A MONSTER CALLS

Written by

Patrick Ness

Based on "A Monster Calls" by Patrick Ness,
Inspired by an idea from Siobhan Dowd

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Michelle Kass Associates
85 Charing Cross Road
London WC2H 0AA
020 7439 1624

FADE UP ON

An amateur video, filmed on a phone, fills the middle of the screen. CONOR, 12, films himself and his MUM, 30s, healthy, vibrant, getting into a ROLLER COASTER car. They giggle together, up to something. The seat restraints close.

MUM
Shh, here they come.

The image disappears as Conor hides his phone. We hear their seats being checked by an attendant. Conor raises the phone again. They look around to make sure they won't get caught, smiling like fiends.

MUM (CONT'D)
If you drop that, it'll leave a permanent mark across your face.

CONOR
Nah, it'll probably hit you first.

Mum slaps his arm playfully. They both laugh in surprise as the car lurches forward. They start up a steep incline.

MUM
You know what I'm thinking?

CONOR
What?

MUM
We shouldn't have had all that Indian food for lunch.

Conor makes a fake vomiting sound. His mum laughs and makes one, too, until it becomes a competition and dissolves into laughter. Then they're nearly at the top.

MUM (CONT'D)
Ready? Here we go.

CONOR
Here we go.

They look into the camera. At the last second, Mum grabs Conor's arm lovingly, then they plunge over the top. Just as their faces start screaming in delight, we cut to sudden:

BLACKNESS

...as the screams from the plunge of the roller coaster fade...

TITLE: A MONSTER CALLS

FADE IN:

EXT. CHURCHYARD HILLTOP - NIGHT

A YEW TREE, huge, ancient, ominous, looms over us, its needle-like leaves sharp in the moonlight, red berries clustered throughout its branches. It sits in a small churchyard on a hilltop, a graveyard stretching down the hill in front of it.

We hear a single, distant CRY. Someone, somewhere, is terrified.

Down the hill, across some TRAIN TRACKS, we see the back of a small HOUSE. Did the scream come from there? It comes again, still distant, this time accompanied by a faint, monstrous ROARING.

We move down the hill, through the tombstones, over the train tracks and into the house's back garden. The SCREAMING and ROARING continues, increasing in volume, with newer sounds of raging winds and branches crashing. The sounds don't match the quiet, still night we're seeing.

We rush across the small back garden, up the back wall of the house, through an open window, taking us into:

INT. CONOR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

We find Conor sleeping fitfully in his bed. The sounds grow louder, and we realise we're HEARING HIS NIGHTMARE. As we close on his struggling face, the sounds reach their apex and-

CONOR
No!

He wakes, sitting up in bed, breathing heavily. He's a bit older than the video, seconds away from suddenly growing two feet in a year, but crucially, still small. He gets a look of resignation. This nightmare isn't unfamiliar.

CONOR (CONT'D)
(to himself)
You're okay. You're okay.

He glances around his moonlit bedroom. It's messy but homey. Posters at the borders of manhood on the wall: rugby teams, rock bands, but also cartoons. Old stuffed toys in corners, framed PHOTOS of Conor and his MUM; of Conor and schoolfriend LILY in a school play together, smiling wide; a laptop; handheld games. A boy's room, couldn't be more normal.

He takes a deep breath, gets up, goes to his door and out into:

INT. CONOR'S HALLWAY - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

He pads quietly down the hallway until he gets to his MUM's bedroom door. It's open slightly and he pushes it farther to look in.

In the moonlight, his mother is deeply asleep, alone in her bed. Her head is obscured by pillows, but we (can Conor) can see the blankets rise and fall gently as she breathes.

Conor pulls the door nearly closed again and returns to:

INT. CONOR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Conor gets back into bed, glancing at his bedside CLOCK, which reads 12.06. He lays down, sighs, closes his eyes.

After a beat, the clock ticks over to 12.07, and as if on cue:

VOICE (O.S.)
(whispering)
Conor.

A monstrous voice, deep, old as the earth itself. Conor opens his eyes but doesn't move. Did he actually hear that?

He gets up again, as if to head back to his Mum's bedroom, but the voice comes again:

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(more insistent)
Conor.

And clearly not from the direction of the hall. Conor's head snaps towards the window, where the open curtains are gently moving in a breeze. He gets slowly out of bed and heads over to it. He looks out.

CONOR'S POV - The massive yew tree on the hilltop, lit by moonlight. Nothing unusual.

He makes to go back to bed, but a cloud passes in front of the moon. The yew tree disappears in shadow. A gust of wind blows down the hill and through the open window. Conor blinks away in surprise, and when he turns back:

<u>The yew tree is now standing in his back garden.</u>

Conor stares in disbelief. How is this possible? He looks back at his empty bed.

CONOR
(to himself)
Did I go back to sleep?

He hears a creaking of timber and looks back out the window.

The tree is beginning to change.

Conor watches as it shifts and splits, twisting slowly, incredibly, into the shape of a TOWERING MAN:

--two muscular arms made from branches twining together

--a second leg placed down beside the trunk

---the uppermost branches gathering into a great and terrible face with huge, monstrous eyes.

A MONSTER, huge and impressive, now standing in his back garden, watching him, an evil glint in its eye.

It steps forward, placing two hands on either side of Conor's window, lowering its head to peer inside.

Conor steps back, frightened, but not as frightened as we might expect. This is definitely a dream, isn't it?

MONSTER
Conor O'Malley.

The voice echoes and booms. Conor doesn't answer. The Monster pushes against the house. We hear it creak under the monster's weight.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
I have come to get you, Conor O'Malley.

The monster might be enjoying this. But Conor doesn't run.

CONOR
(beat, quietly)
So come and get me then.

A beat, as the monster, impossibly, looks surprised.

Then it ROARS terrifyingly (though different from the roars in Conor's nightmare) and pounds on the walls of the house sending Conor's electronics and toys tumbling to the floor.

But Conor is still not afraid.

CONOR (CONT'D)
Shout all you want. I've seen worse.

The monster roars even louder and PUNCHES an enormous fist through Conor's window, taking out a large section of the wall. Conor at last tries to run, but the monster is too fast, grabbing him up and pulling him out of his bedroom...

EXT. CONOR'S BACK GARDEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

...and lifting him high in the air, SILHOUETTING him against the moon. The Monster roars again, still terrifying.

In the Monster's grasp, Conor can barely breathe, but he looks surprisingly defiant.

The Monster stops roaring, perplexed.

MONSTER
You really aren't afraid, are you?

CONOR
No. Not of you, anyway.

The Monster gets an angry look.

MONSTER
You will be. Before the end.

Its mouth ROARS impossibly wide, and Conor, at last, screams as we follow his POV into the gaping, knotty-toothed mouth of the Monster.

CUT TO:

INT. CONOR'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Conor sits up suddenly in his bed, MUCH more scared than when he woke from the earlier nightmare.

The sun is up. His alarm clock is buzzing 7.00. He flicks it off, his breathing slows. His window is intact. He can see the yew tree, peaceful and normal on the hilltop.

CONOR
Well, *that* was new.

He throws back his covers and sets his feet on the floor. Which is crunchy.

<u>Every inch is covered in needle-like yew tree leaves</u>.

INT. CONOR'S KITCHEN - MORNING

CONOR pokes his head around the door into his kitchen.

CONOR
Mum?

It's empty. Good. He drags a RUBBISH BAG to the BIN and shoves it deep inside. It opens a little, and we see that it's full of YEW TREE NEEDLES. Conor covers it with other rubbish, so it can't be seen.

He sighs. Job done. He glances out the KITCHEN WINDOW which has the same view of the hilltop.

The yew tree is still just a tree.

CONOR (CONT'D)
Right.

<u>TITLES RESUME OVER MONTAGE</u>

INT. CONOR'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Conor begins what is obviously a familiar routine. He puts on his school uniform, trying for the untucked rebellious look that he's still just slightly too young for.

INT. CONOR'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Conor packs his school bag with the right books and papers.

INT. CONOR'S HOUSE FRONT HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Conor sets the bag by the front door, ready to go.

INT. CONOR'S UTILITY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Conor puts a load of laundry into the washing machine. Why is a boy so young taking so much responsibility?

INT. CONOR'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Conor makes his breakfast of sugary cereal, toast and a glass of juice. We see that the cabinets also contain all kinds of MEDICINAL-LOOKING HEALTH FOOD.

INT. CONOR'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Conor eats at the small table, watching a VIDEO on his phone. We can just make out faint sounds of laughter. Is it the roller coaster video?

INT. CONOR'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Breakfast done, Conor rinses the dishes and puts them in the dishwasher. He eyes the rubbish bin suspiciously.

EXT. CONOR'S BACK GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

Conor shoves the entire kitchen bin liner into the huge green wheelie bin out back.

EXT. CONOR'S HOUSE DRIVEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Conor drags the wheelie bin to the curb to leave it for the dustmen, wipes his hands, looks back to house.

TITLES FINISH

INT. CONOR'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Everything's clean, Conor's ready for school, and still no sign of anyone else. He glances at the clock; it's nearly time to go. He's not quite sure what to do, when he hears a voice from upstairs.

MUM (O.S.)
Conor?

He lets out a long breath, possibly of relief.

INT. CONOR'S KITCHEN - MORNING - MOMENTS LATER

CONOR'S MUM leans against the kitchen counter, a loose scarf around her neck, waiting for a kettle to boil. She's changed since the video and is now clearly undergoing CHEMO-THERAPY: thin, pale, bald. Exhausted, but facing it well. Conor holds his rucksack, ready to go.

MUM
You've had breakfast?

CONOR
Yes, mum.

She gives him a look. She may be ill, but she's still Mum.

CONOR (CONT'D)
(exasperated)
Toast, cereal and juice. I put the dishes in the dishwasher.

MUM
(quietly, looking at the clean kitchen)
And took the rubbish out.

CONOR
There's washing going, too.

MUM
(smiling, a bit sadly)
Sorry I wasn't up.

CONOR
It's okay.

MUM
It's just this new round of-

CONOR
It's *okay*.

Mum is surprised at the strength of his interruption, but she lets it pass. Perhaps for Conor's sake, she oh-so-casually ties the scarf around her head as she makes herself a cuppa.

MUM
(too lightly)
I forgot to tell you. Your grandma's coming by tomorrow.

Conor's shoulders sink in disappointment.

CONOR
Aw, *mum*.

MUM
Don't moan. You shouldn't have to make breakfast every morning.

CONOR
Every morning? How long is she going to *be* here?

MUM
Conor-

CONOR
We don't need her here.

MUM
You know how I get at this point in the treatments-

CONOR
We've been okay before-

MUM
CONOR.

Beat, as its Conor's turn to be shocked at the interruption. Mum, exhausted, smiles again.

MUM (CONT'D)
Only a few days, I promise.
(laughs)
She's going to bring me some of her old *wigs*, if you can believe it. I'll look like a zombie Margaret Thatcher.

Conor picks at the zipper on his rucksack.

CONOR
I'm going to be late.

Mum regards him for a moment, then reaches forward to ruffle his hair. He ducks away, affectionately.

MUM
Go on, go.

As Conor puts his rucksack on his back, she takes up her tea and leans against the counter, looking out the window.

MUM (CONT'D)
(as if to herself)
There's that old yew tree.

Conor looks past her, up the hill, the sun pouring down on the tree, normal as anything.

EXT. PAVEMENT ON CONOR'S STREET - LATER

Conor is walking to school, rucksack on his back. He's deep in his own thoughts, but then he sees someone coming out of a house, down the street.

A girl, LILY, 13, ludicrous amounts of curly hair, the friend we saw smiling with him in the photograph in his bedroom.

She's on her way to school, too. She's harmless, goofy, charming, but Conor holds back so she won't see him, a serious look on his face.

He waits until she walks on, not seeing him, before he continues his way to school.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - LATER

Conor hesitates at the entrance to the schoolyard, waiting until he sees Lily disappear around a corner. He steps inside and...

...immediately falls, as if pushed, hitting the ground on a concrete path. Still down, he puts his hand to his lip. It comes away bloody.

Behind him, we see HARRY, 13, blond wonder boy, calmly vicious bully, flanked by ANTON and SULLY, both 13. Harry is straightening his leg, after clearly having tripped Conor.

HARRY
Careful there. You might fall.

The minions laugh. Conor is resigned. This isn't new. He reaches for his bag and starts to get up, but a perfectly timed trip from Harry sends him falling again.

The minions keep laughing. Conor starts to rise again. Harry notices the blood on Conor's lip.

HARRY (CONT'D)
You're bleeding, O'Malley.

ANTON
He'll have to get his baldy mother
to kiss it for him!

Silence, as the group absorbs this crossing of the line. Conor's face hardens, but before he can respond, Lily bounces back into the scene.

LILY
You leave him alone!

Conor winces, and Harry's minions are already laughing. Not Harry, though, who never stops looking at Conor.

SULLY
Your poodle's here to save you,
O'Malley!

Outraged, Lily - who is, in fact, a little poodle-y - pushes Sully hard. Surprised, he falls backwards over a shrubbery.

MISS KWAN (O.S.)
LILY EVANS!

Everyone freezes as Head of Year MISS KWAN (late 30s, British-Chinese descent, stern but fair) storms over.

LILY
They started it, Miss!

MISS KWAN
I don't want to hear it.
(to Sully, now rising)
Are you hurt, Sullivan?

Sully, seeing an opening, fakes injury. Badly.

SULLY
I don't know, Miss. I might need to go home.

MISS KWAN
Don't milk it.
(to Lily)
To my office, Lily.

LILY
But, Miss, they were-

MISS KWAN
Now.

LILY
They were making fun of Conor's mother!

Everyone freezes. A dangerous silence.

MISS KWAN
Is this true, Conor?

Conor looks from Anton to Sully, and on to Lily, her face burning with injustice, but then to Harry, who is as calm and firmly fixed on Conor as ever.

CONOR
(eyes on Harry)
No, Miss. I just fell. They were helping me up.

Lily looks like she's been slapped.

MISS KWAN
Get to your forms.
(to Lily)
Not you.

Miss Kwan drags an aghast Lily away. Conor watches them go. When he turns back, Harry is holding out Conor's bag for him.

