HALF HEARD IN THE STILLNESS

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1 **EXT. FOREST CLEARING - MOMENTS BEFORE DUSK** 1

An ABANDONED WHITE MINI-VAN pulsates as "The Green, Green Grass of Home" by Tom Jones blasts from its speaker system.

The vehicle is unnerving. Not the chariot of car-pooling soccer moms or early morning newspaper deliveries. It's the breed of mini-van that does not belong near school-bus stops or playgrounds, the kind of van seeking to disrupt the idyllic patina of suburbia.

TWO POLICEMEN'S flashlights permeate the van's interior, illuminating the vehicle in a synchronized kaleidoscope.

An UNMARKED SEDAN anxiously pulls up to the scene and parks, as the driver's WORK BOOTS and BLUE JEANS get out.

We PAN UP to the driver's HANDS clad in rubber gloves. They head toward the rear of the sedan, pop the trunk and grab a flashlight and one can from a six-pack of Slimfast.

The PAIR OF HANDS then approach the VAN. The policemen cease their exploration, granting deference to the boots and jeans, shining their flashlights on the hands' owner, illuminating:

DETECTIVE HILDA MORRISON. Some would guess she's in her late 30s, others would venture to say 50s. She's weathered, a no-nonsense, yet quirky presence. Tough as (manicured) nails, if only to conceal a deep-seated fear.

Morrison cracks open the Slimfast, as if it was a can of Bud.

MORRISON
(pissed, re: the music)
A little Tom Jones to get you boys in the mood?

The POLICEMEN stare at her, frightened.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
Well, turn it off. It's loud as heck, it's 4 A.M., and Jesus Christ, it's Shabbos.

OFFICER #1
You said not to touch anything, ma'am.

MORRISON
That was before I was aware my bat mitzvah soundtrack would warrant a noise complaint from every house from here to the L.I.E.

OFFICER #1 leans in the side door and turns off the radio.

Morrison fingers the perforations of the license plate.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
Run the plates. Might be a rental, but looks lived in. I want a name and address. When you confirm, send a team over. Sweeny pre-OK'd all raids.

Morrison circles toward the side-view mirror. She stares at her lips. Rubs some lipstick off the side of her mouth.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
Paulson, check tire marks. Start with a 20 foot radius. Find point of origin.

Morrison gets in the driver's seat, and is hit by a curious odor. She grabs the dangling CHERRY AIR FRESHENER and inhales. Orgasmic for a moment. Until the odor returns.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
Hayes, scan the grounds for footprints. He was wearing those light-em-up sneakers. Sketchers, size 7. His favorite. Go as far in the woods as you need to.

OFFICER #1 approaches the driver's seat.

OFFICER #1
Ma'am.

MORRISON
Hayes.

OFFICER #1
I don't want to find the body.

MORRISON
So find the boy.

She smiles as she grabs the wheel. Tightens her grip. The rubber gloves SQUISH against the leather wheel.

The quiet then hits her. Her smiles turns cold.

CLOSE ON Morrison's HANDS. They start toward the VOLUME DIAL. They linger for a moment. Then - they begin to rotate the dial clockwise. Just as the music comes back on we -

CUT TO:

2 **INT./EXT. PLACE UNKNOWN - TIME INDETERMINABLE** 2

CLOSE ON: a YOUNG MAN'S FACE (20). His heavy panting makes it clear he's running. As if for dear life. He occasionally looks behind him, instinctively. The breaths become strained, quicker.

In. Out. In. Out. His eyes widen as we -

PAN OUT to reveal: the Young Man is on an OLD TREADMILL in a TINY BASEMENT. The basement is its own ecosystem of sorts. A fully-stocked bomb shelter like, though used, worn-in.

3 **INT. CAPTOR'S BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS** 3

The basement is full of cabinets and cubbies. Drawings taped to the walls. Books at every corner. An old TV and VCR. Though it's neat. Organized. Everything has its place.

The Young Man slows the treadmill down until he's jogging, then hops off and takes a swig from his water bottle.

He takes off his running shorts - two sizes too big - and puts on a pair of sweatpants - two sizes too small.

He spins a CHORE WHEEL on the wall, narrowly missing "SCRUB SHOWER" instead landing on "BROOM and DUSTPAN."

He organizes CHEF BOYARDEE RAVIOLI, SPAM, and other CANS into a corner cabinet, taking inventory on a small NOTE-PAD. He then takes a CANNED PEACHES from the shelf.

He places a book - KIM by RUDYARD KIPLING - back into a well stocked, alphabetically organized book shelf. It lands between THE SHINING by STEPHEN KING and THE MAGICIAN'S NEPHEW by C.S. LEWIS

He then fans out child-like UNITED STATES themed BED SHEETS, with each state as an individual character, and makes the small cot. The Young Man notices a small bit of red substance - BLOOD? - on the sheets. He wipes it off. When -

BOOM! There's a massive bang from upstairs.

An eerie silence follows. As if underwater or shortly after an explosion. The Young Man freezes.

Then more noise from upstairs. Loud banging. Centralized and moving. The noises get louder.

The Young Man quietly turns off the light. Then sits on the bed. Waiting.

He covers his ears with his palms, and then jumps up and turns off a record player in the corner, as if unaware that it was blasting Tom Jones. He gets back on the bed and curls up at the edge of the cot, back pressed up against the wall.

A breath in. Out.

THEN - the door is broken in by a TEAM OF THREE COPS, guns drawn. The same kaleidoscope of flashlights boomerang throughout the basement, like spotlights at a grand opening.

A wheezy breath in.

COP #2
Who's there?

A heavy breath out.

Cop #1 shines his light and pistol on the Young Man, still on the bed, shaking.

COP #1
Bobby?

The OTHER COPS shine their lights. Cop #1 inches closer to the Young Man, until he reaches him. Cop #1 grabs the Young Man and pulls him close, to see his face.

COP #1 (CONT'D)
It's not him!

COP #2
The kid or the guy?

COP #1
Neither!

The cops now all draw their guns and begin shouting, as Cop #1 pulls the Young Man off the bed and stands him up.

COP #1 (CONT'D)
Who the fuck are you?

COP #2
Where's the boy?

COP #3
What's your name? What is your name?

The YOUNG MAN drops to the ground, in shock.

4 **INT. POLICE STATION - HOLDING ROOM ONE - LATER** 4

CLOSE UP on DETECTIVE MORRISON, seated at an aluminum table. She attempts to contain a giddy smile. But can't.

DETECTIVE MORRISON
Max. (beat) Sweetheart. Max. Honey. Of course it's you. Max, I'm Detective Morrison. I've been in charge of your case since the very beginning. (beat) I knew the two of us would meet. Would see each other again. And I've been waiting a very long time to say that you're safe now. You're safe and I'm here.

PAN OUT to see: there is NO ONE at the other end of the table, the room is empty at the moment.

