the poster to the ground.

THEO (CONT'D)  
I think that's the next step.  
Finding out.

YOUNG THEO  
Finding out what?

THEO  
Where we go from here.

Theo stands up.

Young Theo does the same.

YOUNG THEO  
Are you scared?

                  THEO  
Terrified.

                  YOUNG THEO  
Me too.

Theo smiles softly and reaches out his hand.

                  THEO  
I guess that never changes.

Young Theo takes his hand.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Theo looks up into the tree where the camera was. There is nothing. Then, a familiar WHIRRING sound.

Theo looks around. Seeing nothing, he points up toward the tree.

                  THEO  
Look up there.

Young Theo looks up.

                  THEO (CONT'D)  
Do you see anything in that tree?

                  YOUNG THEO  
Yeah.

                  THEO  
What do you see?

                  YOUNG THEO  
There's like a... big camera up there.

Theo checks again. Still nothing.

                  THEO  
I can't see it.

Young Theo shrugs.

                  YOUNG THEO  
Maybe some things only kids can see...

Theo looks down at him in amazement.

THEO  
You don't know how right you are.  
Come on, let's go.

Theo hurries away while holding Young Theo's hand.

YOUNG THEO  
Where are we going?

THEO  
Home.

INT. CAR - DAY

Theo is seated behind the wheel. Young Theo sits shotgun.

Theo starts the ignition.

YOUNG THEO  
Can I drive?

Theo flashes his younger self a look.

THEO  
Very funny.

He kicks it into gear.

EXT. CHILDHOOD HOME - DAY

There's a Sold sign on the front lawn. No cars or trucks in the driveway.

Theo and Young Theo wait at the front door. Theo rings the doorbell.

They wait.

THEO  
Guess no one's home.

Young Theo looks off to the side and heads onto the front lawn.

Theo follows.

EXT. CHILDHOOD HOME, FRONT LAWN - DAY

Theo and Young Theo approach their bedroom window and look in. The room is bare except for a CHAIR in the middle of the floor with an APPLE on it.

THEO  
That's odd.

YOUNG THEO  
Yeah.

Young Theo knocks lightly on the window. No response.

YOUNG THEO (CONT'D)  
I remember I used to sneak out of  
this window at night.

THEO  
Yeah, I remember that too.

YOUNG THEO  
You do?

Theo nods his head.

THEO  
I don't remember why though.

YOUNG THEO  
To get away from dad.

Theo takes this in silently.

THEO  
The night you were taken, what do  
you remember about it? My memory is  
a little foggy, it was thirty years  
ago for me. How long ago was it for  
you?

YOUNG THEO  
It happened yesterday... I think.

Theo shakes his head. *Unbelievable.*

THEO  
Yesterday...  
(beat)  
So remind me.

Young Theo backs away from the window and retraces his steps across the lawn. He stops at the spot where he was taken.

YOUNG THEO

I saw the shadow first... It was in my room. I went out the window to get away from it but it followed me out. I tried to run but I fell. That's when it got me.

THEO

Then what happened?

YOUNG THEO

I remember I had dad's gun and I couldn't move. And it was talking to me in my ear and it told me that nothing moves until the new me finds me. It said the new me would grow without me but he won't grow up. Then it went all black and I woke up in the cave.

Theo nods slowly. He pulls out the .38 revolver from his pocket.

THEO

Is this the gun you had?

Young Theo eyes the gun and swallows the lump in his throat.

THEO (CONT'D)

This is the one, isn't it?

Young Theo nods.

YOUNG THEO

I um, shot it up in the air at the shadow... It was so big. Then it got me. It all went black then there was nothing for awhile. I remember it saying that once the new me finds me then he can find someone else. Then everything would be able to move again.

THEO

Who else do I need to find?

Young Theo shrugs.

YOUNG THEO

I don't know, I already asked you that. I'm really sorry though.

THEO

For what?



YOUNG THEO  
For shooting you...

THEO  
Shooting me?

