

M Y S T E R I O U S S K I N

adapted by gregg araki
from a novel+screenplay by scott heim

05.01.02

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MYSTERIOUS SKIN

CRITICAL ACCLAIM FOR THE NOVEL

"As searing and unforgettable as an electric shock... After reading Heim's amazing debut, only one question remains: How will he ever top this?" - *Kirkus Reviews*

"Wrenching... Powerfully sensuous... What Mr. Heim seems to want to do is inhabit the mysterious skin of the anti-heroic and perverse. He does this less to flout convention and more because he seems hungry to explore extreme forms of experience" - *New York Times*

"Heim is breathtakingly unafraid to take chances, and the fact that he doesn't self-destruct in the process is just one reason he can be rightly called a promising author" - *San Francisco Chronicle*

"The ending left me with tears in my eyes, which is about the highest praise I can make of a novel" - *Philadelphia Inquirer*

"Eerie, precise, emotionally complex, quietly charismatic, and full of grace, *Mysterious Skin* is one of the most accomplished and mysteriously pleasurable novels I've read in years" - *Dennis Cooper, author of Try and Frisk*

"Explores new frontiers of sexuality in unexpected areas... Insightful and beautifully written" - *William S. Burroughs*

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When Scott Heim's debut novel *MYSTERIOUS SKIN* was first sent to me upon its publication in 1995, I thought it was the most beautiful, poetic, strangely powerful story I'd ever encountered. Reading it literally moved me to tears - something that's never happened to me with a piece of writing, before or since. However, while the book affected me profoundly, I couldn't see then how to translate it to the screen without compromising its darker, controversial elements - which are exactly what make the story so devastating and so important in the first place.

In 1996, Scott wrote a screenplay version of *MYSTERIOUS SKIN* and submitted it to the Sundance Writer's Lab. By coincidence, Michelle Satter asked me that year to be on the Lab Selection Committee and sent it as a potential project for evaluation. It, along with *BOYS DON'T CRY*, was one of the few scripts I recommended. Scott participated in the Sundance Lab in January 1997 where he developed the script with advisors including Stewart Stern (*REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE*, *SYBIL*), Peter Hedges (*GILBERT GRAPE*) and Robert Caswell (*CRY IN THE DARK*).

MYSTERIOUS SKIN resurfaced in my life a few years later and, in rethinking the project, I finally came up with a way to cinematically solve the problems of bringing it to the screen. I reread the book and, seeking to restore some of the novel's lyricism, I rewrote the script with Scott's blessing, taking it back closer to its original source. I joined forces with Antidote Films producers Mary Jane Skalski (formerly of Good Machine, producer of 2003 Sundance Award winner *THE STATION AGENT*) and Jeffrey Levy-Hinte (*LAUREL CANYON*, *THIRTEEN*, *HIGH ART*). Together, utilizing our many combined years of experience in the low-budget trenches, we set out to make a film of great beauty and amazing production value.

I envision *MYSTERIOUS SKIN* as a ravishing, provocative and deeply moving film experience. Elegantly photographed and intensely cinematic, I see the picture being as heartrending as *BOYS DON'T CRY*, as controversial as *KIDS*, as unsettling as vintage David Lynch and as gorgeously realized as *IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE*. Too few films today have any sort of impact or resonance - most are just sort of there, with no real reason for their existence. *MYSTERIOUS SKIN*, on the other hand, will be a movie that burns itself into the audience's psyche, that people will talk about, get emotional over, and absolutely will never forget.

A brilliant white void...

The incandescent, almost religious "Golden Hair" by Slowdive SWELLS as we...

FADE IN

OPENING CREDITS over

OUT-OF-FOCUS, MULTICOLORED BLURS falling like SLO-MO psychedelic snowflakes through blinding WHITE... Gradually, the abstract shapes become recognizable as pieces of CHILDREN'S BREAKFAST CEREAL raining down upon -

The luminous face of a YOUNG BOY, eyes closed in ecstasy in the cascade of sugar-encrusted particles... As MUSIC SOARS toward a majestic DolbyDigital crescendo -

FADE UP

TITLE:

MYSTERIOUS SKIN

SMASHCUT TO

Blackness.

And a teenage boy's voice emanating from nowhere -

BRIAN (VO)

The summer I was eight years old, five hours disappeared from my life.

SLOW FADE UP

INT. CELLAR. NIGHT

CAMERA SEARCHES the dank dimness, following a sliver of light bisecting the darkness. We hear the SOUND of faint OS breathing like that of a small, scared animal...

SUPERIMPOSE TITLE:

BLUE
1981, 1983, 1987

We find, cowering in the claustrophobic crawlspace, a pale, fairhaired BOY in a "Panthers" Little League uniform: BRIAN LACKEY (age 8). From his left nostril, a delicate rivulet of blood drips red.

BRIAN (VO, CONT'D)

Five hours. Lost. Gone without a trace.

Brian's eyes, wide behind wire-rimmed glasses, stare into the murkiness...

BRIAN (VO, CONT'D)

Last thing I remember I was sitting on the bench at my Little League game -

CUT TO

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DUGOUT. EVENING

(MOS) Brian (8), collecting splinters as usual, with the rest of the unfit PLAYERS. As it begins sprinkling -

BRIAN (VO, CONT'D)

It started to rain.

CU: Brian looks heavenward.

BRIAN (VO, CONT'D)
But what happened after that remains a pitch black void.

TITLE:

Brian Lackey
Summer 1981

CUT TO

CROSSFADE BACK TO

INT. CELLAR. NIGHT

BRIAN (8)'S POV: The crawlspace door opens and light and the warm, familiar smell of home flood in. Brian's older sister **DEBORAH (12)** peers into the gloom.

Brian?
DEBORAH (12)

Brian blinks in the brightness like some subterranean creature, baseball glove still on his hand.

DEBORAH (12)
You dork. What the heck're you doing in there?

Brian tries to speak, finds his throat stripped as if he's been screaming for hours.

DEBORAH (12)
(noticing)
Hey. You're bleeding.

Brian touches the blood dripping from his nose, looks down, dazed, at the red smudge on his fingertip.

DEBORAH (12)
(puzzled)
Come on.

She grabs Brian by the shoulders and lifts him back up into the world. Muscles cramped, he moves like a frail old man. When he finally speaks, his voice is weak, faraway:

BRIAN (8)
Where's Mom?

DEBORAH (12)
At work still.
(another weird look)
What's the matter with you?

Off Brian's numb confusion...

CROSSFADE TO

INT. LIVING ROOM. TWO HOURS LATER

INSERT CU: TIME-LAPSE - Game after game of "clock" SOLITAIRE, floating by like a blurry dream.

Brian sits with a Kleenex stuffed in his nostril, hugging a crocheted pillow as he stares at Deborah playing cards. Their father **MR. LACKEY** sleeps inert on the couch behind them like set dressing. As the OS SOUND of the door opening causes Brian to turn -

HIS POV: **MRS. LACKEY** arrives home, wearing a raincoat that reads "Kansas State Reformatory" over a starched tan uniform. She's attractive but plain, strong but tired, like she carries more than her share of the world's weight. As she shuts the door on the storm outside -

MRS. LACKEY
Whew. It's terrible out there.

Brian's face lights up while, behind him, Mr. Lackey stirs from his nap.

Mom!

BRIAN (8)

He scurries to her like a puppy, hugging her legs.

MRS. LACKEY
Well, hello there.

As Mrs. Lackey bends to embrace Brian, Mr. Lackey seems almost angry, disapproving.

MRS. LACKEY
(notices the Kleenex in Brian's nose)
What happened to you tonight?

DEBORAH (12)
(back to playing solitaire)
Brian got a bloody nose hiding in the cellar.

MRS. LACKEY
Well, whatever in the world were you doing down there?

Brian doesn't say anything, still shaken but comforted now by his mother's presence.

MR. LACKEY
Margaret, will you stop coddling that boy?

MRS. LACKEY
He's only eight, Bill, he can't exactly be expected to fend for himself.

Mr. Lackey rolls his eyes. As Mrs. Lackey holds her son -

MRS. LACKEY
Poor baby. Are you OK?

Off Brian whose face remains an expressionless blank..

CROSSFADE TO

INT. BATHROOM. NIGHT

INSERT CU: The faucet. *Drip... Drip...*

Brian (8) sits in the tub while Mrs. Lackey washes his upper torso with a hand towel.

MRS. LACKEY
They had me cooped up all night in that awful mailroom. I didn't even know it was raining till I got off work... Hold still.

She leans closer to delicately finger the dried blood from Brian's nostril.

Ow.

BRIAN (8)

MRS. LACKEY
Your game get rained out?

Brian nods slowly.

MRS. LACKEY
Did one of the other moms give you a ride home?

Beat. Brian nods again, not sure. The bathroom door opens and Mr. Lackey pokes his head in, frowning with displeasure.

MR. LACKEY
I'm going to bed.

MRS. LACKEY
Well, I hope you're happy. I knew he'd get hurt out there on the field playing sports.

MR. LACKEY
(reprimanding Brian)
When I was your age, I wasn't exactly the star player either. But at least I gave it my all. I wasn't a quitter. Hell, by the third or fourth summer, I actually got pretty damn decent at it.

Brian hangs his head in shame, mumbles:

BRIAN (8)
Sorry, dad.

Mr. Lackey shakes his head, regarding his son with something like disgust. As he leaves -

MR. LACKEY
Good night.

He closes the door and Mrs. Lackey rolls her eyes.

MRS. LACKEY
"Good night".
(to Brian)
I told your father this Little League thing was a stupid idea. Hold your nose.

Brian pinches his nostrils and his mother guides his head under the water like some soothing baptism -

CU: As we FOLLOW Brian underwater, reveling in the astonishing peace and quiet as all SOUND goes away -

BRIAN (VO)
Mom made me quit baseball the very next day.

SOUND PRELAP: Foreboding RUMBLE of THUNDER as we

CROSSFADE TO

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Brian (8), asleep, intermittently lit by FLASHES OF LIGHTNING from the ongoing storm outside.

CUT TO

INT. CELLAR. NIGHT

Brian (8), as at the opening, crouched in the dimness, eyes wide with fright -

CROSSFADE TO

INT. LIMBO

Brian (8), still in the Panthers uniform, now somewhere other than the crawlspace, but so close-up his surroundings are vague, unknown. As his small face looks up, curiously, into a soft BLUE LIGHT that suffuses the room -

HIS POV: A LARGE SHADOWY FIGURE comes closer, closer...

BACK TO

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM

Brian wakes with a start, filled with terror and revulsion. As he lies there, hyperventilating in the dark...

BRIAN (VO)

This was when the nightmares began.

FADE TO

BLACK

CUT TO

INT. LACKEY HOUSE - FOYER. DAY

(MOS) Brian (8), home from school, steps through the door, blood pouring from his nose. As Mrs. Lackey rushes over, trying to stem the flow -

BRIAN (VO, CONT'D)

And the nosebleeds.

BACK TO

BLACK

CUT TO

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM. MORNING

(MOS) Mr. Lackey, ranting, holds up a urine-stained bedsheet as Mrs. Lackey defends a humiliated Brian (8) -

BRIAN (VO, CONT'D)

I wet the bed several times.

BACK TO

BLACK

CUT TO

INT. KITCHEN. MORNING

(MOS) Mrs. Lackey and Deborah (12) jump up from the breakfast table as Brian (8), holding a glass of milk, suddenly loses consciousness -

BRIAN (VO, CONT'D)

Then there were the blackouts.

CU: Brian's head gently swaying backward -

BRIAN (VO, CONT'D)
I'd feel my eyes roll back in my head and I'd crumple like a dropped puppet.

INSERT CU: His glass of milk SHATTERING in spectacular SLO-MO on the linoleum...

FADE TO

BLACK

SOUND PRELAP: BANG... BANG...

CUT TO

INT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

Brian (8) and Deborah (12) on the couch in their pajamas while Mrs. Lackey pounds the side of the TV set. BANG. BANG. BANG.

MRS. LACKEY
Darned thing's not even a year old yet.

The TV screen remains staticky, scrambling with interference. As Deborah goes to help her mother -

DEBORAH (12)
Maybe it's screwed up from all that lightning last week.

MRS. LACKEY
Your father's going to be overjoyed about this...

As Brian, losing interest, drifts towards the window -

HIS POV: The backyard. Quiet, still, with a soft blue glow emanating from behind a patch of trees...

DEBORAH (12)
What time's Dad getting home?

MRS. LACKEY
Oh, not for another hour yet at least, honey.

CU: Brian, staring out the window, sees something that makes his heart stop.

Mom. Deborah...
BRIAN (8)

Mrs. Lackey and Deborah turn around.

Come look.
BRIAN (8)

As they join Brian at the window -

THEIR POV: A FLYING SAUCER, seemingly powered by a group of pulsating blue lights on its underside, glides through the sky, coming closer, closer...

Brian, Mrs. Lackey, Deborah gape in astonishment at the surreal sight -

DEBORAH (12)
(whispering)
It's a UFO.

MRS. LACKEY
Oh please. It's a weather balloon or something.

DEBORAH (12)
No. Look what it's doing to the TV.

She points at -

THEIR POV: The television, now going wild with STATIC.

They all three look back out the window -

THEIR POV: Beginning to lose sight of the UFO, now heading directly overhead...

DEBORAH (12)
It's flying over the house.

BRIAN (8)
Let's go up on the roof.

MRS. LACKEY
Children--

Before Mrs. Lackey can say another word, Brian and Deborah are tearing up the stairs to -

EXT. ROOFTOP. NIGHT

Brian rushes ahead, Deborah and Mrs. Lackey a step behind, all three gazing heavenward -

THEIR POV: The gigantic UFO cruising right over them, emitting a gentle HUM.

Their faces - amazed, dumbstruck, a little scared. Brian is completely enthralled.

DEBORAH (12)
I wonder if anyone else sees it...

BRIAN (8)
Shh.

The UFO's lights pulsate, bathing the trio in an otherworldly glow. Mrs. Lackey instinctively wraps her arms around her kids as -

THEIR POV: The UFO blocks out the night sky like a gargantuan eclipse -

DEBORAH (12)
Nobody's ever gonna believe this.

Mrs. Lackey holds her children tight as CAMERA MOVES IN on -

CU: Brian, in awe, like he's face-to-face with God, his wide-eyed features saturated with blue light...

BRIAN (VO)
 That summer, those were the two things I'd never forget. The cramped, stale darkness of the crawlspace and, equal in power and mystery, that UFO, out there somewhere, travelling across the universe...

CROSSFADE TO

TITLE:

Neil McCormick
 Summer 1981

CUT TO

INT. MCCORMICK HOUSE - BEDROOM. NIGHT

CU: Another BOY's face, subliminally familiar from the opening TITLE SEQUENCE: **NEIL MCCORMICK (8)**. In every way, Brian's antithesis - dark opposed to fair; sullen, tough opposed to shy and introverted; and most unlike Brian, not afraid of anything in the world.

As he stares...

NEIL (VO)
 The summer I was eight years old, I came for the first time.

HIS POV: What he's seeing: His mother **MRS. MCCORMICK** (30s, white trash sexy) straddles her redneck bf **ALFRED** on the slide of a rickety swingset. They're drunk, laughing, "*Wasted Days and Wasted Nights*" playing over a tinny radio. As Alfred **GROANS** like a harpooned walrus -

MRS. MCCORMICK
Shh! You're gonna wake Neil.

Neil stands on his bed in underwear printed with little baseballs, spying out the window.

HIS POV: Alfred buries his face in Mrs. McCormick's open blouse, smothering in her ripe breasts -

ALFRED
mmmmhpfh....

Mrs. McCormick returns the favor, ripping open Alfred's western style shirt, undoing his cowboy belt.

ALFRED
 Oh, Ellen. Yes...

CU: Neil watches, fascinated...

Alfred leans back in surrender while Mrs. McCormick unzips his pants. At the moment his monstrous hard-on is unleashed from its denim prison -

CU: Neil's eyes go wide.

HIS POV: Alfred's head rocks back in ecstasy as Mrs. McCormick blows him.

ALFRED
 Oh God, Ellen... That feels *so good... Yeah... Yeah...*

CU: Neil's little face scrunching with concentration -

HIS POV: As Alfred's face, contorted with carnal bliss, is **SUPERIMPOSED** with that of another sandy-haired **MUSTACHED MAN** -

ALFRED/MUSTACHED MAN
... Oh... That's *so amazing*...

Neil's eyes roll back, his mouth forming a small "o" -

NEIL (VO)
I mean, I'd been masturbating for years but it wasn't till that summer
that jizz actually squirted out of my dick when I came.

Squeezing his eyes shut, Neil GASPS, almost in pain, for what seems like a long time.

Finally, as he looks down with a mixture of surprise, repulsion and wonder...

NEIL (VO, CONT'D)
I couldn't wait to show Coach.

CUT TO

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD. DAY

(MOS) Mrs. McCormick climbs out of Alfred's PICKUP, a Peach Nehi in one hand and Neil (8)'s tiny hand in the other. With Alfred waiting in the truck, she proudly parades Neil out onto the field -

NEIL (VO, CONT'D)
But maybe I should start at the beginning. Back in June, my Mom
signed me up for Little League. It was Alfred's idea, a way for them to
fuck freely, without the expense of a sitter or worrying about me
walking in on them.

Mrs. McCormick drags Neil who, in his number 99 Panthers uniform, with black sunblock smudged under his eyes, resembles a miniature soldier of fortune.

MRS. MCCORMICK
Hurry, Neil. I think we're a little late.
(smiling at her tough-looking son)
You excited, honey?

NEIL (8)
(not very)
Uh huh.

They reach the diamond where a motley crew of BOYS (including Brian (8), totally out of his element) are lined up before their COACH who we see only from behind. He's wearing blue sweatpants, an A's cap, a tight white t-shirt.

MRS. MCCORMICK
(waving her soda can)
Coach Heider?

COACH turns around. In his mid-30s, with sandy blonde hair and a mustache, we subliminally recognize him as the MUSTACHED MAN from Neil's sex fantasy.

CU: Neil, gazing as if hypnotized.

HIS POV: Coach jogs towards US/NEIL. As he takes off his cap, wipes sweat from his brow of thinning hair...

NEIL (VO)
 Desire sledgehammered me. He looked like the lifeguards, cowboys
 and firemen I'd seen in the *Playgirls* that my mom kept stashed under
 her bed -

SUPERIMPOSE

The IMAGES of Neil's wet dreams: 80s style NAKED CENTERFOLD GUYS with mustaches and
 feathered hair lounging by pools, pouring champagne, nibbling strawberries...

BACK TO

CU: Neil's enraptured face.

NEIL (VO, CONT'D)
 Back then, I didn't know what to do with my feelings. They were like
 a gift I had to open in front of a crowd.

Mrs. McCormick reaches for Coach's hand, slipping into an instinctively flirtatious mode.

MRS. MCCORMICK
 Mr. Heider, I'm Ellen McCormick. And this is my son, Neil.

Coach shakes her hand firmly, looks down at Neil. He smiles.

Hello, Neil.

COACH

Neil averts his gaze, looks at the dirt.

He's a little shy.

MRS. MCCORMICK

(to Neil)

Neil, aren't you going to say hello to your new coach?

Neil keeps looking down, finally mumbles a barely audible:

NEIL (8)

huh...

MRS. MCCORMICK
 (laughing, to Coach)

Don't worry, it takes him awhile to warm up to strangers.

Off Coach's crinkly-eyed smile...

CUT TO

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD. DAY

SERIES OF JUMPCUTS

The other Boys - Brian (8) included - cowering, hitting fouls, striking out while Coach grimaces.

NEIL (VO)
 I quickly became the team's star player - which wasn't saying much
 considering the other kids were a bunch of hopeless spazzes.

Neil (8) steps up to the plate, pistoning his arm like a pint-sized pro.

Coach smiles. Lobs him a pitch -

CRAAAAACK! Little Neil smacks a line drive deep into left field in GLORIOUS SLO-MO.

As Coach grins...

CROSSFADE TO

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD. EVENING

First game of the season, excitement and mosquitoes buzzing in the thick summer air. Neil (8) up to bat. As he knocks one to the bleacher wall -

NEIL (VO, CONT'D)

Our first game, bottom of the eighth, I whacked a triple with the bases loaded. The crowd went fuckin' nuts.

Neil running the bases as the CROWD rises to their feet, CHEERING in the stands.

NEIL (VO, CONT'D)

But I didn't care about that. All that mattered was it made Coach proud.

From third base, Neil looks to Coach who beams, giving him a thumbs up.

CUT TO

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD. LATER

(MOS) The end of game routine as described by Neil -

NEIL (VO, CONT'D)

After every game, there's this lameass ritual where, to display sportsmanship, you're s'posed to bump fists with your opponents and go "good game".

Neil in line with the others, jogging towards the opposing team -

NEIL (VO, CONT'D)

But I always just stayed silent and glared. This pissed the other team off more than if I shrieked "Fuck you!" right in their faces.