DETECTIVE MORRISON (CONT'D)
(rehearsing)
I'm here - *I'm*...I'm here - I'm here sweetheart -

The DOOR BURSTS OPEN as POLICE CHIEF BERNSTEIN (late 40s) and the YOUNG MAN - **MAX WHEELER** - walk into the room. Max is clad in an oversized Nassau County Police Department sweatshirt.

BERNSTEIN
Max, this is Detective Morrison. She's been on your case since the beginning.

Detective Morrison stands and stares. She can't speak. She's star-stuck almost. Or seeing a ghost. Bernstein helps Max sit down, then sits next to Morrison.

BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)
You look for a boy for so long, at some point you choose to forget you should be looking for a man.

Bernstein smiles as he slides over numerous "Missing Child" documents from Max's file toward Max. Among them is an AGED-ENHANCED PHOTO of Max. It resembles him slightly, eerily.

Max stares at the portrait. An alternate version of himself.

BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)
I've been waiting a long time to say that you're home now. You're safe and you're home. Do you understand?

Morrison is crushed. It was hers to say.

Max stares in shock.

BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)
Another boy went missing three days ago. A vehicle was recovered early this morning near where the boy was last seen. It was abandoned. We ran the plates and they were registered to the home of a Mr. J. HAROLD CARTER. The home where we found you -

MORRISON
(impulsively)
Hi.

Morrison then stares blankly, unaware she spoke. She realizes she had and quickly hands Max a picture of BOBBY WATERS (11).

MORRISON (CONT'D)
We're sorry about doing this now, but this is BOBBY WATERS. Can you remember if you ever saw this boy?

MAX
No. (I didn't)

BERNSTEIN
Did Mr. Carter ever mention this boy to you?

MAX
(concerned, re: Carter)
Is he OK?

MORRISON
(covering for Max)
Bobby's still missing. (*beat*) As is Carter. We don't have much time, sweetheart - is there anything -

BERNSTEIN
(whispers to Morrison)
The kid's got no idea.

Max absorbs the new reality.

MAX
Do I still get to see them?

BERNSTEIN
Who?

MAX
My...him and her.

Bernstein smiles. Morrison looks hurt, jealous almost.

BERNSTEIN
Your parents are right on the other side of that wall. They've been waiting ten years for this. Would you like to see them now?

Max sinks. Silence. Max's eyes widen. His head begins to shake subtly, then more powerfully.

MAX
Ten?

His eyes begin to well. Instinctively he tries to cover it. Control it. Is it instinct or conditioning? He begins to sob again. He looks at Morrison. For something. For what?

MAX (CONT'D)
Um...

Max shakes his head no, slightly. He is in shock. He begins to shake. Then sobs. Then controls.

MAX (CONT'D)
That's it?

5 **INT. POLICE STATION - HOLDING ROOM 3 - CONTINUOUS** 5

DARLENE and FRANK WHEELER (Late 40s) - Max's parents - are seated across from a FEMALE REUNIFICATION EXPERT (40s). They are in shock, a confused dishevelment.

REUNIFICATION EXPERT
Given the duration your son has been missing there are certain changes he has undergone which may make him unrecognizable to you.

FRANK
Can we see him?

REUNIFICATION EXPERT
In the coming days, you will want to make sure he understands his real identity. Name, address, date of birth. (beat) The attention will only intensify. Because you live in a gated community, we can keep reporters out, but you'll need to disconnect your phones, e-mail, everything. The outside world, all at once, can be confusing.

FRANK
We just want to see him.

REUNIFICATION EXPERT
He may have gone years without contact with the outside world - natural sunlight or human contact, outside of interactions with the suspect.

Frank gets up from his chair.

REUNIFICATION EXPERT (CONT'D)
You can't force trust. He will talk about his experience when he is ready. This should not be about what happened. It should be about moving forward. (beat) Mr. Wheeler, if you'll sit please.

FRANK
I'm not gonna sit. I want to see him. I don't - you're gonna bring me to him, now.

REUNIFICATION EXPERT
Mr. Wheeler, I'm not some stewardess telling you to fasten your seat belt. You don't follow what I'm telling you, any chance for his re-association to this world will be lost. Permanently. The next few days are critical. Do you understand?

Frank sits, his head drops. Darlene stares straight ahead.

REUNIFICATION EXPERT (CONT'D)
Most important is to bear in mind that he may have been victim to repeated physical trauma. As such any touching or embracing may be overwhelming or dangerous for him. (beat) They'll be done preparing him soon.

DARLENE
Preparing him for what?

REUNIFICATION EXPERT
For you.

6 **INT. MEDIATION ROOM - MOMENTS LATER** 6

Darlene and Frank sit on chairs, waiting.

The door opens, as Max walks in. Slowly. Darlene and Frank get up.

Max stares at them. Frank and Darlene at him. Frank and Darlene inch closer to him. Max stands his ground.

Frank and Darlene stop inches from Max. Darlene is overcome. She begins to sob. Frank tries to reach out and embrace Max, but fights the urge. He too begins to cry. They stand just inches from Max, sobbing uncontrollably, longing for him, while Max stands coldly, watching, in shock.

A RINGING NOISE gets LOUDER, until it CRESCENDOS.

7 **INT. CAR - HOURS LATER** 7

FRANK drives as Max sits in the backseat. Darlene's seat is pulled far back. Max's knees are pressed up hard against it.

Max plays with the door lock. Locking, then unlocking. He puts his hand on the door handle and closes his eyes, as if tempted to open it.

SOOTHING FEMALE RADIO DJ
"KOST 102.3, Love Songs on the Radio. We're coasting tonight with Nina from Oyster Bay, who has a message for Glenn. Glenn, Nina knows how hard it was for you to be away all these years, but she wants you to know that you're still her world and your return will be the silver-lining for your journey together. Nina wants to tell you how much she loves you with your special song. Here's "Making Love Out Of Nothing At All."

"Making Love Out Of Nothing At All" by Air Supply plays.

Max stares out the window, taking in the town of Jericho, NY, the Great Hall of Suburbia. It's now new, but ever familiar.

MAX suddenly looks at the REARVIEW MIRROR. DARLENE's and FRANK's EYES are staring at him. They linger a moment then turn away. Darlene smiles warmly. Max stares at the mirror.

Max's legs shift, his KNEES pressed up harder against Darlene's seat. Darlene turns around to see his discomfort.

DARLENE
Oh, I didn't...here.

Darlene struggles to move the seat up. She can't.

DARLENE (CONT'D) MAX
Frank, how do you do this? It's fine.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
No, sweetheart, I got it -

DARLENE tugs at the LEVER, trying to PULL the SEAT FORWARD, when suddenly the SEAT JERKS forward TOO FAR. Darlene is now PRESSED UP against the front dashboard, with Max having too much room. But she accepts the new position, smiles warmly.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
There.

Silence.

FRANK
Are you hungry? You must be hungry.

MAX
He fed me before.

This lingers.