Theo lifts the .38 up to eye level and checks the ammunition in the revolver... one bullet is missing.

The BUZZ of a cell phone emits from his pocket.

Theo removes his cell phone and checks the screen, it reads; *'New Message - Amber'*. Theo quickly swipes the message indicator.

All the messages are now *'Read'*. There is one response, it reads; *'luv u 2. I'm at ur place. Where r u?'*.

Theo smiles to himself.

THEO (CONT'D)  
(Under his breath)  
Everything can move again...

Young Theo points to the cell phone.

YOUNG THEO  
Who was that?

THEO  
Your- -

He stops himself. Chuckles.

THEO (CONT'D)  
You'll see. Now what did you mean about shooting- -

Just then, a sharp WHISTLE sound from above.

Theo's head jerks left quickly - His eyes widen with surprise. He stands there, motionless, like he's afraid to move.

Young Theo steps up close and stares at a BULLET WOUND on the right side of Theo's head. He points to it.

YOUNG THEO  
You're bleeding.

Theo slowly reaches up and touches the right side of his head. His fingers come back red with BLOOD.

Theo looks down at the .38 in his hand then looks up into the sky...

He almost laughs.

THEO  
No fucking way...

He collapses. The .38 falls to the ground.

Young Theo looks on in shock. He slowly brings his index finger - the trigger finger - up in front of his face. It is covered in an ashy-black soot.

Gunshot residue.

INT. THE WHITE ROOM - DAY

Theo, 76, is seated in his chair staring out the window to the valley beyond.

He ITCHES the right side of his scalp - A clear BULLET SCAR is visible as he scratches.

He stares out the window as the valley slowly turns into his own REFLECTION in the glass.

THEO  
Chair... House... Apple.

Theo's eyes widen.

THEO (CONT'D)  
(Excitedly)  
Chair, House, Apple.

Something suddenly dawns on him. He looks stunned. He looks around the room, searching for someone.

THEO (CONT'D)  
Amber? Where... Somebody get me  
Amber... Someone... I need help.

A familiar elderly woman approaches in a walker.

JESSIE, 75, reaches Theo's chair.

JESSIE  
Are you okay, Theo?

THEO  
Where's Amber?

Jessie's eyes widen.

JESSIE

You remember... Wait, wait... Do you know who *I* am?

Theo looks her over, he is breathing rapidly.

THEO

Jessie?

Jessie nods in amazement and places a hand gently on his cheek.

JESSIE

Yes. My goodness. I can't even...  
(beat)  
I'll go see if I can find her.

The click-clack of Jessie's walker as she hurries away.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

I think I just did a number one in my Depends...

Jessie leaves.

Theo scans the room - The room is filled with ELDERLY PEOPLE.

The Homeless Man sits by himself in the corner, hooked up to an OXYGEN TANK. He coughs and WINKS at Theo.

Theo gasps and spots a pad of paper and a pencil on a nearby side table. He pulls the table close and grabs the pencil. He begins to scribble something frantically, his chest heaving.

Finishing, he rips the paper from the pad and places it on his lap. He sits back in his chair and stares at his reflection in the glass.

THEO

I know you...

Theo closes his eyes, struggling to find his breath...

A crash of GLASS.

A WHIMPER.

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Theo, 38, stands over a cowering Sandra, his eyes blazing.

There is broken glass everywhere.

Amber, 11, rushes to her mother's aid. She drapes herself across her.

AMBER

Dad, stop!

Theo's eyes relax. He looks at his hands in astonishment.

THEO

What did I do?

He approaches Sandra, trying to comfort her.

SANDRA

Get away from me!

Theo stops in his tracks. He stands there in disbelief for a moment then rushes out of the kitchen.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Sandra has her bags packed by the front door.

Theo is seated nearby, his head hanging.

THEO

I never thought I'd turn out like  
him...

Sandra opens the door to leave but stops herself. She looks back at Theo.