HARRY
Well done, O'Malley.

Beat. Conor takes the bag and makes his way inside.

INT. PHYSICAL SOCIAL AND EDUCATION CLASS - LATER

A Powerpoint display at the front of the class reading: "THE MIRACLE OF BIRTH". MR CLARK, 40s, wry, kind, perhaps a bit soft, steps up next to it.

MR CLARK
Brace yourselves.

Conor sits at the back, an empty desk next to him. He's secretly watching his phone again, the sound barely audible.

MR CLARK (CONT'D)
Now, we've been studying this all week. You've seen all the diagrams and the drawings and you think you're ready to watch the real thing.

He gives a little you-have-no-idea-what-you're-in-for chuckle and clicks a button to start a CHILDBIRTH DOCUMENTARY on the Powerpoint.

The sounds from the documentary (a narration about the last stages of birth, complete with sounds of a mother in labour) fade as we focus on Conor, firmly watching his phone. His face is unreadable.

As the documentary plays, Mr Clark patrols the classroom and pauses beside Conor.

MR CLARK (CONT'D)
(softly)
You all right there, Conor?

Conor quickly puts away his phone and waits to see if he's in trouble. But Mr Clark is looking overly sympathetic instead.

MR CLARK (CONT'D)
(whispers)
We've missed you in language club.
(beat, nothing from Conor)
You know, if you ever wanted to talk-

He's interrupted by a labour-scream from the video and an accompanying SHOUT OF HORROR from the class who can't believe what they're seeing. Mr Clark looks up with an amused smile, gives Conor a last look, and keeps patrolling the classroom.

As Mr Clark steps away, Conor sees Harry a few seats over. Harry's watched the exchange and looks at Conor as if he's sussing him out, somehow.

As the sounds of childbirth and the accompanying trauma of the class continue, Lily enters from the front, eyes swollen from crying. She sits next to Conor in the empty desk. He doesn't acknowledge her, despite her furious gaze.

Wounded, she looks back up at the video, seeing it for the first time, and is comically horrified by what she sees.

Mr Clark reaches the front of the classroom as the sounds of childbirth reach their exhausted conclusion ("And mother's happy ordeal is finally over..."). Mr Clark clicks off the Powerpoint and turns to the class.

MR CLARK (CONT'D)
Any questions?

Apart from Conor, Lily and Harry, every single traumatised hand in the classroom shoots into the air.

EXT. PAVEMENT ON CONOR'S STREET - THAT AFTERNOON

Conor walks home by himself, lost in thought. Lily appears behind him.

LILY
Hey! Wait! Conor, wait!

Conor ignores her. Lily catches up.

LILY (CONT'D)
Why did you do that today? Why didn't you tell Miss Kwan what really happened?

CONOR
Why did you butt in when it was none of your business?

LILY
I was trying to help you.

CONOR
I didn't *need* your help.

Lily's visibly hurt by his curtness. She still keeps up, though.

LILY
My mum keeps asking why you don't come over anymore.

Conor still says nothing.

LILY (CONT'D)
(now genuinely distressed)
Why are you acting like this? I've got detention *all week* now.

CONOR
That's not my problem.

LILY
But it's your fault.

Conor turns on her in fury. She jumps back, frightened.

CONOR
It's *your* fault. It's *all* your fault.

He takes off walking again, leaving her behind.

LILY
(calling after him)
We used to be friends!

Conor carries on angrily down the street, fast at first then eventually slowing as he nears his house. He stops and looks back to see if Lily is still there, half-hoping she will be.

She isn't. Conor turns to look at his house, past it, to the yew tree visible on the hilltop behind it.

It's just a tree.

Then it's very much not a tree as the Monster rears up into the sunlight, its giant terrible face saying-

MONSTER
Conor-

Conor steps back so fast he stumbles off the curb into a parked car.

When he looks back up, it's once more just a tree.

INT. CONOR'S BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Conor lies sleeping in his darkened bedroom. We hear the screaming and roaring from the earlier NIGHTMARE as we close on him, but this time we see FLASHES of it (it is very clearly not the same as the monster who came to his window):

--Two pairs of hands locked in a ferocious grip, as if one is trying to keep the other from falling.

--An undefinable violent motion, dark and burning.

--Conor's face, struggling in terror, calling out-

Conor wakes.

CONOR
No!

He takes a moment to recover. We see his bedroom. His clock reads 11.34. His bedroom window is firmly closed.

He hears a door open out in the hall, then hurried footsteps. He thinks it's Mum coming to check on him, but she rushes past his room to the toilet. We hear her being sick, a good deal more serious and brutal than the play-vomiting from the video. Conor waits. She vomits again.

CONOR (CONT'D)
(calling to her)
Do you need any help?

MUM (O.S.)
(beat, forced cheer)
No, sweetheart! I'm kind of used to it by now.

Beat, then water running. Footsteps again. She opens his door.

MUM (CONT'D)
You should be asleep.

CONOR
I was. I am.

She smiles a good night and closes the door behind her. Conor watches it for a moment. What's going on in his head?

INT. CONOR'S BEDROOM - LATER

Conor is still awake. The clock now reads 12.06. He watches it until it ticks over to 12.07.

He looks around the bedroom, expecting something.

...but there's nothing.

...and still nothing

He exhales in relief and turns over to go back to sleep-

And the Monster's face suddenly looms into his window. Conor calls out and scoots back in his bed.

CONOR
(frightened, annoyed)
I'm too old to be dreaming monsters like you.

MONSTER
Is that what I am? A dream.

CONOR
Just go away. I don't have time for-

MONSTER
I want to talk to you, Conor O'Malley.

CONOR
Yeah, sure, because that's what monsters always want. To *talk*.

MONSTER
Come outside.

CONOR
Are you *kidding?*

The monster reaches back a fist.

MONSTER
Then I shall take you by force.

Conor flinches back in panic.

CONOR
No! Leave me alone! What do you *want* from me?

The Monster pauses, perplexed again.

MONSTER
It is not what I want from you, Conor O'Malley. It is what *you* want from *me.*

Conor looks back at the Monster, a wary curiosity rising.

EXT. CONOR'S BACK GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

Conor has his arms crossed against a chill. The Monster stands above him in all its tree-like glory, easily 10 meters tall, massive and powerful.

CONOR
Well? I'm *here*.
(to himself)
Like an idiot.

The Monster says nothing, seems to be waiting for Conor.

CONOR (CONT'D)
What *are* you, anyway?

The Monster's eyes widen, its voice raises.

MONSTER
What am I? *What am I?*

Winds start to swirl around Conor. The Monster seems to grow even bigger, rising up into the sky, mythically huge, its arms opening wider and wider, enough to reach the horizons.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
I have had as many names as there are years to time itself! I am Herne the Hunter! I am Cernunnos! I am the eternal Green Man!

One of the Monster's arms, terrifyingly fast, snatches Conor from the ground again, lifting him high into the air. The raging winds continue.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
WHAT AM I? I am the spine that the mountains hang upon! I am the lungs that breathe the wind! I am the snake of the world devouring its tail! I am everything untamed and untameable!

The Monster brings Conor up to its eye as the winds cease.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
I am this wild earth come for you, Conor O'Malley.

CONOR
You look like a tree.

The Monster squeezes Conor as a warning. Conor cries out.

MONSTER
I do not often come walking, boy. And when I do, I expect to be listened to.

CONOR
(squirming)
Fine. I'm listening. Not like I have much choice.

The Monster draws him even closer, getting scarier, possibly enjoying this, as he tells them what's to come.

MONSTER
I will visit you again on further nights, Conor O'Malley. And I will shake your walls until you wake. And then-

Conor really starting to look terrified.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
I will tell you three stories.

Beat, at this sudden anti-climax.

CONOR
You're going to tell me *stories?*

MONSTER
I am.

Conor looks around in disbelief.

CONOR
Well... How is *that* supposed to be scary? Are they, like, really *boring* or something?

The Monster cocks his head, confused.

MONSTER
Stories are the wildest things of all. Stories chase and bite and hunt.

CONOR
Yeah, that's what teachers always say. No one believes them either.

MONSTER
(pressing on)
And when I have *finished* my three stories, *you* will tell me a fourth.

CONOR
(confused)
I'm no good at stories.

MONSTER
You will tell me a fourth, and it will be the truth. *Your* truth.

CONOR
(wary)
What are you talking about?

MONSTER
You know the truth I speak of. The truth that you hide. The truth you are most afraid of.
(glowers)
You *dream* it, Conor O'Malley.

Suddenly, Conor knows *exactly* what truth the Monster means.

CONOR
No. No *way*-

MONSTER
You will tell it. For this is why you called me.

CONOR
Called you? I didn't *call* you-

MONSTER
You will tell me the fourth tale.
You will tell me the truth.

CONOR
And if I don't?

The monster gives an evil, evil grin and seems to grow again, shooting up higher and higher, loosening its grip on Conor...

Until, screaming, he falls down through the air...

INT. CONOR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

...and onto his bed, bouncing right off it and down to his bedroom floor, where every inch is covered in bright red yew tree berries, staining his pyjamas.

CONOR
(annoyed)
Oh, *come on*.

INT. CONOR'S SITTING ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

A hand slaps Conor's cheek, *almost* affectionately. Conor's GRANDMA, mid-50s, crisp, professional, VERY ungrandmotherly.

GRANDMA
Are you being a good boy for your mum?

Conor's mum, red scarf tied around her head, is on the settee, looking horrified into a box full of wigs.

MUM
Very good, Ma, so there's no need to inflict quite so much pain.

Conor says nothing, as Grandma looks at him too intently.

MUM (CONT'D)
(of wigs)
I thought you were bringing your old ones. Where did you *get* all these?

GRANDMA
Clearance of an old people's home. They're turning it into flats and I'll be the agent.

Mum gives Conor a look of comical horror Grandma can't see. Conor smiles. Grandma looks to see if she's being made fun of, but Mum's face immediately goes serious again.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
They're *clean*.

MUM
Thanks, Ma.

Conor shares one last conspiratorial look with his Mum.

GRANDMA
(to Conor)
Why don't you go and put a kettle on?

Conor looks at his Mum, who nods. As he leaves, Grandma turns to Mum.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
Now then, my dear. What *are* we going to do with you?

INT. CONOR'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Conor waits for the kettle. He looks out the window, where the yew tree sits innocently atop the hill. Grandma enters.

GRANDMA
(all business)
You and I need to have a talk.

Conor stiffens. This isn't the first time for this.

CONOR
I'm making tea.

GRANDMA
Conor-

CONOR
I'm making *tea*.

GRANDMA
(snapping)
We have to-
(beat, gathers herself)
I'm not your enemy, Conor. I'm here to help your mother.

CONOR
I know why you're here.

He grabs a cloth and starts furiously wiping the counter. Grandma snatches the cloth out of his hand.

GRANDMA
I'm *here* because 13-year-old boys shouldn't be wiping down counters without being asked to first.

CONOR
Were *you* going to do it?

GRANDMA
Less of your cheek-

CONOR
Just *go*. She's *always* sick after the treatments. She'll be better tomorrow. And then *you* can go home.

But he's surprised. Grandma's hands are shaking. She rubs her face, then her arms, keeping strong emotions in check. This is a woman whose daughter may be dying, after all.

Conor is so unsettled, he grabs another cloth and starts on the counter again. He glances out the back window.

The Monster is standing in his back garden, watching him. Grandma doesn't see it from her position.

GRANDMA
(barely controlled)
She'll *seem* better tomorrow, Conor. But she won't be.

Conor doesn't like this at all, looks away from the Monster.

CONOR
Yes, she will. "You go through the rough stuff but it's for a good reason." That's what she says.

Grandma clearly wants to say much more but can't or won't.

GRANDMA
You need to talk to her about this.
(to herself)
She needs to talk about this with *you*.

CONOR
Talk to me about what?

GRANDMA
(beat)
About you coming to live with me.

There, the die is cast. Conor is furious.

CONOR
I'm *never* coming to live with you.

GRANDMA
Well, your father can't take you in, and when this is all over-

CONOR
When this is all over, you'll leave and we'll be fine-

GRANDMA
Conor, you have got to grow up and face the-

Their argument is interrupted by a call from the sitting room.

MUM (O.S.)
(distressed)
Ma? *Mum?*

A look of heartbreaking terror crosses Grandma's face, as she bolts, almost comically fast, out of the kitchen to her daughter. Conor follows, glancing out the window-

Where the Monster is gone.

INT. CONOR'S SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Conor enters the sitting room. His Mum is coughing up into a small dustbin. Grandma rubs her back.

GRANDMA
It's okay, darling, it's okay, shh, shh, shh.

Grandma looks up at Conor, her face set and hard and totally unreadable.

INT. CONOR'S HALLWAY - THAT NIGHT

Conor stands outside his own bedroom as his grandma hands him his blankets. Her bag is partially unpacked on his own bed. This is where she'll be staying for the night.

CONOR
Just don't touch anything.

GRANDMA
Trust me. I'll be doing my very best not to.

She hands him a last pillow.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
Our conversation isn't over, young man.

She gives him a “to be continued” look and shuts the door on him.

CONOR
(quietly, to the closed door)
Oh, yes, it is.

INT. CONOR’S SITTING ROOM - THAT NIGHT

The sitting room is dark. Conor lies awake, restive, on the settee, where he’s been put for Grandma’s stay.

He looks impatiently around the dim, untidy room. We can see plenty of get well cards on the shelves, plus tumbles of smart chicklit and his mum’s CD collection (90s rave, Massive Attack, Blur).

Conor glances impatiently at the clock display on the DVD player. It clicks over from 12.06 to 12.07.

Conor sits up, listening out for the Monster.

And listening.

And listening.

Nothing. The DVD clock ticks over to 12.08.

Conor, annoyed, gets to his feet, blanket wrapped around him. He goes into...

INT. CONOR’S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

...the kitchen, heads to the window. He looks out.

The Monster is waiting for him.

MONSTER
What took you so long?

EXT. CONOR’S BACK GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

Still annoyed, Conor sits in a plastic deck chair, wrapped up in the blanket. The Monster towers over him again.

MONSTER
It is time for me to tell you the first tale.

Conor isn’t listening. He’s looking up to his bedroom.