Off Coach, smiling at Neil's bad boy behavior...

CROSSFADE TO

INT. MCCORMICK LIVING ROOM. EVENING

(MOS) Mrs. McCormick, wearing an IGA supermarket checker uniform, is on the phone while Neil (8) lies on the floor playing with a battalion of evil-looking ACTION FIGURES.

NEIL (VO, CONT'D)

After that first victory, Coach called my Mom to tell her he was taking the team out to a movie to celebrate.

(MOS) Neil looks up as Mrs. McCormick gives him the good news. Off his blank reaction...

CUT TO

INT. MCCORMICK HOUSE. THE NEXT DAY

Neil (8) runs over, opens the door to find -

HIS POV: Coach on his porch, dressed casually in a t-shirt and jeans.

Hey, big guy. Ready to go? COACH

uh huh... NEIL (8)
(having trouble making eye contact)

As Coach's smiles -

CUT TO

INT. STATION WAGON (MOVING). DAY

Neil (8) in the passenger seat beside Coach, a pine-tree-shaped air freshener hanging from the mirror.

Where's everybody else? NEIL (8)

Oh, it's just gonna be you and me today. COACH

Neil gives Coach a look, a bit puzzled but excited at the same time.

Really? NEIL (8)

Coach nods, smiling.

Yup. COACH

Cool. NEIL (8)

CUT TO

INT. MOVIE THEATRE. DAY

(MOS) In the dimness, Neil (8) stares up at the luminous screen, happily feasting on popcorn, candy and soda. Coach, meanwhile, ignores the movie, immersed instead in watching Neil.

NEIL (VO)
I picked "Blood Prom", an R-rated slasher flick with tons of cool gore and murders in it. When this one really annoying blonde chick got her head chopped off, I cheered, which made Coach laugh.

(MOS) Neil, reveling in the onscreen mayhem, while Coach smiles approvingly...

CUT TO

EXT. COACH'S HOUSE. DUSK

(MOS) Coach, carrying a pizza box, unlocks the front door for Neil (8) -

NEIL (VO, CONT'D)
After the movie, we picked up a pizza and headed back to Coach's.

INT. COACH'S HOUSE

As Neil and Coach enter, Neil's face goes slack with wonder -

HIS POV: Coach's living room is a young boy's dream clubhouse come true: beanbag chairs, shag carpet, toys, sports equipment, comic books, videogames...

NEIL (VO, CONT'D)

Coach's house was *awesome*. He had a giant TV, an Atari with Donkey Kong, Frogger, all my favorite games...

Neil, amazed, looks up at Coach who gives him a big, crinkly smile -

CROSSFADE TO

INT. COACH'S LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

INSERT CU: A Frogger game ending with a FROG disappearing *BLOOP*.

Neil (8) and Coach sit crosslegged on the floor, surrounded by pizza remnants and half-drunken cans of soda.

NEIL (8)

Ha! You drowned. My turn.

As Neil takes the controls -

COACH

So you sure your mom's not expecting you?

NEIL (8)

(fixed on his game)

She works. Plus she's probably got a date with Alfred after.

COACH

My guess is you spend alot of time by yourself.

INSERT CU: On screen, Neil's frog vaults over a ravenous alligator.

NEIL (8)

Yeah, but I kinda like it. I just ride my bike, watch TV. It's cool--

INSERT CU: Neil's frog dies *BLOOP*.

NEIL (8)

Oh shit! You made me mess up!

COACH

Sorry.

(an idea)

Hold on.

Neil watches Coach go over to the stereo cabinet, extract a SMALL MICROPHONE which he plugs into his tape deck.

COACH

Come here for a sec. And bring one of those cans of Peach Nehi.

Neil, puzzled, does as he's told while Coach flicks switches on his amplifier.

COACH

This might seem weird at first, but I need to record my team's voices, especially my best players.

He hands the mike to Neil who looks at it as if it were some kind of dead animal.

COACH
Just talk into it using your normal voice.

NEIL (8)
(baffled)
What should I say?

COACH
Anything you want. Start with your name.

NEIL (8)
Neil...

COACH
OK. Now take a big drink of pop and burp.

Even more confused, Neil takes a swig but some soda spills down his face and onto the carpet.

NEIL (8)
Shit.

COACH
Good, good. Say "shit" again.

NEIL (8)
Shit.

COACH
Again.

NEIL (8)
Shit, shit, shit..

Neil, happy that he's amusing Coach, inadvertently burps.

COACH
That's great! Keep going -

Coach grabs a STILL CAMERA from the top of the stereo, starts fervently CLICKING PICTURES while Neil gleefully continues burping and swearing -

NEIL (8)
Shit (burp). Shit (burp)...

COACH
That's it... Now look up at me... Stick your tongue out...

NEIL (8)
(laughing)
Shit! (burp) Goddamn! (burp)! Shit, hell, fuck...

As Neil, enamored with the attention, performs for Coach who keeps taking pictures, IMAGES momentarily FREEZING with each CLICK -

COACH
Yes, Neil, yes...

The FREEZEFRAMES come faster, faster - Coach inserts his finger between Neil's lips *CLICK*... Neil opens his mouth *CLICK*... Bites down on the finger *CLICK* -

Oh Neil, that's perfect. COACH

As the IMAGE drowns in a FLASH of blinding WHITE...

CROSSFADE TO

INT. MCCORMICK KITCHEN. AFTERNOON

Mrs. McCormick fixes her makeup, getting ready for work, while Neil (8) sits at the table eating a bowl of Spaghetti-Os.

NEIL (VO)
July second. We had a 7:30 game against Hutchinson Taco Hut.

MRS. MCCORMICK
I feel like a slave. There's got to be more to life than this...

She stoops to hug Neil.

MRS. MCCORMICK
I know you're gonna kick their butts tonight. Knock one out of the park for your poor, hard-working mom, will ya, slugger?
(kisses the top of Neil's head)
So you're getting a ride home with Coach, right?

Neil nods as Mrs. McCormick rushes out the door.

MRS. MCCORMICK
You're mine and I love you and don't you ever forget it.

As she leaves and Neil resumes slurping Spaghetti-Os...

CROSSFADE TO

INT. COACH'S HOUSE. NIGHT

Coach and Neil (8) enter, Coach turning on the lights. Neil beams proudly as Coach musses his hair.

COACH
Boy, were you on fire tonight! It's the best you've ever played!

NEIL (8)
Thanks, Coach.

Making himself at home, Neil collapses into a bean bag chair.

NEIL (8)
Can we play some more of those game cartridges tonight?

COACH
Sure. But I wanna show you something first.

He goes to the bookshelf, extracts the latest in a series of identical PHOTO ALBUMS. He hands the book to Neil who sits up to take a look -

INSERT CU: The pages are filled with PHOTOS of Neil taken the other night. In most of the pictures,

Neil's pupils gleam red like a demonic albino's.

Neil is confused but flattered to see so many pictures of himself - more than have been taken of him his entire life.

INSERT CU: A PHOTO of Neil, his eyes closed, with Coach's finger touching the tip of his tongue.

NEIL (8)

Ew. I look stupid in this one.

COACH

No, you're perfect. Your expression - it's like you're having a wonderful dream.

Coach sits on the beanbag next to Neil. Places his huge hand over Neil's knee.

COACH

Neil, I've been thinking about you alot this week.

Neil, feeling his face flush, gets up from the beanbag.

NEIL (8)

I'm hungry.

COACH

What d'you feel like eating? Another pizza? Or maybe there's something here you'd like?

He gets up, leading Neil to -

INT. KITCHEN

Coach opens the cupboards which are stockpiled with the foods kids dream about - candy, cookies, Hostess pies, Tang, boxes of pudding. A virtual smorgasbord of sugar-sweetened heaven.

NEIL (8)

(face lighting up)

Whoa...

Coach picks Neil up, lifting him like he's weightless towards the cupboard of unearthly delights.

COACH

So what'll it be, lil' buddy?

Neil reaches for -

INSERT CU: A BREAKFAST SAMPLER PAK, miniature boxes of ten different kinds of cereal.

NEIL (8)

My mom never buys these. Says they're a big waste of money.

Coach grins.

COACH

Let's eat then.

Neil sits at the kitchen table, removing the plastic wrap like it's Christmas paper while Coach fetches milk and two spoons.

Which one do you want? NEIL (8)

What are you having? COACH

Corn pops. NEIL (8)

Then it's Cocoa Krispies for me. COACH

Coach takes his place at the table, setting down the milk and spoons. He faultlessly opens his carton, creating a cardboard receptacle ready to add milk and eat. Neil tries to emulate but his box explodes, cereal flying everywhere -

Shit. NEIL (8)

He looks down, embarrassed, at the crunchy gold nuggets scattered all over the linoleum.

Sorry... NEIL (8)

Coach holds his finger to his lips, stifling Neil's apology. He then lifts his box over his own head and Cocoa Krispies rain down. Neil gasps in disbelief.

Coach then opens the Froot Loops, AlphaBits, Special K. Tosses them all in the air. For an insane moment, the air is full of multicolored confetti from heaven, sprinkling down on Coach and Neil's delighted, laughing face.

Neil, overcome with shock and glee, looks down -

HIS POV: The floor, covered with pieces of cereal, like crazy colored snow.

He looks up -

HIS POV: (The entire scene is now rendered in FIRST PERSON SUBJECTIVE - from Neil's POV) Coach is staring directly INTO CAMERA at US/NEIL. His expression now ever-so-subtly different, he seems less invincible, superheroic. Suddenly he's just a man, with human wants and needs... As he moves inexorably towards US/NEIL -

Here we go. COACH

Coach looms closer, closer, like a monster, KISSING US/NEIL. As his face obscures the LENS like a giant dark cloud -

I like you, Neil. I like you so much... COACH

CAMERA MOVES with Coach, him hovering over us, leading US/NEIL to the floor -

CU: Neil lying flat on the floor, surrounded by crushed bits of cereal. His eyes wide with nervous wonder, he shifts his body, pieces of cereal crunching beneath his small frame. Snap, crackle, pop...

HIS POV: Coach reaches for US/NEIL, stroking his/our face -

As Neil closes his eyes -

FADE TO

BLACK

COACH (OS)
When I really, really like someone -

FADE UP

CU: Coach laying his head on Neil's Number 99 uniform, listening to his tiny, racing heart.

COACH
There's a way I show them how I feel -

FADE TO

BLACK

COACH (OS)
Shh...

FADE UP

NEIL'S POV: Coach, gazing adoringly at US/NEIL

COACH
Angel.

FADE TO

BLACK

COACH (OS)
There's nothing wrong with kissing someone like this...

FADE UP

NEIL'S POV: Coach on top of US/NEIL, coming closer, closer...

COACH
Don't let anyone tell you that it's wrong.

As he kisses US/NEIL deeply, passionately, his head filling the frame like a huge black sun - we hear a new SOUND in addition to Coach's shallow, excited breathing: Neil's tiny, low moans. Like a small animal drowning in a sack at the bottom of a deep, dark lake...

SLOW FADE TO

BLACK

Silence.
Then:

NEIL (VO)
It happened. That's what I told myself. It just happened. After it was over, I looked down at the mess on the floor -

CUT TO

INT. KITCHEN

Neil (8) examining the aftermath -

HIS POV: The two spoons, a pearly bead of Coach's come, pulverized particles of brightly colored cereal strewn everywhere - like Jackson Pollack in three dimensions.

NEIL (VO, CONT'D)
It was like a kaleidoscope had shattered.

CU: Neil, expressionless, registering nothing. He blinks, gulps...

NEIL (VO, CONT'D)
And when I swallowed, the taste of Coach's tongue seared my mouth.

BACK TO

BLACK

FADE UP

INT. KITCHEN

Coach kneels at Neil's eye level. Ironically, the image recalls a coach giving pointers to his star player.

COACH
You liked it. It's OK that you liked it.

CU: Neil's face, utterly blank.

HIS POV: Coach, gazing again directly at US/NEIL:

COACH
Everything's gonna be OK...

SLOW CROSSFADE TO

TITLE:

October 1983

SOUND PRELAP:

DEBORAH (14) (OS)
Brian. Brian, come on!

CUT TO

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - HUTCHINSON. NIGHT

Halloween. Deborah (14), dressed as a witch, calls to Brian (10) who's in a red devil costume.

DEBORAH (14)
Hurry your slowpoke butt up! We only have one crummy hour in Hutchinson before we have to go meet Dad at Aunt Judy's.

BRIAN (10)
(pouting)
I wanted to be a spaceman.

DEBORAH (14)
Would you just quit your whining and hurry?

Deborah grabs Brian's hand, dragging him while assorted KIDS run past, shrieking and screaming. As both Brian and Deborah pause, noticing -

THEIR POV: A HOUSE across the street, decorated for Halloween. Scary Jack-o-lanterns in the

windows, skeletons on the door, covered in cobwebs. Pre-recorded HOWLING emanates from speakers on the lawn as a line of costumed KIDS file in and out.

What's that? BRIAN (10)

A Haunted House. Let's go. DEBORAH (14)

Dad says we're supposed to stay on this side of the street. BRIAN (10)
(uneasy)

Come on, we'll just go for a minute then come right back. DEBORAH (14)

As Deborah pulls a reluctant Brian across the street -

EXT. "HAUNTED HOUSE"

Deborah and Brian approach the house where a WOMAN dressed as a vampire ushers KIDS inside.

Oooooooooooooo.... Beeewaaaaaaare.... VAMPIRE WOMAN

Brian is getting freaked out while Deborah's not scared one bit. TWO KIDS on their way out pass by, extravagantly dressed as spiders, extra eyes glued to their faces, extra legs bobbing at their sides. It's Neil (10) and his cohort-in-crime ten-year-old WENDY PETERSON.

Brian and Neil's eyes meet in a subjectively-accentuated SLO-MO moment of blurry recognition while an OS kid's voice SCREAMS in terror. As Neil scowls at Brian with something like derision, exits -

Do you know him or something? DEBORAH (14)

Brian doesn't answer, deeply unsettled... Deborah shrugs.

C'mon. DEBORAH (14)

As she pulls him along and they disappear, swallowed up by the house -

EXT. STREET. NIGHT

Neil and Wendy head back towards the sidewalk, spider legs bouncing up and down.

How lame was that. NEIL (10)

Totally. WENDY (10)

Like that "bucket of eyeballs" was so obviously just grapes with their skins peeled off. NEIL (10)

I know. Ooooooh, I'm so scared. WENDY (10)

They laugh, both jaded beyond their years. Neil takes an apple from his treat bag, hurls it to the sidewalk.

What are you *doing*? WENDY (10)

Neil jumps up and down, stomping the apple to bits. He looks down at the splattered mush, frowns.

Damn. No razor. NEIL (10)

Wendy laughs, clearly infatuated with Neil's outlaw behavior.

You're insane. WENDY (10)

A TRIO OF KIDS dressed as a PIRATE, BEARDED LADY and a DRAGON pass by.

NEIL (10)
(conspiratorial, to Wendy)
Hey. It's you-know-who from school. The Retardo.

Wendy gives him a puzzled look.

NEIL (10)
The Dragon. It's that LD, Learning Disability guy.
(retarded face/gesture)

Stephen Zepherelli? WENDY (10)

Neil nods, eying the trio. There are no parents in sight. As his face lights up in an evil grin -

Let's kidnap him. NEIL (10)

What? WENDY (10)

Before Wendy can protest, Neil runs after the threesome, grabs Stephen by the arm. Green face, smudged with candy, Stephen looks dumbfounded.

NEIL (10)
(to the other Kids)
His mom says we're supposed to take him home.

The Pirate and Bearded Lady trade baffled looks as Neil and Wendy whisk Stephen away. With Stephen hindered not only by mental deficiencies but also his bulky green costume -

Ow. W-wait... STEPHEN

Shut up, retard. NEIL (10)

Wh-where are you taking me?... STEPHEN

NEIL (10)
A house with lots and lots of candy.

STEPHEN
Goody.

Neil grabs a Zero bar from Stephen's plastic pumpkin treat bag, unwraps it.

NEIL (10)
Here. Zero, perfect for you.
(shoves the bar in Stephen's mouth)

STEPHEN
Mmmmm..

Stephen happily munches on the candy as Neil jerks him along roughly, almost violently -

CUT TO

EXT. MCCORMICK HOUSE - FRONT YARD. NIGHT

Neil, Wendy, Stephen come upon Neil's house which looks dark, deserted.

NEIL (10)
OK. You hold him while I'm go get something.

WENDY (10)
What are we gonna do?

NEIL (10)
Have some fun.

He runs into the house. Wendy turns to Stephen who has spittle collecting in the corner of his mouth.

STEPHEN
Is this the house with all the candy?

Off Wendy, not answering...

CUT TO

INT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

Neil enters to find Mrs. McCormick passed out, snoring on the couch, a bottle of gin and an empty glass on the floor beside her. A horror movie plays on TV, volume off: black-and-white ZOMBIES lurch across a field, casting flickering shadows around the room.

Neil scurries up the stairs -

BACK TO

EXT. FRONT YARD

Neil reappears, holding a paper bag and a flashlight.

WENDY (10)
What's that?

Neil, not answering, turns on the flashlight, its beam slicing the darkness.

Follow me.

NEIL (10)

Stephen makes a whimpering puppy sound while Wendy, concealing her uncertainty, lets Neil lead the way like a miniature explorer...

EXT. BACKYARD

A cold, pitch black wilderness. Neil and Wendy herd Stephen past the old swingset to a clearing beneath an apricot tree where rotten fruit litter the lawn like mashed human organs. As Neil pushes Stephen toward a coffin-sized, cement-filled hole -

Lie down.

NEIL (10)

Stephen just stands there, scared, drooling.

I said Lie Down, Retard.

NEIL (10)

Stephen does as instructed while Neil hands the flashlight to Wendy. Crouching on the ground, Neil unpacks the bag's contents like a surgeon laying out his instruments. Wendy shines the light on -

INSERT CU: Three BOTTLE ROCKETS and a pack of MATCHES.

Wendy looks confused as Neil picks up the rockets, approaches Stephen -

W-what are you....?

STEPHEN

Shut up, retard. Shut up or we'll kill you.
Point the beam over here.

NEIL (10)
(to Wendy)

Wendy does as she's told, turning the beam on Stephen's eyes widening with fright.

Open your mouth.

NEIL (10)

Stephen makes a small whining sound.

I said Open Your Mouth.

NEIL (10)

Stephen obeys and Neil inserts the rocket sticks in his drooling mouth. Wendy, seeing the handicapped boy's naked fear, begins to lose her nerve.

Now keep these in your fuckin' mouth. And you better do what we say, or we'll kill you, I swear.

NEIL (10)

Stephen, with the rockets protruding like cartoon buckteeth, is an image of profound, absurd horror.

Neil, what--?

WENDY (10)

Give me the matches. NEIL (10)

Neil, emotionless, takes the matchbook from Wendy -

INSERT CU: Strikes a match.

INSERT CU: Lights the fuses - one, two, three...

Neil and Wendy skitter back, their spider arms jiggling.

CU: Stephen's face, illuminated by the garish orange light of the burning fuses -

mmmpfhhh...! STEPHEN

Wendy hides her eyes, unable to look, while Neil stares, face lit low-angle, ghoulish, by the rockets' glow till -

POP POP POP The rockets go sailing into the air, exploding in pitiful gold bursts over the yard.

A dark, still eternity. Finally, Neil says to Wendy who stands there, frightened, trembling -

Shine the flashlight on him. NEIL (10)

Wendy, fearing the worst, slowly pans the beam towards their victim...

She gasps in horror.

THEIR POV: Stephen's face is covered with grey streaks of powder, his bulging eyes darting back and forth like nervous fish in a bowl. His lips are torn and bleeding, tiny red splinters from the rockets sticking out of them like porcupine quills.

Wendy looks like she might throw up.

OhmyGod... WENDY (10)

Neil meanwhile, looks blank, deadened.

Neil, he's gonna tattle. We are so gonna get it. WENDY (10)

No. He won't tell. There's things we can do to get him on our side. NEIL (10)

Neil crouches, starts untying Stephen's green sweat pants.

Don't worry. I know what to do. NEIL (10)

With Wendy's shaky flashlight beam illuminating his actions in intermittent bursts, Neil speaks in a lower, older register as if suddenly channeling someone else -

It's OK, buddy. You just stay still for a minute. You're my little green buddy, right? There's this cool thing I wanna show you... NEIL (10)

Neil pulls down Stephen's pants while Wendy just watches like it's a bad dream...

NEIL (10)

When I was little, a man used to do this to me and it feels really good.

Seemingly forgetting Wendy's presence, Neil begins fondling Stephen's OS penis.

NEIL (10)

That's nice, isn't it?

Stephen gazes at the black sky as if he's going into a trance.

STEPHEN

mmm...