SANDRA

You're severely lacking a  
conscience Theo, so I don't know  
why you're hanging your head right  
now. And you have no real emotion  
for anything... Except anger... God  
knows you have plenty of that. But  
I'm not buying the whole blame my  
father routine. So whatever it is  
that you think you're missing to be  
a good person, please go and find  
it. Take some responsibility. Until  
then, you will not see your  
daughter again... That's a promise.

Theo looks up, tears in his eyes.

THEO

I'm sorry.

Sandra shakes her head.

SANDRA

It's way too late for that.

She grabs her bags and leaves.

INT. THEO'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Theo sits at his desk examining his .38. He looks woozy, out of it. He spins the barrel around and around. It is full of bullets.

On the desk is empty prescription pill bottles. An empty liquor bottle. Bills that are Past Due. His PI badge. A framed PICTURE of himself, Sandra and Amber together, smiling for the camera.

Theo checks his cell phone. No missed calls. No messages. All his messages to Sandra and Amber remain 'Unread'.

He puts the cell phone down and clicks the revolving barrel in place. He presses the gun to the right side of his head.

Just then, the lights FLICKER. His cell phone RINGS.

Theo looks at the screen, '*Unknown Number*'. He puts the gun down and answers the call.

THEO

Hello?

(beat)

That's me, yes. I'm... I'm me. Go ahead.

Theo rubs his eyes quickly and leans forward in his chair, getting his wits about him. He places his hand on the PI badge.

THEO (CONT'D)

Yes, um, what is this regarding exactly?

Theo stares at Amber in the picture frame in front of him as he listens.

THEO (CONT'D)

Well... I currently have a gap in my schedule so I can certainly consider it. Can I get your location please?

CUT TO BLACK:

FROM THE DARKNESS WE HEAR- -

AMBER (V.O.)

Time... It takes from all of us.  
But you wanted a way out before it took it's toll on you, didn't you?  
You wanted to beat it to the punch.  
(beat)  
So you did.

A GUNSHOT.

FADE IN:

EXT. FRONT LAWN - DAY

Theo lies unconscious on the front lawn, coughing and spitting up blood by sheer reflex, a BULLET WOUND on the right side of his skull.

AMBER (V.O.)

But time had other plans for you.  
You survived only because you messed it up.  
(beat)  
That seems to be what you're good at.

The .38 lies on the ground close by.

AMBER (V.O.)

I think there's some things you need to hear... Even if you can't anymore. Maybe they just need to be said.

(beat)

That very day, I came to visit you around the same time you... did it. I came thinking we could mend the bridge between us. Between you and mom maybe too. But I was too late... By what? A few hours?

(MORE)

AMBER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Timing never was our specialty, was it?

Theo's eyes flutter briefly. His body twitches.

AMBER (V.O.)

You were already gone when I got to your place; Off on another call to rescue someone who wasn't yourself. Or us. Then you shot yourself in front of your childhood home. We still don't know why. What did you discover out there, dad? What snapped inside you? What made you want to give up?

INT. JESSIE'S CAR - DAY

Jessie is seated behind the wheel with her camera. She snaps a few pictures.

AMBER (V.O.)

You're just lucky someone found you in time...

A GUNSHOT in the distance.

Jessie quickly looks over her shoulder toward the sound...

EXT. FRONT LAWN - DAY

Jessie runs up toward Theo and kneels down over him. She presses her hand on the bullet wound and makes a call on her cell phone with the other.

AMBER (V.O.)

Jessie asked about you often, you know. Checked on you all the time. There wasn't much point, but she did. She was a good friend to you. I think someone who rescues someone else feels responsible for them in some way. I know I did.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

Theo is rushed down the hall on a gurney.

Various HANDS hold him steady and hold an oxygen mask in place over his mouth. One GLOVED HAND holds the seeping wound on his head.

AMBER (V.O.)

Mom and I rushed to the hospital after we got the call. We were right there with you the whole time. We took care of you the best we could.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Theo lies unconscious in a hospital bed. He's hooked up to a breathing machine. His vital signs BEEP steadily. There is a BANDAGE wrapped around the right side of his head.