MAX (CONT'D)
The detective.

A beat.

DARLENE
Max, honey - there have been some big changes since you've - since -

MAX
I know about it. They rebuilt pretty quickly.

Darlene's confused by the comment, but let's it go.

FRANK
Max, see where Bagel Boss used to be? Now it's Cho-Sen Village - Kosher Chinese restaurant. You believe that? Pete says they even got Kosher mu-shu pork.
(Frank laughs)
People love fooling themselves.

8 **INT. WHEELER HOME - FRONT HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER** 8

Frank, Darlene, and Max shut the door behind them. An ELDERLY WOMAN - ETHEL - (76) approaches them with a YOUNG BOY (7) following shyly behind her.

The Elderly Woman stares at Max, entranced, emotional.

DARLENE
Ethel, thanks.

ETHEL
(re: Tommy)
Of course, dear. He was as he always is. Sweet.

Ethel stares at Max, wanting desperately to say hello. But she doesn't, and Max ignores her, fixated on the YOUNG BOY.

DARLENE
Tommy.

Tommy understands Darlene's tone. He gets up and gives an obligatory hug to Ethel, the kind that a child may give to a mother's second cousin when he just wants to go play.

Ethel heads out the door, as the Young Boy takes his place by Frank's leg.

Max stares, afraid at first. Then confused as he studies the boy. Eyes widen. He smiles, relieved, then stops, doubting, staring at Tommy some more. He looks to Frank and Darlene.

FRANK
This is your brother, Thomas.

Max stares at Tommy. He doesn't understand.

Max quickly closes his eyes, unsettled by a thought or vision. He then opens again, as if resetting the image.

TOMMY
Hi.

Tommy stands there for a moment, then walks over to Max.

FRANK
(muted)
No -

Tommy then hugs Max, an Ethel-like hug. Obligatory. Holds it for a moment. Tommy then lets go, goes to sit on the stairs, takes out a cell-phone and begins playing a game on it. Max appears shocked. Then smiles.

9 **INT. WHEELER HOME - DEN - LATER** 9

Frank and Darlene lead Max into the den - the final room of the tour. Max takes larger steps than necessary, as if wading through water. Unaccustomed to this spaciousness and freedom.

They stand awkwardly until Max sits on the couch. Darlene and Frank sit on either side of him. Max looks to Darlene, anticipating the next move. She smiles broadly, warmly, perhaps too overdone, as Frank stares at the turned-off TV.

FRANK
Oh. And we re-did the basement a few years ago. Made it a playroom. Pinball, air-hockey. It's the "fun room." You'll love it down there -

Frank catches himself. Silence again.

Max stares at their reflection on the turned-off TV, watching them. Enthralled, emotional.

Frank flips on the TV, as Max twinges, and settles back to their company. A "HOME IMPROVEMENT" re-run murmurs in the background. The LAUGH TRACK from the show resonates. Darlene and Frank inch a bit closer to Max.

MAX
Was he a mistake?

LAUGH TRACK.

FRANK
What's that?

MAX
Did you have him by mistake? Why did you have him?

DARLENE
(kindly)
No sweetie. We had Tommy because we wanted him.

MAX
(kindly)
That's a good reason.

LAUGH TRACK. Max peeks a glance at his parents, watching the TV. Darlene sneaks a glance at Max.

TV SHOW CHARACTER
Mom never said today!

LAUGH TRACK. Darlene and Frank laugh at the sitcom.

Max studies them, watching them watching. He’s enthralled.

TV SHOW CHARACTER (CONT’D)
Well that's what families do.(beat)
I'm tired. I'm gonna hit the hay!

LAUGH TRACK. Max laughs. As if mimicking his parents.

Darlene looks at Max, expectantly.

DARLENE
(paraphrasing the Reunification Expert)
You can't force trust, and you can't expect to feel it right away. You have to let it come to you. This shouldn't be about what happened. It should be about moving forward.(beat) But you can tell us anything. You can talk to us. We are listening. It's important you hear that.

A beat. Max turns to her.

MAX
Sorry, what?

Darlene shakes her head, relieved he missed what she said.

MAX (CONT’D)
When is sundown?

Frank and Darlene look at each other, confused.

MAX (CONT’D)
Bedtime.

FRANK
Oh. Right. Whenever - whenever you feel like going to bed.

MAX
Well - I think I'm going to "hit the hay."

LAUGH TRACK. FRANK looks at him, as if discovering him anew. Frank smiles at Max. He laughs. Glowing. Then gets emotional.

FRANK
Come here.

Frank reaches for Max, brings him into him, hugs him tight. Max loves this, a reward for acting "normal." Darlene looks on, jealous, wistful, unable to bring herself to touch him.

FRANK (CONT'D)
(teary)
Mine.

Darlene stands by. The hug lingers, until -

DARLENE
Well, let's go up.

LAUGH TRACK. Max gets up, looks at the television. Success.

10 **INT. GUEST BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER** 10

Darlene and Frank clear away a colony of unused INFOMERCIAL WORKOUT MACHINES, evicting the BOWFLEX XTREME and TOTAL GYM from prime real estate. There's a bed and a dresser, but it's a de facto storage room. Tommy's old toys. Frank's occasional work desk. Things without meaning or memory. Leftovers.

DARLENE
We'll move it all out, sweetie. This used to be Tommy's room, but he always liked to sleep in your bed. We kept it, you know. Just the way...until we moved him in there.

Max becomes fixated on the WINDOW in the room.

MAX
Was that always there?

DARLENE
Of course, sweetheart.

Max slowly gets into bed. Under the covers. Frank and Darlene stand over Max, tucking him in.

FRANK
Sweet dreams, Maxxie.

Frank leaves Max and Darlene alone. Darlene pushes herself to fill the void. But just smiles, longingly. Max smiles.

MAX
Can you close it...all the way?

Darlene nods, closes the door.

Max accustoms himself to the new bed. He lies back. Smiles.

MAX (CONT'D)
(sitcom voice)
"I think I'll hit the hay"...hit the hay. Good. Good.

Max smiles big. Strangely. Then tosses, then turns, growing frustrated. Scared. Unsure. He begins to sing "SAY YOU'LL STAY UNTIL TOMORROW" by Tom Jones to soothe himself as he closes his eyes. He takes his HAND and moves it down his body and UNDER HIS UNDERPANTS, as we -

CUT TO:

11 **INT. CAPTOR'S BASEMENT - ONE WEEK EARLIER** 11

CLOSE-UP on Max. Tense. Anxious

There is a LOUD, INTERMITTENT, VIOLENT POPPING NOISE, throughout as Schubert's Impromptus, Op. 90 plays quietly.

CAPTOR
(O.S.)
Does he have brown hair?

Max stares at him, nervously. A smile ekes out. Max contains it. Coy.

MAX
No. (beat) Does he have blonde hair?

THE POPPING NOISE becomes more FREQUENT.