Neil smiles while Wendy can't believe what she's witnessing. Then as Neil lowers his head to Stephen's crotch -

CU: Stephen's face, no longer scared, goes slack with pleasure. He moans, a bubble of drool mixed with blood collecting on his lips -

STEPHEN

uhhhhh...

Off Wendy, horrified, repulsed, utterly transfixed...

CROSSFADE TO

INT. "HAUNTED HOUSE." NIGHT.

A small troop of KIDS including Brian (10) and Deborah (14) venture through the darkness with HORROR FILM MUSIC and FX playing in the BG. On the dining room table, a fake VICTIM's head pokes from a hole, ringed with stage BLOOD, a red-spattered AXE nearby. As the Victim MOANS, the sound almost sexual, Vampire Woman holds out a yellow plastic BUCKET -

VAMPIRE WOMAN

These are the eyes of the Axe Murderer's victims...

Brian tries not to cower as Deborah thrusts her hand into the bucket of *SQUISHY* globules. She just smiles, enjoying the tactile sensation, not scared at all. Then, as both Deborah and Vampire Woman turn to Brian...

VAMPIRE WOMAN

Your turn, little boy.

Brian is petrified. As older KIDS behind him - a MUMMY; a FRANKENSTEIN start razzing him:

MUMMY

Come on, "Satan".

FRANKENSTEIN

Hurry up, chicken.

BRIAN'S POV: Vampire Woman coming closer, closer with the bucket of eyeballs...

Finally, Brian freaks, bolting for the door, the others Kids laughing and jeering. As Deborah grabs him by the arm -

Where are you going? DEBORAH (14)

I wanna go. BRIAN (10)

You big baby. This isn't even scary. DEBORAH (14)

Brian stands there, lips quivering like he's about to cry. Deborah sighs, irritated.

Wait outside for me. I'll be done in a minute. DEBORAH (14)

As Brian scampers away -

EXT. "HAUNTED HOUSE"

Shaken, shivering in the cold, Brian emerges from the house. Three older Bullies, dressed as a SOLDIER, FIREMAN and TENNIS PLAYER descend upon him.

What's the matter, "Satan"? SOLDIER

Brian tries to retreat but the Bullies have him surrounded.

N-nothing. BRIAN (10)

What'd you say, punk? SOLDIER

Nothing. BRIAN (10)

The Soldier shoves Brian and his wirerim glasses go flying. As Brian looks around, frantic -

HIS POV: PANNING through a world reduced to an OUT-OF-FOCUS blur.

The Bullies laugh as Brian desperately tries to find his glasses. The Soldier pushes him again, sending him to the ground -

INSERT CU: *CRRRUNCH*. His right knee crushes his glasses to shards.

BRIAN'S POV: The OUT-OF-FOCUS Bullies laugh louder.

What a loser! FIREMAN

Brian starts to cry.

Loser! Loser! Looooooooo-ser!! SOLDIER/FIREMAN/TENNIS PLAYER

As Brian runs away, bawling, tripping, bumping into things, taunted by OS laughter -

HIS POV: HANDHELD, OUT-OF-FOCUS MIASMA of cars, trailing streetlights, KIDS in scary MASKS...

CUT TO

EXT. GROVE

Finally, Brian stops, hyperventilating, heart racing like a frightened deer. We see that he's now in a grove of tall trees but all he sees is:

HIS POV: Dark, OUT-OF-FOCUS shadows and shapes, like a Caligari nightmare.

Brian listens: Chirping CRICKETS. The murmur of a nearby creek. A barely perceptible night breeze... Then, the RUSTLE of someone approaching. Footsteps. The CRICKETS suddenly STOP.

Who's there? BRIAN (10)

There's eerie stillness, as if the whole world is holding its breath. Then the SNAP of a twig breaking.

Brian turns, his terrified face bathed in a by-now-familiar BLUE light -

Brian. OS MALE VOICE

BRIAN'S POV: A large, OUT-OF-FOCUS FIGURE coming towards him...

FLASHCUT

INT. UFO. NIGHT

(MOS) CU: Brian (8) in his Panthers uniform, unconscious on a silver table as -

A SILHOUETTE approaches, backlit by overpowering BLUE LIGHT -

Brian... OS MALE VOICE

BACK TO

EXT. GROVE

CU: Brian's eyes widen as BLOOD begins to trickle from his nostril...

HIS POV: The OUT-OF-FOCUS FIGURE almost upon him -

I thought that was you MALE VOICE

As Brian's eyes roll back in his head and he passes out -

FADE TO

BLACK

SOUND: The OS THUD of Brian's body hitting the ground. Followed by the RUSTLE of clothing, footsteps, unknown movement. Then...

Silence.

CUT TO

EXT. GROVE. LATER THAT NIGHT

(MOS) CU: Brian, bloody nose now dried, wakes, disoriented, covered with dirt and bits of leaves -

BRIAN (VO)
I woke up, once again not knowing where I was or what had happened.

BACK TO

BLACK

CUT TO

EXT. "HAUNTED HOUSE" FRONT YARD. NIGHT

(MOS) As concerned PARENTS and curious KIDS congregate, Deborah asks a shaken Brian what's wrong -

BRIAN (VO, CONT'D)
By the time I made my way back, Deborah said I'd been missing for over an hour. But I couldn't remember a thing. All I knew was that it was somehow linked to the other time, the night I woke up in the cellar...

Off Brian's pale, shellshocked face...

SLOW CROSSFADE TO

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

CAMERA SLOWLY DESCENDS on Brian (10), in bed, staring into the darkness.

BRIAN (VO, CONT'D)
And I also knew that, no matter how long it took, I had to find out what had happened to me. I had to find an answer to the mystery...

FADE TO

BLACK

CUT TO

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - HUTCHINSON. DAY

A cold winter day. A lonesome figure bicycles beneath a panoramic, slate grey sky.

SUPERIMPOSE TITLE:

December 1987

NEIL (now 15, a pubescent, even rangier version of his younger self) rides his beatup BIKE along a deserted street.

NEIL (VO)
When I was fifteen, I overheard some kids at school talking about a place. A place that you could find even in a dumbass hicktown like Hutchinson...

CU: Neil, excited, anxious. As he pedals faster -

EXT. CAREY PARK. DAY

Neil arrives at a children's PLAYGROUND - swings, jungle gym, brightly painted circus animals anchored by heavy springs. Next to the playground, a graffiti-covered bunkerlike public BATHROOM.

Neil drops his bike on the ground, glances around -

HIS POV: Of the road which snakes through the park. An old IMPALA cruises by, its DRIVER, barely visible behind the window glass, staring into CAMERA...

Neil leans against a chipped pink elephant, pulls his knit cap lower over his freezing ears. Takes out a cigarette, lights it with a match.

HIS POV: Another car, a SUBARU STATION WAGON, passes by so slowly it's barely moving at all. The car taps its brakes once, twice, red lights winking.

Bingo. NEIL

HIS POV: The Subaru does a U-turn, stops. Its window rolls down a crack and a hand beckons.

Neil takes a deep breath, then says:

Here we go. NEIL

Full of nervous excitement, Neil tosses his cig, saunters towards the car.

HIS POV: The window lowers to reveal an overweight **OLDER MAN** with thinning, curly hair, dressed in a green suit and tacky Christmas tie. He looks Neil over like a piece of meat.

How's it going? OLDER MAN
(practically smacking his lips)

OK. NEIL

Neil fidgets while the Older Man rubs the corner of his mouth.

I'm Charlie. OLDER MAN

Neil. NEIL

Wanna go for a ride? CHARLIE

Neil shrugs with a nonchalant coolness he's practiced in the mirror.

Sure. NEIL

CUT TO

INT. SUBARU (MOVING). DAY

Neil, in the passenger seat, rubs his knuckle against the frosty cold window glass.

You got cash? NEIL

I'll pay fifty, no higher. CHARLIE

Neil nods, fine.

CHARLIE
You've got to be careful. Cops patrol this whole area - even when it's freezing out.

Neil pretends to listen, checking out the fastfood containers and unwrapped packages of crackers and cookies littering the car's interior. It's obvious the man is married, has kids. A toy hangs from the rearview, a tiny stuffed bear in a red shirt that says "DADDY".

CHARLIE
I'm in Hutchinson on business. I supply snack foods to the local markets.

(pointing behind him)
Go ahead. Take anything you want.

Neil turns to find the back of the car filled with cartons of chocolate chip cookies, swiss cake rolls, peanut butter crackers... He leans over, grabs a handful, starts chowing.

CHARLIE
Hungry, huh?

NEIL
(mouth full, face dotted with crumbs)
mhm.

Charlie reaches over, pats Neil's thigh. Off the older man's leering smile...

CUT TO

INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY

Charlie enters, switching on the light. The place is creepy, couldn't be uglier. Burnt orange bedspread with a fist-sized black stain, coin-op TV, dust glittering in the sunlight seeping through curtains which are hurriedly drawn by Charlie. Neil sits on the bed like a robot, removes his jacket and cap.

CHARLIE
(rubbing his hands together)
Well, we've only got an hour, so we'd better get busy.

Neil goes to pull off his sweater and shirt.

CHARLIE
Wait.

Neil pauses.

CHARLIE
Let me.

Neil shrugs. As Charlie peels off Neil's top as if unveiling a priceless sculpture -

CHARLIE
(now he *does* smack his lips)
Gorgeous.

Neil can't help but smile, relishing this man's adoring attention. He stretches his lithe torso, putting on a show for his grateful audience.

CHARLIE

What do you like to do? Tell me what you want me to do.

Neil, thinking "I'm a pro", lies back on the bed, says what he knows Charlie wants to hear:

NEIL

Whatever.

CHARLIE

(loosening his tie, eyes fixed on Neil's crotch)
You like older guys? Huh? Tell me...

Neil stares at the ceiling.

NEIL

Yeah.

Charlie's hands are on Neil's hips, rubbing his upper legs through the denim of his pants.

NEIL

(rehearsed)

mmh. That feels nice.

Completely under Neil's power, Charlie unbuckles the boy's belt, undoes his jeans.

CHARLIE

You are such a beautiful, beautiful boy.

Neil's eyes remain on the ceiling as Charlie pulls his pants down to his calves. We don't see Neil's dick but from Charlie's reaction, the sight of it is like a fucking revelation.

CU: Neil smiles, knowing he's a fantasy come true for this pathetic old man.

Charlie, unable to stand it any longer, lunges forward, engulfing Neil's cock.

CU: Neil winces almost in pain. When his eyes open again, they keep staring, staring at the ceiling...

CHARLIE (OS)

Mmmm...mmmmmpfh.....mmmmhh...

Slowly, Charlie's hand enters the frame, creeping up Neil's torso, neck, ear, finally lingering on his full, red lips. Neil kisses the man's pudgy fingers, nibbling a little, not for one second taking his eyes off the ceiling. As CAMERA PUSHES in on his expressionless face -

CROSSFADE TO

INT. WHITE VOID

REPLAY of the OPENING SEQUENCE (though now more real, not quite as abstracted): Multicolored bits of cereal showering down on Neil (8)'s blissed out face... As Neil suddenly, startlingly bursts into almost violent laughter -

BACK TO

INT. MOTEL ROOM

Neil blinks, returning to tawdry reality. Noticing his breathing getting faster, shallower, he realizes:

I'm gonna come.

NEIL

He repeats, deliberately:

I'm gonna come.

NEIL

And he does, his face twisting, scrunching up, his breath becoming choked gasps while OS, Charlie makes muffled gulping, swallowing, moaning SOUNDS...

CROSSFADE TO

INT. MOTEL ROOM. LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Charlie swishes, gargles, spits mouthwash into the bathroom sink while Neil does his pants back up.

CHARLIE

I know what you're thinking. That wasn't safe. But we're in Kansas, thank God, not some big city full of disease.

He fastidiously washes his hands while Neil picks up the grimy money lying on the bedspread.

CHARLIE

Plus, you're only a kid.

Neil doesn't react, shoving the bills into his pocket..

CROSSFADE TO

EXT. CAREY PARK. THAT NIGHT

WENDY (now also a sullen, alienated teenager) rides her Schwinn past the skeletal playground equipment while a wolf howls in the distance like in some B horror movie. She stops by the pink elephant where Neil sat earlier, looks around, her breath clouding in the frigid air. She can't help but jump when -

NEIL

Boo.

WENDY

Maniac. What are you doing?

NEIL

Thanks for meeting me.

WENDY

This better be good. My mom'll kill me if she finds out I snuck out this late.

NEIL

I got something I wanna show you.

A strange smile on his face, he leads her to -

INT. MEN'S ROOM

Dark and dank, a sliver of ugly halogen light leaking through the single window.

WENDY
(re: the smell)

Ew.

Wendy holds her nose, following Neil into the unknown, past a row of disgusting urinals, to the last of three open stalls. Neil crouches down -

THEIR POV: SCANNING the lewd drawings and GRAFFITI scrawled on the wall: BLOWJOBS 6:30 WEEKDAYS; 850-0325 ASK FOR TIM; BLUE FORD PICKUP I'LL HONK 3 TIMES..

WENDY

Yeah. So?

Neil points to one red crayon-etched message in particular -

INSERT CU: An erupting cartoon volcano hovers over the words: "FRIDAYS + SATURDAYS FROM 3 TIL 4". Below that, "READY TO PLEASE" crossed out, replaced with "YOUNG AND WILLING" and a big DOLLAR SIGN.

Wendy gives Neil puzzled look. He smiles proudly.

NEIL

That's me.

Off Wendy's stunned disbelief...

CROSSFADE TO

EXT. ABANDONED DRIVE-IN THEATRE. NIGHT

CAMERA CRANES PAST a dilapidated MARQUEE, feebly illuminated by a lonely light. It reads HES COMING SOON in letters rearranged by an anonymous prankster.

In the vast lot, beneath a gigantic white screen, Neil and Wendy balance on cement spacers submerged in the asphalt, their bikes deserted nearby.

WENDY

I don't believe you.

NEIL

I'll prove it.

WENDY

Pfh. OK. How?

Neil smiles smugly. Starts undoing his pants.

WENDY
(cracking up)

OhmyGod, what're you--?

Neil displays his OS cock to Wendy who averts her eyes, embarrassed.

WENDY

Put that back in your pants, exhibitionist.

NEIL

Look.

No way, perv. WENDY

NEIL
(laughing now too)
Look what the guy did to me.

Finally, Wendy, curiosity getting the best of her, leans closer like a detective examining a clue. Her face registers concern, surprise, confusion all at once.

Are those bruises? WENDY

NEIL
Yeah, fucker gnawed on my dick like it was a fuckin' candy cane! I didn't even realize he was hurting me till after I blew my load...

Neil tucks himself back in his jeans, zips up.

WENDY
Well, you better watch out, McCormick. Next time someone might chomp the whole thing off.

Neil shrugs, whatever, feeling carefree, on top of the world.

WENDY
Seriously. Even Hutchinson has its share of freaks. You trick with the wrong guy and I'd find pieces of you everywhere.

NEIL
OK, "Mom".

Touched by her concern but loathe to show it, he looks to the immense movie screen - an open door to an empty world.

NEIL
I wish a movie was showing right now.

WENDY
Me too. A film about our lives, everything's that's happened so far. And the last scene would be us standing here right now. Just you and me.

NEIL
Yeah.

They look at each other, a little awed by the moment which, were they normal teenagers, could be handily defused by them doing something banal like making out. Instead Wendy unhooks one of the metal speakers from its pole, holds it to her ear like a seashell. Off Neil's quizzical look -

WENDY
I hear something.

Wendy strains to make out an ephemeral, barely existent sound. Is it the bitter cold wind, a choir of air molecules singing, or...?

Finally, a smile dawning on her face, she whispers:

WENDY

It's the voice of God.

At that precise moment, it begins to snow, the black sky speckled with a million animated flakes. Neil and Wendy look at one another in amazement, silent in the face of such a miracle.

Wendy hands the speaker to Neil who presses the freezing metal to his ear -

CU: Neil's face, lighting up with excitement -

NEIL

Yeah... Yeah, I hear him...

As CAMERA CRANES UP, UP, UP leaving these wild children behind, two insignificant dots in a desolate, snow-dusted wasteland...

FADE TO

BLACK

SOUND: On the *BLAM* of a GUNSHOT -

TITLE:

GREY
Fall 1991

As the gunfire continues *BLAM BLAM BLAM* -

CUT TO

EXT. LACKEY BACKYARD. DUSK

INSERT CU: A ROW OF EMERALD GREEN 7UP BOTTLES obliterated in style-y SLO-MO.

Mrs. Lackey lowers her smoldering service revolver. Smiles, pleased with her marksmanship.

Mom. Mom -

BRIAN (OS)

Mrs. Lackey turns to find -

BRIAN, now 18 and just starting college, standing at the kitchen door. He's still awkward, with bookworm glasses, only now his blonde hair is longer, unkempt, his face dotted with zits.

BRIAN

It's about to begin.

MRS. LACKEY
(smiling)

Alright, alright, I'm coming.

Brian vanishes into the house, the screendoor BANGING shut. As Mrs. Lackey holsters her gun, heads inside -

INT. LACKEY LIVING ROOM. EVENING

The TV plays loudly, bathing the room in light. Framed PHOTOS on top of it display younger versions of Brian and Deborah as well as a more recent PICTURE of Deborah, now older and away at UC Berkeley. No trace at all remains of Mr. Lackey.

Brian hunches forward on the sofa as Mrs. Lackey takes her place in an overstuffed easy chair.

VCR on?

MRS. LACKEY

I checked it twice.

BRIAN

MRS. LACKEY
Well, it's probably going to be a little silly. The commercial showed this crazy old man claiming aliens beamed him up right out of his bathtub.

BRIAN
If you're going to make fun, I'd just as soon watch by myself-- Shh, it's starting.

Mrs. Lackey settles back as Brian leans even closer, face blue with the TV's glow -

TV: The "WORLD OF MYSTERY" LOGO appears.

NARRATOR (VO)
And tonight on "World Of Mystery", we investigate the terrifying world of UFOs. Is it mass hysteria or something *all too real*?

Mrs. Lackey is skeptical already while Brian's instantly spellbound.

TV: CAMERA EXPLORES a BLUE-LIT, soft-focus, reconstructed "UFO Interior": Silver TABLE, array of examination LIGHTS, TRAY laden with misshapen MEDICAL INSTRUMENTS -

OLD MAN'S VOICE (OS)
They kept me prisoner for hours. It wasn't till years later, under hypnosis, that I discovered what they'd done...

TV: A blurry ALIEN HAND moves a silver wishbone-shaped DEVICE towards the flesh of an anonymous BOY's belly -

OLD MAN'S VOICE (OS)
They examined me like I was a frog in biology class. Stuck a probe in my stomach...

TV: The OLD MAN, now a geezer in his 70s, lifts his shirt -

OLD MAN
I still got the scar to prove it.

TV: INSERT CU of a faint dime-sized scar on his wrinkled, blotchy skin.

Mrs. Lackey rolls her eyes while Brian is fascinated.

TV: AVALYN FRIESEN (32, overweight, thick glasses, mousy brown hair pulled into a bun) looks directly into CAMERA, her eyes haunted.

AVALYN
I always got scared anytime I watched movies about UFOs. Even "E.T." terrified me.

MRS. LACKEY
Poor thing. She looks so homely and sad.

Shh.

BRIAN

TV: CAMERA PANS across a flat, sunlit FIELD with GRAIN ELEVATORS in the BG -

NARRATOR (VO)

Avalyn Friesen lives on a farm in the tiny, ordinary town of Inman, Kansas.

BRIAN

Inman? That's only thirty miles away.

TV: Avalyn playing with a floppy eared MUTT in her yard.

NARRATOR (VO)

Thirty-two years old, she is unmarried, lives with her father and works part-time as a secretary. But there is something unusual about Avalyn, something far beyond the ordinary. For as long as she can remember, things have happened to her, things she cannot explain...

TV: Avalyn, again interviewed "talking head" style. In the BG, we can see the armada of STUFFED ANIMALS that populate her bedroom.

AVALYN

I'd heard about people who've experienced missing time, whole chunks of their life they can't account for. I'd had so many of those.

Brian, simultaneously frightened and excited by Avalyn's words...

AVALYN

Through hypnotic regression, I learned that I had been abducted more than twenty times.

MRS. LACKEY

(scoffs)

Oh please.

BRIAN

Quiet.

TV: Avalyn growing more and more emotional as she tells her story -

AVALYN

The first time, I was six. I was on my way home from a picnic with my grandparents. It was just starting to get dark and we got lost, driving down a dirt road...

(pauses, fighting tears)

Brian's glued to the screen as -

TV: A RE-ENACTMENT of Avalyn's story begins, featuring cheap FX, "eerie" synth MUSIC and ACTORS portraying young AVALYN and her GRANDPARENTS -

AVALYN (CONT'D, VO)

There was this blinding white light. Grandpa lost control, drove into a ditch... The light surrounded us like an ocean. But the aliens weren't interested in my grandparents, they only wanted me. They floated me up out of the car using some kind of gravitational ray...