Sandra and Amber are seated nearby, hugging each other.

AMBER (V.O.)

But you didn't know that, did you? The coma... the brain damage... they protected you in a way. Protected you from the truth. But eventually, after a few agonizing weeks, you regained consciousness...

(beat)

And I use that term loosely.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Theo is propped up in bed, bandage still wrapped around his head. He is awake but doesn't look all there. A blank canvass.

AMBER (V.O.)

You awoke to a foreign world where nothing made sense and everyone was a stranger to you. Even your family. We hoped it was temporary.

He stares at a TV News Report playing on the wall mounted flat screen.

AMBER (V.O.)

It wasn't.

The News Report documents a sexual predator being arrested - Reginald Lossman's mug shot pops up on screen.

INT. HOSPITAL, PHYSICAL THERAPY ROOM - DAY

Theo walks awkwardly while holding two side handles on a slow-moving treadmill.



Dwayne, a muscled physical therapist is at his side, holding him upright.

Madison is helped out of her wheelchair on the other side of the room.

AMBER (V.O.)

You went through all the painstaking physical recovery. Even learned to walk all over again. The day in day out struggle of it all would've broke most people, but you dealt with it the same way you dealt with everything else in your life... on your own. Then came the news of your permanent memory loss... An entire life erased just like that. Clean slate.

(beat)

Lucky you.

INT. THE WHITE ROOM - DAY

Theo, 38, is helped into his chair in front of the window by a living breathing, and quite real, KAIRI. He manages a small smile of appreciation.

AMBER (V.O.)

And after that was the treatment center... That's where you stayed for thirty eight years. Thirty eight years of staring out a window into oblivion...

(beat)

Yeah... Thirty eight years...

INT. THE WHITE ROOM - NIGHT

Theo, 76, sits in front of the window, blank faced.

AMBER (V.O.)

I often wondered what you were thinking... What does a person with no memory think of? All I think about is all those moments you missed out on. My first date. My graduation. My wedding. Mom's battle with cancer... Her death. I suppose some of it really is a blessing in disguise. And it's funny because I felt disguised everyday around you.

(MORE)

AMBER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I checked up on you all the time,  
but you never recognized me. Not  
once. I liked to believe you got  
close sometimes, but you never  
fully connected the dots. Things  
just seemed... out of reach to you.

INT. DR. HIRO ITAMI'S OFFICE - DAY

Doctor Hiro Itami, wearing a white coat, stands at a bulletin board with various pictures showing x-rays of Theo's brain. He points out different mapped out points with a ballpoint pen to... someone.

On the wall is a picture of Kairi in her pink flower dress.

AMBER (V.O.)

Then came Doctor Itami with his  
experimental surgery. You remember  
him, don't you? You must remember  
his wife... Kairi.

INT. THE WHITE ROOM - DAY

Kairi stares out a nearby window, stoic, unmoving.

Theo, 38, mouths the word "Kairi" and lightly places a hand on her arm - Kairi stops and turns her head, looking at him.

She blinks.

AMBER (V.O.)

She was your primary caregiver for  
years before she died. Two peas in  
a pod you two were. The only face  
you ever recalled with any sort of  
consistency was hers.

Theo smiles back, nodding his thanks.

Kairi pats his hand.

KAIRI

You're welcome, Theo.

She leaves.

Theo looks out the window.

AMBER (V.O.)

I have to admit I was a little  
jealous of that.

(MORE)

AMBER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I guess some people just leave an impression on certain people. There's no rhyme or reason for who we connect to. Every side of a puzzle piece has a fit... You just have to find it.

INT. OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Theo, 76, lies on his back on a operating table.

Doctor Hiro Itami preps himself for surgery.

AMBER (V.O.)

Anyway... the surgery. Doctor Itami called it the 'The Eternal Needle'. It was primarily used for alzheimers but capable of helping build new memories for anyone. It involved a rather simple yet delicate procedure of small titanium needles being implanted under the skin of the ear, which is then connected with the brain through nerve endings.