CAPTOR
(O.S.)
No. (beat) Does he have glasses?

MAX
Yes.

Max almost laughs, but contains it.

MAX (CONT'D)
Does he have red hair?

CAPTOR
(O.S.)
Yes. (beat) Is your person Paul?

PAN OUT on Max and the Captor playing "GUESS WHO?" at a small fold-up table. *POP, POP, POP.*

MAX
No.

CAPTOR
No?

We see the Captor for the first time. Just a man. He stares at Max, coldly. *POP, POP, POP.*

Max shakes his head “no” and lets out a laugh. Playful.

CAPTOR (CONT’D)
Is it him?

MAX
No. Is your person Bill?

The Captor stares at Max.

CAPTOR
Do you have Paul?

Max shakes his head no, not convincingly. He squirms, playfully. Then grows silent, fearful.

Max looks at the Captor. Trying not to nod. His eyes begin to water. He shakes his head side to side.

Max tries to hold back tears. *POP, POP, POP.*

CAPTOR (CONT’D)
Bite your tongue.

Max bites his tongue, tries to stop from crying, to be defiant. But he can’t.

The Captor shifts in his chair. Max jumps. *POP, POP, POP.*

CAPTOR (CONT’D)
This isn’t you. Not like this. I don’t want to be a certain way to you. So why do you force my hand?

Max surrenders.

MAX
I’m sorry. It was Paul. I always had Paul.

For the first time we Max’s PLAYER CARD. But Max has ERIC. Not Paul.

The Captor stares at Max, offers a warm smile. Max gazes back. Then - BEEP! BEEP! as the POPPING comes to a stop.

Max gets up and heads to the microwave, where POPCORN was POPPING. He gets a bowl and pours the bag of POPCORN into it.

CAPTOR
I love Game Night.

Max brings the bowl to the table and sits down.

MAX
Who'd you have?

The Captor tosses his card toward Max.

CAPTOR
I had Max.

Max picks up the card to see the "GUESS WHO?" character MAX.

CUT TO:

12 **INT. MAX'S BEDROOM (GUEST ROOM) - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT** 12

Max wakes in bed in the guest room - now "Max's Bedroom." He CHECKS the BED for WETNESS. Then SMELLS the SHEETS.

He makes like he has to go to the bathroom and heads to the door. He stands in front of it. Hand hovering above the doorknob. He can't open it. He whimpers. He shakes his head. He clenches his fist and takes his hand as if to -

13 **INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM - SECONDS LATER** 13

KNOCK. We hear a loud KNOCK coming from outside the room. KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK.

Frank wakes to the noise. Drowsy. He gets up and deliriously follows the noise.

14 **INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS** 14

KNOCK. KNOCK. It gets louder.

Frank is in front of Max's door and opens it.

Max is standing there, clenching, holding his crotch.

MAX
Can I...Can I use the toilet?

FRANK
You don't have to ask here. You don't ever have to ask.

Max hurries out to the bathroom. Frank looks on, horrified.

15 **INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING** 15

MAX wakes, gets up slowly. A pan is sizzling, a TV on downstairs. The house is awake.

Max heads to the door, unable to open it. His hand hovers over the doorknob. Then touches it. But he can't open the door. Conditioned against it for so long.

He removes his hand and stares. Max then closes his eyes and opens it. Success.

16 **INT. TOMMY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER** 16

Max slowly opens the door. He peers into the room. Tommy's bed is empty. Max peruses around. Looking at his old world. Now resettled with a new owner.

After a few moments, he heads to the door, but is stopped by Tommy's HEIGHT CHART etched in pencil on the door-frame. It seems to be written over an even older, nearly erased height chart. This was Max's - the only visible entry is from "JUNE 2003" - 4'5". Max now towers over each ETCHING. The last vestige that he even existed. He measures where he is now.

17 **INT. DETECTIVE MORRISON'S BEDROOM - MORNING** 17

Detective Morrison gets dressed in uniform in front of a full-length mirror. She stares at her reflection. It appears she's pregnant - a noticeable "baby bump" now apparent.

As she buttons her shirt, she takes notice of the bump. She rubs it, closes her eyes, smiles. Rubbing and rubbing.

She stares for a moment longer, then removes a sweatshirt - the faux baby bump - from underneath her shirt. A game of pretend. If only.

18 **EXT. ALLENWOOD PARK - LATER THAT MORNING** 18

Detective Morrison sits on a park bench with a TEENAGE GIRL (16). The girl wears a Allenwood Day Camp Staff t-shirt, a Tiffany's charm bracelet and Juicy Couture sweatpants. She's a classic JAP (Jewish American Princess).

They watch a herd of 10-year-old campers play in the sprinklers.

JAP COUNSELOR
I wouldn't say there was like anything funny about him that day.
(MORE)

JAP COUNSELOR (CONT'D)
I mean - he was a funny kid, not like funny but like he was kind of quiet, would like pick his nose sometimes and stuff, when no one was looking. Well *I* was always looking, you know, because that's my job. (*beat*) He was at Arts and Crafts all day that day, though. He just like wouldn't play kickball. He was such a shit sometimes.

MORRISON
Did you happen to remember seeing a white mini-van that day? Parked in the lot, or circling around -

JAP COUNSELOR
Nope. Just a white Range.

MORRISON
A Range?

JAP COUNSELOR
Range Rover. I remember cause my parents just got me one but in black and I was thinking like how shitty my black one was compared to the white one. And I just wanted white, but it was more expensive, and my dad's cheap so...that's why I have a summer job and a black Range Rover.

Morrison takes the girl in.

JAP COUNSELOR (CONT'D)
This is so crazy. My friends from school and camp and my teen tour are like texting me non-stop, like what is going on. And I'm just like I have no idea. (*beat*) You'll find him though, right? He probably misses me. And that's really hard for me to think about.

Morrison stares at the girl, then watches the kids playing in the sprinklers.

JAP COUNSELOR (CONT'D)
Hey, do you think they'll interview me on TV?

19 **INT. PEDIATRICIAN'S OFFICE - DAY** 19

Max sits in a gown on a fire-truck themed examination table. He is clearly too old for the room. DR. GOULD (60s), with untamed ear hair, is poking and prodding Max with different instruments.

Dr. Gould checks Max's ears.

DR. GOULD
Mmmhmm.

Dr. Gould checks Max's eyes.

DR. GOULD (CONT'D)
Follow the light.

Max follows the light left to right. Right to left.

DR. GOULD (CONT'D)
Mmmhmm. (beat) Deep breath in for me, hold, and release.

Max does it.

DR. GOULD (CONT'D)
Again.

They repeat this exchange a few more times. Then we -

CUT TO:

20 **INT. CAPTOR'S BASEMENT - THE RECENT PAST** 20

Max and the Captor sit on the edge of the small cot. Still. Max is dressed in SUPERHERO PAJAMAS, many sizes too small. It's a ridiculous costume of sorts for the young man.