TV: Young Avalyn rising in a tractor beam, into the belly of a saucer-shaped UFO.

MRS. LACKEY
OK, I've had enough. I'm getting ice cream. Want some?

BRIAN
(riveted to the TV)
No thanks.

Mrs. Lackey gives her son a concerned look, heading to the kitchen as -

TV: The program cuts back to Avalyn.

AVALYN
Under hypnosis, I remembered lying on a table. It was all silver, cold, smooth...

TV: More of the reenactment, Young Avalyn in a BLUE-ish, OUT-OF-FOCUS VOID which bears an uncanny resemblance to the strange place that haunts Brian's dreams.

AVALYN (CONT'D, VO)
The aliens surrounded me, carrying thin tubes and instruments, like a dentist would use. They were bald, with huge marshmallowy heads and tiny arms that didn't have an ounce of muscle in them.

As Brian stares, hanging on Avalyn's every word...

AVALYN (CONT'D, OS)
But the worst thing about them was their eyes. Big, black diamonds is the closest thing I can think of, only inside it was all liquidy and jelly-ish...

Off Brian, the TV casting dancing blue shadows over his face...

CROSSFADE TO

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM. LATER THAT NIGHT

CAMERA TILTS DOWN from a slowly twirling MOBILE of the solar system, past walls covered with POSTERS of sci-fi movies to find Brian crouched at his desk. He's got the local phone book open by his side as he intently focuses on the blank piece of stationery in front of him.

INSERT CU: The page as he neatly prints:

*Dear Avalyn:
You don't know me but*

Brian thinks a moment then adds cryptically -

INSERT CU: The words:

you will...

BLACK

FADE TO

SOUND PRELAP: The exhilarant noisy fuzz of *My Bloody Valentine's "Only Shallow"* and the RATTLE of a rundown car engine -

CUT TO

INT. GREMLIN (MOVING). DAY

As the MUSIC, totally unheard of in this town, BLASTS, Wendy does a goth-like dance with her hands in the backseat. Now 18 and even more bored, she wears black lipstick and eyeliner and an intricate braided hairdo. Neil, 18, is in the passenger seat, smoking, gazing out the window. Driving is ERIC PRESTON, 18, a skinny, slightly feminine goth boy with dyed magenta hair. New in town, he's not quite assimilated into the group, having yet to prove his outlaw cool. From the rearview hangs his graduation tassel, recent, its ends torched off.

WENDY

I can't believe I'm finally getting out of this fucking nowhere town.

NEIL

You better let me know the second you're settled. Or else.

WENDY

You better come. Or else.

ERIC

New York City. You are so lucky!

They reach a stoplight. A PICKUP idles beside them, playing bad COUNTRY-WESTERN. A redneck HICK glowers at the carful of freaks.

Neil, desperate for anything to relieve his boredom, leans over, shouts:

NEIL

Hey, assface! What're you gawking at?

Before the Hick can respond, Neil grabs Eric, french-kisses him, shocking and infuriating the Hick.

ERIC

OhmyG--!

Eric, secretly in love with Neil and thrilled, panics for his life. He, Neil, Wendy look over as -

THEIR POV: The Hick pulls out a SHOTGUN, aimed right at them.

HICK

Faggots.

NEIL

Oh shit! Go-go-go-go-go-GO!!--

Eric floors it, running the red light -

EXT. INTERSECTION. DAY

As a MINIVAN SWERVES wildly to avoid a collision **SCREEEEEECHHOOOOOONK-**

INT. GREMLIN (MOVING)

Eric, Neil, Wendy freaking, screaming their heads off. Neil hangs out his window, giving Hick the finger.

NEIL

FUCKER!!!

As the band of outsiders laughs, charged with welcome adrenaline -

CUT TO

EXT. CAREY PARK. DAY

The Gremlin slows down by the playground where Neil "works". Stops.

INT. GREMLIN (STOPPED)

Neil fixes his hair in the rearview, making it even more bedhead fucked up, as Eric watches, unable to hide his adoration.

NEIL

(to Wendy)

Remember the guy I told you about from last week? White Camaro?
That's him. Parked over there in that sort of driveway thing.

Eric and Wendy glance over -

THEIR POV: The White Camaro, waiting like a predatory animal.

NEIL

I've fucked literally every john in this park. Except for White Camaro.

Neil licks his lips, making them moist and glossy.

NEIL

So time for you two to get lost and stop scaring my business away.

ERIC

Want us to come pick you up later?

NEIL

(shrugs)

If you want. I oughta be done by six or so.

ERIC

We'll meet you.

WENDY

Speak for yourself, Eric. I gotta go home and start packing.

Neil leans over, pecks Wendy on the lips like a husband heading to the office.

NEIL

Call me tonight.

(giving Eric a wink)

See *you* later.

Eric is thrilled but jealous he didn't get a kiss like Wendy. Neil exits, *SLAMS* the door. As Eric and Wendy watch him saunter towards the waiting Camaro -

WENDY

You better be careful.

ERIC

Of what?

WENDY
You know what.

Eric does know. As he rolls his eyes, puts the car in drive -

WENDY
I'm serious, Eric. You're not in Modesto anymore.

ERIC
What's that supposed to mean?

WENDY
I see the way you look at him.

ERIC
He's so beautiful, I can't help it. He's like a god.

WENDY
You don't have to tell me, I was totally infatuated with him too once.
But I know all Neil's secrets.

ERIC
Lucky you.

WENDY
(turning serious)
Not really. There's shit there you don't even want to know about,
trust me.

Eric looks at her, not sure what that cryptic comment means.

WENDY
Once I'm gone, you'll be all Neil has and you've gotta understand
one thing. Neil is incapable of loving anyone. Where normal people
have a heart -

CUT TO

EXT. CAREY PARK

(MOS) Neil, at that moment, is meeting WHITE CAMARO GUY (40ish, tough, weathered-looking). As Neil gives his best crooked, seductive smile -

WENDY (CONT'D, OS)
Neil McCormick's got a bottomless black hole.

BACK TO

INT. GREMLIN (MOVING)

WENDY
And if you don't watch out, you can fall in and get lost forever.

Eric knows this already, but it only makes him love Neil even more. As he sighs...

CUT TO

INT. UFO. NIGHT

Brian (8) lies in his Panthers uniform on a silver table, eyes slowly flickering open. As a slender GREY

HAND brushes against his cheek, almost caressing it, and he SCREAMS -

SHOCK CUT TO

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM. DUSK

Brian jolts awake from a nap, disoriented and scared. He reaches over -

INSERT CU: From his nightstand he removes his DREAM JOURNAL, its cover decorated with stars, planets and spaceships.

He opens the book, writes the date: *September 23, 1991*.

He starts feverishly scribbling whatever details of his dream he can remember. Then:

MRS. LACKEY (OS CALLING)
Brian? Brian, you home?

BRIAN
Yeah, Mom. Up here.

Brian jots down notes to fill in later as Mrs. Lackey *CLUMP, CLUMP, CLUMP* makes her way up the stairs. Hearing his mother *KNOCK* on his door, he quickly stashes his journal back in its place.

BRIAN
Come in.

Mrs. Lackey enters in her uniform, obviously just off work. She holds the day's mail in her hand.

MRS. LACKEY
No class today?

BRIAN
I've got English Comp discussion group at 7:30.

MRS. LACKEY
mh. You have mail. Looks like a letter from your sister and also one from...
(reads envelope)
"A. Friesen"?

Brian jumps up.

BRIAN
I can't believe she wrote back.

Mrs. Lackey hands the letters to Brian who rips open the envelope from Avalyn, starts anxiously reading...

MRS. LACKEY
Who?

BRIAN
Avalyn Friesen. The woman on TV.

MRS. LACKEY
(smelling her fingers)
Well, she didn't have to go and dump a gallon of perfume on it, did she?

Brian ignores his mother, engrossed in the letter's contents.

MRS. LACKEY
Well, what did she say?

Brian keeps reading, his face going slack with amazement.

BRIAN
She wants me to visit her in Inman...

CROSSFADE TO

EXT. CAREY PARK. DUSK

Neil hangs like a monkey from the jungle gym, silhouetted against a gorgeous Technicolor sunset. Eric's Gremlin pulls up, and Neil smiles, his wattage easily outshining God's painting in the sky.

As he trots to the car, pops open the door and Eric lights up, thrilled to see his object of unrequited devotion -

ERIC
How was work, honey?

Neil rolls his eyes at his bad joke, gets in -

CUT TO

EXT. MCCORMICK HOUSE. EVENING

The Gremlin pulls up to the curb and Neil gets out.

NEIL
Thanks for the ride, Preston..

Eric smiles, waves: no problem, anytime, I want to marry you...

NEIL
Later.

He gives Eric his wink, heads off. As Eric sighs, drives away -

INT. MCCORMICK LIVING ROOM. EVENING

Neil enters to find Mrs. McCormick, still in her clerk uniform, crosslegged on the floor, eating pretzels and drinking gin in front of the TV. Still pretty and voluptuous, she now looks older, a bit more worn.

MRS. MCCORMICK
You just missed it, sweetie. This little old lady won *both* showcases.

Neil puts an arm around his mom, smelling the alcohol on her breath.

NEIL
What'd she get?

MRS. MCCORMICK
Trip to Scotland, "beautiful living room set", and a brand new car - I can't remember the name of it but it cost over twenty-seven grand...
(noticing)
Are you wearing cologne?

NEIL
(changing subject)
Work OK?

MRS. MCCORMICK
The pits. When is *our* ship gonna come in, huh baby?
He smiles, kissing his slightly inebriated mother on the cheek.

NEIL
Soon, Ma. Soon.
He straightens up, starts for his room.

MRS. MCCORMICK
Oh, Neil.

NEIL
Yeah?

MRS. MCCORMICK
Don't forget tomorrow's my date with that hot Italian who always comes through my checkout lane.

NEIL
Don't worry. I'll be at work. Last tournament of the season.
Mrs. McCormick takes a long, slow drink, returning her attention to the TV.

MRS. MCCORMICK
"Vincenzo" ...
As Neil smiles, heads upstairs...

CROSSFADE TO

EXT. WIDE OPEN PASTURES - INMAN. DAY

A lone TOYOTA CELICA makes its way across the vast plain, a dot in a wide, desolate frame, with smaller dots of grazing cattle in the BG.

INT. TOYOTA (MOVING)

Brian behind the wheel, nervous, hair slicked, wearing his best blue oxford shirt as if going to church.

DRIVING POV: Through the windshield, we're approaching Avalyn's farm, already familiar from "World of Mystery". Riding an OLD TRACTOR, Avalyn's ancient father MR. FRIESEN stares suspiciously, directly INTO CAMERA.

Off Brian, unsettled, pulling into the dusty driveway while Mr. Friesen continues glaring...

EXT. FARM

The Toyota parks and Brian emerges, Dream Journal tucked under his arm. As he pauses to take a deep breath, fix his hair -

Avalyn comes out of the house in a white housedress, greeting Brian like an overexcited child. As the DOG she was playing with on TV jumps on Brian's neatly pressed pants -

AVALYN

Patches! Patches, down.
 (pulls Patches back with one hand, extends the other)
 Sorry. He just gets excited. Brian, right? I'm Avalyn.
 (laughs)
 Obviously, huh? It's so nice to meet you.
 (then, noticing)
 Dad?

THEIR POV: Mr. Friesen watching stonefaced from his tractor out in the field.

AVALYN

It's OK, Dad. It's that young man I told you about.

As Mr. Friesen silently returns to work -

AVALYN

Don't mind him. He's a little wary of strangers. Oh, I'm so glad you're here. Come on in.

As she leads a somewhat overwhelmed Brian into the house -

INT. FARMHOUSE

BRIAN'S POV: Avalyn addresses CAMERA, giving the grand tour as we SURVEY the living room - antique wood burning stove, rolltop desk, an old TV, a FRAMED PHOTO showing a younger Avalyn flanked by her parents...

AVALYN

It isn't showy, but it's home. Sit, sit.

Brian settles in a old rocking chair while Avalyn parks on the sofa.

AVALYN

Have you eaten? I was in the middle of lunch, hope you don't mind.

BRIAN

No, go ahead. I ate earlier.

Avalyn devours a plateful of saltines with mustard-coated sardines in a bright red tin. Inbetween bites:

AVALYN

So you saw the show?

BRIAN
 (nods)

Several times. I videotaped it.

AVALYN

It wasn't bad. They left out some things but they managed to get the major points across.

Avalyn continues eating while Brian grows self-conscious, awkward. Finally, he announces, somewhat melodramatically:

BRIAN

I think I was taken too.

AVALYN
 You mentioned that in your letter. Seems like you're at the point I was
 a few years ago, where you're just starting to remember.
 (munches a cracker)
 There are many of us, believe me, and we all have this drive to
 know what happened.

BRIAN
 So you think that's what happened to me. Just from what I told you
 about the missing time and--

AVALYN
 Oh, I'm sure of it.

Brian exhales, reassured that at least someone believes he was abducted. As Avalyn, finished with
 lunch, claps the crumbs from her hands onto the dish -

AVALYN
 Wanna go for a walk?

Off Brian; uneasy -

BRIAN
 sure...

CUT TO

INT. BARN. DAY.

Avalyn and Brian venture into a shadowy barn, escaping the scorching heat.

AVALYN
 (re: the book in Brian's hand)
 What's that you're carrying?

BRIAN
 It's my uh, Dream Journal. I keep a log of all my dreams, whatever
 bits and pieces I can recall at least. I feel like it's slowly helping me
 remember...

AVALYN
 That's a really good idea. Your subconscious is where all the
 memories are buried.

She leans against a large piece of farm equipment.

AVALYN
 For you and me and people like us, almost every single thing we do
 stems from our being abducted...

Brian nods, swallows.

AVALYN
 Come here. I want to show you something.

Brian hesitates then perches tentatively on the machinery next to Avalyn who leans forward, the
 light catching a tiny gold cross dangling around her neck.

AVALYN

Here's something they wouldn't allow on "World of Mystery"...

Slowly, almost seductively, she lifts the hem of her dress, exposing -

INSERT CU: A small scar on her white, soft thigh.

AVALYN

I've been tagged. It's part of their experiments.

She traces the scar with her finger, her voice growing strangely sexual.

AVALYN

Touch it.

Brian, very nervous now, reaches over, just barely grazes her flesh then withdraws.

AVALYN

When I was taken, my leg was bleeding but I didn't remember being cut, nothing. Then, through hypnosis, I discovered that this is where they implanted my tracking device...

Brian feels a queasy tightness in the pit of his stomach.

AVALYN

Everything I do, they know. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if they were spying on us right now.

BRIAN

When I was found that night, my nose was bleeding...

AVALYN

The old up-the-nose trick. Where the scar can't be seen.

Off Brian, growing even more unsettled, anxious...

CROSSFADE TO

INT. HUTCHINSON AIRPORT. DUSK

With a rosy-orange Kansas sunset filtering through the terminal windows, Neil and Eric see Wendy off. She gives Eric a tight hug.

ERIC
(fighting tears)

Don't forget to write.

WENDY

Don't you forget what I told you.

ERIC

"K..."

They part and Wendy turns to Neil. Unlike Eric whose feelings are all right there on the surface, Neil's are buried deep, deep below. A fact Wendy, the only person Neil's ever really allowed into his world, knows better than anyone.

WENDY

Well...

Neil gives her a look that could be mistaken for indifference but is actually sadness, fear, a million conflicted, colliding emotions. When he tries to say "Well..." back, nothing comes out.

WENDY
(trying to keep her emotions in check)
You better come see me soon, asshole.

NEIL
(hardly able to make eye contact)
I will.

Wendy lifts his chin, looks into his eyes which remain half-hidden behind greasy bangs.

NEIL
I will.

Wendy, feeling like she's going to lose it any second, hugs Neil with all her might. Neil just stands there, numb, almost mechanically putting his arms around her like that's what he's supposed to do.

WENDY
Take care of yourself, McCormick.

Neil says nothing. Wendy leans back to look at his beautiful, doomed face one more time.

WENDY
I mean it.

At last, Neil says, like he's expected to:

NEIL
You too.

Wendy finally lets go of Neil, as if tearing one half of herself from the other. She collects her bags and begins her retreat, not wanting to break down in front of her friends.

WENDY
Stay out of trouble, you two.

Eric, crying full-force by now, wipes his eyes.

ERIC
Call us the second you get there.

WENDY
'K...
(needing to get away)
Bye.

ERIC
Bye.

Wendy goes. Eric bawls. And Neil just stands there like an empty shell, unable to say a word...

CUT TO

INT. BARN. DUSK

Brian and Avalyn, still in the barn, now crisscrossed with oblique streaks of dwindling sunlight. Brian checks his watch.

BRIAN
It can't believe it's so late. My mom's gonna worry.

AVALYN
(like she doesn't want him to go)
You live with your mom?

Brian nods, a bit self-conscious.

BRIAN
My dad moved out seven years ago. I don't see him much.
Sensing this is a touchy subject, Avalyn points to the journal in Brian's hands.

BRIAN
Want to read me one of your dreams?
Brian fidgets, uncomfortable, on the spot...

BRIAN
I just, you know, scribble them out in the middle of the night.
Sometimes I can hardly even read them...

AVALYN
That's OK.

She waits till Brian opens the book. As finally, he clears his throat, begins reading:

BRIAN
This is from two nights ago. There's a blue light.. I'm in my Little League uniform and a tall alien is hovering over me. Someone else is with me. Another boy, also in uniform... A Panther?... Oh, that was the name of my baseball team... Let's see, uh... The alien has big black eyes. He's touching my face. I want to cry out for help but I can't...

Brian chokes up, distraught, reliving the dream as he tells it. Avalyn puts her hand on his shoulder.

AVALYN
You're on your way to uncovering the truth. Think of yourself as a detective, following clues...

Brian nods, finding comfort in her words.

AVALYN
Like you should try concentrating on this other boy in your dreams.
Maybe he'll help you find the answers you're looking for...

Off Brian, struggling to bring his mental image of this "other boy" into sharper focus -
SUPERIMPOSE/CROSSFADE

INT. SUN CENTER SOFTBALL COMPLEX - ANNOUNCER'S BOOTH. EVENING

CU: The older version of the face Brian's searching for: Neil, at his "day job", announcing softball tournaments.

NEIL
(strangely adult, "professional" voice)
Two outs. Third baseman Jackson up, with Hinton on deck.

Neil's voice booms over the PA speakers, sounding weirdly godlike. He and Eric are sequestered in the pressbox, sneaking swigs from a bottle of gin "borrowed" from Neil's Mom's stash.

NEIL
(to Eric)
Jesus. Check out at that Jackson. Hubba hubba.

Eric looks -

HIS POV: Neil's lust object JACKSON at the plate. The guy is balding, in his mid-30s, has huge sideburns and is built like a barrel with arms and legs.

ERIC
(gas face)
Ew. Are you joking?

NEIL
(takes a burning swig)
I'd fuck him for *free*.

CRACK! Jackson hits a foul ball which loops over the fence into the parking lot.

Neil switches on, leans into his microphone -

NEIL
("official" voice again)
Please return foul balls to the pressbox. Thank you.

Neil clicks the mike off, settles back in his chair.

NEIL
You don't think Jackson's hot?

ERIC
Dude, he's fat and bald!

NEIL
Diff'rent folks, diff'rent strokes.

Neil makes a rude gesture with the bottle and Eric shakes his head. There's a timid *KNOCK* at the door. As Neil leans over, opens it -

A crewcut little BOY, no older than nine, stands holding the retrieved foul ball like a sacred offering.

BOY
My Daddy hit this.

NEIL
(lighting up in a way we haven't seen before)
Why thanks, pardner. Come on in and collect your prize.

The Boy enters the booth and Neil opens a CIGAR BOX next to the scoreboard buttons. Inside it: wrapped pieces of BUBBLE GUM and a dozen shiny DIMES.

NEIL
What'll it be, big guy? Cash or bubbles?

The Boy is too excited to make up his mind. Neil grins.

OK. I'll help you out. NEIL

He gives the Boy three dimes and four pieces of gum, scrubs his brushcut head.

There you go. NEIL

The Boy grins so wide his face almost splits.

Thanks! BOY

He scampers off. Neil turns back to Eric who's witnessed the whole interchange in stunned disbelief.

NEIL
What? When kids do good, you gotta reward 'em.
(then, noticing on the field)
Oh Christ. It's Hinton, a.k.a. "Ass of the Gods".

As Eric smiling, takes another drink...

CROSSFADE TO

INT. MCCORMICK LIVING ROOM. LATER THAT NIGHT

Neil and Eric stagger, shitfaced, into the dark, deserted house -

I am so, *fucking, wasted!* ERIC

Neil, even more obliterated than Eric, cracks up.

Where's your mom? ERIC

NEIL
Out with her new boyfriend prob'ly. "Vincenzo"...