John takes a seat beside Theo while putting on a surgeon's mask. He preps the anesthesia.

Theo looks John over.

THEO

You the laughing gas guy?

John chuckles.

JOHN

More like the sandman.

THEO

What time is it?

John looks up toward a clock on the wall.

JOHN

2:47. Almost halftime.

THEO

Ah, a football fan, huh?

JOHN

Guilty as charged.

Theo smiles politely.

THEO  
What's your name?

JOHN  
John.

THEO  
Do you have any children, John?

John glances over at Hiro... *What's with the questions?*

Hiro just shrugs and nods.

JOHN  
Not anymore, unfortunately.

THEO  
What does that mean?

John grabs a gas mask.

JOHN  
It means... I had a son. John Junior. But we lost him.

THEO  
Where?

John brings the gas mask toward Theo's mouth.

JOHN  
I'm going to place this on you now, Mister Winfield. Okay? Take deep breaths.

He places the gas mask over Theo's mouth. His other hand holds up a RUBBER BALL.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
I want you to squeeze this ball one hundred times for me, okay?

John puts the ball in Theo's hand.

Theo begins squeezing.

THEO  
(Muddled)  
Where did you lose him, John?  
Where... ?

Theo's hand eventually relaxes. His eyes close.

The ball falls to the floor.

AMBER (V.O.)

Doctor Itami called the procedure The Uncanny Valley. Something that must be traversed slowly at first, with recognition occurring scarcely, if at all. But with time, the connections would form, and hopefully with a little luck... they would stick.

Doctor Hiro Itami approaches the operating table and removes the gas mask from Theo's mouth. He confirms Theo is unconscious and shines a penlight in his ear.

AMBER (V.O.)

I volunteered you pretty quickly after being told about it. I signed the waiver, as your legal guardian. I had nothing to lose. Turns out, neither did you.

INT. THE WHITE ROOM - DAY

Theo, 76, organizes some colored blocks on the table in front of him.

AMBER (V.O.)

The surgery was a success. You started improving... making connections... but... they were fleeting.

Theo suddenly looks confused. His hand hovers over a block, not knowing what to do.

AMBER (V.O.)

They just never lasted. Like a comet shooting across the night sky; Brilliant to witness but all too brief. And then there was the side effects...

Theo cringes in pain; He brings his hand up to his ear and holds it there.

AMBER (V.O.)

Headaches. Ringing in the ears. There's a price to pay for everything in life. Nothing is free.

INT. THE WHITE ROOM - DAY

Theo, 76, is seated in his chair, chatting up a storm to a group of Elderly People around him. He itches the bullet scar on the right side of his scalp.

AMBER (V.O.)

You'd talk about the people around you all the time, but as if they were younger. Always younger. Never now. You still thought you were thirty eight years old whenever you were asked. The concept of time seemed swallowed within you. Lost. Did you know what was real and what wasn't? Could you tell the difference? What really happened to you as a child, dad? Was it the abuse I know you suffered? You always told me that whatever happens in childhood will come back to haunt you. The world never lets you forget forever. It will *always* send out a messenger...

(beat)

I guess you decided to shoot yours.

INT. THE WHITE ROOM - NIGHT

Theo, 76, sits in front of the window, blank faced again. Reset. His eyes dart back and forth within their sockets, like a computer searching for something.

Searching... Searching...

AMBER (V.O.)

I know you were searching for answers everyday within yourself. Always searching...

(beat)

But I guess everybody creates a purpose for themselves. The way we dream of the proud moments of our past that we can no longer accomplish, for whatever reason. The way we twist it in our heads until the recollection comes back like clockwork...

(beat)

Like clockwork.

INT. THE WHITE ROOM - DAY

Theo, 76, draws another clock that is wrong in every way - Numbers out of order; Hands too short and too long. He slides it triumphantly across the table to someone.