CONOR
She always takes my room. I mean, I know she's an old lady but-

MONSTER
Are you listening to me?

CONOR
(not listening)
What?

The air swirls violently again in the Monster's anger.

MONSTER
I will be listened to! I have been alive as long as this land and you will-

Abruptly, Conor gets up and heads back to the kitchen door.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
Where do you think you're going?

Conor whirls around, so angry the Monster stands up straight, its huge, leafy eyebrows raising in surprise.

CONOR
What do *you* know? What do you know about *anything*?

MONSTER
I know about *you*, Conor O'Malley.

CONOR
No, you don't. If you did, you'd know I don't have time to listen to stupid, boring stories from some stupid, boring tree that isn't even real-

MONSTER
Were the leaves on the floor of your room real? Were the berries?

CONOR
Who cares if they were?! They were *berries*. Woo-hoo, so *scary*. Oh, please, please save me from the *berries!*

The Monster puts its hands on its hips.

MONSTER
How strange. The words you say tell me you are scared of the berries, but your tone suggests otherwise.

CONOR
You're as old as the land and you've never heard of sarcasm?

The Monster shakes its head, but not in response.

MONSTER
It is most unusual. Nothing I do seems to make you frightened of me.

CONOR
You're a *tree*.

MONSTER
And you have worse things to be frightened of.

Beat, as this reminder sinks in for Conor.

CONOR
I thought...
(swallows)
I saw you watching me in the kitchen when I was talking to my grandma, and I thought...

MONSTER
You thought I came to topple your enemies. Slay your dragons.

Conor frowns. This is obviously true.

CONOR
(bitterly disappointed)
But all you want to do is tell me *stories*.

MONSTER
Stories of how I toppled enemies. Stories of how I slew dragons.

The Monster leans down until its face is close to Conor's.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
Let me tell you a tale of when I came walking. Let me tell you of the end of a wicked queen and how I made sure she was never seen again.

Cautiously, Conor thinks this seems a bit more like it.

CONOR
Go on.

The Monster grins his evil grin. He turns, opening his hands in a way that frames the (currently treeless) hilltop behind the house.

But as Conor watches, the colors in the frame bleach out to black and white. The hill remains in place, but the church and graveyard disappear. A slightly younger yew tree appears alone on the hilltop, and the world around it turns into an abstract, shadow-puppet-like landscape.

CONOR (CONT'D)
Whoa.

MONSTER
Whoa, indeed.

We zoom into the frame of the Monster's hands and this becomes our new landscape until we're on...

EXT. FIRST TALE HILLTOP - DAY

...the shadow-puppet hilltop itself, turning to look down at an empty valley below. All the modern houses and roads are gone, but there's a small VILLAGE and a looming CASTLE. <u>The shadow-puppet style remains for the entire tale.</u>

MONSTER (V.O.)
Long ago, before this was a town with roads and trains and cars, it was a kingdom.

CONOR (V.O.)
Here? We don't even have a MacDonald's.

We race down the hill, over the village and towards the Castle, swooping over moats and turrets before finding a window and rushing through it and...

INT. FIRST TALE CASTLE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...down a hallway, passing maids and servants and the business of a castle before stopping in the...

INT. FIRST TALE CASTLE THRONE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...throne room, where a shadow puppet KING sits on a throne.

MONSTER (V.O.)
It was a happy kingdom, with a wise king, who had won peace for his people. But peace had come at a price.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRST TALE BATTLEFIELD 1 - DAY - CONTINUOUS

A battlefield of armies fighting.

MONSTER (V.O.)
The king had lost all four of his sons in battle. To giants.

A FIRST SON of the king is killed by a giant.

EXT. FIRST TALE BATTLEFIELD 2 - DAY - CONTINUOUS

A different battlefield in a different place.

MONSTER (V.O.)
To dragons.

A SECOND SON of the king is killed by a dragon.

EXT. FIRST TALE BATTLEFIELD 3 - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

A rainy, darkened, third battlefield.

MONSTER (V.O.)
To black wolves with red eyes.

A THIRD SON of the king is overrun by black wolves.

EXT. FIRST TALE BATTLEFIELD 4 - DAY - CONTINUOUS

A final battlefield, one army fighting another led by a terrible wizard.

MONSTER (V.O.)
To armies of men led by great wizards.

The battle commences, hard fought and chaotic.

CONOR (V.O.)
This is all sounding pretty fairy tale-ish.

MONSTER (V.O.)
You wouldn't say that if you heard the screams of a man killed by a spear.

A stylised FOURTH SON of the king is run through with a spear. The screams are terrible. We return to...

INT. FIRST TALE CASTLE THRONE ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The King sits forlorn on his throne again.

MONSTER (V.O.)
The king's sole remaining heir was his orphaned grandson.

ANGLE ON: the toddler PRINCE, playing with a wooden toy dragon. The King watches him affectionately. But a different angle reveals a QUEEN, sitting to the King's right.

MONSTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The King had taken a wife in peacetime, his first having died of heartbreak at the loss of all her sons.

The KING leaps from his throne to play with the PRINCE. The QUEEN watches, detached.

MONSTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And if the new Queen's tongue was a bit sharp, she was at least young and fair and made the King happy.

We pull back out the hallway we came in and into:

EXT. FIRST TALE COUNTRYSIDE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The young prince runs playfully through the countryside, the King in pursuit. These images continue as the Prince ages: the Prince with a dog, the Prince hunting his first stag, the Prince winning his first joust as a 17-year-old.

MONSTER (V.O.)
The Prince grew until he was nearly a man, winning the love of the kingdom for his gallantry and good heart. But one day, the old king fell ill.

In the audience for the joust, the king suddenly collapses.

INT. FIRST TALE CASTLE THRONE ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The King, now in a sickbed tended by the Queen.

MONSTER (V.O.)
Rumour began to spread that he was being poisoned by his new wife. That she was an evil witch, bent on taking the throne for herself.

The Queen gives the King medicine. Or is it poison?

MONSTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But the King loved her and even with his dying breath, he begged his subjects not to blame her.

The King has his dying breath. We rush back out of the throne room to...

EXT. FIRST TALE COUNTRYSIDE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

...the Kingdom, in mourning, shadowy rain coming down. We find the Prince, looking up at the castle.

MONSTER (V.O.)
The Prince was too young to take his place yet as King. The Queen would rule as Regent for another year. The future was uncertain.

The FARMER'S DAUGHTER approaches the Prince. He greets her with a flower.

MONSTER (V.O.)
The Prince, meanwhile, had given away his heart-

CONOR (V.O.)
(groaning)
I *knew* it. There's *always* some stupid prince falling in stupid love, ruining everything-

MONSTER (V.O.)
(louder)
The Prince, meanwhile, had given away his heart-

The Prince sweeps the Farmer's Daughter up in romance, running flirtatiously through orchards, exchanging love letters, parting with sweet sorrow...

MONSTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
She was beautiful and smart and though only a farmer's daughter, the kingdom smiled on the match.

We rush back up to the castle, through the hallway and into:

INT. FIRST TALE CASTLE THRONE ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The Queen, sitting on her throne, dispensing queenliness.

MONSTER (V.O.)
The Queen, however, had other ideas. She was rather enjoying being Queen. And what better way to remain so than to marry the prince herself?

CONOR (V.O.)
WHAT?! That's disgusting! She was his grandmother!

Queen on throne, offering this objectionable plan to Prince.

MONSTER (V.O.)
Step-grandmother, no relation, and still a young, beautiful woman herself, don't forget. The Prince, however, didn't like this idea either.

We rush out of the castle and into...

EXT. FIRST TALE COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

...a stormy night. The Prince saddles a horse and helps up the Farmer's Daughter.

MONSTER (V.O.)
He took the farmer's daughter and they rode away in the night-

They ride through the storm, before taking shelter on...

EXT. FIRST TALE HILLTOP - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

...the hilltop where the yew tree stands. The Prince and the Farmer's Daughter shelter at the base, under blankets.

MONSTER (V.O.)
Stopping only to shelter themselves under the branches of a yew tree. They slept.

Sleeping is pretty clearly what they *aren't* doing; it's more canoodling.

CONOR
Yeah, I don't think they're sleeping.

MONSTER (V.O.)
They slept. Eventually.

The Prince and the Farmer's Daughter sleep. The image stills as time rapidly passes and...

EXT. FIRST TALE HILLTOP - DAY - CONTINUOUS

...the sun comes up. The Prince wakes.

MONSTER (V.O.)
The next morning, the Prince woke. "Arise, my beloved," he said.

The Prince mirrors the Monster's words.

MONSTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But the farmer's daughter did not stir.

The Farmer's Daughter slumps. CLOSE ON: The Prince's bloodied hand.

MONSTER (V.O.)
Which was when the Prince noticed the blood.

CONOR (V.O.)
Blood?

The Prince stands. Blood everywhere. The Farmer's Daughter is very dead.

MONSTER (V.O.)
Someone had killed his beloved in the night and made *him* look like the murderer. “The Queen!” he cried. “The Queen is responsible for this treachery!”

The Prince mirrors the Monster’s words. Men approach the Prince from the distance.

MONSTER (V.O.) (CONT’D)
He saw men approaching and knew they’d been sent to arrest him.

CONOR (V.O.)
And the queen would be able to rule unchallenged! I hope this story ends with you ripping her head off.

The Prince looks around in panic.

MONSTER (V.O.)
There was nowhere for the Prince to run. His horse had been chased away. He turned to the only place he could look for help.

The Prince looks up at the yew tree.

CONOR (V.O.)
You?

The Prince talks to the tree. We don’t hear what he says. The tree remains a tree.

CONOR (V.O.)
What did he say?

MONSTER (V.O.)
He said enough to bring me walking.

We rush away from hilltop and down into...

EXT. FIRST TALE COUNTRYSIDE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

...the Prince racing through the countryside, calling the people to arms.

MONSTER (V.O.)
The Prince ran through the villages. “The Queen has murdered my bride! The Queen must be stopped!”

Behind the Prince, the Monster himself comes, terrifying, huge.

MONSTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The people were quick to rally to the Prince when they saw the great Green Man behind him, high as the hills, coming for vengeance.

The Prince leads the villagers to a storming of the castle, the Monster behind them. With its great hands, it tears down the castle walls. Flames rise, turrets tumble, until we ANGLE ON: the terrified Queen screaming in the Monster's upraised hand.

Then we rush back, until we're passing backwards through the frame of the Monster's hands and into:

EXT. CONOR'S BACK GARDEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Conor is watching where the Monster lowers his hands.

MONSTER
The Queen was never seen again.

CONOR
Good! She deserved it!

Conor looks up at his bedroom where his Grandma sleeps.

CONOR (CONT'D)
I don't suppose you can help me with her? I mean, I don't want you to tear down the house or anything-

MONSTER
The story is not yet finished.

Conor turns to the Monster, confused.

CONOR
But you said the Queen was never seen again.

MONSTER
Indeed.

The Monster reframes his hands. We rush back into...

EXT. FIRST TALE HILLTOP - DAY - CONTINUOUS

...the Castle burning in the background as the Monster, still holding the Queen, walks away from it.

MONSTER (V.O.)
I carried her far enough away so that her people would never find her.

The Queen looks quite safe in the Monster's hands.

MONSTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I took her to a village by the sea, where she began a new life.

CUT TO:

EXT. CONOR'S BACK GARDEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Conor is outraged. The Monster's hands still in the frame.

CONOR
But she killed the Farmer's Daughter! How can you save a murderer?

He takes a step back from the Monster in dawning fright.

CONOR (CONT'D)
You really *are* a monster.

MONSTER
I never said she killed the farmer's daughter. I only said that the *Prince* said it was so.

They turn back to the Monster's still-framed hands, which now show a shadow-puppet version of the very hilltop that's behind them. We move through the frame into:

EXT. FIRST TALE HILLTOP - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The Prince and the Farmer's Daughter, sleeping, as before.

MONSTER (V.O.)
The Prince never fell asleep that night.

The Prince rises and looks down at the Farmer's Daughter. He goes to his tied-up horse and retrieves something, setting the horse free in the process.

CLOSE ON: A KNIFE glinting in the Prince's hand as he approaches the sleeping Farmer's Daughter.

CONOR (V.O.)
NO!

We rush back from the hilltop to...

EXT. CONOR'S BACK GARDEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Conor watches in shock as the scene fades on the hilltop, the Monster lowering his hands again.

CONOR
You said he was surprised when he woke up! You said he asked you for help and you *gave* it!

MONSTER
I only said he told me enough to make me come walking.

CONOR
And what was that then?

MONSTER
He said he had done it for the good of the kingdom. That the queen was, in fact, a witch, too powerful to topple on his own, so he killed the Farmer's Daughter to get the fury of the people behind him. Just as the King's sons had died in battle, so had the Farmer's Daughter given her life to a greater good.

CONOR
That's a load of *crap*! The people were behind him anyway! He didn't need to kill her!

MONSTER
The justifications of men who kill should always be heard with scepticism.

CONOR
Did he ever get caught?

MONSTER
He became a much beloved king who ruled happily until the end of his long days.

Conor unhappily considers all this.

CONOR
So the good prince was a murderer and the evil queen wasn't a witch after all? Is that supposed to be the lesson of all this?
(on his bedroom window)
That I'm supposed to be *nice* to her?

The Monster begins to rumble, louder and louder, until we realise it's *laughing*, a laugh that shakes the earth, spooking owls from their perches, causing leaves to fall.

MONSTER
You think I have come walking out of time and earth to teach you a lesson in *niceness*?

Carries on laughing.

CONOR
(embarrassed)
Yeah, all right.

MONSTER
(calming some)
No, the Queen most certainly *was* a witch and could very well have been on her way to great evil. Who's to say?

CONOR
Why'd you save her then?

MONSTER
Because what she was *not*, was a murderer. She hadn't poisoned the king. He had merely grown old.

CONOR
I don't get it. Who's the good guy here?

MONSTER
There is not always a good guy. Nor is there always a bad one. Most people are somewhere inbetween.

CONOR
That's a terrible story. And a cheat.

MONSTER
It's a *true* story. Many things that are true feel like a cheat. Kingdoms get the princes they deserve, farmer's daughters die for no reason, and sometimes witches merit saving. Quite often, actually. You'd be surprised.