Neil accidentally stumbles into, capsizes a bowl of popcorn left on the floor.

Shit! NEIL

ERIC
My head hurts. You have any pot?

NEIL
Yeah. C'mon.

He and Eric clomp upstairs -

INT. NEIL'S BEDROOM

Neil and Eric enter the room which is a total disaster area. Neil extracts a key from his pants, unlocks his "private" drawer. Takes out a baggie of pot and pipe, tosses them to Eric.

NEIL
Knock yourself out.

He crashes facelirst on the mattress *WHOOOMPI*.

NEIL
Ahhhhhhhhhh.

Eric sits on the corner of the bed, loading the pipe while Neil, face smushed into his pillow, murmurs:

NEIL
There's a porno in the VCR if you wanna jack off.

ERIC
Thanks. Got a lighter?

Neil mumbles something inaudible, points to the nightstand. Eric retrieves the lighter, fires up his hit. Holds it in a beat then exhales. By the time he looks down -

HIS POV: Neil is softly snoring.

Eric can't help but appreciate how perfect, how heartbreakingly angelic Neil looks asleep. He reaches over, emboldened by alcohol, and tenderly brushes a strand of hair from Neil's face, fingertips barely grazing his exquisite cheekbone. He almost says "Good night, Sweet Prince" but he's not *that* fucking drunk. This thought makes him smile. He takes another hit... Then, closing the Ziploc seal, he goes to return the pot to its proper place.

He opens Neil's drawer. Stops -

CU: Eric's face. He checks back over his shoulder -

HIS POV: Neil sleeping peacefully.

Eric returns his attention to -

INSERT CU: The contents of Neil's drawer: all the secret mysteries of his beloved's life laid out like an unburied treasure chest - A PLAQUE that reads "Most Valuable Player, Hutchinson Pizza Palace Panthers, Summer 1981"... The thick stack of dirty BILLS Neil's made hustling...

Eric counts it, amazed by the amount. Keeps snooping -

INSERT CU: PORN magazines featuring hairy, older guys... An 8X10 PHOTO of a Little League team, the Panthers...

Eric examines the impossibly young, blank faces, his finger alighting on one he suspects is Neil. Starting to get a queasy feeling in his stomach, he finds -

INSERT CU: More PHOTOS, those leering IMAGES of Neil taken by Coach... Several CASSETTE TAPES, including one labeled: **NEIL M.-JULY 81.**

Eric, checking to ensure Neil's still asleep, creeps over to his stereo -

INSERT CU: *FLICK. FLICK.* Switches the Realistic console to 'TAPE', the monitor to 'HEADPHONES'.

Inserting the cassette, he slips on the bulky headphones like Gene Hackman in *The Conversation*. Hits PLAY -

SUBJECTIVE AUDIO: Disembodied VOICES - whom we recognize as Neil (8) and Coach - sounding

eerily, frighteningly up close and intimate. In the BG, the mechanized *BLIPS* and *BLEEPS* of early 80s videogames...

Do you like that? COACH (VO)

It tickles a little. NEIL (8) (VO)

Silence, with just a RUSTLING sound.

That feels good, doesn't it, Neil? COACH (VO)

Eric's eyes go wide. He starts slowly moving back towards the drawer, the line connecting the headset to the amp stretching like an elongated umbilical cord.

Uh huh. Can we put the blanket over our heads like we did last time? NEIL (8) (VO)

More RUSTLING. Neil giggles and Coach laughs. As Eric picks up the Little League PHOTO again -

Here we go. COACH (VO)

CU: Eric's gaze fixed on -

INSERT CU: Neil's face in the faded 8x10. Seemingly staring back at him with haunted, sunblock blackened eyes...

CUT TO

INT. BASEMENT - HUTCHINSON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE. DAY

CAMERA PULLS BACK from young Neil's face in another copy of the same PHOTO, this one FRAMED on a wall, part of a gallery of years and years of old Little League teams. Brian stares at the picture like he's seeing a ghost, his Dream Journal and schoolbooks under his arm. He leans closer to examine -

INSERT CU: Neil's sullen, glowering face.

As Brian feels the hairs on the back of his neck slowly rise...

OS FEMALE VOICE
Find what you were looking for?

Brian about jumps out of his skin, spinning to find a motherly, overweight RECEPTIONIST lugging an armload of files.

Oh... uh, yeah. Th-thanks alot. BRIAN

No problem. Glad I could help out. I used to write for my school paper too, back in the day. RECEPTIONIST

Well, this'll really make a big difference in my article. According to my editor, this player I'm researching is gonna be the next big thing. BRIAN

RECEPTIONIST
Maybe you'll win a Pulitzer Prize.

BRIAN
(trying to laugh along)
Maybe...

RECEPTIONIST
Well, you just let me know if you need anything else.

BRIAN
Thanks. Thanks so much.

The Receptionist exits. Brian looks around like a spy, then delicately removes the PHOTO from its nail on the wall. He opens his journal full of notes: DIRECTIONS to Avalyn's farm, the words: "CLUES - BE YOUR OWN DETECTIVE - BOY FROM DREAMS?". Tucking the frame inbetween the pages and closing the book, he adopts his most innocent face, heads out -

INT. CORRIDOR - CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Brian emerges through a door marked "COUNTY RECORDS", acting as inconspicuous as possible.

HIS POV: Approaching the Receptionist who's back at her desk, sorting through her files.

BRIAN
Thanks again.

RECEPTIONIST
Done already?

BRIAN
Yeah. I'm on kind of a tight deadline.

RECEPTIONIST
Well, good luck.

As Brian rushes out, terrified he's going to get caught -

CROSSFADE TO

INT. SUN CENTER ANNOUNCER BOOTH. EVENING

Neil leans into the mike, switches it on *CLICK*.

NEIL..
That's two outs. Garfield the batter, Heim on deck.

As Neil leans back, switching off the mike, we notice a small pile of money on the console. Neil's eyes start to roll back and he winces, almost in pain -

NEIL
Ah.

OS MALE VOICE
Move your chair a little further back.

Neil scoots back a few inches to give the OS MAN whose head is buried in his crotch more room.

That's better.

OS MALE VOICE

The OS Man resumes blowing him and Neil's head arches backward. The Man starts MURMURING, MOANING, both him and Neil getting more and more into it till Neil, eyes opening a slit, pauses:

Wait. Hold on a sec.

NEIL

He leans forward again, *CLICKS* on the microphone.

NEIL

At the end of three Innings, the score is Hutchinson First National Bank, three; Wichita Coleman Industries, zero.

As he *CLICKS* the mike off again, looks down -

OK.

NEIL

HIS POV: The Man in his lap is JACKSON, the balding ballplayer with sideburns Neil was lusting after the other night. As Jackson returns to blowing him -

And Neil closes his eyes, his head rocking back...

CUT TO

INT. LACKEY KITCHEN. NIGHT

Mrs. Lackey does the dishes, Brian's supper waiting on the table. Hearing him coming in the front door, she dries her hands on her apron. As Brian enters, back from his "mission" at the Chamber of Commerce -

Where have you been?
MRS. LACKEY

Sorry. I should've called. I didn't realize the time.
BRIAN

Brian sits at the table, careful to not let the stolen Little League PHOTO slip out of his journal.

Well, your dinner's cold as ice.
MRS. LACKEY

That's OK.
BRIAN

Brian, what's going on? You've been acting so... strangely. Running off, disappearing for hours...
MRS. LACKEY

He digs into his dinner, avoiding the subject.

It's just school, Mom. College is way different from high school.
BRIAN

Did you ever call your father back?
MRS. LACKEY

BRIAN

I will. I've been busy.

Mrs. Lackey sighs as the phone RINGS. As Brian starts to get up -

MRS. LACKEY

I'll get it. Finish your dinner.

She picks up the receiver.

MRS. LACKEY

Hello? Yes. He's eating supper right now -

BRIAN

Who is it?

MRS. LACKEY
(covering the phone)

It's that UFO Woman.

BRIAN
(jumps out of his chair)

I'll get it in the hall.

As Mrs. Lackey frowns disapprovingly -

INT. LIVING ROOM

Brian snatches up the receiver, shouts back to his mother standing in the brightly lit kitchen doorway -

BRIAN

Got it.

INTERCUT WITH

INT. AVALYN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Avalyn on her bed, surrounded by her menagerie of stuffed animals, a plate of crumbs beside her.

AVALYN

Brian?

Brian whispers furtively as Mrs. Lackey, annoyed, heads back into the kitchen.

BRIAN

I was just going to call you. I found a photo of the boy. The one in my dreams.

AVALYN

That's amazing. What are you doing right now?

BRIAN

Nothing... Why?

AVALYN

There's something I need to show you. Something important. Can you come out here?

Off Brian, confused, a chill creeping up his spine -

sure...

BRIAN

CUT TO

EXT. SUN CENTER. NIGHT

Off work, a pentup, restless Neil exits the complex, a cig dangling from his pouty lips. He looks over - HIS POV: Eric waiting in the parking lot, leaning against his trusty old Gremlin.

Hi honey. How was work?

ERIC

Fuck you.

NEIL
(ditching his cig)

Eric smiles. As they both *POP* open their respective car doors -

NEIL
(suddenly shouting at the top of his lungs)
**I'M SO FUCKING SICK OF THIS STINKY LITTLE
BUTTCRACK OF A TOWN!!!**

Eric cracks up as they get in the car -

INT. GREMLIN (PARKED)

Neil sits, looking especially gorgeous all moody and angst ridden like this.

I gotta get out of this place.

NEIL

Well, where to, your highness?

ERIC

NEIL
(leans over, in Eric's face)
I don't give a fuck anymore!

As Eric, grinning, fires up the Gremlin's WHEEZING engine -

CUT TO

EXT. FARM. NIGHT

Brian pulls up to Avalyn's house in his mother's Toyota, parks. As he gets out, he's met by Avalyn with Patches, jumping at her feet.

Patches! Shh! You'll wake Daddy.

AVALYN
(to Brian)

Thanks for coming.

No problem.

BRIAN

(extracts the PHOTO from his journal)
I stole this from the Hutchinson Chamber of Commerce.

He hands the picture to Avalyn who studies it carefully. Brian points out -

INSERT CU: Neil, the mysterious, dark-haired boy in the back row.

BRIAN
That's him. That's the one from my dreams.

AVALYN
hmm...

INSERT CU: Even tighter on Neil's face, glowering, almost angry, defiant...

BRIAN
Look at his face. It's almost like you can tell he knows something.

Avalyn stares at the picture as if hypnotized. Then suddenly, out of the blue, she SMASHES it against her knee CRACK.

BRIAN
What are you doing?!

Avalyn says nothing, removing the photo from its shattered frame. She turns it over -

INSERT CU: Written in blue ink on the back are all the names of the Little League players.

Brian's mouth falls open. Avalyn smiles, hands him the photo.

INSERT CU: Scanning through the names, following Brian's finger which pauses at his own: B. LACKEY. The finger keeps moving, past a blur of lost and forgotten boys till it reaches: N. McCORMICK.

BRIAN
(astonished whisper)
"N. McCormick".

AVALYN
Brian, I'm so happy for you! First thing tomorrow, you can start looking for him. Maybe he still lives in Hutchinson...

BRIAN
yeah...

AVALYN
But meanwhile, I have something to show you that only you would be able to understand...

Off Brian, feeling that shiver crawl up his spine again...

CUT TO

INT. "THE FLAG" BAR. NIGHT

Neil sits, even more bored, in a booth with Eric at the tacky, depressing "only gay bar in town". Despite the fact they're both obviously underage, the place gladly serves them to keep fresh meat in the shark tank. As Neil's eyes scan the room -

HIS POV: SURVEYING the middle-aged, out-of-shape REGULARS leering at him.

NEIL

I've fucked every single guy and his ugly uncle in this podunk town. *Twice.*

He takes a tab of acid from his wallet, drops it under his tongue.

NEIL

Want some?

ERIC

Uh, one of us has to drive.

Neil shrugs, washes the acid down with a swig of beer.

ERIC

I got a postcard from Wendy.

Without even asking if Neil wants to see it, he pulls the card from his coat pocket.

NEIL

Think she's mad at me cuz I owe her like three letters.

ERIC

Yeah, her last "P.S." is *"Tell Fuckface to write me"*. So y'wanna hear what she says?

Neil shrugs again, drinks more. Eric starts reading:

ERIC

"Hey ass. So New York is insane and crazy, in the best possible way--"

OS MALE VOICE

Uh, pardon me.

A 40ish bearded man dressed like a LUMBERJACK comes up, interrupting them -

ERIC

Can we help you?

LUMBERJACK

I was wondering if I might buy you boys a drink.

Neil looks the man up and down like inferior goods in a store. Sneers, then:

NEIL ..

Fuck off.

Both Eric and Lumberjack's jaws drop, stunned by Neil's bluntness.

NEIL

(sadistic streak)

You heard me, fag. *Fuck Off.*

LUMBERJACK

(muttering as he exits)

Stuckup little pricks...

As soon as he's gone:

ERIC
Harsh. Wasn't he kinda your type?

NEIL
I hate when they look like Tarzan and sound like Jane.

Eric busts up as Neil, finishing his beer, gets up -

NEIL
Let's get outta this shithole.

ERIC
(rolls his eyes)
But we just got here...?

CUT TO

EXT. FARM. NIGHT

Brian helps Avalyn climb through a barbed wire fence, spreading the wires wide enough for her to pass through. Then, dusting himself off, he notices -

BRIAN
It's so quiet.

Avalyn nods, indicating that's part of what she has to show him.

AVALYN
Follow me.

With Patches sniffing the ground ahead of them, Brian follows Avalyn through the darkness. Then as Patches begins whimpering, making Brian even more tense, unsettled...

THEIR POV: In the distance, beneath a tall, shadowy tree is the silhouette of a COW and a darker form in the grass below.

AVALYN
By that tree.

Distant LIGHTNING and THUNDER make the scene even eerier as the Cow MOOS, a drawn, haunting bawl more mournfully human than animal. As Avalyn and Brian get closer, Brian's eyes widening with fear...

AVALYN
Patches, stay back.

She points to the black shape in the grass.

AVALYN
There.

Off Brian, turning ghost white -

HIS POV: A DEAD CALF, its brown eyes open, staring. A huge gash has been carved from its neck to below its belly, the wound glistening in the intermittent FLASHES of LIGHTNING. The calf's mother MOOS again.

Brian is frozen with horror as Avalyn bends to stroke the dead animal's side as if trying to comfort it...

AVALYN

Farmers around here have been finding cattle mutilated like this for years. I told "World of Mystery" but they conveniently edited it out. Daddy insists it's just a bunch of "Satan worshippers" going around chopping up cows. Ha!

(turns to Brian)

Come look at this.

Brian, feeling nauseous, slowly kneels. Avalyn takes his hand, guides it along the calf's underside.

AVALYN

Feel. Its sex organs. They're gone.

Brian looks like he's about to vomit as -

INSERT CU: Avalyn coaxes his hand into the moist, meaty netherworld of the dead animal's wound...

AVALYN

The allens experiment on cows 'cuz the poor things are defenseless. Us, on the other hand, they can't kill, they just leave us with the hidden memory of what they've done. And that, in its own way, is almost worse...

Brian says nothing, trembling as Avalyn guides his hand into the hollow cavity in the calf's abdomen...

AVALYN

Notice anything else strange? There's no blood. They took that, too.

The storm seems to be growing nearer as Brian feels his hand, almost with a will of its own, venturing deeper and deeper into the bloodless wound...

INT. UFO. NIGHT

FLASHCUT

CU: Brian (8) on the silver table, staring up, into the BLUE light -

EXT. FARM

BACK TO

Brian's eyes involuntarily flickering as the tunnel of flesh closes around his wrist like a sucking mouth -

INT. UFO. NIGHT

FLASHCUT

CU: Brian (8), eyes wide as an ALIEN HAND caresses his face -

EXT. FARM

BACK TO

Brian, as his forearm is inexorably devoured by the dead animal's orifice -

INT. UFO. NIGHT

FLASHCUT

CU: Brian (8), petrified, as the HAND stroking his face is now that of a MAN -

EXT. FARM

BACK TO

Brian, hyperventilating, his arm engulfed up to his elbow. As BLOOD begins trickling from his nostril -

FLASHCUT

INT. HOUSE. NIGHT

SUDDENLY, Brian (8) is no longer in the UFO, but rather in a blue-lit space we vaguely recognize. He looks over, and lying next to him is NEIL (8) who says, smiling:

Here we go.

NEIL (8)

EXT. FARM

BACK TO

Blood now gushing from his nose, dripping off his chin, Brian tries to scream but can't -

INT. HOUSE. NIGHT

FLASHCUT

The human hand covers Brian (8)'s face as his eyes bulge with shock and revulsion. As Neil (8) leans close, whispering in his ear -

Tell him you like it.

NEIL (8)

EXT. FARM

BACK TO

Brian's eyes roll back in their sockets -

Brian -

AVALYN

Brian passes out, slumping backwards onto the soft earth, his hand making a wet *SLURP* as it leaves the calf's insides.

Brian...!

AVALYN

Off Avalyn attempting to revive Brian's inert, limp form...

CROSSFADE TO

EXT. HUTCHINSON STREET. NIGHT

Neil, tripping hard now, stumbles from Eric's idling car, onto the sidewalk -

HIS POV: Wobbly, HANDHELD approaching a small, nondescript HOUSE at the cusp of a darkened cul-de-sac.

Eric gets out, standing by the open car door -

Neil. What are you doing?

ERIC

He sighs, mildly annoyed by Neil's erratic, drug-induced behavior but so in love it doesn't matter.

Come on. It's two-thirty in the morning...

ERIC

Neil doesn't even hear Eric - it's like he's pressed "MUTE" on the giant TV that is the world. His only focus is the house in front of him - which despite its utter ordinariness, seems imbued with a secret, almost supernatural power... Wiping the spit collecting in the corner of his mouth, he says in a low, slurred whisper:

NEIL
You called me your fucking angel.

Off Neil, looking uncharacteristically raw, vulnerable, on the verge of coming apart...

SLOW FADE TO

BLACK

FADE UP

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION. DAY

A teary-eyed Eric and Mrs. McCormick are saying goodbye to Neil who's even more sullen, emotionally shutdown than usual.

MRS. MCCORMICK
So you're sure Wendy's going to meet you at the station. I don't want you getting lost in that crazy city.

NEIL
Ma, don't worry. Everything's all arranged.

MRS. MCCORMICK
Now you call me collect the minute you arrive. You promise? Promise me, Neil.

NEIL
OK, OK...

Mrs. McCormick begins instinctively straightening Neil's jacket, hair, etc.

MRS. MCCORMICK
We should've at least gotten you a decent hair cut...

Neil sighs, clearly uncomfortable being doted on.

NEIL
I gotta take a piss.

He turns to Eric, surprising him by inviting him to come with -

NEIL
Preston?

Eric gives him a puzzled look. As he follows Neil to the head -

NEIL
(to Mrs. McCormick)
We'll be right back.

INT. GREYHOUND STATION MEN'S ROOM. DAY

The second Neil and Eric are alone in the bathroom, Neil starts furiously scratching his crotch.

NEIL
Fuck.

ERIC
What's the matter?

NEIL
I don't know. My fucking dick itches like motherfucking fuck.

Neil undoes his pants, his cock flopping out as he scratches the bristly dark hair all around it.

ERIC
(defensive laugh)
What do you want *me* to do about it?

NEIL
Look down there.

Eric rolls his eyes. Under different circumstances, he'd drop to his knees in a flash, but...

NEIL
Preston, help me out here.

Finally, Eric sighs, bends to inspect Neil's privates.

NEIL
What the fuck's wrong with me?

Eric, kneeling, looks up at Neil. Then:

ERIC
Dude. You've got crabs.

Neil gets a look on his face we've never seen before: total innocence. Like what Eric's talking about is completely beyond his realm of comprehension.

NEIL
What?

ERIC
It's crabs.

Eric is taken aback, unaccustomed to playing the "experienced" role to Neil's naive one.

ERIC
It's no big, man. You just go to the drug store, get this stuff called Rid...

Neil stands there, his dick hanging out, devastated almost, like a helpless child.

ERIC ..
(the thought suddenly dawning)
You better be playing safe.

Neil mumbles barely audible as he pulls his pants back up -

NEIL
I stay in control.

They're interrupted by a *KNOCK-KNOCK* at the door. Neil buckles his pants as Mrs. McCormick peeks her head in -

MRS. MCCORMICK
Honey. Your bus is boarding.

Alright.

NEIL

Mrs. McCormick, seeing there's no one else in the bathroom, scampers in, resumes fussing with Neil's clothes and hair. She looks at him like he's five again, attending his first day of school. And it's almost like she's seeing him for the first time.

My baby. You're all grown up.

MRS. LACKEY

Eyes brimming with tears, she struggles to keep it together while Neil visibly squirms. Then, as if she knows everything:

Be careful.