Theo looks up at a clock on the wall. His vision BLURS.

AMBER (V.O.)

The clocks. The hundreds and hundreds of clocks you drew incorrectly. But they looked right to you, didn't they? That was the most heartbreaking part. I won't lie, sometimes I wish Jessie never found you in time... Not for my own selfish reasons, and there are those trust me, but for your own sake. Because in the end what's worse? Death, or an empty life? A period... or an ellipsis? The end... or a to be continued?

Theo itches the right side of his scalp. He gets up and leaves the table.

AMBER (V.O.)

I prayed that one day you would tell me. Every day I looked at you and waited and hoped that you would look back at me the way you used to. Before... before you decided to give up. But I never got to see that look again until the day you died...

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Jessie, 75, makes her way down the hall, going as fast as she can with her walker.

Doctor Hiro Itami passes by wearing a surgeon's gown.

HIRO

Jessie. Someone's feeling limber this afternoon.

JESSIE

Hello Doctor Itami. Yes, I am. Um, have you seen nurse Parks?

Hiro points down the hall and smiles.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

Thank you.

HIRO

No problem. I'm here to help.

Jessie nods her thanks again and keeps going.

Nurse Parks is filling out some paperwork on a clipboard as Jessie approaches.

JESSIE

Nurse Parks.

Nurse Parks looks up from her paperwork.

NURSE PARKS

Jessie, what are you so worked up about?

JESSIE

It's... it's your father. He's asking for you. By name. Your *first* name.

Nurse Parks goes still.

NURSE PARKS

He asked for Amber?

Jessie nods excitedly.

JESSIE

Yes! Can you believe it?

Nurse Parks shakes her head slowly in disbelief.

NURSE PARKS

No, I can't...

She rushes passed Jessie down the hall.

AMBER (V.O.)

But I guess some things aren't meant to fit within the time line of life...

INT. THE WHITE ROOM - DAY

Nurse Amber Parks rushes to her father's side. She kneels down beside his chair.

Theo's eyes are still closed.



NURSE PARKS

Dad?

She shakes him lightly.

NURSE PARKS (CONT'D)

Dad?

Nurse Amber Parks reaches out and checks his pulse. Her head drops. Her eyes close.

Opening her moistened eyes, she notices the piece of paper on Theo's lap. She picks it up and looks at it.

A perfectly formed CLOCK has been drawn on the piece of paper; The numbers are all in order and aligned. The hands are straight up and down.

Below the clock, it reads, *'I love you like clockwork, Amber. Like clockwork... Dad.'*

Amber lets out a small laugh and wipes a tear away.

AMBER (V.O.)

Some things can only be said when death puts up its insurmountable wall and goes... *'It's okay. You're protected now. There will be no response. Say what you please...'*

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

Amber has her left hand on a coffin, her wedding ring glistening in the sun. She stands beside the woman from the ice cream parlor... Cassie.

AMBER

So that's why I'm telling you all this dad, even though it's... difficult. And maybe even pointless. But death... it's just another stage, isn't it? Another transition we will never understand but we all have to go through. Alone.

Amber removes her left hand from the coffin and takes hold of Cassie's hand.

AMBER (CONT'D)

But we don't have to spend our lives alone to prepare for it.

(beat)

(MORE)

AMBER (CONT'D)

I think what you've taught me more than anything is to find someone to share the journey with, and love them the best way you can. Before it's too late.

Cassie wipes a tear away with her left hand, her wedding ring clearly visible. She leans in and kisses Amber on the head.

Amber stares at the coffin. She takes a deep breath.

AMBER (CONT'D)

So I guess this is goodbye, dad.

(beat)

I hope you found what you were looking for.

Amber takes one last look at the coffin, nods, and walks away arm-in-arm with Cassie.

The coffin is slowly lowered into the ground...

Painfully slow.

We stay with it though, unflinching and unmoving, until it finally disappears beneath the earth...

Because that's the time it takes.

FADE OUT.