Conor glances unhappily up to his bedroom window again.

CONOR
So how is that supposed to save me from her?

The Monster slowly stands to its full terrifying height.

MONSTER
It is not *her* you need saving from.

A mist rises suddenly and in an instant, the Monster is gone, leaving Conor alone in the back garden. On the hilltop, the yew tree is back in place, as if nothing had happened. Which is annoying.

EXT. A PAVEMENT - THE NEXT DAY

Conor walks to school, rucksack on his back, lost in thought. Lily catches up to him again. She doesn't say anything at first, just waits for his response. Gets none.

LILY
I forgive you.

Conor says nothing, just walks on.

LILY (CONT'D)
I forgive you for getting me into trouble, okay?

CONOR
You got yourself into trouble.

LILY
(ignoring this)
And I forgive you for all the things you said yesterday, too.

Conor remains silent. Lily is defiant, but hopeful.

LILY (CONT'D)
Aren't you going to say you're sorry back?

Conor stops, and his anger backs Lily into a nearby wall.

CONOR
I'm *not* sorry, and *I* don't forgive *you*.

Lily tries to be the bigger person.

LILY
My mum said we need to make allowances for you. Because of what you're going through-

CONOR
I don't *need* allowances. I was doing just *fine* before you screwed everything up.

LILY
(baffled)
Me?!

CONOR
No one knew, Lily. No one. And then your mum tells you and then guess what? Suddenly *everybody* knows-

LILY
About your mum-?

CONOR
(over)
-and now everyone treats me like *I'm* the one who's sick or that I'm not *really there* or...

He stops, choked up, angry about it. He takes off again, leaving Lily behind.

INT. PHYSICAL SOCIAL AND EDUCATION CLASS - DAY - LATER

"SELF-ESTEEM" is up on the powerpoint display. Hands up, normal classroom discussion. Conor sits at his desk, ignoring Lily, not participating.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY - LATER

Conor moving from one classroom to another. Alone. He gets a few confused looks from others, but no one speaks to him.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY - LATER

A crowded school cafeteria. Against a wall, there's an old-fashioned DIGITAL CLOCK with clacking tiles. Conor, with a tray of food, looks for a place to sit. Takes a seat near some other boys, but not exactly with them.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY - LATER

Conor falls to the pavement again. He gets to one knee, a tear in his trousers. SULLY and ANTON are laughing. HARRY, as usual, stares with odd focus at Conor.

SULLY
Seriously, O'Malley. All this falling!

ANTON
You drunk or something?

Conor rises, sees classmates filing back into the building, Lily among them. She looks at him. Then looks away. Sully reaches for the rising Conor to cause more mischief.

HARRY
Don't touch him.

Sully immediately steps back.

HARRY (CONT'D)
O'Malley and I have an understanding. I'm the only one who touches him. Isn't that right?

Conor says nothing, but this does seem to be the agreement. Harry steps closer. Conor doesn't back away.

Harry raises a fist as if to strike Conor. Again, Conor doesn't flinch, just waits for the punch.

Beat. Harry drops his fist.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Yeah. That's what I thought.

MISS KWAN (O.S.)
You boys!

Miss Kwan strides towards them.

MISS KWAN (CONT'D)
Break's over. What do you think you're still doing out here?

A sudden change oozes over Harry. He becomes smooth, politician-like.

HARRY
Sorry, Miss. Just trying to buck up O'Malley's spirits. What with all that's been going on for him.

MISS KWAN
Yes, that sounds entirely likely. To class. Now.

She waits while Harry, Sully and Anton slink off, Harry with a last long look at Conor. Conor makes to follow them.

MISS KWAN (CONT'D)
Just a minute, Conor.

Conor hesitates, with dread.

MISS KWAN (CONT'D)
You're sure everything's all right?

CONOR
Yes, miss.

MISS KWAN
Because I'm not blind to how Harry works, you know. A bully with top marks and charisma is still a bully. He'll probably end up Prime Minster one day, God help us all.

Conor stares at the ground, bracing himself for what he knows is coming. And here it is.

MISS KWAN (CONT'D)
(more softly)
I can't imagine what you must be going through, Conor, but if you ever want to talk, my door is always open.

Conor doesn't look at her. Can't. Miss Kwan seems willing to leave it at that, touches him lightly on the shoulder.

MISS KWAN (CONT'D)
Run along to class then.

She leaves him there. Conor doesn't move. We pull back and see him standing, alone in the empty schoolyard.

INT. CONOR'S HOUSE FRONT HALLWAY - LATER

Conor enters, home from school, but stops when he hears raised voices upstairs: Mum and Grandma, having a disagreement. Then Grandma comes down the stairs, annoyed but determined. She stops when she sees him, surprised.

CONOR
What's wrong?

GRANDMA
(beat)
Your mum has to go to back to hospital. You're going to come and stay with me for a few days.

CONOR
What's wrong with her?

Grandma grapples again with what she's obviously been forbidden to say by her daughter. Half says it anyway:

GRANDMA
It's not working, Conor.

CONOR
What's not working?

Grandma finishes coming down the stairs.

GRANDMA
Your mum's upstairs. She wants to talk to you.

CONOR
But-

GRANDMA
Your father's flying in on Sunday.

CONOR
Dad's coming? From *America?*

GRANDMA
(exiting to sitting room)
I've got some calls to make.

CONOR
Why is my *dad* coming?

Grandma pulls the sitting room door shut.

GRANDMA
Your mum's waiting.

Shuts door. Conor stands for a moment, shellshocked.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE CONOR'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Conor approaches the door to his bedroom, makes to go in, but hesitates, worried about what might await him. He has a FLASH MEMORY of his NIGHTMARE:

--a brief, terrifying glimpse of the roaring and the screaming, of the hands clasped tightly together.

Then he gathers himself and opens the door.

INT. CONOR'S BEDROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

His mum, in a TERRIBLE WIG, lies on his bed, looking out at the yew tree.

MUM
(w/o turning)
They're amazing trees, you know. Live for thousands of years. And they're always planted in churchyards because the-

Conor finishes the sentence. He's heard it a thousand times.

CONOR
-berries are poisonous so they have to be kept away from sheep and stuff.

Mum turns and smiles at him, exhausted. Conor gives a horrified look at the wig on her head. She laughs.

MUM
I *know*. Tina Turner. If she was from Sheffield.

CONOR
I don't really know who that is.

Mum tugs the wig off, laughing, tying a scarf around her head instead.

CONOR (CONT'D)
Why are you going back to hospital?

MUM
(sighs lovingly)
We've been here before, sweetheart.
(MORE)

MUM (CONT'D)
I feel really bad and I go in and they take care of it.

She pats the duvet next to her, inviting Conor to sit. After a long moment, he does. They both look out the window at the tree. His mum starts stroking his hair.

CONOR
Why is dad coming?

Mum pauses in the hair stroking, but picks right back up.

MUM
It’s been awhile since you’ve seen him. Aren’t you excited?

CONOR
Grandma doesn’t seem too happy.

MUM
(snort)
Well, you know how she feels about your father. Don’t listen to her.

Beat, silence.

CONOR
There’s something else, isn’t there?

Mum’s face, making a decision.

MUM
Look at me, son.

He does.

MUM (CONT’D)
The latest treatment’s not doing what it’s supposed to. So they’re going to adjust it, try something else. That’s all.

CONOR
That’s all?

MUM
(nodding)
There’s lots more they can do. It’s normal. Don’t worry.

CONOR
You’re sure?

MUM
I'm sure.

CONOR
Because... You could tell me, you know.

And here's the moment, where she could tell him everything.

But she can't, not yet. She leans up, puts an arm around him, her head on his shoulder. They both look out at the tree.

MUM
Keep an eye on it for me while I'm away, will you? Make sure it's still here when I get back?

Conor tries to half-smile at this. His mum grabs him and turns him to her, faux-serious.

MUM (CONT'D)
And for God's sake, whatever you do, *don't* touch your grandmother's clock.

CUT TO:

INT. GRANDMA'S SITTING ROOM - DAYS LATER

The face of Grandma's prize antique clock, including a smoothly running SECOND HAND. Her fingers delicately adjust the time, ever so slightly.

Pull out to see it on her mantelpiece in the midst of a pristine sitting room, every surface clean and museum-like, including glass display cases with figurines, low bookcases, porcelain knickknacks. The polar opposite of Conor's warmly untidy house. Conor leans in the doorway.

GRANDMA
(looking at clock)
I've got a house to show. I'm trusting you here alone until your dad shows up.

CONOR
I'm not five years old.

GRANDMA
(ignores this, admires the clock)
(MORE)

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
I almost got this on Antiques Roadshow once.

Conor rolls his eyes. A VERY old story. She brushes past him to her:

INT. GRANDMA'S FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

She glides smoothly to a mirror, checking how she looks. Without glancing at the floor-

GRANDMA
Pick up your rucksack, please. Don't want your father to think I'm keeping you in a pigsty.

CONOR
(muttering)
Not much chance of that.

His Grandma continues getting ready, opening a front closet, putting on a coat.

GRANDMA
Now, Conor, when you go to the hospital, your father may not notice how tired your mum's been getting, okay? So we're going to have to make sure he doesn't outstay his welcome.

One last check in the mirror.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
(to herself)
Not that *that's* historically been a problem.

She gives one last appraising look at Conor. Frowns, sighs.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
Be good.

And lets herself out.

INT. GRANDMA'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Quick montage as Conor looks around his Grandma's house for something to do. First in her spotless kitchen, cupboards full of nothing a boy might like to eat.

INT. GRANDMA'S TV ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Conor in a sterile TV room. Every channel he wants to watch blocked by a PIN code.

INT. GRANDMA'S GUEST ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Conor in his temporary bedroom, half-heartedly playing a handheld video game. His suitcase is open, clothes removed, but the room is bright white, with pictures of sailboats on the wall. It could be a hotel room. He tosses the game to the side in boredom.

EXT. GRANDMA'S BACK GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

Conor steps out into his Grandma's back garden which, again, couldn't be more different than his own. No green space at all, just stone paths, sheds and an office she's had built in the back.

No hilltop on the horizon. No tree to be seen anywhere.

INT. GRANDMA'S SITTING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Conor sits on the antique-ish settee, the clock ticking on the mantelpiece. He sits back and takes out his phone.

CONOR'S POV on his phone's screen. It's the VIDEO OF HIM AND HIS MUM ON THE ROLLER COASTER that we saw at the start.

On the video, they laugh and the seat restraints close.

MUM (ON VIDEO)
Shh, here they come.

Cut back to Conor's face on the settee, unreadable.

MUM (ON VIDEO) (CONT'D)
If you drop that, it'll leave a permanent mark across your face.

CONOR (ON VIDEO)
Nah, it'll probably hit you first.

Conor still watches. We hear the sounds we heard before.

MUM (ON VIDEO)
You know what I'm thinking?

CONOR (ON VIDEO)
What?

MUM (ON VIDEO)
We shouldn't have had all that Indian food for lunch.

Cut back to Conor's face on the settee as the fake vomiting sounds rise, a faint smile appearing. He watches intently. On the video, we see them reach the top.

MUM (ON VIDEO) (CONT'D)
Ready? Here we go.

Cut back to Conor as he mouths along with himself:

CONOR (ON VIDEO) (O.S.)
Here we go.

The screams of delight are cut off as Conor JUMPS at the sound of the DOORBELL. He switches off the phone and hurries toward...

INT. GRANDMA'S FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...the front door. He opens it on: HIS DAD, late thirties, handsome, slightly too boyish for his own good.

Conor's gives him a genuinely free smile.

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - LATER THAT EVENING

Conor and his Dad are seated at a table, waiting for their food. Dad has a glass of RED WINE, Conor a clear soft drink. Dad is awkward, not sure how to talk to this son he doesn't see very often. His accent is HALF-IRISH/HALF-AMERICAN.

DAD
How you hanging in there, champ?

CONOR
"Champ"?

DAD
Sorry. America is almost a whole different language.

Dad fidgets with his wine glass. Conor drums lightly with his chopsticks.

DAD (CONT'D)
Your mom was looking pretty good tonight. A real fighter, that one.

Conor shrugs.

DAD (CONT'D)
So how are *you* holding up, Con?

CONOR
(slightly impatient)
That's like the eight hundredth time you've asked me that.

DAD
Sorry.

CONOR
I'm *fine*. Mum's on this new medicine. It'll make her better. Why is everyone acting like-?

He stops. Takes a drink.

DAD
You're right, son. You're absolutely right. Still. You're going to need to be brave for her. You're going to need to be real, real brave.

CONOR
You talk like American television.

Dad takes this in good humour.

DAD
Your sister's doing well. Almost walking.

CONOR
Half-sister.

DAD
I can't wait for you to meet her. I've been talking to your grandma about getting you out to LA.

Conor looks up surprised and with nascent hope.

CONOR
You want me to come to LA?

DAD
Absolutely! Would you like that?

CONOR
(hope growing)
I'd *love* that.

Dad smiles, pleased he's connected. Then he blows it.

DAD
I was thinking maybe even over Christmas, so we can get you back in time for school.

Beat as Conor realises, his face falling.

CONOR
...so it'd just be a visit then?

DAD
What do you mean? A visit as opposed to...

Conor looks away, embarrassed at having his hopes revealed about moving in with his father.

DAD (CONT'D)
(pained, realiseing)
You mean when... *if* your mum-

But Conor suddenly doesn't want to talk about it.

CONOR
(rushed, over his Dad)
There's a tree that's been visiting me at night. Telling me stories.

DAD
...*What*?

Conor ferociously drums with the chopsticks.

CONOR
I thought it was a dream at first, but I kept finding leaves and stuff when I woke up-

DAD
Conor-

CONOR
It hasn't come to Grandma's house yet, even though I've been there like five days-

DAD
Con-

CONOR
But why should it matter where I am, though?
(MORE)

CONOR (CONT'D)
If it's as old as the earth, why can't it just walk across town-

Dad slams his hand down on the drumming chopsticks.

DAD
Conor, *stop* this-

CONOR
(suddenly loud)
I don't want to live with Grandma!

Awkward silence, as Dad has no answers.

CONOR (CONT'D)
It's an old lady's house. You can't touch anything or sit anywhere and you can't leave a mess for even two seconds.