MRS. MCCORMICK

She hugs him so, so tightly. Like she doesn't ever want to let go.

You're mine and I love you and don't you ever forget it.

MRS. MCCORMICK

Off Neil, no response, not saying anything, just letting her squeeze the living breath out of him...
CROSSFADE TO

EXT. GREYHOUND STATION. DAY

Mrs. McCormick and Eric stand waving to -

THEIR POV: Neil's impassive face framed in the window of the BUS as it disappears down the street...

They keep waving till way past the point Neil can see them. Then Mrs. McCormick blows her nose into a ratty Kleenex, turns to Eric.

Come on. I'll buy you Dairy Queen.

MRS. MCCORMICK

CUT TO

INT. GREMLIN (MOVING). DUSK

Eric drives Mrs. McCormick home, both of them eating double-dipped cones.

So what'll you do now that Neil's gone?

MRS. MCCORMICK

Kill myself, I guess.

ERIC

That's not funny, Eric.

MRS. MCCORMICK

Eric shrugs, flicks his ice cream.

Well, I start Hutchinson Community College next week.

ERIC

Really. That's wonderful.

MRS. MCCORMICK

ERIC

Pathetic is more like it

MRS. MCCORMICK

(shaking her head at his wacked sense of humor)

Oh, Eric... Well, you know that you're always welcome to come over to the house, even without Neil around.

ERIC

Thanks, Mrs. M. I may just take you up on that.

MRS. MCCORMICK

You better.

(then, noticing)

Now who the hell is that?

DRIVING POV: Pulling up to the McCormick house where Brian, with a MAP in his hand, nervously KNOCKS on the front door.

ERIC

Incognito Boy Scout?

DRIVING POV: As Brian turns and faces CAMERA, looking like a lost orphan...

Eric pulls the car to the curb -

EXT. MCCORMICK HOUSE. DUSK

Brian watches as Eric and Mrs. McCormick get out of the Gremlin.

MRS. MCCORMICK

Can I help you?

BRIAN

Is this your house?

MRS. MCCORMICK

Yes...

BRIAN

I-I'm really sorry to bother you but I got your address out of the phonebook. I've spent the whole afternoon checking every McCormick in Hutchinson and you're the last one on my list..

Mrs. McCormick and Eric trade looks like "Who is this crackpot?" (For Eric, there's also an acknowledgement of "Hm, he's almost kinda cute").

BRIAN

Anyways, I don't mean to babble, it's just I've been searching for such a long time--

MRS. MCCORMICK
(cut to the chase already)

What do you want?

BRIAN

I... I'm looking for N. McCormick.

ERIC
(unable to resist a joke)

Are you FBI?

MRS. MCCORMICK
Sorry honey, but it looks like you're shit outta luck.

Brian's face falls, his hopes dashed.

BRIAN
You mean there's no N. McCormick living here.

MRS. MCCORMICK
I mean we just put him on a Greyhound headed for New York City.

Brian goes numb with disbelief.

BRIAN
I just missed him?

MRS. MCCORMICK
'Fraid so, sweetie.

ERIC
I'm Neil's friend, Eric. This is his Mom.

BRIAN
"Neil". His name is Neil...

ERIC
uh, yeah...

BRIAN
I'm Brian. Brian Lackey.

Eric and Mrs. McCormick regard this odd, tousle-haired stranger with suspicion, wariness and something like pity. As Brian just stands there, eyes wide and anxious as a puppy's...

FADE TO

BLACK

SOUND PRELAP: The rumbling THUNDER of a subway train and Cocteau Twins' "Lorelei" overpower the SOUNDTRACK as we -

CUT TO

TITLE:

WHITE
Fall, Winter 1991

CUT TO

INT. SUBWAY - NEW YORK CITY. DAY

Neil on the train, listening to a Walkman, reading a POSTCARD from Eric. The image on the back depicts a SCREAMING WOMAN with a FLYING SAUCER in the BG -

ERIC (VO)
So you still haven't written - big surprise - but Wendy says you're doing OK which is cool. Anyways, I've been wanting to tell you about this strange guy I met three weeks ago -

FLASHCUT

EXT. MCCORMICK HOUSE. DUSK

(MOS) INSTANT REPLAY of Brian and Eric's initial encounter on the McCormick front walk -

BACK TO

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN

Neil reading -

ERIC (VO CONT'D)
No, we're not fucking, get your mind out of the gutter, perv. He's not even gay I don't think -

CUT TO

SERIES OF MOS SHOTS

Chronicling Eric and Brian's tentative, growing friendship -

ERIC (VO CONT'D)
In fact, his vibe is kinda weirdly asexual. Anyway, his name is Brian Lackey. He lives in Little River and, like yours truly, attends Hutchinson Loser Community College -

EXT. SUN CENTER. NIGHT

Eric giving Brian a tour of the deserted, closed-for-the-season park where Neil used to work -

INT. COLLEGE LECTURE HALL. DAY

The pair sharing notes in a boring lecture class -

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS. DAY

The two outcasts having lunch together on the grass -

BACK TO

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN

Neil reading -

ERIC (VO CONT'D)
So anyways, the day you left, your mom and I found him literally on your doorstep, looking for you. He says you and him played Little League together like ten years ago, he was the worst player on the team, blah, blah, blah...

FLASHCUT

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD. DAY

Brian (8) pathetically dropping a fly ball.

BACK TO

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN

Neil, sifting through his murky memory, unable to place any "Brians" -

ERIC (VO, CONT'D)
He's full of questions about you but, of course, I haven't told him much - i.e. about your "line of work"...

CUT TO

EXT. ERIC'S GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE. NIGHT

(MOS) Eric's dented Gremlin parked in the driveway of his Grandmother's small, low-income home.

INT. ERIC'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

(MOS) Surrounded by teen goth gloom and doom, Eric and Brian hang out, listening to records, talking -

ERIC (VO, CONT'D)
I did say you were queer like me, only cuz I figured you wouldn't care, which he was totally cool with anyway.

BACK TO

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN

Neil still reading -

ERIC (VO, CONT'D)
But now, are you ready for the good part? He thinks that when you and him were little, you were both abducted and examined by space aliens! How brilliant is that? But he was completely serious when he told me this...

BACK TO

INT. ERIC'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

(MOS) CU: Brian gravely recounting his UFO experience to Eric -

ERIC (VO, CONT'D)
Like you should've seen the look in his eyes.

BACK TO

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN

Neil, still trying to remember -

ERIC (VO, CONT'D)
So what's the story, dude? *WERE YOU ABDUCTED BY A UFO OR WHAT?*

Neil scoffs, rolls his eyes. Then:

ERIC (VO, CONT'D)
PS. Are your crabs gone yet?

As Neil smiles. Yes...

CUT TO

INT. ROUNDS BAR. NIGHT.

Neil leans against the bar, trying to look cocky but not the big fish he was in Hutchinson's little pond. Despite the fact we're many, many miles from The Flag, in "cosmopolitan" New York, the vibe is surprisingly similar. Lonely OLDER MEN stare hungrily at the HUSTLERS, only the undercurrent here is somehow sadder, even more tragic... As a FORTYSOMETHING JOHN in a three-piece suit sidles up to Neil:

JOHN
Come here often?

NEIL
Uh, not really. My first time actually.

JOHN
Sure it is.

The Man makes a face and a "hmpf" sound. Then cutting to the chase:

JOHN
I pay one twenty. Not a cent more.

Neil has to suppress a gasp - things really do go for a premium here in the Big City. He shrugs, trying to act nonchalant.

NEIL
OK...

JOHN
Shall we?

Off Neil's not-wanting-to-be-eager nod...

SMASHCUT TO

INT. TONY UPPER EAST SIDE APT. NIGHT

The John frenches Neil furiously, as if trying to swallow him whole. Tearing off his clothes, he guides the backwards-stumbling Neil to -

INT. BEDROOM

The John climbs onto the bed, getting on his hands and knees -

JOHN
Fuck me! Fuck me up the ass with your hot, teenaged cock!

Neil positions himself behind the John, preparing to mount him.

JOHN
Wait-- What the fuck do you think you're *doing*?

He reaches over, grabs a condom from the nightstand drawer. Holds it out to him. As Neil looks at the square of foil in the man's sweaty palm, puzzled...

JOHN
(rolls eyes)
Oh, alright. *Whatever.*
(MORE)

JOHN (cont'd)
 (rips open the packet with his teeth)
 I'll put it on for you.

He slips the condom on Neil who looks down, bewildered, as if the penis getting encased in Latex is not his own.

JOHN
 There.

The John turns back around, reassuming the position -

JOHN
 Well, c'mon, stud. We're on the clock.

As Neil, still a bit taken aback, puts his hands on the man's hips, gets busy...

CUT TO

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Brian, at his desk, supposedly studying but instead doodling in his Dream Journal -

INSERT CU: Amidst the scribbled notes and drawings that are like a topographical map of his psyche, he surrounds the name "N. Mc CORMICK" with a series of increasingly larger QUESTION MARKS...

There's a KNOCK at the door. Brian closes his journal, stashing it under his homework -

MRS. LACKEY
 Brian?

As Mrs. Lackey, visibly irritated, opens the door -

MRS. LACKEY
 You have a visitor.

AVALYN
 Hi Brian.

Brian looks a bit confused and putoff by this unexpected visit. It feels weird to have Avalyn in his room and she's likewise uncomfortable, out of her element.

AVALYN
 I was just in the area, thought I'd drop by, see how you were doing.

MRS. LACKEY
 (not bothering to hide her annoyance)
 I'll be downstairs if you need anything.

BRIAN
 Thanks, Mom.

Mrs. Lackey exits and Avalyn wanders around, checking out Brian's books and posters...

AVALYN
 (re: the *Capricorn One* poster on his wall)
 Didn't care much for this film...
 (re: *Angry Red Planet* poster)
 And that, I never saw.

As Avalyn continues exploring, Brian's tension growing...

AVALYN

Your mother doesn't like me very much. She thinks I'm stealing you away.

Brian neither agrees nor disagrees.

AVALYN

Any luck in your search for "N. McCormick"?

BRIAN

Sort of. I met his mom and his best friend, but he's in New York right now.

AVALYN

New York. Really...

She finally comes to rest on his bed, the mattress sagging under her weight. She kicks off her sandals, patting the spot beside her.

AVALYN

Come sit.

Brian alights on the opposite edge of the mattress.

AVALYN

You still having those dreams?

BRIAN

(nods)

Yeah. But they seem to be slowly evolving, like they're turning into something else...

AVALYN

Mh.

BRIAN

And maybe it's just because I've been spending time with Eric, Neil's friend, but it's becoming clearer and clearer that he, Neil that is, is a key figure in all this. Like he was there with me the night it happened...

They sit contemplating this till Avalyn, in one fast motion, lunges at Brian and starts rubbing his crotch. Brian's eyes go wide with shock as Avalyn gnaws on his neck -

BRIAN

I can't... Don't...

But Avalyn keeps aggressively fondling him, triggering a gut-wrenching fear deep inside him. As she starts undoing his pants -

AVALYN

It's OK, Brian...

Brian is shaking violently, being taken back to something his mind has purposefully blotted out. As Avalyn speaks, her mouth forms words but the VOICE that comes out belongs to another:

NEIL (8)'S VOICE
(whispering)

It'll feel good.

Terrified, Brian finally manages to force a dry, choked noise from his constricted throat:

No...

BRIAN

He leaps up, pulling on his pants as Avalyn falls back into a sitting position on the floor *THUD*. She looks like a sad, hurt child. As Brian swallows, trying in vain to get the taste of her out his mouth -

I'm sorry.

AVALYN

Avalyn slowly rises to her feet, straightening her dress.

You'd better go.

BRIAN

Long beat. Avalyn just stands there, ashamed and embarrassed, face turned toward the floor.

Please.

BRIAN

As Avalyn exits without a word, leaving Brian alone, confused, deeply disturbed...

CROSSFADE TO

INT. WENDY'S STUDIO APT. NIGHT

Wendy, just off work from her coffee waitress job, reclines on the couch in the tiny shoebox that costs her \$1000 a month. Neil rests his head in her lap, rolling a joint while *This Mortal Coil's "I Must Have Been Blind"* plays over the stereo.

WENDY

We're not in Kansas anymore, Neil. You have got to be so, so careful.

NEIL

I know.

WENDY

Don't "I know" me, Neil McCormick. Do you understand what I'm saying? This is New York City. You do the wrong thing with with the wrong person and you die. Period. End of story.

Neil knows he can't say "I know" again. Instead he fires up the joint, takes a hit.

WENDY

Promise me you'll always be safe. Every single time.

NEIL ..

(exhaling smoke)

OK...

WENDY

I mean it, Neil. Look at me.

She lifts his chin, stares into his dark eyes, deadly serious.

NEIL

I promise already, Jesus... Here.

He hands the joint to Wendy whose eyes remain on him, in silent warning. Off Neil's gorgeous face, visibly uneasy under such scrutiny...

FADE TO

BLACK

SHOCK CUT TO

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

TV: A WOMAN SCREAMING as her arm is torn off by a swamp MONSTER.

Brian and Eric lounge on the bed, watching a video, Brian trying to not recoil from the onscreen gore.

ERIC
OK, this is the best part coming up...

BRIAN
Are these the only kinds of movies you watch?

ERIC
Why? Don't you like it?

BRIAN
(not wanting to seem un-hip)
No, it's cool.
(change subject)
So, did you hear anything back from Neil yet?...

ERIC
(shakes his head, in "lecture" mode)
Allow me to explain The Universe of Neil McCormick. He's like a planet, Saturn say, and we're all like little moons orbiting around. Now do planets write letters?

Brian frowns, disappointed till Eric teasingly adds:

ERIC
But I do know that he'll be in Hutchinson for Christmas.

BRIAN
(sitting up)
What?

ERIC
His mom told me she's sending him a ticket to fly home for Baby Jesus's Birthday. So I'll introduce you then.

Brian is excited and nervous about finally meeting the legendary Neil in person. There's a *KNOCK* at the door.

MRS. LACKEY (OS)
Brian?

BRIAN
Yeah?

Mrs. Lackey peeks her head in, holding a tray of cookies, nicely spread out, and two glasses of milk. Her expression says she's glad Brian's got a friend, even if he is a bit oddly dressed and effeminate.

MRS. LACKEY
Thought you two might be ready for a study break.

ERIC
(digging in)
Mmm. Thanks, Mrs. Lackey.

BRIAN
(embarrassed)
Thanks, Mom.

MRS. LACKEY
So I'm headed for bed. Don't stay up *too* late now.

BRIAN
OK, Mom...

The phone RINGS. Brian gives Eric and his Mom a look.

MRS. LACKEY
(rolling her eyes at the impoliteness)
It's eleven-thirty.

BRIAN
If it's Avalyn, can you tell her I'm not here?

Mrs. Lackey smiles, happy Brian's over his obsession with the weird "UFO Woman". She picks up the phone -

MRS. LACKEY
Hello. No, I'm sorry, Avalyn.
(giving Brian and Eric a wink)
He's out with his friends. No problem. I'll tell him. Good night.

As she hangs up and Brian sighs with relief -

ERIC
I thought you kinda liked her.

BRIAN
Yeah, I just, I don't know. I feel like I need a little space from her right now.

MRS. LACKEY
I always thought she was a freak anyway. Well, I'm off to bed.
Good night, boys.
(kisses Brian on the cheek)

BRIAN
(practically rolling his eyes)
Good night, Mom.

As she leaves, Brian and Eric trade glances, Brian humiliated by his mother's affection while Eric finds it so cute and sweet...

CROSSFADE TO

INT. ROUNDS BAR. NIGHT.

Neil leans, crotch forward, against the bar. As a sad-eyed, slender MAN nervously approaches him -

Hello. MAN

Hey. NEIL

I'm Zeke. From LA. MAN
(extends his hand)

Neil shakes Zeke's hand which feels like it's made of bones wrapped in cellophane.

Neil. NEIL

Zeke smiles, his alabaster countenance glowing in the dimness.

So what brings you to New York, Neil? ZEKE

I'm an actor. NEIL

Really. Been in anything I might have seen? MAN

I mainly do independent films, y'know artsy-fartsy stuff. NEIL

Mm. MAN
(not believing his lie but it not mattering)

CUT TO

INT. UPSCALE HOTEL ROOM. NIGHT

Neil and Zeke enter a minimalist room dominated by a huge reproduction of a Flemish PAINTING of a woman's face hung over the bed.

Vermeer. Well, sort of. ZEKE
(notices Neil gazing at the painting)

He comes over and matter-of-factly removes Neil's clothes. Soon Neil is on the bed, completely naked.

Beautiful. ZEKE

He stands, admiring Neil for a beat, then sighs.

I suppose it's my turn. ZEKE

He dims the lights to an amber glow, begins slowly undressing.

As Neil watches, passively, like it's TV -

HIS POV: Zeke's clothes come off, revealing a body more emaciated than any photo of starving Biafran children Neil's ever seen. And scattered over his ghost white skin are a dozen purplish brown lesions that look angry, ready to burst.

CU: Neil, his horror hidden beneath a blank, detached non-expression.

ZEKE

Hope these don't frighten you. They keep popping up in the most awful, unexpected places.

He puts his cold hand on Neil's knee and Neil fights the urge to run away, screaming.

ZEKE

Don't worry. This will be the safest encounter you've ever had. Trust me.

With that, he lies on the bed in his boxers which bloom ridiculously baggy around his bony ass.

ZEKE

Just rub my back for awhile. I need... this.

Swallowing his terror, Neil straddles Zeke, tentatively touches his diseased flesh. It feels dry, inanimate, like paper. Head on the pillow, Zeke sighs with exquisite pleasure at the touch of another.

ZEKE

Make me happy...

Neil rubs Zeke's back, looking like he's either going to cry or vomit. He looks up, away, finds himself gazing directly into -

HIS POV: The staring eyes of the Woman in the fake Vermeer. Her mouth is curved in a gentle smile, as if encouraging Neil to continue providing this tortured soul some small iota of joy...

Off Neil, like a desperate, trapped animal, massaging harder, harder...

JUMPCUT TO

EXT. NEW YORK STREET. NIGHT

Neil, frantic, flees through the wet, bitter cold streets. Running, running, running -

CUT TO

INT. BOHO COFFEEHOUSE. NIGHT

Neil sits, still shaken from his encounter, smoking at the counter of the pretentious cappuccino hole where Wendy works. It's so late the place is practically empty, with "*The Carnival Is Over*" by Dead Can Dance reverberating over the house system. As Wendy pours Neil more tea -

WENDY

You were 100 percent safe, right?

Neil gazes down at the steam rising from his cup.

NEIL

I told you I just jerked off while he watched from across the room.

Wendy wants to take Neil in her arms, protect him from the world, but realizing how impossible that is, she just sighs. Neither of them says anything for a beat. Then Neil mumbles quietly, almost to himself:

NEIL

For the first time in my life, I'm bothered by it.

WENDY

It?

NEIL

The sex.

He looks up with a vulnerability in his eyes we've not seen before.

WENDY

Maybe you should quit.

Neil stares at her, almost in shock, as if such an idea was completely beyond his comprehension. All he can say in response is:

NEIL

What?

WENDY

Maybe you should try and find some other, safer way to make money. You know, like everyone else. Like normal people do.

Neil is bewildered, like his soul has exited the building and left only his body behind. Finally, he goes:

NEIL

yeah... maybe.

He sighs wearily, as if what Wendy's talking about is too overwhelming to even ponder. In its confusion, Neil's mind drifts to something from his past, an isle of security and comfort...

NEIL

You're the only person I've ever told, y'know. I never told Eric, or my Mom...

WENDY

I know.

NEIL

And people may think it's fucked up or terrible or whatever, but what happened that summer is a huge part of me. It's inside here, forever. He made me feel like no one's ever made me feel, before or since. Like I was... special, y'know?

WENDY

Neil, you were only eight years old.

The pitch of Neil's voice shifts as he becomes unhinged, strangely emotional -

NEIL

But he really loved me, you know? There were other kids sometimes, but I was his prize. I was his one true love...

Neil seems disoriented, like he's lost track of where he is. Watching him makes Wendy want to cry. She puts her hand on his arm.

NEIL

Everything just feels so fucked up right now.

Off Wendy, eyes shining as she looks at Neil - so lost, beautiful and damned...

FADE TO

BLACK

SOUND PRELAP: "The Same Deep Water As You" by The Cure and the OS SOUND of laughter -
CUT TO

INT. ERIC'S BEDROOM. AFTERNOON

Eric and Brian celebrate Brian's birthday, drinking whiskey, eating cupcakes with a "1" and an "8" candle stuck in them, making messes with Eric's art supplies. Eric hands Brian a black-wrapped gift.

Happy birthday. ERIC

You didn't have to get me anything. BRIAN

It's just a little something I picked out. ERIC

Brian opens the box: it's a BLUE SWEATER, obviously from the thrift store where Eric shops.