Max's HAND moves just an inch -

CAPTOR
(off the hand)
Just stop. It's not gonna make a difference.

MAX
I'm sorry.

CAPTOR
Did you even shave today?

Max nods.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
Your face and your hands?

Max nods. The Captor sighs. Disinterested. Not aroused. The two sit for a moment. Still. Max breathes deeply.

CUT TO:

21 **INT. PEDIATRICIAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS** 21

DR. GOULD
Well, you're still breathing.

The dry humor is lost on MAX. Dr. Gould puts on LATEX GLOVES.

DR. GOULD (CONT'D)
If you'll lie down please.

Max does so as Dr. Gould moves his hands around Max's head, then to his neck, and slowly down his chest, further and further, until he reaches his underpants.

Max pushes him away, instinctively.

DR. GOULD.
It's for your own good.

Dr. Gould begins to check underneath his underpants.

Max is shaking. Uncomfortable. Breathes in and out.

22 **INT. PEDIATRICIAN'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS** 22

Darlene and Frank sit waiting, a wistful look on Darlene's face.

She watches Tommy playing with some of the toys at the office. A COUGHING BOY plays nearby with other toys.

Darlene watches the COUGHING BOY get closer to Tommy. Frank moves his hand on Darlene's.

DARLENE
What did he feel like? Did he feel right?

Frank looks at her.

FRANK
Just like he should.

DARLENE
We're not supposed to. Hold him like that. She said not to.

FRANK
Honey, it's okay. You can -

Darlene watches Tommy.

DARLENE
But then I'll know. If it's real. (beat) Maybe this is enough.

Darlene looks at Frank. She shakes her head, removes her hand from under Frank's.

The Coughing Boy gets closer to Tommy, tries to play.

FRANK
Hon -

DARLENE
Tommy! Come here sweetheart.

Tommy walks over to Darlene. She hugs him tight.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
That boy is very sick. I don't want you going near him. OK?

Tommy nods, and goes back to play. Max heads into the waiting room, a bit shell-shocked. Frank stands to greet Max.

MAX
(feigned excitement)
He did all the tests. Everything's normal.

Darlene looks up at him, tears in her eyes. She stands and hugs him close. She doesn't let go. He's real.

23 **INT. WHEELER HOME - DEN - LATER** 23

Max and Darlene sit on one side of the couch, with Frank and Tommy on the other, as they are on separate teams. Tommy holds a plastic disc in his hands. It's the party game "CATCHPHRASE," a word association guessing game.

TOMMY
(to Max)
You'll get it as we do it. It's easy. (to Frank) Okay, and...

Tommy turns over the plastic hourglass.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
Go!

FRANK
(rushed, reading the disk)
You do this in October -

TOMMY
Soccer camp.

FRANK
No. You were Iron Man last year -

TOMMY
Trick-or-treat.

FRANK
Yes!

Frank hands the disc to Darlene. She reads the clue word.

DARLENE
(to Max)
Okay, sweetheart, um...you used to love this. Maybe you still do.

Max doesn't respond.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
It's a summer drink. Made from a fruit.

MAX
Lemonade.

DARLENE
Yes!

Darlene hands the disc to Tommy. He reads the clue.

TOMMY
Um, oh, ok, it's a place.

FRANK
School. Bowling alley. Water park.

TOMMY
You used to take me here every Sunday after basketball practice, with the team -

MAX
(wistfully almost)
McDonalds.

FRANK
McDonalds!

TOMMY (CONT'D)
(to Max)
No, don't help us. Only we can guess.

Tommy passes Max the disc. Max looks at his clue. Smiles.

MAX
Okay - "Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe..."

Max smiles knowingly at Darlene.

DARLENE
I don't know.

MAX
"Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?"

Darlene and Frank stare at him, mesmerized.

MAX (CONT'D)
"Call me Ishmael!"

DARLENE
Oh. Oh. Moby Dick!

Max smiles at his mother as Tommy takes the disc.

TOMMY
You like...oh! You always say I'm your favorite little...

FRANK
Sidekick.

Frank smiles, then looks at Max, apologetically.

Tommy hands the disc to Max. He looks at the word. Confused.

MAX
Um... (beat) I don't...

DARLENE
Just try, sweetheart.

TOMMY
Ten seconds!

MAX
I really don't...

DARLENE
Is it an English word?

MAX
I don't think so.

TOMMY
Five seconds!

MAX
I don't know.

TOMMY
TIME! We win!

DARLENE
That's ok, honey. What was it?

MAX
(struggling with the pronunciation)
"Barack Obama?"

DARLENE
Barack Obama.

Darlene looks at Frank, then back at Max.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
(quietly)
Do you know who that is, sweetheart?

MAX
That's a person?

DARLENE
That's a person.

TOMMY
It's the President. Of America.

Max laughs. Smiles at Tommy.

MAX
Who is it, really?

Silence. Max looks confused.

MAX (CONT'D)
But there's no president anymore. Not after the war.

CUT TO:

24 **INT. DETECTIVE MORRISON'S CAR - DAY** 24

The sedan is parked outside a mansion in Port Washington, NY, an identical suburb just fifteen minutes from Jericho.

VOICE OVER of DARLENE's 911 call from 2003 plays:

911 DISPATCHER
What's your emergency?

DARLENE
My son, it's my son...he went out alone for a bike ride and was supposed to be back two hours ago. I was supposed to watch him -

911 DISPATCHER
Okay ma'am, I need you to stay on the line. What is your name and address?

DARLENE
It's um, Darlene Wheeler. 7 Fortune Lane in Jericho. Please, I don't -

911 DISPATCHER
Ma'am, we're going to have an officer over shortly. They're minutes away -

There's a CLICK in the car. Morrison hits the REWIND button. We realize it wasn't a voice-over at all, but a TAPE ON LOOP. She inhales. Hits Play. Exhales.

911 DISPATCHER (CONT'D)
What's your emergency?

DARLENE
My son, it's my son... he went out -

CLICK. REWIND. PLAY.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
My son, it's my son -

CLICK. REWIND. PLAY.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
My son, it's my son -

Morrison closes her eyes, then shuts the engine. Opens her eyes. Then opens the car door.

25 **EXT. PORT WASHINGTON - MANSION - CONTINUOUS** 25

The MANSION sits perched on a nest of perfectly manicured lawn. The home could as well be the Headquarters of Suburbia. The lair of some June Cleaver-Martha Stewart love child. If you listen closely enough you can hear the jingle of an ice cream truck or the putter of the mailman's carrier.

Morrison wipes lipstick from her teeth, then knocks on the front door.

An elegant WOMAN (40s) opens the door a crack. A few too many Xanax are keeping her together. Little girls' voices are heard in the background.

MORRISON
My name is Detective Morrison with the Nassau County Police Department. I'm looking for a Helen Carter.

The Woman nods.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
You're the sister of J. Harold Carter, of Bayside, NY, he worked at the Jericho Public Library, I got the right one?