DAD
We can talk to her about those things. I'm sure there are plenty of ways to make you comfortable-

CONOR
I don't *want* to be comfortable there! I want my own room in my own house.

DAD
(wincing)
You wouldn't have that in America. We barely have room for the three of us. Your school is here, your *life* is here. It'd be unfair to take you out of it.

CONOR
Unfair to who?

DAD
(sighing)
This is what I meant. When I said you were going to have to be brave.

CONOR
As if that means anything.

Another awkward silence. Conor goes back to quietly drumming the chopsticks. Dad finishes his wine and sets his glass down with a gasp. Tries to lighten the mood.

DAD
What was all that about a tree?

CONOR
(quietly)
Nothing. It wasn't anything.

A WAITRESS sets their meals down in front of them. Neither of them make a move to eat.

EXT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - LATER THAT EVENING

Conor and his Dad pull up outside his Grandma's house in his father's rental car.

DAD
Doesn't look like your Grandma's home yet.

CONOR
She sometimes goes back to the hospital after I go to bed. The nurses let her sleep in a chair.

DAD
Your Grandma may not like me much, but that doesn't mean she's a bad lady.

CONOR
How long are you here for?

DAD
'Til Friday.

CONOR
(appalled)
That's *all*?

DAD
Americans don't get much holiday.

CONOR
You're not American.

DAD
But I live there now. You're the one who made fun of my accent all night.

CONOR
Why did you come then?

DAD
I came because your Mum asked me to.

Beat, as the seriousness of this is absorbed.

DAD (CONT'D)
I'll come back, though. You know, when I need to. And you'll visit us at Christmas!

CONOR
In your cramped house, where there's no room for me.

DAD
Conor-

CONOR
(again)
Why did you come?

Dad doesn't answer. Reaches out to put a hand on Conor's shoulder, but Conor avoids it and gets out of the car.

DAD
(through open door)
Conor, wait. I'll see you tomorrow, yeah? There's still plenty of time.

Conor doesn't really believe this. He shuts the car door.

INT. GRANDMA'S SITTING ROOM - EVENING - MOMENTS LATER

We hear Conor come in the front door. He enters the sitting room, slumping down unhappily on the settee in his coat. He's angry, but keeping it in check.

He takes out his phone briefly to look at the video again, but stops before it even starts. He puts the phone back into his pocket, but ends up fighting with the sleeve of his coat.

He stands, getting frustrated as he takes it off, eventually throwing it to the floor. He stands there, breathing, on the verge of letting all his bottled up anger go.

Almost absentmindedly, he kicks the settee. It scoots along the hardwood floor, making a loud sound. This is surprisingly satisfying, so he kicks it again, harder.

He jumps up on the settee and back down. It scrapes along the floor, leaving ugly scratches in the hardwood. Conor is unsure of this, but the expression of anger is feeling good.

Suddenly, BONG! BONG! The precious CLOCK starts striking the 9 o'clock hour.

Conor approaches it. It chimes away, the pendulum swinging. Still edgy, Conor grabs it mid-swing. The bongs continue, but the clock makes a groaning sound.

Holding the pendulum in place, Conor starts pushing the dials of the clock around. They resist at first, but he pushes them harder and faster, until they're spinning around the face. The BONGs groan alarmingly as he passes each hour, but he keeps going, faster and faster, until-

SNAP! The second hand breaks free and falls to the floor, bouncing into the ashes of the hearth and disappearing.

Oh, no. Conor comes to his senses, realises what he's done. The clock is broken, *really* broken, frozen in place.

He's doomed, and so horrified he doesn't register that the now non-moving hands have stopped at 12.07.

MONSTER (O.S.)
As destruction goes, this is remarkably pitiful.

Conor turns and sees that somehow, impossibly, the Monster is in his Grandma's sitting room. It fills up all available space, folding its massive form into every corner, its head bumping the ceiling as it kneels.

Conor looks back at the clock, frantic now.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
I have come to tell you the second tale.

Conor makes an exasperated sound. He's got bigger things to worry about.

CONOR
Is it as bad as the last one?

MONSTER
It ends in proper destruction, if that's what you mean.

This has Conor's attention, somewhat, but he shakes his head.

CONOR
No, I can't, I-

MONSTER
It's about a man who thought only of himself. A man who gets punished very badly indeed.

Beat, as Conor realises he's still angry at his father.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
Stories are wild creatures, Conor O'Malley. When you let them loose, who knows what havoc they might wreak?

Another beat, until:

CONOR
I'm listening.

We rush into the monster's evilly smiling face, into his eye and suddenly we're...

EXT. SECOND TALE LANDSCAPE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

...flying over a shadow puppet landscape as before, but this time it's GREEN and VERDANT and more realistic.

MONSTER (V.O.)
One hundred and fifty years ago. This had become a valley of industry.

The green ends as we plunge through a treeline into "industry" on the valley floor: black factories belching smoke and fumes, scraggly silhouettes of crows and trodden-down workers, fish jumping in polluted rivers.

MONSTER (V.O.)
But there was still green, if you knew where to look.

We come out the other side to a surprisingly quiet, green hillside. We turn and see that Conor and the Monster are standing in the landscape, their figures altered into the fuller shadow puppetry this time. Conor looks at this new version of himself, amazed.

CONOR
I look like manga!

The Monster draws Conor's attention to:

ANGLE ON: The APOTHECARY, walking up the hillside. A more realistic figure than the first tale, but still stylised.

MONSTER (V.O.)
His name is not important. The villagers only ever called him The Apothecary.

CONOR (V.O.)
The what?

MONSTER (V.O.)
The Apothecary.

CONOR (V.O.)
The what?

MONSTER (V.O.)
An old-fashioned named for chemist.

CONOR (V.O.)
Oh. Why didn't you just *say*?

The Apothecary digs up roots and pick leaves and herbs.

MONSTER (V.O.)
The Apothecary dealt in the old ways of medicine. Herbs and barks. Concoctions brewed from berries and leaves.

CONOR (V.O.)
Dad's new wife does that. She owns a shop that sells crystals.

MONSTER (V.O.)
It is not remotely the same.

The Apothecary reaches the edge of a wood and sees it drastically cut back for the industry below.

MONSTER (V.O.)
The Apothecary had dedicated his life to healing. But the world was changing, and he grew resentful and unforgiving.

EXT. SECOND TALE VILLAGE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The Apothecary peddles his wares to various villagers. We get a sense of bad-tempers and bitterness.

MONSTER (V.O.)
People in the valley stopped seeking him out, preferring modern medicine. Which only made him more bitter.

The Apothecary, doors slamming against him, slouches off alone. We pull back across the valley to...

EXT. SECOND TALE HILLTOP FRINGE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

...the same hilltop as behind Conor's house, but this time there is a parsonage beside the yew tree, and the beginnings of a church being built. Conor and the Monster stand off to one side, in the landscape again.

MONSTER
In the Apothecary's village, there also lived a parson-

CONOR
This is the hill behind my house.

MONSTER
(pressing on)
The parson had two daughters, who were the light of his life.

In the distance, they see two small figures run out playfully from the parsonage doors, chasing each other.

CONOR
(on the 2nd yew tree)
That's you. You were shorter then.

MONSTER
(sighs)
Fine. On the parsonage grounds there also grew a yew tree.

We move forward and CLOSE ON:

EXT. SECOND TALE HILLTOP - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The hilltop that's grown so familiar. The Apothecary hoves into view, watching intently.

MONSTER (V.O.)
Now, the Apothecary wanted the yew tree very badly.

CONOR (V.O.)
He did? Why?

MONSTER (V.O.)
(surprised)
The yew tree is the most important of all the healing trees. Its berries, its bark, they thrum and burn and twist with life. It can cure almost any ailment, if mixed by the right apothecary.

CONOR (V.O.)
(quietly, thinking)
Really?

The Apothecary looks enviously at the tree.

MONSTER (V.O.)
In order to use the tree, though, the Apothecary would have to cut it down, and this the Parson would not allow.

The PARSON comes out warningly; the Apothecary leaves.

MONSTER (V.O.)
The Parson was not an unkind man. He wanted the best for his congregation, wanted to take them out of the dark ages of superstition and witchery.

We zoom in on the Parson figure and he's suddenly...

INT. SECOND TALE PULPIT - DAY - CONTINUOUS

...preaching to his congregation.

MONSTER (V.O.)
He preached against the Apothecary's use of the old ways, and the Apothecary's foul temper and greed made certain those sermons fell on eager ears.

We pull out from the pulpit, through a celebratory congregation, out of the CHURCH to...

EXT. SECOND TALE COUNTRYSIDE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

...The Apothecary slinking away. We keep pulling back to:

EXT. SECOND TALE HILLTOP - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The parsonage is now a drab and grey place.

MONSTER (V.O.)
But then the parson's daughters were struck by a terrible sickness.

Figures move in the windows of the parsonage. Night passes.

MONSTER (V.O.)
Nothing the parson did helped. No prayer, no cure from the more modern doctors, nothing seemed to make them better. There was no choice but to approach the Apothecary.

The Parson stands sadly onto his doorstep.

CUT TO:

EXT. SECOND TALE APOTHECARY'S HOVEL - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The Parson is on his knees before the Apothecary, in front of the Apothecary's hovel.

MONSTER (V.O.)
"Will you not help my daughters?" the Parson begged. "Will you not save two innocent girls?"

The Apothecary stands over the Parson haughtily.

MONSTER (V.O.)
"Why should I?" said the Apothecary. "You have driven away my business with your preachings, and you have refused me the yew tree, my best source of healing."

The Apothecary walks away. The Parson chases him.

MONSTER (V.O.)
"You may *have* the yew tree," said the Parson. "I will preach sermons in your favour. I will do anything if you would only save my daughters."

The Apothecary stops, surprised.

MONSTER (V.O.)
“You would give up everything you believed in?” said the Apothecary. “If it would save my daughters,” said the Parson, “I would give up everything.”

The Apothecary turns and enters his house.

MONSTER (V.O.)
“Then there is nothing I can do to help you,” said the Apothecary.

The Apothecary’s door closes on the Parson.

CONOR (V.O.)
(shocked)
What?

We pull back from the Apothecary’s hovel to...

EXT. SECOND TALE HILLTOP - DAY - CONTINUOUS

...the parsonage, where the Parson and his wife stand over two new graves.

MONSTER (V.O.)
The very next day, both of the parson’s daughters died.

CONOR (V.O.)
WHAT?

Night falls. The yew tree on the hilltop begins twisting itself into the shape of the Monster we know.

MONSTER (V.O.)
And that night, I came walking.

The Second Yew Tree becomes fully, terrifyingly monstrous.

CONOR (V.O.)
Good! He deserves all the punishment he gets!

The Second Yew Tree Monster turns to the Parson’s house.

MONSTER (V.O.)
Indeed. It was shortly after midnight that I tore the Parson’s home from its very foundations.

We pull back abruptly to:

EXT. SECOND TALE HILLTOP FRINGE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The stylised Conor and Monster (distinct from the Monster by the Parson's house) stand again at the edge of the hilltop, watching the second tale unfold.

CONOR
(shocked)
The Parson?!

MONSTER
Yes, I knocked out every brick with my own fists.

Conor looks in horror back to:

EXT. SECOND TALE HILLTOP - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The second Monster lays destruction upon the parsonage, tearing off its roof and flinging it down the hill, sending the Parson and his wife fleeing in terror.

EXT. SECOND TALE HILLTOP FRINGE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Conor is outraged.

CONOR
What are you *doing?* The Apothecary is the bad guy!

MONSTER
Is he?

CONOR
Yes! He refused to help the parson's daughters! They *died*.

They hear a crash, and turn to see the Second Monster knocking down a wall.

MONSTER
When times were easy, the Parson nearly destroyed the Apothecary, but when the going grew tough, he was willing to throw aside every belief to save his daughters.

CONOR
So? So would *everybody!* What the hell did you expect him to do?

MONSTER
I expected him to give the Apothecary the yew tree when he first asked.

CONOR
(surprised)
You'd have let yourself be killed?

We hear further crashes of the parsonage being destroyed.

MONSTER
I am far more than just one tree, but yes, I would have let it be chopped down. It would have saved many lives, including the Parson's daughters.

CONOR
But the Apothecary was evil!

MONSTER
He was greedy and rude, but he was still a healer. But the Parson, what was he? He was *nothing*.

They see the Second Monster topple a chimney.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
Belief is half of all healing. Belief in the cure, belief in the future that awaits. Here was a man who *lived* on belief, but who sacrificed it at the first challenge. He believed selfishly, fearfully. And it took the lives of his daughters.

CONOR
(annoyed now)
You said this was a story without *tricks*.

MONSTER
I said this was the story of a man punished for his selfishness. And so it is.

Beat, as the Monster gets a mischievous look. It steps away from Conor, all the way into...

EXT. SECOND TALE HILLTOP - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

...the scene on the hilltop. It approaches the second version of itself, and the two COMBINE, becoming a bigger, scarier version of the one Monster. It turns to Conor.

MONSTER
Tell me, Conor O'Malley. What shall I destroy next?

Conor, bewildered, also steps forward into the hilltop.

CONOR
What?

The Monster kicks down a wall.

MONSTER
It is most satisfying, I assure you.

Conor hesitates, still unsure.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
What should I destroy? I await your command.

Conor hesitates again.

CONOR
(confused)
Knock over the fireplace?

The Monster unhesitatingly knocks over what remains of the parsonage fireplace. Conor steps a little closer. That felt interesting.

CONOR (CONT'D)
Throw away their beds.

The Monster reaches into the house and flings the beds nearly to the horizon. Conor is beginning to feel liberated.

CONOR (CONT'D)
Smash their furniture!

The Monster stomps on top of the parsonage's furniture.

CONOR (CONT'D)
Break the windows!

The Monster does.

CONOR (CONT'D)
TEAR THE WHOLE THING DOWN!

As the Monster goes for it, Conor picks up a large fallen branch and runs to the parsonage, joining in the destruction.

We remain VERY CLOSE on Conor as he smashes one window and then another, his face blazing with excitement and fury.

But the lights are slowly changing, darkening as he continues smashing, the landscape and Conor becoming less stylised.