Wow. Cool. BRIAN
(beaming)

You really like it? I thought it'd go great with your hair color. ERIC

He tries it on: it does look good, giving nerdy Brian a bit of a cooler edge. He eyes himself in the mirror.

What do you think? ERIC

It's so cool. Thanks. BRIAN

He bends to give Eric a hug, feeling the world go woozy for a second -

Whoa. BRIAN

You alright? ERIC

Brian's face lights up with a sudden realization:

I'm drunk. BRIAN

Eric cracks up.

I've never been drunk in my entire life...! BRIAN

ERIC

I'm corrupting you. Good.
 (folding a large piece of paper in three)
 Here. Let's play a game I learned in art class.

He pushes the folded paper towards Brian.

ERIC

Draw the head of an alien.

BRIAN

(laughs then shrugs, what the hell)
 Whatever you say...

He takes another drink, starts sketching -

ERIC

Don't let me see what you've drawn, just leave me guidelines where
 to start the body.

Brian, chewing his tongue in concentration, finishes his part.

BRIAN

Done.

He gives the paper to Eric who hands him the bottle of whiskey.

BRIAN

Who's gonna do the legs?

ERIC

Shit. I don't know...

BRIAN

Too bad Neil's not here.

Eric finishes drawing his portion, slides the paper back to Brian.

ERIC

Here. You do the legs and "channel" Neil.

BRIAN

What?

ERIC

Pretend you're him and draw it like he would.

BRIAN

OK...

He takes another drink, starts sketching. As Brian focuses on drawing, it's like he goes someplace else,
 someplace deep within himself... Finally:

BRIAN

Finished.

ERIC

Let's look at our "masterpiece".

As they ceremoniously unfold the drawing -

INSERT CU: Brian's Part One is A BULBOUS HEAD with two nostrils, huge black eyes, a slit for a mouth. Eric's Part Two is a goth-influenced GRIM REAPER torso, carrying a blood-dripping scythe.

Eric and Brian trade pleased smiles.

Not bad...

ERIC

uh... what's that?

(then, noticing)

INSERT CU: Part Three, the part "Neil" drew, is a MAN'S MUSCULAR LEGS in shorts, wearing cleated Adidas. On the ground, is a BASEBALL MITT and an out-of-proportion BASEBALL...

BRIAN

(staring, utterly perplexed)

I have *no idea*...

MUSIC PRELAP: "Reverence" by The Jesus And Mary Chain EXPLODES on the soundtrack -
CUT TO

INT. WENDY'S APT. NIGHT

Neil naps on the couch with the stereo BLASTING, smiling contentedly. On his chest is an open envelope and a PLANE TICKET. He doesn't even notice Wendy coming home from work, carrying a bag of groceries. She sneaks up, goes:

Boo!

WENDY

Neil hardly starts at all, sits up, smiling. As Wendy lowers the volume with the remote -

Uh, remember, neighbors?

WENDY

Oh yeah, sorry. How was work?

NEIL

Fucking boring.

WENDY

As she heads into the kitchen and Neil follows -

But I do have news for you.

WENDY..

Hey. Me too.

NEIL

OK. You first.

WENDY
(putting groceries away)

Look what my Mom sent me today.
(holds up plane ticket)
She wants me to come home for Christmas.

NEIL

WENDY

Your mom is so cool. Like mine would ever do that for me.

Neil starts helping Wendy put stuff away.

NEIL

It's weird. Like I hate Hutchinson more than anything, but I'm almost kinda looking forward to going back, for a short *visit* at least.

WENDY

Plus you get to see Eric.

NEIL

Yeah. So what's your news?

Wendy turns to Neil, excitement in her eyes...

NEIL

What?

WENDY

(after a dramatic pause)

I think I found you a job.

Neil just looks at her for a beat. Then:

NEIL

What?

WENDY

I was talking to this friend at work, Rachel, about you, and well, it's only minimum wage at a stupid sandwich place but...

She stops, noticing Neil's blank reaction.

NEIL

What?

WENDY

You're not into it. Whatever.

NEIL

(not wanting to disappoint her)

No. No, tell me more.

WENDY

Really?

NEIL

Yeah. Really, Wendy. I want to hear about it.

WENDY

You do?

Neil smiles, nods.

NEIL

Yeah.

Wendy gives him a spontaneous hug, her face glowing with hope that Neil might actually go legit. Neil, meanwhile, just looks numb, unsure...

CUT TO

INT. GREMLIN (PARKED). NIGHT

Eric is dropping Brian off at home. Brian, shitfaced drunk by now, is still wearing his new blue sweater.

ERIC
Y'sure you're gonna be OK?

BRIAN
I'm just glad my Mom's working late.
(turns to Eric)
Thanks for everything. This has been the best birthday ever.

ERIC
You're welcome.

There's an awkward beat, tense with an almost romantic undercurrent between the two friends. Then:
THEIR POV: A WHITE FORD PICKUP TRUCK pulls into the Lackey driveway.

BRIAN
Oh shit.

ERIC
Who's that?

BRIAN
It's my *Dad*.

EXT. LACKEY HOUSE

Mr. Lackey, looking much older than when we last saw him and even more unhappy, emerges from the truck, wearing clothes he might wear to a nice restaurant. In his hands, a small wrapped GIFT. He trots to the front door, is just about to ring the bell when:

BRIAN (OS)
Dad.

Mr. Lackey turns -

HIS POV: Brian and Eric coming up behind him.

MR. LACKEY
(puts on an artificial, uncomfortable smile)
Son. I caught you. Your mom said she wasn't sure you'd be home.
(presents his gift)
Happy Birthday.

Brian stands there, nonplussed, the alcohol bringing the emotions he normally sublimates to a boil.

MR. LACKEY
(eying Eric somewhat disapprovingly)
Who's your friend?

BRIAN
Eric.
(confusion becoming anger)
What are you doing here?

MR. LACKEY
I'm not allowed to wish my only son a happy birthday?

BRIAN
Dad, I haven't seen you for what, two years?

MR. LACKEY
Well, maybe if you returned my phone calls every now and then -

BRIAN
Maybe I don't want to return your calls. Dad. Maybe I just want you to leave me alone.

Eric looks at Brian, a little stunned by his bluntness.

MR. LACKEY
Oh, don't be like this, Brian. I drove all this way. I just want to know how you've been, what you've been up to--

BRIAN
Well, let me tell you what I want to know. Something happened to me when I was little. Do you know what I'm talking about?

MR. LACKEY
(angry now too)
What kind of lies has your mother been filling your head with?

BRIAN
Mom's got nothing to do with this. What happened to me that night I woke up bleeding in the cellar? Where were you that night? God, I can tell you don't even remember...!

MR. LACKEY
(suddenly realizing)
You're drunk.

BRIAN
Quit avoiding the subject! I was bleeding, I kept passing out, I wet my fucking bed and you never asked why, all you ever did was yell at me!

Mr. Lackey lowers his head.

BRIAN
And what about that Halloween when I blacked out again? I know something happened to me both those nights!! What do you know about it? Tell me!

Brian, hyperventilating by this point, stops shouting and there's a momentous silence, tinged only by a neighborhood dog barking and a baby wailing, very distant in the BG. Finally, Mr. Lackey, filled with a deep sadness, looks his only son in the eye.

MR. LACKEY
I'm sorry, Brian. I can't help you.

Brian stands there, too drunk, too worked up to do anything but watch in silence as his father leaves his gift on the cold concrete stoop and walks out of his life forever.

As Eric places a comforting hand on Brian's shoulder...

FADE TO

BLACK

CUT TO

INT. WENDY'S APT. NIGHT

INSERT CU: A wall CALENDAR with the first 22 days of DECEMBER crossed out in BIG RED X's.

CAMERA WIDENS to include a pathetic, scrawny, one foot tall CHRISTMAS TREE on the kitchen table. Neil, in a rush, grabs a slice of bologna from the fridge, sniff tests it for freshness, stuffs it in his mouth. As he pulls on his winter coat, runs out the door SLAM -

CUT TO

INT. SUBWAY SANDWICH SHOP. NIGHT

Neil behind the counter in a world of ugly fluorescent light and bright yellow formica. He's helping an overweight, lonely-looking OLDER WOMAN.

NEIL

Welcome to Subway. May I help you?

There's something almost sad, resigned about seeing Neil in the ordinary workaday world...

CUT TO

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Brian stands on his bed, taking down his mobile of the solar system. His room is clearly in a state of transition - the UFO, SCI-FI POSTERS being replaced by POSTERS of POSTPUNK BANDS and PARAPHERNALIA obviously on loan from the gallery du Eric. There's a KNOCK at the door.

DEBORAH (OS)

Brian?

Brian turns, the planets, moons and wires of his mobile dangling in his arms. The door behind him opens and DEBORAH (now 22) enters with Mrs. Lackey carrying her daughter's luggage.

BRIAN

Deborah!

Brian dumps the miniature galaxy on his desk while Deborah checks out the disarray.

DEBORAH

Redecorating?

BRIAN

Sorta, yeah.

Brian gives his older sister a hug.

BRIAN

Thought you weren't coming for another hour.

DEBORAH
 My flight got in early if you can believe that.
 (affectionately mussing Brian's hair)
 So how've you been, Bri?

BRIAN
 Good. How's Berkeley?

MRS. LACKEY
 Hold on, you two. How about we continue this conversation downstairs
 over the peanut-butter peach pie I baked just for the occasion?

DEBORAH
 I'm on a diet, Mom.

MRS. LACKEY
 Pfh! I'll hear no such nonsense while you're under this roof, young lady.

Deborah rolls her eyes. She and Brian both smile, putting their arms around each other.

DEBORAH
 Good to see you, little brother.

BRIAN
 (grinning)
 " You too.

As they follow Mrs. Lackey downstairs -

CROSSFADE TO

EXT. STREET. NIGHT

Neil, off work, on his way home. Even though he's now a gainfully employed member of society, there's something in his walk, his body language that advertises in big neon letters what his true calling is...

A nondescript brown PLYMOUTH SEDAN approaches, its headlights like glaring eyes. Neil senses its presence like a cat. The Sedan pulls up beside him and Neil stops, turns -

HIS POV: The passenger window slides down and a MAN leans over, face hovering in the shadows. 40ish, with a buzzcut and chiseled military features, he resembles Coach more closely than any other John Neil's ever had.

Neil looks over, half excited, half apprehensive. The Man checks him out then says in a gruff baritone:

MAN
 Need a lift?

Neil considers for a beat. Then:

NEIL
 Sure.

As the Man *KATHUNK* opens the door and Neil climbs in -

CUT TO

INT. SEDAN (MOVING). NIGHT

"Love Songs On the Radio" by Mojave3 plays dreamily in the BG as Neil gets down to business -

Where we going? NEIL

My place. Don't worry, I'll pay. MAN
(then sternly)
Put the window up.

Neil cranks the window shut and the outside world seems to fall away. Exhausted from his eight hour shift, Neil tries to relax, lulled by the narcotic effects of the car heater and the MUSIC's somnabulistic sweetness. The Man, noticing, shuts the radio off with a *CLICK*. Claustrophobic quiet takes over. As Neil gazes out his window -

DRIVING POV: Passing a CHURCH, its illuminated NATIVITY SCENE glowing like a ghostly hallucination...

As Neil speaks, more to himself than anyone, his breath clouding the chilled glass -

Christmas Eve's tomorrow. NEIL

The Man shoots him a look from the corner of his eyes.

No more talking. MAN

A bit taken aback, Neil shrugs "whatever, asshole", leans back in his seat. The Man fires him another sideways glance.

You better be horny. MAN

Neil says nothing, settling in, letting the time and scenery pass by. As his eyes slowly close, the swaying car gently rocking him to sleep...

SLOW, MATCHED CROSSFADE TO

INT. SEDAN (PARKED). LATER

CU: Neil opens his eyes as the car ignition is killed. Disoriented, not sure how long he's been dozing, he's subconsciously reminded of long ago road trips with his Mom, awakening to a tender "Honey, we're home"...

... where are we? NEIL

Brighton Beach. MAN

Not even sure where that is, only knowing it's fucking light years from the cozy warmth of Wendy's sofa, Neil sighs. Rousing himself, he follows the Man out of the car -

EXT. APT COMPLEX

The entire world is hushed, arctic, like some post-apocalyptic movie. Only the orangy light of a subway station reminds Neil that he's still even theoretically "in New York". Not speaking, he and the Man enter the security door of a rundown building -

INT. APT

Simple and small, utterly devoid of personality. The Man turns on a feeble light by the door which barely makes a dent in the darkness.

Bedroom's this way.

MAN

Neil follows him, saying nothing. Glad actually to be spared the "make yourself at home" bullshit and foreplay. The sooner the fucking is done, the sooner he's on his long way home.

INT. BEDROOM

The Man turns on the lights which are again low, leaving darkness dominating the space. He opens a drawer, removes some cocaine and a tiny pink plastic spoon of the sort one uses to taste ice cream at Baskin Robbins. He lifts a spoonful of coke to Neil's nose.

Do it.

MAN

Neil, not in the mood but wanting to get this over with as quickly as possible, snorts. The Man refills the spoon.

Again.

MAN

Neil sighs. Complies. The Man very quickly *SNORT-SNORT* does two spoonfuls himself, puts the coke away. He starts removing his clothes as if disrobing for an army physical.

Strip.

MAN

Neil, on automatic pilot, begins undressing. He's clumsily trying to step out of his pants when the Man surprises him by suddenly shoving him onto the bed. He yanks Neil's pants and underwear off, hurls them across the room. Then he grabs Neil by the scruff of his neck and says:

Open wide and suck it, slut.

MAN

Neil looks up at the Man, stunned. Used to being in control, he's suddenly like a nervous, inexperienced virgin... Out of nowhere, the Man *SLAPS* his face - a brutal, shocking moment for Neil who makes a wet gasping sound.

What are you waiting for, slut?

MAN

He pushes Neil to the ground, his kneecaps crashing into the hardwood floor.

Suck it

MAN

He grabs Neil by the ears in a steel vise grip, forcing his face toward his crotch. As Neil, shaken, reeling, wanting to get this horrible experience over with, begins sucking the Man's dick..

You like that, don't you, slut? Take it deep. Moan for me. Let me know how much you want it...

MAN

Neil, OS, is making noises like he's being choked, strangled to death.

As the Man *SNORRRTS* phlegm from deep in his throat, spits -

And Neil, a gob of spit dripping down his cheek, pulls back, withdrawing -

NEIL

Wait...

The Man, holding Neil's head with both hands, hurls him onto the waterbed like a rag doll -

Neil lands face down in a churning ocean of undulating motion that makes him feel even more dislocated and nauseous. As the Man climbs on top of him like a massive spider -

MAN

Slut knows what's coming next. I'm gonna give the slut just what he's begging for--

Neil somehow manages to wriggle out from underneath the Man, get him at arm's distance -

NEIL

No... Wait. There's some things I don't do--

Neil squirms off the bed, relying on instinct to save himself -

NEIL

I... I gotta take a piss. Just wait a minute. I'll be right back--

As Neil scrambles out of the room -

INT. BATHROOM

Neil quickly locks the old-fashioned hook-shaped latch in its silver eyehole. Turns on the light *CLICK*. Overhead fluorescents *BUZZ* on, too bright. He sits on the rim of the bathtub, trying to steady his nerves. His thoughts: Calm down. Calm *him* down. Finish, get your money, go home--

Suddenly, his attention drawn to a strange scraping *SOUND*, he turns:

HIS POV: A *BUTTER KNIFE* is wedged in the crack of the door, the blade sawing up, nearer and nearer to the latch...

Neil recoils as -

HIS POV: The knife and latch connect *CLINK-CLINK* and the latch comes undone from its eyehole.

There's a second of unbearable silence that feels like a fucking eternity. Then the door flies open and the Man comes thundering in, clenching the knife in his fist.

Neil cowers, thinking: he's going to kill me.

The Man raises the blade but instead of stabbing Neil, he tosses it in the air -

INSERT CU: As the knife makes a graceful *SLO-MO* half-revolution...

The Man then catches it, *SMACKS* Neil in the forehead with the blunt handle. The blow sends Neil tumbling backward into the hard white void of the tub, his skull making a resonant *THUD* on the porcelain. His face inches from the silver drain, Neil looks up -

HIS POV: The Man towers over him, blocking out the light like some barbarous god.

MAN

You're getting fucked, slut, whether you want it or not.

He grabs Neil's thrashing ankles and twists him into a failed handstand, SLAMMING Neil's face into the side of the tub. Neil struggles to fight back, his flailing fists accidentally hitting the faucet handle. Cold water begins sprinkling from the shower head which only enrages the Man even more.

Slut!

MAN

He plunges his dick into Neil's ass, skewering him in a savage thrust that makes Neil's eyes bulge as if he was being electrocuted -

ahhh--

NEIL

Holding his splayed legs in the air, the Man fucks Neil, grunting with each lacerating thrust -

Slut! - Slut! - Slut! -

MAN

Neil's mouth is open wide like he's trying to scream only, horrifyingly, no sound is coming out.

The Man reaches over, picking up -

INSERT CU: A shatterproof plastic bottle of BABY SHAMPOO.

He raises the bottle high and in time to the rhythm of his fucking, viciously beats Neil's head, face, neck - each blow making a hollow, sickening *BUP*. A red poppy of BLOOD squirts onto the porcelain, swirling with the water trickling down the drain.

MAN

God, you love it. Take that cock all the way up there. Take it, slut.
Yeah... Yeah...

Finally, preparing to spray Neil's insides with his deadly seed, the Man releases the bottle -

INSERT CU: It lands *CLUNK* beside Neil's bloody, battered profile. The label says: No More Tears.

MAN

You want it, don't you, slut? Don't you? Here it comes... Are you
ready? Ready? *READY?*...

CU: Neil's beautiful, desecrated face distorted with unutterable agony as the Man lets loose a guttural *HOWL* that reverberates in the tiny room. As Neil, in contrast, makes a small, pitiful mewl, like a baby kitten being smothered...

FADE TO

BLACK

CUT TO

EXT. APT COMPLEX. NIGHT.

CU: Neil wakes up, once again not knowing where he is. His face, bruised, swollen, bleeding, is specked with dirt and debris.

Discovering he's been dumped in front of the Man's building like a bag of garbage, Neil slowly lifts his head, his every fiber and tissue a throbbing ache. He looks around at the world - now completely, irrevocably changed. A world that will never, ever be the same.

Neil opens his mouth and, in a parched, ghostly whisper, only one word comes out:

NEIL

...Mom.

He forces his ruined body to do a decrepit pushup, pain shooting through him. Then, as he staggers like an ancient drunk towards the subway station's sickly orange glow -

CUT TO

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN. DAWN

Neil sits on the freezing cold, empty train, propped up like some inanimate object. In his mind, one sentence plays over and over like a hellish tape loop: *This is what has happened...*

CUT TO

INT. WENDY'S APT. EARLY MORNING

Neil stumbles in, opening all the knobs and deadbolts with a minimum of metallic noise. With the first rays of morning seeping through the curtains, he passes the sofa where he'll soon sleep for the few hours before his flight home. He stops, gazing at -

HIS .POV: Through the slightly ajar bedroom door, the top of Wendy's head is visible, safe and warm in a fort of blankets.

The sight of her almost too much to bear, Neil slips silently into -

INT. BATHROOM

CLICK. Neil turns on the light, facing the horrific image of himself in the mirror. The blood has almost dried on his nose and mouth; his eye has begun to swell; his shirt is smeared with blood.

Turning away, he begins to undress, wincing as each movement sends pain coursing through him. He pulls open the lip of his underwear, stares down at his dick. Hating it and himself. As he drops his underwear to the floor, he notices a green-and-yellow striped shirt he'd had on earlier that day.

Kneeling down, he holds the shirt to his face, breathing in the scent of how he was before. Before leaving for his job at Subway. Before accepting the ride from The Man in the Brown Sedan. Before everything happened...

There is a long, awful silence, with the entire world seeming to grow incredibly quiet. Neil holds his breath, shivering in the cold. And he starts to cry...

CROSSFADE TO

TITLE:

Christmas Eve, 1991

CUT TO

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM. AFTERNOON

Brian lies on his bed in his redecorated room, ready burst with anticipation... Staring up at the open space where his solar system mobile used to be, he says out loud:

BRIAN

Today is the day.

Seemingly on cue, there's an OS *HONK, HONK, HONK*. Brian rushes to the window -
 HIS POV: On the street below, Eric waves from his battered Gremlin.

Brian, grinning, grabs his coat, flies out the door -

CUT TO

INT. KITCHEN

Mrs. Lackey and Deborah sit at the kitchen table, having afternoon tea. As Brian goes racing by -

MRS. LACKEY
 Brian! Now where are you off to?

BRIAN
 Going out with Eric.

MRS. LACKEY
 You don't want to stay and talk with your sister awhile?

BRIAN
 I'll be back soon.