26 **INT. HELEN CARTER'S HOME - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER** 26

The kitchen is grand but untouched. Morrison, visibly disapproving of the plasticity, stands against the counter. Helen brings a MUG OF COFFEE over, Morrison rejects it.

MORRISON
Five years sober. (beat) Unnatural to depend on things.

Helen dumps the coffee in the sink melodramatically, then sits down and stares at Morrison. Quietly judging.

HELEN
I thought you were a reporter.

MORRISON
They don't knock. (beat) When did you last speak with your brother?

HELEN
A month ago. We went over there for dinner. (beat) You know, he was a great uncle. No matter what you say.

MORRISON
When you would go over there, was there ever any indication of anything?

HELEN
(fresh)
Was there ever any indication that a kidnapped boy was living in his basement for ten years? No, ma'am.

MORRISON
So you never saw Max?

HELEN
(sarcastic)
Oh, *Max*, you're talking about? Yeah, Harry used to bring him up from his cage, dress him in a tux, and have him serve hors d'oeuvres. The fuck you think.

Morrison wipes lipstick from the sides of her mouth.

MORRISON
Ma'am, you ever show me chutzpah like that again, I'll shuttle your ass to Mineola and book you as an accessory to kidnapping. And even if your fancy goy lawyer gets you off, I'll spend every dime of my pension and every favor I'm owed to tell every book club and botox party from Manhasset to Montauk that you had something to do with Max's kidnapping and Bobby's disappearance. That happens, good luck getting your girls play-dates and carpools, cause last I checked you're marooned on an island of scared shitless P.T.A. mothers. And they don't want a little blood. They want a sacrifice. (beat) We got a little boy missing and we ain't got time, so I'll ask you again, you never saw Max, is that correct?

By now, Helen is crying. She shakes her head yes.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
I need *something*, Helen.

HELEN
I don't see how it - but our uh - our father died a week or so ago. Ma said Harry seemed pretty beat up over it, but uh, Harry couldn't really afford to fly down to Florida for the funeral. Dad didn't have much to do with him anyway.

MORRISON
Florida?

Helen nods. Morrison stares at her. Helen looks at Morrison, embarrassed at what she's about to say.

HELEN
It was just...just *boys* right?

MORRISON
That we know of.

Helen nods.

HELEN
(apprehensively)
Should I talk to the girls? Just to see?

She sickens at the thought. Morrison gets up to leave.

MORRISON
You know your family best.

27 **INT. WHEELER KITCHEN - EVENING** 27

The family sits at the table, a beautiful spread covers the table. Turkey, gravy, cranberry sauce, the whole works. Like Thanksgiving. Almost.

Frank, Darlene, and Tommy devour their food, while Max picks at his plate, still nearly full.

28 **INT. WHEELER KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER** 28

Darlene washes plates at the sink. Max brings his still nearly full plate to her.

MAX
Excuse me and thank you.

DARLENE
Do you want something else, sweetheart? Some cereal maybe? You should be eating.

Max stops for a moment. Takes her in. He smiles, subtly.

MAX
I'm just not hungry.

Darlene takes the plate and pushes it down the garbage disposal. She smiles as she presses the switch on. A LOUD GRINDING NOISE IS HEARD.

CUT TO:

29 **INT. CAPTOR'S BASEMENT - THE RECENT PAST** 29

Max sits on a chair, directly across from the TURNED OFF OLD TELEVISION that can only play VHS tapes. He's banging the side, as if to reset an image that doesn't exist.

CLOSE ON: his warped reflection in the black screen. He's talking directly to it.

MAX
That's better. No, no, it's a good time...I actually don't know. Space time is...well there is no time here really. Just sleep and awake. Is it late by you guys?...Good, well yeah, I'm hoping they send me on this walkabout mission soon. You get to actually leave the space station and go make repairs outside...No I am. I am eating. The food here's not so bad. Sometimes they even have space Chinese food.

He hears a CREAK at the BASEMENT DOOR. Spins around, pauses for some movement. Nothing. He turns back to the TV. He pauses, as if listening to the TV.

MAX (CONT'D)
I know, but it's important that I stay here. Just a little while longer.

Max pauses again, takes in the black screen, growing emotional.

MAX (CONT'D)
I can't really see you. I think the connection is fuzzy. Satellites or something. But can you...can you describe what you look like? I can't see, and I'm trying to remember but, well, the connection...

Max stares at the black, emotional. Anticipating a description. Silence.

Max begins to make the noise of faux-static with his mouth. It gets louder and louder. Until he stops.

Another CREAK from the BASEMENT DOOR. Max ignores it, drops his head.

MAX (CONT'D)
That's enough.

CUT TO:

30 **INT. UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - LATER** 30

Max and Tommy brush their teeth. Identically. Max spits out. Tommy spits out and heads to his room.

Max studies himself in the mirror, as if for the first time. Smiles. Drops it. Flexes like a bodybuilder. Stops. Smiles.

31 **INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT** 31

Frank is in bed, as Darlene closes the book the reunification therapist gave her, "You're Not Alone," turns off the bedside lamp and gets under the covers.

There's movement under the covers. Rustling. Darlene pushes Frank's hands away. She turns over. Silence.

32 **INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT** 32

Max awakes in his bed. Uncomfortable. He gets up and heads toward the door.

33 **INT. WHEELER HOME - MOMENTS LATER** 33

Max quietly walks down the stairs, with a pillowcase in hand.

34 **INT. WHEELER KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER** 34

Max begins to open cabinets, searching for something.

35 **INT. WHEELER HOME - MOMENTS LATER** 35

Max walks back up the stairs, lugging his now full pillowcase.

36 **INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER** 36

Darlene awakes. Uncomfortable. She slowly gets out of bed, puts on her robe, and heads toward the door.

37 **INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - SECONDS LATER** 37

Max's moves quickly about his room, setting the pillowcase down on his bed.

38 **INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER** 38

Quiet, strange noises permeate throughout the upstairs hallway. Darlene inches closer and closer to Max's room. She turns the knob.

39 **INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS** 39

Max sits up in his bed, in the dark, FIVE CANS OF FOOD - vegetables, meats, peaches, etc. - opened, as well as POWDERED MASHED POTATOES and RAW RAMEN NOODLES. Max methodically lines up each can, as if taking stock of his supply. Carefully he begins to slurp down the different cans, taking a bit from each before moving onto the next.

Max doesn't notice the door open slightly, or Darlene in the doorway. He eats intently. A small dribble of sauce on his face. But there's a regality to it. Dracula, in black tie, perforating a victim's neck. He then opens the RAW RAMEN NOODLES and chews them as they crack in his mouth.

40 **INT. PARENTS' BATHROOM - NEXT MORNING, EARLY** 40

Darlene is standing in a bathrobe, having just showered, while Frank showers.