Until he takes one last ferocious swing, flinging the branch away with a cry, spinning around and...

INT. GRANDMA'S SITTING ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

...he's back in his Grandma's sitting room.

Where he's destroyed nearly everything. The settee is in pieces, the side tables, the glass display cabinets shattered.

Worst is the CLOCK. Flung from the mantelpiece and broken into pieces almost beyond recognition.

There is so much destruction, Conor is ankle-deep in rubble. He's shocked at first, and then a growing horror at what he's done starts to dawn.

CONOR
Oh, no. No, no, no.

And then, almost before he can compute it, there's worse: his Grandma's car pulls up outside.

He freezes. The lights from her car shine behind the sitting room curtains, then turn off. He hears her door open.

There's nowhere for him to run, not a single thing he can do except follow the sound of her coming up the front steps, turning her key in the lock, coming in through the front door, down the hallway and-

She enters her sitting room. Before she registers anything, her unguarded face is serious and worried.

But then she looks up.

GRANDMA
What the-

She looks slowly around the room, her face in ever-growing horror, her mouth open. She leans down and picks up a piece of her beloved clock.

We wait for the apocalypse. But then her face changes. She puts a palm over her mouth as if to try and stop sound from coming out. Then she slaps a second hand over it.

But she can't help it. A horrible, anguished *keening* erupts from her. And again.

Conor is terrified. This is *much* worse than her being angry.

CONOR
Grandma?

Grandma takes her hands away from her mouth and she screams. It's wordless and furious. She screams again, stepping into the sitting room. Conor flinches back, as if she's going to attack him but-

She heads for the one last remaining display cabinet, puts her hands behind it and takes one, two, *three* pushes to send it crashing to the ground, screaming all the while.

She leans forward, gasping, ragged, her face broken with anguish. She leaves the sitting room without another word.

Conor stands there, beyond shocked.

INT. GRANDMA'S HALLWAY - NIGHT - LATER

Conor slowly approaches his Grandma's bedroom. The light is on underneath the door. He can hear her in there, weeping. He stays outside, not knowing what to do.

INT. GRANDMA'S GUEST ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Conor lies awake in bed. It's the morning after. It looks like he hasn't slept. He hears footsteps around the house, then the front door slamming. He gets up.

INT. GRANDMA'S STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

Conor comes slowly down the stairway, but the house seems to be empty. He glances in the sitting room. Someone has made a futile effort to clean it a bit. He heads into:

INT. GRANDMA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Where to his astonishment, Dad is cooking breakfast.

DAD
I know you like 'em scrambled.

CONOR
What are you doing here?

DAD
What do you think?

He motions for Conor to sit at the table, then dishes up two plates, sets one in front of Conor and sits down himself. They eat in silence, Conor just playing at his food.

DAD (CONT'D)
That was quite a mess you made.

Conor says nothing.

DAD (CONT'D)
She called me this morning. Very, very early.
(beat, it's not what we expect)
Your mum's taken a turn, Conor.

Conor looks up.

DAD (CONT'D)
Your grandma's gone to the hospital. I'm going to drop you off at school-

CONOR
School!? I want to see mum!

DAD
It's no place for a kid right now. I'll pick you up after and take you to her. Sooner... If I need to.

Conor looks down at his breakfast, no longer hungry.

DAD (CONT'D)
Hey, remember what I said about you being brave? Well, now's the time you have to do it, Con.
(nods to sitting room)
I can see how upset you are.

CONOR
I didn't mean to. I don't know what happened.

DAD
Worse things happen at sea.

CONOR
What does that mean?

DAD
It means we're going to pretend like it never happened, because other things are going on right now.

CONOR
You're not even going to punish me?

DAD
(sighing)
What would be the point, Con? What could possibly be the point?

Dad eats in silence. Conor can't take another bite.

INT. PHYSICAL SOCIAL AND EDUCATION CLASS - LATER THAT DAY

Conor sits at his desk, looking at the VIDEO on his phone again. Mr Clark lectures in the background, BULLYING on the Powerpoint (along with, ironically, "This school operates a zero-tolerance anti-bullying policy"). Classmates' hands (including Lily, next to Conor) are in the air.

Mr Clark walks by Conor's desk. He and Conor exchange a look, and we see Mr Clark decide to let Conor keep looking at his phone this time.

Conor's become untouchable. Which is worse than ever. Harry catches his eye. Conor looks away.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - LATER THAT DAY

Conor leans against a wall at breaktime, isolated. He sees Lily with friends across the way. She never looks over.

We see FLASHES OF HIS NIGHTMARE as he thinks of it:

--The two pairs of hands in the ferocious grip.

--The undefinable violent motion, dark and burning.

But then he spies Harry, Anton and Sully approaching and gets a funny look. Is it relief?

HARRY
Conor O'Malley.

Conor stands up, almost eager. But Harry just waits. And waits. Even Sully and Anton grow uncomfortable.

CONOR
What are you waiting for?

SULLY
Yeah, what are you waiting for?

ANTON
Hit him.

But Harry doesn't move, just stares that eerie stare. Conor grows more and more agitated, until-

CONOR
Just do it!

HARRY
(faux surprise)
Do what? What could you possibly want me to do, O'Malley?

Standoff continues, Conor's fists clenching at his side, Harry just staring.

The bell rings. Miss Kwan appears at the other end of the yard, watchful. Everyone starts moving inside.

HARRY (CONT'D)
I guess we'll never know. What it is O'Malley wants.

The three bullies move out of the yard and inside. Leaving Conor alone, again.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - LATER THAT DAY

Conor carries a cup of coffee from a vending machine. He reaches a HOSPITAL ROOM DOOR and pauses outside because there are voices arguing within.

MUM
(muffled)
Bad show, Liam. *Again*.

DAD
(muffled)
You're changing the argument-

Conor pushes the door open and...

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...his Mum and Dad look up at him guiltily. The room is filled with get-well cards and balloons. The anger on his Mum's face is hidden quickly behind an exhausted smile. She's clearly much sicker and weaker. Her voice is heavier, as with a chest infection.

MUM
Hey there.

Conor pauses before entering, suspicious. He holds out the coffee to his Dad, who takes it.

DAD
Thanks, sport. I'm going to see about finding some food. You want anything?

CONOR
I want you to stop calling me "sport".

Mum laughs, then coughs. It sounds ugly. Dad gives up and makes his exit.

Mum pats the bed, like before. Conor sits next to her. She ruffles his hair. He notices the tubes and bruises on her arm. She sees him noticing and tries to change the subject.

MUM
Hey, you know what I was just thinking about? When we were at Alton Towers for your birthday, remember? On the roller-coaster?

Conor doesn't look at her, but of course he remembers. She snorts.

MUM (CONT'D)
We really *shouldn't* have had that Indian food.

CONOR
(as if to himself)
That was a brilliant day.

MUM
It *was* a brilliant day.

Conor nods. It was so brilliant it's too painful to share with her just now.

CONOR
Are you okay? What happened this morning?

Mum sighs, meaningfully.

MUM
I had a bit of a bad reaction, sweetheart. Not what they were hoping for.

Here it is. Here's the bad news. But once again-

MUM (CONT'D)
(forced brightness)
But there's one more thing they're going to try, a medicine that's had some good results.

CONOR
Why didn't they try it before?

MUM
Well, this is something you take when the normal stuff hasn't quite worked the way they want it to.

CONOR
(carefully)
Does that mean it's too late?

MUM
(quickly, firmly)
No, Conor. Don't think that. It's not too late. It's never too late.

CONOR
Are you sure?

MUM
(smiling)
I believe every word I say.

CONOR
(to himself)
"Belief is half of healing."

MUM
(surprised)
Well, yes, I suppose it is.

Beat, as perhaps something important's been left unsaid. Mum plays with his hair again.

MUM (CONT'D)
Oh, and *here's* something. You know that tree behind our house I'm always prattling on about?

Conor freezes, comically. Mum coughs, again ugly, leans back on the bed.

MUM (CONT'D)
Well, if you can believe it, this drug is actually *made* from trees like that.

CONOR
It *is*?

MUM
Yeah, I *know*. All this time, we could have just chopped the damn thing down.
(laughs)
Well, not *that* one. That one's almost like a friend.

Conor doesn't answer as his face shows a growing revelation. Could this be the reason? Is it too much to hope for?

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Conor exits his mum's room, gently shutting the door. Raised voices again and he looks down the corridor to see his Grandma arguing ferociously with his Dad, poking her finger into his chest.

DAD
(loud enough to hear)
Well, what do you want me to *do?*

Grandma just storms away from him. She passes Conor, but won't meet his eye. Conor walks down to his Dad.

CONOR
Why is everyone yelling at you?

Dad makes a face.

DAD
Let's go for a walk.

EXT. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

A huge CLOCK FACE on the front wall of the hospital. We pull down to follow Conor and his Dad as they cross from the hospital entrance to a PARK across the road.

DAD
I've got some bad news, Con. I have to fly back home tonight.

CONOR
Tonight? *Why?*

They enter...

EXT. PARK ACROSS FROM HOSPITAL ENTRANCE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

...a small, leafy park with trees and pathways and benches, most of which are filled, surreally, with patients in hospital gowns sneaking cigarettes.

DAD
Stephanie called. The baby's sick. Probably nothing serious, but your step-mom went a bit crazy and took her to hospital-

CONOR
Are you coming back?

DAD
Yes. Yes, I am. Sunday after next, so not even two weeks.

CONOR
(thinking)
But that's okay, though. Mum's on this new medicine, so two weeks-

Turns when he sees his father has stopped by an empty bench. He goes back and they both sit. Long beat, as his Dad doesn't know where to begin.

DAD
Conor, this new medicine your mum's taking-

CONOR
(firmly)
It's going to make her well.

Beat, as Dad makes the important decision.

DAD
No, Conor. It probably isn't.

CONOR
Yes, it is.

DAD
It's a last ditch effort, son. Things have moved too fast.

CONOR
It'll heal her. I know it. This new medicine is the whole reason, I'm telling you-

DAD
Reason for what?

CONOR
So you just go back to your other family and-

DAD
Conor, no-

CONOR
(snaps)
It's going to work!

DAD
Son, stories don't always end how you want them to.

A sudden doubt for Conor, because he knows full well that they don't.

DAD (CONT'D)
This is too much to ask of you. I know it is. It's not fair.

Conor doesn't respond, just gets up from the bench, firm resolve on his face.

DAD (CONT'D)
Conor?

Conor heads out to the path and looks up to the huge Hospital clockface. It's 4.15. Clockface morphs into...

INT. GRANDMA'S GUEST ROOM - THAT NIGHT

...another, smaller clock on the wall of Grandma's guest room. Conor watches it intently. It ticks through 12.06 and 45 seconds. 12.06 and 55 seconds. Click, 12.07.

Conor throws back the blankets and gets out of bed.

EXT. GRANDMA'S BACK GARDEN - SECONDS LATER

Conor steps out into his Grandma's back garden.

CONOR
Where are you?

MONSTER (O.S.)
I am here.

The Monster steps from the darkness over his Grandma's office in one easy motion. He stands above Conor, huge as ever.

CUT TO:

EXT. GRANDMA'S BACK GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

Conor and the Monster are mid-conversation.

CONOR
But can you make her *better*?

MONSTER
It is not up to me.

CONOR
Why *not*? You said the yew was a tree of healing.

MONSTER
It is. If your mother can be healed, the yew tree will do it.

Conor crosses his arms.

CONOR
Is that a *yes*?

The Monster sighs and in what we can see is an extraordinary action, SITS DOWN. He places all his weight on the roof of Grandma's office. The wood moans. Conor winces, but it seems to hold the Monster's weight.

MONSTER
You still don't know why you've called me. It's not as if I do this every day.

CONOR
I didn't call you. And even if I did, it was obviously for my mum.

MONSTER
Was it?

CONOR
Why else? To listen to idiotic stories that make no sense?

MONSTER
It is not time yet for the Third Tale. But soon. And after that, you will tell me *your* story, Conor O'Malley. You will tell me your truth.

Conor grunts impatiently, but the Monster leans forward.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
You know of what I speak.

Conor looks up as the sounds from his nightmare start filtering in. The scene around them starts to melt away. Conor turns in rising horror as the walls of the garden grow blacker, and the sound of screaming start to rise.

CONOR
No! No, not this!

The wind rising. The distant ROARING is heard-

CONOR (CONT'D)
No! Please!

The garden is suddenly as it was before. Conor is shaken.

CONOR (CONT'D)
That's not my *truth*. That's just a nightmare.

MONSTER
Nevertheless, it is what will happen after the third tale.

The Monster stands. Grandma's office groans in relief.

CONOR
I want to know what's going to happen with my mum.

MONSTER
Do you not know already?

The Monster steps back over Grandma's office. It's leaving.

CONOR
If you're a tree of healing, I need you to heal!

MONSTER
And so I shall.

With a last look, the Monster EXPLODES into a murder of crows, black against the night, flying away, leaving Conor alone.

MUSIC RISES. A montage of days passing:

EXT. SCHOOL ENTRANCE - MORNING

Grandma drops him off at school, barely looking at him as he gets out of the car. He turns to maybe say goodbye, but she's already driving away.

INT. GRANDMA'S SITTING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Conor looks in on the sitting room. It's been cleared of debris, but looks empty and broken. The precious clock has been replaced by something comically cheaper and smaller.

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

Conor walks against the flow of students, alone. They unconsciously leave an area around him, as if they can't see him at all.

EXT. GRANDMA'S BACK GARDEN - NIGHT

Conor sits in the dark in a lawn chair. He checks the clock on his phone. It switches from 12.07 To 12.08. No monster.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - EVENING

Conor is at the door to the room. His Mum, helped by a FEMALE NURSE, is in distress.

Fear in her eyes, his Mum gestures angrily for Grandma to get Conor out of the room. Grandma does. She's stern, though, not spiteful.

INT. GRANDMA'S GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Conor has a laptop on the bed, open to a SKYPE session with his Dad. Dad holds up a baby for Conor to see. Conor tries to look interested, but it's not going great.

MUSIC FINISHES

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Conor sits alone, not eating the food in front of him, withdrawn into himself. In the background, we might notice that the digital clock reads 12.04.