MRS. LACKEY
 Well, don't be late, young man. Christmas Eve dinner's at six sharp.

BRIAN
 'K.

He's out the door with a *SLAM*. As Deborah smiles and Mrs. Lackey shakes her head...

CROSSFADE TO

EXT. MC CORMICK HOUSE. DUSK

Eric's Gremlin pulls up to Neil's house, sputtering exhaust in the frigid air.

ERIC (OS)
 Here we are.

INT. GREMLIN (PARKED)

Eric kills the engine, turns to Brian who's trying to flatten out his hopelessly unruly hair.

BRIAN
 I look OK?

ERIC
 OK's a relative term.
 (rolls eyes)

Kidding. You look fine.
 (a reassuring hand on Brian's shoulder)

Excited?

BRIAN
 Yes. And nervous.

ERIC
 Don't worry. I'm sure you guys are gonna hit it off great.

I hope you're right..

BRIAN

Brian bites his lip, taking a deep breath. As he and Eric exit the car -

EXT. MC CORMICK HOUSE - FRONT DOOR

BANG-BANG-BANG Eric pounds on the door, making the Walmart WREATH nailed to it tremble. Then, showing off for Brian, Eric throws open the unlocked door, SHOUTING:

Ellen?

ERIC

Brian timorously follows Eric inside, scanning around -

HIS AND ERIC'S POV: Mrs. McCormick emerges from the kitchen, holding a plate of fresh-baked CHRISTMAS COOKIES. There's something a little off about her, a seriousness that's out of character.

Eric.

MRS. MCCORMICK

Hey, Mrs. M. Merry Christmas.

ERIC

He gives Mrs. McCormick a hug.

You remember Brian.

ERIC

Of course I do. Hi, Brian.

MRS. MCCORMICK

Brian stands there, gives an awkward wave.

Merry Christmas.

BRIAN

So where's the Man of the Hour?

ERIC

Mrs. McCormick's demeanor grows biblical: tired, wounded, meaningful.

I was going to call you, but we just now got home from the airport.

MRS. MCCORMICK

Brian's face falls as he prepares for depressing news.

Why? What happened?

ERIC

There's been an accident. Neil got mugged on his way to the airport.

MRS. MCCORMICK

Brian reels as if punched in the stomach.

Is he OK?

ERIC

MRS. MCCORMICK
He'll be fine. He's asleep now, in his room.

Beat. Eric and Brian just stand there, stunned...

ERIC
Should we maybe come back tomorrow...?

MRS. MCCORMICK
Maybe. Or you can both stay if you'd like, have some cookies, see if he's feeling any better...

Eric and Brian exchange looks, not sure what to do. Suddenly, Eric's gaze shifts over Brian's shoulder and his expression changes, as if he's seeing a living ghost. His reaction makes both Brian and Mrs. McCormick turn -

MRS. MCCORMICK
You're up.

THEIR POV: Neil shuffles like an eighty year old man down the stairs. He looks drugged, his face purple and bruised, one of his eyes swollen shut, his lips a puffy, raspberry-like sore. The cuts on his face are so heavily stained with iodine they glow orange.

NEIL
What the fuck are you staring at, Preston?

Neither Eric nor Brian can speak as Neil stands before them almost defiantly, like Marlon Brando at the end of *On The Waterfront*.

MRS. MCCORMICK
(filling the strained silence)
So Brian says you both used to be in Little League together?

Neil is checking Brian out, trying to clear his foggy memory. Brian visibly squirms under his gaze.

NEIL
Uh huh...

Brian is in awe of Neil, like he's Jesus or something. Eric meanwhile seems about to burst into tears.

ERIC
Your face...

MRS. MCCORMICK
(keeping the conversation going)
So how long's it been since you two last saw each other?

At last, Brian finally speaks:

BRIAN
Ten years.
(then, after a beat)
Five months, seven days.

Neil smirks, amused by his precision. Because of his swollen eye, it seems like he's winking.

MRS. MCCORMICK
Boy, you must have a lot of catching up to do.

Off Neil and Brian, eying each other, sharing the thought: That's the understatement of the century...
CROSSFADE TO

INT. GREMLIN (MOVING). EVENING

With the neighborhood Christmas lights blinking in the BG, Eric drives Neil and Brian to their fateful destination while "In This World" by Cindytalk plays on the stereo.

NEIL
Turn left off Main by the fairgrounds.

ERIC
OK.
(then)
So what the fuck happened?

NEIL
Long story. I'll tell you later. Just drive for now.

ERIC
Yes, Master. Nice to see New York hasn't hardened you one bit, McCormick.

Neil smirks, realizing how much he's missed Eric.

NEIL
Fuck off.

Eric smiles too. Neil turns to Brian.

NEIL
So you're the legendary Brian.

BRIAN
uh huh...

NEIL
(with a trademark "Neil" enigmatic look)
We have alot in common, don't we?

BRIAN
(not exactly sure what he means)
I think so...

Neil smiles. Brian takes that as a cue that he should smile too.

NEIL
(to Eric)
We're almost there. Right at the next stop sign.

Brian, a deep uneasiness growing inside him, gazes out his window -

DRIVING POV: A GROUP OF CAROLERS going from house to house in the winter night, their sweet-sounding rendition of "The First Noel" barely audible through the glass.

Off Brian, the sight and present situation somehow making him hugely emotional, feeling weirdly like he's going to cry...

NEIL
Is this starting to look familiar?

Brian looks at Neil then out the windshield. He doesn't say anything but his face, the hair raising on the back of his neck speak louder than words. Eric's face likewise registers recognition as they approach -

DRIVING POV: The HOUSE in the darkened cul-de-sac where, months ago, Neil had his acid-trip meltdown.

As Eric slows down, stops the car -

NEIL
Come pick us up in half an hour.

Eric looks at Brian and Neil then nods, fully understanding that this is their deal.

ERIC
'K.

Neil gets out of the car and Brian, giving Eric one final anxious look, follows him into the blackness. As Eric dutifully puts the car in gear, drives off -

EXT. STREET

Brian watches Eric's Gremlin disappear down the street. Then:

NEIL
You ready?

Brian nods silently, follows Neil up the walkway -

HIS POV: HANDHELD approaching the small house. The porchlight left burning, radiates an eerie, luminous semicircle of a significant color -

BRIAN
(as if in a trance)
Blue...

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT DOOR

Neil RAPS on the door while Brian hangs back, gazing at the blue orb that's haunted him for over a decade. Neil, sliding the wreath aside, peers into the rectangular window.

NEIL
No one's home. Let's go round back.

Brian, worried they'll be caught by whoever now lives there, trails behind Neil who traipses around the side of the house, feet crunching in the gravel. Passing a row of plastic windmill sunflowers speared into the cold earth, Neil unlatches the gate, leading Brian into the unknown...

EXT. BACKYARD

Neil rattles the back doorknob. Also locked. He and Neil are on a patio littered with brightly colored TOYS, neglected, left out in the cold.

NEIL
We have to get in.

Brian says nothing, his shallow breath clouding the air.

I know a way.

NEIL

Neil pushes an overturned lawn chair over to a high window which he, despite his injuries, expertly jiggers open.

Voila.

NEIL

As Brian watches, his mind now going back, remembering...

You were the best player on the team, weren't you?

BRIAN

That's what he always told me. Give me a hand.

NEIL

With Brian lifting him by the soles of his shoes, Neil crawls through the window. Brian attempts to follow, lacking the strength to pull himself inside.

Help...

BRIAN

As Neil provides an assist and Brian disappears like Alice into the rabbit hole...

INT. BEDROOM

Neil and Brian have landed in a very dark master bedroom. They survey their surroundings: mirrored dresser, queen-sized bed, walk-in closet with sliding doors.

Not much for interior decoration, are they?

NEIL

Venturing into the murk, they find a stocky grey CAT, PURRING softly, prowling the carpeted floor.

Aww.

NEIL

Neil bends, scratches the murmuring cat's head.

Coach didn't use this room much. Kept baseball equipment here, other crap.

NEIL

(like a tour guide)

Eyes adjusting to the darkness, he leads Brian into the hall, the cat trailing behind them.

This was his bedroom.

NEIL

INT. BEDROOM

Neil opens the door to a room which has been converted to a nursery for a baby girl: all pink, cozy, full of stuffed animals, wallpaper printed with clowns, elephants, jugglers.

Neil, disgusted almost by the decor, directs his gaze upwards -

NEIL

At least the ceiling's still the same. I used to get lost for hours in all the patterns, whirls, speckly sparkly things...

As Brian, out of respect for Neil's memories, looks up too... Then:

NEIL

Come on.

Continuing the tour, they head back into the hall, closing the door behind them -

INT. KITCHEN

The two boys walk into the kitchen, Neil opening and slamming cabinet doors like a hungry burglar -

NEIL

Man, what's up with these people? He always kept these things *stocked*.

He finds a ceramic cookie jar shaped like Santa's decapitated head. Swiping a cookie, he crams it in his mouth, offers one to Brian -

BRIAN

No thanks.

Brian's eyes have moved beyond the kitchen already, on to the next room - the living room - where the blue light from the porch spills through the picture windows.

Neil comes up behind him. In the dimness, the two opposites could be twins or at least, brothers.

NEIL

You OK?

Brian's reply is so quiet, it's barely there.

BRIAN

uh huh.

NEIL

This is it, right?

Brian nods very slowly, as if under a hypnotic spell...

INT. LIVING ROOM

Brian enters, his gait strangely vacant like he's sleepwalking. After all these years, he's finally here. Where it all happened. Where the nightmares began. And it's not the inside of a UFO at all: it's just a plain, ordinary living room.

With Neil lurking behind him like a doppelganger shadow...

NEIL

Why now? Why did you search me out?

BRIAN

I'm tired of it. I want to dream about something else for a change.

Like a frail old person, Brian sits on the couch. Neil sits beside him. And they both just soak it all in for a

minute, Brian surveying the room, unable to believe that he's actually back in this place... As the faint OS SINGING of the Carolers down the street is heard, Brian finally breaks the silence in a voice that sounds unfamiliar, strangely distant:

"Away in a Manger."
BRIAN

Neil nods. Realizing that the time has come for him to speak, to give Brian the answers he's been searching for for so long...

NEIL
Y'know it took till I actually laid eyes on you today to remember you. When Eric wrote me about you, I could only get the vaguest, hazy picture in my head. Like a staticky TV.

BRIAN
Same here. But seeing you here, in this room...

He trails off, unable to say more.

NEIL
I feel like he's watching us right now.

Brian slowly nods, sensing it too.

NEIL
I have no idea what happened to him. After that summer, he just disappeared. I think somebody must've found out, narced. I don't know if he's even alive or what. Maybe it's his ghost watching us...

He looks at Brian whose eyes plead for him to continue.

BRIAN
Tell me. Please. Tell me everything you can.

Neil takes a deep breath. Gazes into the darkness -

NEIL
I was his favorite. Out of everyone, he picked me. It sounds weird, but when it first started happening, I felt... honored.

He pauses, Brian hanging on his every word...

BRIAN
Go on. Please.

Neil gets up, starts indicating empty spaces around the room -

NEIL
This is where the big TV was with all the cool video games... Over in the kitchen, that's where we... That's where our first time happened. It lasted that whole summer. Just me and him...

Brian leans forward on the edge of the sofa, his own memories beginning to come back...

BRIAN
I saw him one other time. On Halloween, a couple years later. I was lost. He said my name...

CUT TO

EXT. WOODS. NIGHT.

Brian (10) turns around without his glasses, peering into the blackness -

OS MALE VOICE

Brian...

HIS POV: COACH materializing from the OUT-OF-FOCUS murk -

COACH

I thought that was you.

Off Coach's smile -

BACK TO

INT. LIVING ROOM

Brian, unsettled, frightened as the details return in an inexorable flood of images and fragments...

BRIAN

The game had just started. I was sitting on the bench as always. It started to rain -

CUT TO

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DUGOUT. EVENING

(MOS) REPLAY of the OPENING: Brian (8) on the bench, gazing up at the dark sky -

BRIAN (CONT'D VO)

Sprinkles at first, then a downpour.

He looks over at -

HIS POV: The other PLAYERS on the field getting drenched.

He turns to -

HIS POV: The UMP waves his arms, signaling a rainout.

BRIAN (CONT'D VO)

The umpire called the game.

BACK TO

INT. LIVING ROOM

NEIL

And no one came to pick you up.

BRIAN

My mom was working. My dad, who knows...

CUT TO

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DUGOUT. EVENING

Brian (8), abandoned, while the other PLAYERS are all shepherded off by their PARENTS.

BRIAN (CONT'D, VO)

Everyone else drove off with their parents. I was all alone.

CU: Brian, looking like he's going to cry. He turns -

HIS POV: Neil (8) approaches. Behind him, Coach, tall, strong, reassuring.

BRIAN (CONT'D, VO)

Then you were in the dugout with me. You said -

BRIAN'S POV: As Neil puts a comforting hand on Brian's shoulder -

NEIL (8)

We'll take you home.

BACK TO

INT. LIVING ROOM

Neil comes over, sits back down beside Brian on the couch.

NEIL

We got in Coach's station wagon, remember?

CUT TO

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - PARKING LOT. EVENING

Brian (8), carrying his glove, runs through the pouring rain, following Neil (8) and Coach. They all pile into Coach's station wagon -

CUT TO

INT. STATION WAGON (MOVING). EVENING

As the wipers *WHUP, WHUP, WHUP*, Neil sits, perched happily between Coach driving and Brian looking tiny, scared, huddled in the corner.

NEIL (CONT'D, VO)

And he brought us here.

CUT TO

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT DOOR. NIGHT

With the porchlight shining like a blue moon behind his head, Coach unlocks the door, smiling down at Neil (8) and an intimidated Brian (8) -

BRIAN'S POV: Coach looms over CAMERA, patting US/BRIAN on the shoulder -

COACH

Don't worry, Brian. We're just going to have some fun.

BACK TO

INT. LIVING ROOM

Brian and Neil, continuing their shared recollection.

NEIL

He didn't want you in the bedroom. That was just for us. So it all happened here, in this room. On a sofa, much nicer and more comfortable than this.

(pats the cushion between them)

BRIAN
Keep going. Don't stop till you've told me everything.

Neil takes a breath. Then:

NEIL
Anytime there was another boy involved, it was the same. Coach used me as a prop to pull you in...

CUT TO

INT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

CU: Brian (8), confused, terrified, watches -

HIS POV: Neil (8) sits, excited, happily kicking his legs on the sofa. As Coach's SILHOUETTE comes in, obscuring the frame like a dark eclipse -

NEIL (CONT'D, VO)
He took off my clothes.

BACK TO

INT. LIVING ROOM

Brian stares at Neil, reliving each event and detail as it's retold -

NEIL
It was up to me to make it seem like fun. Like it was this cool game we were playing -

CUT TO

INT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

BRIAN (8)'S POV: Coach pushing Neil (8) towards CAMERA -

COACH
Go on. Show him, Neil.

Neil steps right up to CAMERA -

NEIL (8)
These are the rules. I kiss you first, then you kiss me back, and then he gets a turn...

CU: Brian (8), petrified, shifts his gaze towards -

HIS POV: CAMERA PAN/RACKS to Coach kneeling, a goliath peering into CAMERA...

CU: Brian's wide eyes move back to -

HIS POV: Neil coming closer, closer...

NEIL (8)
You ready?

CU: Brian's frozen face, being ineluctably obscured by the back of Neil's head -

HIS POV: Neil right in CAMERA now, smiling -

Here we go. NEIL (8)

As he moves forward, completely blocking out the frame -

BACK TO

INT. LIVING ROOM

Remembering, Brian's eyes fill with tears, his voice reduced to a choked whisper -

Oh my God... BRIAN

Do you want me to stop? NEIL
(quietly)

Brian, unable to speak, shakes his head intensely, no.

I put my tongue in your mouth, getting it all wet and shiny...
(pauses as if making sure Brian can take it)
Then it was his turn. NEIL

Brian, tears trickling down, is determined to hear everything, to put this behind him once and for all.

Watching his big lips sucking your face, I remember thinking: He's
going to swallow his head whole. NEIL

Brian begins to weep.

Go on. Don't stop. Don't stop... BRIAN

So we took off your clothes and you made this whimpering puppy
sound that Coach always loved. Then the game continued. Coach and I
had this thing where he would open his mouth and wrap it around my
dick, balls, everything at once. He did that to me then I tried to do it to
you but couldn't really, my mouth was too small...
(looks to Brian steeling himself to hear more)
Then he went down on you for what seemed like a really long time. Your
eyes were closed mostly, but every now and then they would flutter
open, and they had this glassy, faraway look... NEIL

CUT TO

INT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

CU: Brian (8)'s eyes, exactly as described. The image unreal, horrific... He whimpers, turning his head
and Neil (8) comes right up to his ear -

Then I leaned over and whispered - NEIL (CONT'D, VO)

It's fun, right? Tell him you think it's fun. NEIL (8)

BACK TO

INT. LIVING ROOM

Adult Brian is whimpering now too, the SOUND startlingly similar to the one he made when he was eight. He rests his head on Neil's shoulder, in dire need of comfort from the only person on earth that can possibly understand. Neil tenses at first, taken aback, but finally gives in, stroking Brian's head with uncharacteristic tenderness.

NEIL

We're almost finished. Are you gonna be able to...?

Brian nods, face hidden in the nook between Neil's shoulder and chin.

NEIL

Then we played the five dollar game. Coach'd ask me to do things, crazy sex things, and if I could do them, he'd give me a five dollar bill.

FLASHCUT

INT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

SUBJECTIVE POV: Coach, hunched on all fours, looking over his shoulder, encouraging, right into CAMERA -

COACH

Go ahead, Neil.

BACK TO

INT. LIVING ROOM

NEIL

He made us fist him. Do you know what that is?

Brian nods, not raising his head, desperate for Neil to finish the story.

NEIL

I went first, of course. On that night, the five dollars was mine if I could ram my little fist up his ass, wring it all the way up to the elbow. And goddamn it, I did it. I'll never forget how it felt, like his body was trying to suck me into it, devour me...

There's a long silence as Neil senses that there's no need for him to go on because Brian can now himself describe what happened next. And when he does, his voice is weirdly calm and not his own -

BRIAN

Then I did it too.

Neil nods, relieved his duty is finally done. Outside, the Carolers are getting nearer and nearer, their serene harmonies seeping into the stillness.

NEIL

Then we drove you back to Little River and left you in your driveway. The End.

Brian sits up, leaving the sanctuary of Neil's shoulder as he recalls something else:

BRIAN

And my nose was bleeding. How did that happen?

Neil has to think for a second and, in this moment, Brian surprises him by laying his head in his lap - not in a sexual way but rather, like a child being read a bedtime story. Neil is stunned at first but again, allows it. As he reaches over, taking hold of Brian's hand -

NEIL
When it was over and we were dressing you... your face, it was like you'd been erased, like you were empty inside. And you just fell. Face first on the floor. Bam.

CUT TO

INT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

Brian (8) collapsing in SLO-MO -

NEIL (CONT'D, VO)
And when we pulled you up, your nose was bleeding.

Coach and Neil (8) retrieve Brian's limp form from the floor, blood gushing from his nostril...

BACK TO

INT. LIVING ROOM

Brian lifts his head. As before with Avalyn, a bright red stream dribbles from his nose.

Like this?

BRIAN

He makes the bleeding worse by poking at it, showing Neil.

Like this?

BRIAN

Stop. Stop.

NEIL
(grabbing Brian's hand)

He nurses Brian's nosebleed with excess material from his t-shirt, wiping his face, applying pressure to stem the flow. There's something timeless, heartrendingly beautiful about the image of the two boys huddled together in the darkness like a Botticelli Madonna and Child...

Then, hearing the OS Carolers gathering at the doorstep, Neil and Brian trade panicked looks.

Shh.

CAROLER 1 (OS)

No one's even home.

CAROLER 2 (OS)

Someone's in there. I can see them.

CAROLER 1 (OS)

A small BOY's face peers in the frosty window. Neil and Brian don't move, as if staying absolutely still creates a field of invisibility around them. There's a beat that stretches into an eternity. Then...

The Carolers begin to SING, their voices in this context startlingly pure, resplendent, not of this earth:

CAROLERS

*Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright..*

Listening to this incredible, perfect SOUND, Neil and Brian are overwhelmed by the spontaneous, transcendent beauty of the moment - the exact opposite of the atrocities that occurred in this same space ten years ago. As Neil strokes Brian's hair, the pair gazing at each other with the deep tenderness of lovers even though they're not -

CAROLERS (OS, CONT'D)

*'Round yon virgin mother and child,
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace...*

Brian and Neil smile as CAMERA BEGINS SLOWLY CRANING UP, leaving behind these two lost souls, this mortal realm of grief and suffering. Rising, rising, rising like angels ascending toward Heaven, or a luminous silver UFO disappearing into the night..

SLOW FADE TO

WHITE

END CREDITS.