She stands in front of the mirror. The glass is fogged, we can't see her expression. She DRAWS a FACE on the mirror. Head. Eyes. Smile. She practices her smile.

Suddenly she clutches her stomach, lifts the toilet seat and VOMITS into the bowl.

FRANK
(from the shower)
What's that hon?

Darlene breathes deeply, kneeling over the bowl.

41 **INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER** 41

Max stirs awake as there's a knock on the door. The mess from the night before is gone.

Darlene opens the door and watches Max from the doorway. She then takes a deep breath and gets on the bed, next to him.

He's turned toward the wall, but he's awake. Listening.

DARLENE
I know this is hard for you, but we'll tackle this together. (beat) I thought we would do an exercise. Re-learn things that are true.

Silence.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
I made these note cards for you. Things to look back at and memorize. OK? Let's start.

Darlene takes a pack of note cards and begins reading them.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
What is your full name?

MAX
Max.

DARLENE
Max Jonathan Wheeler.

Max breathes deeply.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
Say it, sweetie. It's OK.

MAX
Max Jonathan Wheeler.

DARLENE
Good. What is your address?

Max is silent.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
Your address is 7 Fortune Lane, Jericho, NY. Say it.

MAX
7 Fortune Lane, Jericho, NY.

DARLENE
Good, sweetheart. Okay, next. Barack Obama.

Silence.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
Barack Obama.

MAX
The President.

DARLENE
That's right. What year is it?

MAX
The tenth year.

DARLENE
No, sweetheart. No, it's 2013. Say it.

MAX
I'm tired.

DARLENE
I know you are. But say the year it is.

MAX
Can I rest for a minute?

DARLENE
After you say it. Now say it.

MAX
2013.

DARLENE
Good Max, that's very good. Let's keep going.

Darlene smiles.

MAX
There wasn't a war, was there?

Darlene considers it. Then -

DARLENE
No, sweetheart. There wasn't.

42 **INT. JERICHO PUBLIC LIBRARY - CHILDREN'S SECTION - MORNING** 42

Morrison, in plainclothes, enters the Children's Section of the Library. She watches a bevy of kids with their parents, longing, jealously.

She finally approaches the LIBRARIAN'S DESK where a SILVER-HAIRED LIBRARIAN (70) with a large, bejeweled LADYBUG PIN on her blouse, places a picture book in a plastic cover.

MORRISON
Hello there -

The Librarian looks up. She's the kind who makes up voices for the different characters and licks her finger before turning each page. She now smiles sweetly, warmly.

LIBRARIAN
(whispering)
Darling. We try to keep our voices small in these parts. For the children, of course.

Morrison nods. The rest of the exchange is in a whisper.

MORRISON
Ma'am, my name is D -

LIBRARIAN
Quite refreshing to see a mother picking out stories for her children. And all too rare.

Morrison stares at her. Enlivened by the chance. As if enchanted by a spell.

LIBRARIAN (CONT'D)
You'll read them to sleep, won't you?... And you'll tuck them in... And they'll dream of you, won't they?

Morrison nods, tears welling, as a congress of children begin to pass by the librarian's desk. Morrison is affected by the presence of each one.

LIBRARIAN (CONT'D)
Oh honey, they are lucky to have you. (beat) And my goodness gracious, if you could only see the other mothers who come in here. They're not half the mother you are.

The Librarian quits whispering, returning to a normal volume.

LIBRARIAN (CONT'D)
(with the sweetest smile)
They're all such cunts.

43 **INT. WHEELER HOME - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON** 43

Max is filling up a glass of water at the sink. He sees TOMMY in the BACKYARD, struggling with getting something out of a BOX. We can't see what exactly. Max watches. Curious. THE GLASS OVERFLOWS WITH WATER.

CUT TO:

44 **INT. CAPTOR'S BASEMENT - THE RECENT PAST** 44

The Captor sits on the cot, observant.

He's staring at Max, who now stands on a tiny stool and struggles to hold a heavy cinder-block high above his head. His body quivers and twitches. He looks to the Captor.

CAPTOR
You'll have to do it there.

Max pisses himself. It streams down his sweatpants.

Max's body is about to give out. His muscles can take no more.

Max steals a glance over at the spot where the old TV used to be. Before it was confiscated.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
Don't let it go.

CUT TO:

45 **EXT. WHEELER HOME - BACKYARD - AFTERNOON** 45

CLOSE ON Max and Tommy, staring down the long end of something. Max is holding Tommy back. Apprehensive, uncomfortable to be touching him.

TOMMY
Let me go!

Tommy tries to go, Max pulls him back

MAX
(nervous)
You want to just go head first. You have to go head first or you'll hurt yourself, OK?

TOMMY
(playfully annoyed)
Ok, let me go.

MAX
(stern)
It won't hurt if you do it right. (beat) Okay, three...two...one.

CLOSE ON TOMMY'S FACE as he takes off HEAD FIRST down the SLIP-N-SLIDE.

PAN OUT to reveal an OLD SLIP-N-SLIDE set up in the Wheeler backyard. Max slides down head-first after him.

Tommy laughs. Max laughs with him, then abruptly stops.

MAX (CONT'D)
We have to spray it down.

Max starts spraying it down with the garden hose.

TOMMY
Can I go?

Max watches him, mesmerized, then horrified. Snaps out of it.

MAX
If you want to.

Tommy smiles, screams, and then revs up for the big run, winding up his foot, like a dog does in cartoons.

MAX stares at Tommy.

TOMMY
Okay...one...two...three...

Tommy runs quickly towards the SLIP-N-SLIDE, plunges head first. His momentum throws him down the slide and deep into the bushes.

Max smiles, until -

Tommy SCREAMS loudly.

Max darts into the bushes to discover a screaming, frightened Tommy, near tears, pointing at something in the dirt.

Max looks at the find: a half decayed DEAD CROW, flies collecting around it. Max kneels down to it as Tommy runs into his brother's arms, hiding his eyes from the carcass.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
I didn't mean to see it.

Max holds him tight, staring at the carcass. Tommy begins to turn around slowly, dangerously, trying to score a peek.

MAX
I know. Close your eyes.

Tommy covers his eyes with his hand, as Max lets him go.

Max then starts to bury it. He stops himself from growing emotional. After a few handfuls of dirt, it is buried.

Max stares at it. Then covers his eyes with hand.

CUT TO:

46 **INT. CAPTOR'S BASEMENT - THE RECENT PAST** 46

CLOSE ON: MAX, covering his eyes with his hand, smiling.

CAPTOR
(O.S.)
Keep 'em closed! (beat) No peeking.

MAX
(playful annoyance)
They're closed!

CAPTOR
Okay...

We hear a SIZZLING.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
Let me just set the sun.

The LIGHTS GO OUT.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
Okay, you can open them.

Max opens his eyes and sees A BIRTHDAY CAKE, CANDLES SIZZLING. "HAPPY BIRTHDAY BOY" is written on the CAKE.