SLAP! From across the table, two hands smash down on either side of his tray. It's just meant to startle him, but it knocks his orange juice into his lap.

Conor stands, lap covered in juice, and looks into the laughing faces of Anton and Sully, either side of Harry's usual eerie stare.

SULLY
O'Malley's wet himself!

Anton flicks some spilled juice onto Conor.

ANTON
You missed some!

They laugh, but then notice that Harry and Conor are doing that uncomfortable staring thing again. The laughter dies.

HARRY
I think I've finally figured you out.

Harry steps forward. Conor braces himself.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Here is the very worst thing I can do to you.

He holds out his hand to shake. Surprised, Conor shakes it.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Goodbye, O'Malley. I no longer see you.

He lets got of Conor's hand and turns his back to leave. After a confused beat, Anton and Sully do the same.

Conor watches them go, growing more and more upset...

...and as the bullies pass in front of the digital clock, it ticks over to 12.07.

The Monster now stands behind Conor, stretching up to the tall ceiling of the cafeteria. It kneels down and speaks into his ear.

MONSTER
It is time for the third tale.

Without looking back at the Monster, Conor starts to walk after Harry. The Monster matches him, step for step.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
There was once an invisible man, who had grown tired of being unseen.

CONOR
(to Harry)
Hey!

Conor quickens his step. The Monster keeps up.

MONSTER
It was not that he was *actually* invisible. It was just that people had become used to not seeing him.

CONOR
HEY!

Conor catches up to Harry and grabs him by the shoulder, twisting him around. Harry pretends to not see Conor, pretend-blaming a laughing Sully for grabbing him.

MONSTER
And if no one sees you, are you really there at all?

Conor watches the three bullies walking away again.

CONOR
(to Monster w/o turning)
What did the invisible man do?

MONSTER
He called for a *monster*...

Conor raises his fists. Behind him, the Monster does the same.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
...to *make* them see.

Conor runs after Harry, the Monster following. Here at last is the explosion of rage that's been building.

ANGLE ON: Harry, Sully and Anton turn in amusement, but their faces change to fright. Are they seeing the Monster or just Conor? Sully and Anton bolt, leaving Harry.

ANGLE ON: Conor, runs at him, yelling his rage. He raises a fist. The Monster raises a fist behind him in mirror. They both swing forward.

SLOW-MOTION of Harry and chairs and tables flying through the air, as if hit by an explosion.

INT. MISS KWAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Conor flexes his fists in his lap. They're bloody and bruised. MISS KWAN is there, but we stay tight on Conor.

MISS KWAN (O.S.)
I don't even know what to say to you, Conor. You sent him to *hospital*. His parents were threatening to sue.

Conor looks up, briefly.

MISS KWAN (CONT'D)
But I explained that he'd been bullying you and that your circumstances were... special.

Conor winces at the word, looks back down, examining his battered fingers. He remembers:

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - EARLIER

Conor's memory of frantically punching an overwhelmed Harry. Sound is echoey, distant. But are the punches coming from Conor or from the Monster behind him?

INT. MISS KWAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS FROM PREVIOUS

As before.

MISS KWAN (O.S.)
(shouting)
But that's not the point!

Conor jumps. Still doesn't look at her. We hear her sigh.

CONOR
It wasn't me.

MISS KWAN
What was that?

Finally glances up to her, very briefly then down again.

CONOR
It wasn't me. It was the Monster.

MISS KWAN
The Monster.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - EARLIER

Distant, echoing sounds again. Conor continues punching, even though Harry is clearly beaten, being tossed like a ragdoll by the Monster (or is it Conor?).

CONOR
I'm not invisible! I am NOT invisible!

The Monster, with Conor, fells the final blows onto the weeping Harry. His words are all close, intimate, as if spoken into our ears against silence.

CONOR (CONT'D)
I am *not* invisible.

He stops at last and looks up. Every horrified eye in the cafeteria is on him.

MONSTER
But what all invisible men learn...

A mist rises around the Monster behind Conor.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
...is that there are harder things than not being seen.

It disappears, leaving Conor with everyone watching him. Then adult hands, including Mr Clark, grab Conor to take him away.

INT. MISS KWAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS FROM PREVIOUS

As before.

MISS KWAN
Conor, an entire dining hall saw you hitting him. Saw you beating him very badly.
(beat)
Heard you yelling about not being invisible.

Conor winces again, and keeps looking down at his fists.

MISS KWAN (CONT'D)
I understand how angry you must be. I mean, I haven't even been able to track down a parent or guardian for you.

CONOR
My dad's gone back to America. My Grandma turns her phone on silent so it won't wake up my Mum.

Miss Kwan sits back. It's an impossible situation.

MISS KWAN
School rules dictate immediate exclusion.

Conor shuts his eyes in anticipation. Here it comes. We sense that, in fact, he *wants* it.

MISS KWAN (CONT'D)
But how could I do that-

Conor opens his eyes, surprised.

MISS KWAN (CONT'D)
-and call myself any kind of teacher?

He looks up at her in disbelief and crushing disappointment.

MISS KWAN (CONT'D)
Go back to class. We *will* talk about this one day, Conor. But not today.

CONOR
You're not punishing me?

She mirrors the words his father spoke earlier.

MISS KWAN
What could possibly be the point?

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Conor, shellshocked, walks back to class. He passes a STUDENT, who gives him an elaborately wide berth.

INT. PHYSICAL SOCIAL AND EDUCATION CLASS - MOMENTS LATER

Mr Clark is in mid-flow about EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING but everyone, including him, stops when Conor opens the door.

Conor pauses for a moment, then walks through the silence, all eyes on him, past Harry's empty desk and back to his own, next to LILY. He sits, defeated, as Mr Clark faintly continues his lesson.

A small scraping sound. Conor looks down.

CONOR'S POV - Lily's finger tentatively pushes a NOTE onto his desk.

Conor looks at her. She's face-forward to Mr Clark, but wants him to take the note.

He takes it. Opens it, unfolding it a comical number of times. Finally, it's just four lines:

"I'm sorry for telling everyone about your mum."

"I miss being your friend."

"Are you okay?"

"I see you."

The "I" in the last line is underlined vigorously.

Conor reads it again, then looks slowly up to Lily, who's looking at him now. He doesn't know what to say.

CONOR
Lily-

The classroom door opens again. A SECRETARY enters with a note. Conor and Lily watch as she crosses to Mr Clark and they read it together.

They both look up, right at Conor.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY

Conor's Grandma leads him to his Mum's hospital room. He makes to enter, but stops when she doesn't follow him in.

CONOR
Aren't you coming?

Grandma struggles with herself, knowing what awaits him. She finally just puts her hands on his shoulders and squeezes them brusquely. Her version of a hug.

GRANDMA
I'll be... I'll be around. Okay?

She nods, still struggling with herself. Then abruptly walks away. Conor watches her go. Then opens the door.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Mum's bed is in the sitting position. She looks very bad, breathing tube in her nose, but she smiles when she sees him. She holds up a long, straight-haired, yet *purple* wig.

MUM
(voice thin)
I suppose even drag queens get old.

But her joke falls flat, as Conor doesn't laugh. He realises fully what's about to happen.

Surprisingly, all he feels is anger.

Mum pats the mattress like before. But Conor pointedly sits in the chair by her bed instead. She nods that this is okay, too.

MUM (CONT'D)
What did you do to your hands?

CONOR
Why did Grandma get me out of school?

Mum readies herself, smiles again.

MUM
I wanted to *see* you. And you know how the morphine sends me off to Cloud Cuckoo Land sometimes-

CONOR
(angrily)
This is the talk, isn't it? Everybody always wants to *have a talk* lately.

He stares down at the floor.

MUM
Look at me, son.

He refuses at first, but finally does, arms crossed tight against himself. Here it is. There's no going back.

MUM (CONT'D)
I spoke to the doctor this morning. The new treatment isn't working, sweetheart.

CONOR
The one from the yew tree?

MUM
Yes.

CONOR
How can it not be working?

Beat, as Mum swallows, tries to smile for him.

MUM
Things have just moved really, really fast. Much faster than they thought.

CONOR
(as if to himself)
But how can it not be *working*?

MUM
I know. I had big hopes for our own personal yew tree.

CONOR
But it didn't help.

Mum shakes her head slightly.

CONOR (CONT'D)
So what happens now? What's the next treatment?

Mum doesn't answer. Which is an answer in itself. Conor looks back at the floor and says the final thing out loud.

CONOR (CONT'D)
There aren't any more treatments.

MUM
(quietly crying now)
I'm sorry, son. I've never been more sorry about anything in my life.

CONOR
You said it would work. You *believed* it would work.

MUM
I know.

CONOR
You lied. You've been lying this whole time.

MUM
I think, maybe, deep in your heart, you've always known, though. Haven't you?

She reaches for him, but he won't take her hand.

MUM (CONT'D)
It's okay that you're angry, sweetheart. It really, really is.
(rueful laugh)
I'm pretty angry, too, to tell you the truth. But I want you to know this, Conor, it's important that you listen to me. Are you listening?

Conor, still looking away, eventually nods.

MUM (CONT'D)
You be as angry as you need to be. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Not your grandma, not your dad, no one. And if you need to break things, then by God, you break them good and hard.

Conor still can't look at her. She starts crying harder, but pushes through it.

MUM (CONT'D)
And one day, if you look back and you feel bad for being *so* angry that you couldn't even speak to me, Conor, then you have to know that it was *okay*. That I *knew*. I *know*, okay? I know everything you need to tell me without you having to say it out loud. All right? All *right*?

Conor can hardly bear it. Agreeing means there's no going back.

But without looking at her, he finally nods his agreement.

Mum breathes out in exhausted relief.

MUM (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry, sweetheart. I'm going to have to take some more painkillers.

Obviously in pain, she presses the morphine button. She reaches for Conor again. After a beat he finally takes her hand.

MUM (CONT'D)
(quietly weeping)
I wish I had a hundred years. A hundred years I could give to you.

Conor holds his mother's hand and looks at the floor, as she drifts to drug-induced sleep. There's nothing more to say.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Conor's Mum is asleep. The light outside has grown dimmer. Conor sits, alone, in the chair, hunched down low. Grandma enters, a worried look on her face. How did it go?

Conor looks up at her, his eyes red, with grief, with *rage*.

CONOR
I want to go home.

GRANDMA
Conor-

CONOR
My home. The one with the yew tree.

EXT. CONOR'S HOUSE DRIVEWAY - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Evening is coming on. Conor's Grandma pulls into the drive. She watches Conor warily as he gets out of the car.

GRANDMA
I don't like leaving her like this, Conor, even when she's sleeping. What do you need that's so important?

CONOR
(looking at house)
There's something I have to do.

Beat, as Grandma considers.

GRANDMA
One hour.
(puts car in gear)
You're going to want to be there tonight.

Conor starts walking up his own front steps. Grandma pulls away. We follow Conor in <u>one continuous shot</u> as he opens his front door and goes into...

INT. CONOR'S HOUSE FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...where he doesn't even shut the door behind him and continues through...

INT. CONOR'S SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...stepping through it into...

INT. CONOR'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

...increasing his pace, he goes to the back door and heads out into...

EXT. CONOR'S BACK GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

...running now, across the garden, where we can see the hilltop and yew tree ahead of him. He goes to the back fence and we follow him as he expertly climbs over and...

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - CONTINUOUS

...crosses the train tracks to a torn opening in the fence on the other side. He ducks under it and we follow him...

EXT. HILLTOP - CONTINUOUS

...into the graveyard that stretches down the hill. The yew tree is up top, but still just a tree. Conor runs furiously now...

Up the hill, dodging through the tombstones...

The tree getting closer and closer...

CONOR
WAKE UP!

Still in the continuous shot, he reaches the tree and starts pounding and kicking it.

CONOR (CONT'D)
I said, WAKE UP! I don't care what time it is!

Kicks it again. And again.

And the tree steps out of the way, causing Conor to fall. We pull up higher and higher, in the Monster's POV, seeing Conor on the ground. Continuous shot ends.

MONSTER
You will do yourself harm if you keep that up.

Conor gets angrily to his feet. It's nearly night now, the sky darkening.

CONOR
It didn't work! You said the yew tree would make her better, but it didn't!

MONSTER
I said if she could be healed, the yew tree would do it. It seems she could not.

Conor attacks the monster again, pounding it with his fists.

CONOR
Fix it! Make her all right!

MONSTER
Conor-

CONOR
(still attacking)
What's the *use* of you if you can't? Just stupid stories and getting me into trouble and everyone looking at me like I've got a disease-

The Monster swoops down a huge hand to lift Conor in the air, trapping him with his fingers.

MONSTER
You are the one who called me, Conor O'Malley. *You* are the one with the answers to these questions.

CONOR
If I called you, it was to save her! It was to heal her!

MONSTER
I did not come to heal her. I came to heal *you*.

Beat, as Conor takes in the impact of this. He squirms in the Monster's hand.

CONOR
Me? *I* don't need... My mum's the one who...

Squirms more and more fruitlessly, but the weight of the Monster's words are too much. He gives up.

CONOR (CONT'D)
(quietly)
Help me.

Beat, as the Monster takes in a breath.

MONSTER
It is time... for the fourth tale.

Conor's eyes widen in horror, but before he can speak, the Monster drops him roughly to the ground. Conor rolls over to rise but the world has changed around him to:

EXT. THE FOURTH TALE NIGHTMARE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Conor is on a dark, barren stretch of ground, bordered by impenetrable brambles. An evil place, in the blackest night. The sounds from Conor's nightmare rise again - the blowing wind, the faint rumblings.

The Monster stands over Conor, but is dangerous-looking and sinister, its eyes changed to a merciless blankness.

CONOR
No! Please! Get me out of here!

MONSTER
(scarier than ever)
There will be no more delays. It is time for you to tell the fourth tale.

CONOR
I don't know any tales! I have to get back to my Mum!

The Monster looks past Conor into the unseen distance.

MONSTER
But she is already here.

Conor turns to look. The clearing stretches up to what looks like the top of a precipitous cliff.

Conor's Mum stands at its edge, looking over. She is frail and thin, but not bald, dressed in flowing white cloth. She turns and smiles at him, but so vulnerable.

CONOR
Mum! Get away from there! Get away from the edge!

The wind swirls around them. Conor struggles to stand, but tendrils of black smoke, rising from the ground, seem to bind him and hold him back.

MUM
I'm fine, darling. There's nothing to worry about.

CONOR
Mum, run! Please, *run!*

MUM
But darling, there's-

She stops and looks back over the cliff, as if she's heard something.

The wind drops, and we hear it, too. A distant ROARING, as of something impossibly big.

MUM (CONT'D)
(troubled)
Conor?

Terrified, Conor fights the smoky tendrils and forces himself to his feet. The roaring increases. Something's coming.

CONOR
Mum! MUM!

The roaring gets louder still. Conor struggles against the tendrils to run forward. The Monster stands impassively behind him. Conor's Mum steps back in horror from the cliff face, seeing something.

MUM
Conor!

Conor keeps struggling towards her, but before he can reach her, a CLOUD OF BURNING DARKNESS rears up the cliff face and over her.

Here it is. The REAL MONSTER of Conor's nightmares. The thing he is most afraid of in the world. It's hard to see clearly, but burns with ash and fire. It looks down with evil burning eyes at Conor's Mum, who screams in terror.

CONOR
MUM!!

TWO BURNING FISTS rush down in a violent pounce and grab her, pulling her rapidly over the cliff face and down.

Conor screams but tears away from the tendrils and can finally run for real. His mum is disappearing from sight, screaming for him, but he runs faster and faster and...

EXT. THE FOURTH TALE CLIFF FACE - CONTINUOUS

...catches her hands as she goes over the cliff, desperately holding her there.

This is the nightmare in full flow, flashes of which we've seen before. The screaming, the roaring, the wind, all because he's holding onto his mother, trying to prevent her from falling.

The Nightmare Monster still has her firmly in its grip, though, trying to pull her down to her doom.

MUM
Don't let go, Conor! Don't let me fall!

CONOR
(struggling)
I won't! I promise.

The Nightmare Monster roars and pulls harder. Conor's Mum starts to slip from Conor's grasp.

CONOR (CONT'D)
No!

Conor turns to our original Monster, still not moving to help, giving nothing away.

CONOR (CONT'D)
Help me! I can't hold onto her!

MUM
Conor! I'm slipping!

CONOR
NO!

But it's getting too much. She's too heavy. The Nightmare Monster roaring and pulling on her-

CONOR (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Please. *Please.*

The original Monster has moved up close behind him.

MONSTER
And here is the fourth tale.

CONOR
Shut up! Help me!

MONSTER
Here is the truth of Conor O'Malley.

Conor's Mum is screaming, slipping.

CONOR
No! Help me!

She's pulling away from his hands, from his fingers. He's trying, trying-

MUM
Conor!

CONOR
NO! Mum-

But she falls.

The Nightmare Monster takes her and they fall, fall, fall away, her white dress a light in the darkness. Conor collapses to the cliff face, watching in anguish as she falls-

And the world around him changes again.

EXT. THE FOURTH TALE NIGHTMARE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Conor is back in the clearing, surrounded entirely by the brambles. No escape. The original Monster waits.

CONOR
(angry, frightened)
This is when I wake up. This is when I always wake up.

MONSTER
The tale is not yet told.

CONOR
Get me out of here. I need to see my mum!

MONSTER
She is no longer here, Conor. You let her go.

The tendrils of smoke start wrapping around Conor again, as if they're part of the Nightmare Monster. He struggles against them, growing more and more upset.

CONOR
This is just a nightmare. This isn't the truth.

MONSTER
It *is* the truth. You let her go.

CONOR
She fell. I couldn't hold onto her any more.

MONSTER
You let her go.

CONOR
She *fell*!

The tendrils wrap around his legs, tumbling him to the ground. They start wrapping around his body, binding him.

MONSTER
You must tell the truth or you will never leave this place.

CONOR
Let me go! Please!

The Monster leans over him, as terrifying as it's ever been.

MONSTER
Speak the truth! Speak it or stay here forever!

CONOR
What truth?! I don't know what you mean!

The Monster's face surges down close to his.

MONSTER
You *do* know.

A sudden quiet. Conor *does* know. He's *always* known.

CONOR
(quietly)
No. I can't.

MONSTER
You must.

CONOR
I *can't*.

There's a sudden note of kindness in the Monster's voice.

MONSTER
You can.

Conor begins to cry, tears streaming from his eyes, even as he battles the tendrils, which have mostly paralysed him.

CONOR
Please don't make me.

MONSTER
You let her go.

CONOR
(shaking his head)
Please-

MONSTER
You let her go, Conor O'Malley.

FLASH of Conor's grip on his Mum's hand releasing. Did he let go first?

Conor squeezes his eyes shut tight.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
You could have held on for longer, but you loosened your grip and let the nightmare take her. You *wanted* her to fall.

CONOR
No.

MONSTER
You wanted her to go.

CONOR
No!

The tendrils look as if they're swallowing him now.

MONSTER
You must tell me the fourth tale, Conor O'Malley. You must!

CONOR
It'll kill me if I do!

MONSTER
It will kill you if you do not!

Conor struggles more. We see a light form in his chest, a kind of eruptive fire starting to bubble.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
You let her go. Why?

Beat, as Conor struggles.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
Why, Conor? Tell me WHY! Before it's too late!

CONOR
No-

The fire rises in Conor's throat, burning his mouth. He fights it.

MONSTER
(pleading)
Speak the truth!

Until, finally...

Conor can't fight it any longer...

He speaks the truth.

CONOR
I want it to be *over*! I can't stand it anymore! I can't stand knowing that she'll go! I want it to be *finished*! I let go of her! I let her fall! I let her *die*!

The fire erupts from his mouth and burns the entire world to blackness.

EXT. HILLTOP - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Conor opens his eyes. He's lying in the grass on the hilltop behind his house. The Monster stands above him. Conor sits up, his face beyond sad, helpless tears coming. After a moment, Conor speaks.

CONOR
Why didn't it kill me? I deserve punishment. I deserve the worst.

MONSTER
Do you?

CONOR
I've known forever she wasn't going to make it, almost from the beginning. She said she was getting better because that's what I wanted to hear. And I believed her.
(beat)
Except I didn't.

MONSTER
No.

CONOR
And I started to think how much I just wanted it to be *over*. How I couldn't stand how alone it made me feel.

MONSTER
And a part of you wished it would end. Even if it meant losing her.

CONOR
(whispering)
I let her go. I could have held on, but I always let her go.

MONSTER
And that, is your truth.

CONOR
I don't *mean* to, though! And now it's for real! Now she's going to die and it's my fault!

MONSTER
And *that*, is not the truth at all.

Conor gives into his grief, collapsing onto the grass. The Monster gently takes him up in his two huge hands, making almost a comforting bed out of them.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
It is not your fault, Conor O'Malley.

CONOR
It is.

MONSTER
You were merely wishing for the end of pain. Your *own* pain. It is the most human wish of all.

CONOR
I didn't mean it.

MONSTER
You did, but you also did not.

Conor looks up at the big face in front him.

CONOR
How can both be true?

MONSTER
How can a prince be a murderer and a saviour? How can an apothecary be evil-tempered but right-thinking? How can invisible men make themselves more lonely by being seen?

CONOR
(shrugs, exhausted)
I don't know. Your stories never made any sense to me.

MONSTER
Because humans are complicated beasts. You believe comforting lies while knowing full well the painful truths that make those lies necessary. It is a wonder you can survive at all.

Conor isn't sure he buys this, as much as he might want to.

MONSTER (CONT'D)
In the end, Conor, it is not important what you think, it is only important what you choose to *do*.

Long beat as Conor considers this.

CONOR
So what do I do?

MONSTER
What you did just now. You speak the truth.

CONOR
That's it?

MONSTER
You think it's easy? You were willing to die rather than speak it.

CONOR
Because what I thought was so wrong-

MONSTER
It was not wrong. It was only a thought. One among millions.

Conor takes a long breath, he's exhausted. In fact, he's fighting to keep his eyes open.

CONOR
I'm so tired. So tired of all of this.

MONSTER
Then sleep. There's time.

CONOR
Are you sure? I want to see my mum.

MONSTER
You will. I promise you.

Conor considers this.

CONOR
Will you be there?

MONSTER
Yes. It will be the final steps of my walking.

Conor nestles into the monster's hands.

CONOR
How does the fourth story end?

But he hears no answer as he can no longer fight off sleep.

EXT. HILLTOP - NIGHT - LATER

Conor is asleep on the hilltop. The Monster is now just a tree, but there's still a suggestion that it's cradling him. Conor's phone buzzes in his pocket but he doesn't wake. We hear a car pull up offscreen and a door open.

GRANDMA (O.S.)
(faintly)
Oh, thank God!

Conor blinks himself awake. He looks up.

GRANDMA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Conor! CONOR!

He sees his Grandma running towards him from where she's left her car (lights on, engine running, door open) by the church next to the graveyard. She's putting away her phone, obviously the one who's been calling him.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
CONOR!

He stands, bracing himself, but when she reaches him she grabs him in a hug so vigorous they almost tumble over.

She releases him and, being who she is, starts shouting.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
Where have you BEEN? I've been out of my MIND trying to find you!

CONOR
There was something I needed to-

But she's already dragging him towards the car.

GRANDMA
No time! We have to go *now!*

She sprints off away from him, back to the car, and what this means finally sinks in for Conor. He races after her.

INT/EXT. GRANDMA'S CAR/CITY STREETS - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Grandma drives at extremely high speed, cutting corners, running red lights. It would be funny if it weren't so desperate. Conor sits in the passenger seat, shy of how much she's both crying and trying to control herself.

CONOR
Grandma-

GRANDMA
Don't. Just don't.

They fly over a bump. Conor rechecks his seatbelt.

CONOR
(quietly)
I'm sorry. About the sitting room. And everything.

She laughs a thick, sad laugh.

GRANDMA
It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter.

CONOR
It doesn't?

GRANDMA
Of *course* it doesn't.

She starts to really cry, so just lets herself.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
You know, Conor? You and me? Not the most natural fit, are we?

CONOR
No. I guess not.

GRANDMA
I guess not either.

She takes a corner so fast Conor has to grab onto his door handle to stay upright.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
But we're going to have to learn, you know.

CONOR
I know.

Grandma makes a little sobbing noise.

GRANDMA
You do know, don't you? Of course you do.

She barely slows down before she runs through a red light.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
But you know what, grandson? We have something in common.

CONOR
We do?

GRANDMA
Oh, yes.

The hospital hoves into view. Grandma takes the first available space, not even trying to park legally and screeching to an abrupt stop. Grandma looks at him.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
Your mum. That's what we have in common.

Conor doesn't answer, but he knows what she means. This is their peace talk, and he agrees to it. He nods.

She reaches forward, grabs his hand, squeezing it tight, once. Then she opens her door.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
We have to hurry.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Grandma and Conor race down the corridor, Grandma in the lead. They reach his Mum's hospital room and...

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

...burst inside, Grandma with a terrible question on her face. The fight is clearly almost over for his Mum. The room is lit only by a small light above her bed. The Female Nurse stands by it, checking an IV.

NURSE
(to Grandma)
It's okay. You're in time.

Grandma makes a cry of relief, covering her mouth with her hands.

NURSE (CONT'D)
I see you found him.

Grandma goes to the opposite side of the bed, sits down and takes her daughter's hand, kissing it and rocking back and forth.

The Nurse leaves, acknowledging Conor. Conor stands in the darkness by the doorway, not knowing what to do.

MUM
(slurring)
Ma?

GRANDMA
I'm here, darling. I'm here.
Conor's here, too.

MUM
(eyes still closed)
Is he?

Grandma looks at Conor, urging him to say something.

CONOR
I'm here, mum.

Eyes still shut, Conor's Mum reaches out a hand for him to take. Just like he held it on the cliff face.

There is movement behind Conor, a familiar shadow appearing.

MONSTER
Here is the end of the tale.

CONOR
(to Monster)
What do I do?

Somehow the Monster fits in the room, and reaches forward to put two hands on Conor's shoulders, gently pushing Conor towards his mother's bed.

Conor looks at the clock as he goes. It reads 11.58. Moments before 12.07. Conor silently guesses the importance of this.

CONOR (CONT'D)
(whispering)
I'm afraid.

MONSTER
Of course you are afraid. And yet you will still do it. Because now you know you can.

They reach the bed, where his Mum's hand is still outstretched. Conor's eyes begin to water.

CONOR
(whispering, to Monster)
You'll stay? You'll stay until...

MONSTER
I will stay. Now all that is left is for you to speak the simplest truth of all.

The moment is here. Conor takes his mother's hand.

She opens her eyes, just briefly, but she sees him there. Really *sees* him. Then she closes her eyes again.

And, at last, he can finally tell her the truth.

CONOR
(simply, quietly)
I don't want you to go.

MUM
(eyes still closed)
I know, my love. I know.

Conor's tears begin to spill now, in a quiet way.

CONOR
(again)
I don't want you to go.

And there's nothing more to say. He leans forward onto her bed, and slips an arm around her, holding onto her.

We pull back, watching Conor hold his mother, the Monster supporting him, his Grandma across the bed, holding his Mum's hand.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

..a slow approach towards the clock on the hospital room wall. As the second hand slowly sweeps from 12.06.40 to 12.06.45, we hear Conor's earlier question to the Monster.

CONOR (V.O.)
How does the fourth story end?

And this time, we hear the Monster's response.

MONSTER (V.O.)
It ends with the boy holding on tight to his mother. And by doing so, he can finally let her go.

We dissolve gently to black before the second hand's sweep reaches 12.07.

FADE TO BLACK.

THEN FADE UP ON:

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

The hilltop on a sunny day, the yew tree in the middle.

Conor stands at a new gravestone in the graveyard. We can't read it, don't need to. After a moment, he looks around and up at the tree. Which stays a tree.

Slowly, he walks over and sits down underneath its branches, his back against the trunk.

He takes out his phone and presses the screen. We can perhaps hear what he's watching if we listen closely enough: the laughter, the roller coaster, the screams of delight.

The sun shines. The birds sing. A breeze blows through the branches of the tree.

Conor has made it through.

END TITLES.