The Captor smiles at him, tenderly.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
(singing)
"Happy Birthday to You. Happy Birthday to You. Happy Birthday to Youuu. Happy Birthday to You!"

Max smiles.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
Make a wish.

Max attempts to BLOW OUT the trick candle. It won't blow out.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
Well, blow it.

Max attempts again as the Captor laughs. Again and again. Then he stops. Pauses. Takes it all in. Smiles.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

MAX
Nothing. It's just nice, is all.

Max tries one more time, and blows it out. Darkness.

The Captor turns the lights on.

CAPTOR
Smear your name and put it on your nose. It's good luck.

Max smears "BOY" and puts it on his nose.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
Well, you sure are getting up there.

Max spots the large CAKE KNIFE on the table and begins cutting the cake.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
I'd get you something, but what do you get the boy who has everything?

Max cuts a piece too big, he tries to cut it in half, but it falls apart. He cuts a new piece.

The Captor looks at the cake, embarrassed.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
I drove by today. I don't know why I did it. It's not my place. But they were outside.

Max stops cutting for a beat. Arrested.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
He was mowing the lawn. She was pruning these chrysanthemums. Snipping away, not to hurt them. Not to destroy. But to grow. To create something even more beautiful.

A beat. Max stares at the CAKE KNIFE. Considering it.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
The low hum of the mower. The sharp clip of the pruners.

Max begins to break, hyperventilating, as he grips the CAKE KNIFE tightly.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
The murmur of plans for later. So quiet. Hushed. Unheard. And yet so loud.

Max can't take anymore. He grabs the knife and lunges at the Captor, holding the knife inches away from the man's chest. The Captor, shocked, doesn't flinch. He stares at Max, confused, as if to say "you don't want to do this."

Max tries to steady his hand as the knife trembles. He inches the knife closer and closer.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
I know your wish. And I know it came true.

Max stops. Fixated. Unsure.

MAX
How? How could you know that?!

CAPTOR
(warmly, mercifully)
Because they *were* happy.

Tears now stream down the frosting still covering Max's face. His resolve slips, overwhelmed.

As he lowers the cake knife, the Captor leaps up from his chair and throws Max head first to the ground. Pinning the young man's head between the floor and his knee.

Max closes his eyes as frosting falls from his face.

DETECTIVE MORRISON
(O.S.)
What'd you wish for?

47 **EXT. WHEELER BACKYARD - THE PRESENT - MOMENTS LATER** 47

Max turns to see MORRISON watching him and Tommy. Max is startled and quickly moves his hand away from his eyes. He turns around protectively.

MORRISON
Or was it a prayer? There's a difference you know.

Morrison smiles brightly. Max is spooked.

MAX
I was just. Rubbing. My eyes.

MORRISON
I didn't mean to startle you. Came by to see how you were doing.

MAX
Tommy, go get ready for dinner.

Tommy heads inside.

MORRISON
Just us.

Morrison smiles, motherly.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
I used to love digging in the backyard. A whole world under you. (*beat*) Sweet boy.

Morrison is lost in the moment. Then -

MORRISON (CONT'D)
Hey Max, did Carter ever mention anything to you about Florida? Taking a trip there maybe?

MAX
No.

MORRISON
Right. Right. Well, just thought I'd check in.

Morrison watches him, smiles.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
Hey, don't blame yourself.

Morrison signals to the clump of dirt.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
You didn't kill the thing.

DARLENE
(O.S.)
Max?!

Darlene comes running into the backyard.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
(to Max)
Sweetheart, go inside.

Max heads back inside, disturbed and flustered.

MORRISON
Darlene.

DARLENE
What are you doing here?

MORRISON
Just had a question.

DARLENE
You can't do that here. They said it could be detrimental to his progress. He needs to feel safe here. Undisturbed.

MORRISON
A boy is missing.

DARLENE
I know. And I know what that is. How that feels.(beat) But not him. He's found, Hilda. You have any questions, you go through me. Do you understand?

Morrison looks on where Max left, wistfully.

MORRISON
Sweet boy. Must feel nice.

Darlene stares at her, as Morrison retreats toward her car.

48 **INT. WHEELER KITCHEN - LATER** 48

Darlene serves everyone a plate of delicious Chinese food, from Cho-Sen Village in town.

She places plates for herself, Tommy, and Frank on the table. She then spoons lo-mein and chicken fried rice onto half of Max's plate, and pours canned food onto the other half.

DARLENE
(to Max)
Small steps. If you finish the Chinese, you can have the canned. Half and half. Good deal?

Max nods. He takes his fork and plays with the lo-mein. Then slowly takes a string of noodle, puts it in his mouth. Unsure. Then begins to chew. Slowly at first. Swallows. Goes for another bite.

Darlene smiles, satisfied.

49 **INT. UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - LATER** 49

Max and Tommy brush their teeth. Identically. Max spits out. Tommy spits out.

TOMMY
Can *you* tuck me in tonight?

Max looks at him, a bit fearful, then nods. A smile emerges.

50 **INT. TOMMY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER** 50

Max sits on the edge of TOMMY'S BED, apprehensive and excited about being so close to him. Tommy gets under the sheets then takes the covers and puts it up around his neck.

TOMMY
You do it like this.

Tommy then beats the two pillows and rests his head.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
And then like that. You got it?

Max nods.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
Oh and the nightlight has to stay on. Or else I can get scared and wet the bed. Mom says I shouldn't tell anyone that. So don't tell anyone. Except Ms. Finnegan, cause she already knows.

Tommy gets under the covers. Max tucks him in as instructed.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
You know any stories? My dad always tells me a story so I can fall asleep.

Max picks up on "my dad" but lets it go.

MAX
Not ones you'd like.

TOMMY
Oh. Can you make one up?

MAX
I don't know.

TOMMY
Can you try?

MAX
Yeah. Sure. Um. (beat) Uh...in some other place, there lives this little boy.

TOMMY
What's his name?

MAX
He doesn't have a name. He doesn't need one. Cause he's the only boy in our story.

DARLENE takes position in the door-frame, out of sight, but listening carefully.

MAX (CONT'D)
And one day he's playing in the woods, in this old fort he loves to play in. (a beat, Max grows uncertain) Well actually, how about the one with the man in space...

But Max notices that Tommy is already sleeping.

Darlene hears the stop in the story, retreats a few steps.

Max tucks Tommy in, hesitantly. Then stares at him sleeping. Smiles, tenderly. Slowly, Max becomes disturbed. Emotional.

He moves his hand toward Tommy's face. Closer. Fighting it, but it's impulsive. The hand inches closer. And closer. Until he brushes Tommy’s hair out of his eyes.

Max is relieved. He smiles.

He then gets distracted by Tommy's nightlight. He moves to unplug it as -

DARLENE
(O.S.)
What are you doing?

Max turns around and sees Darlene in the door-frame.

MAX
I, uh...it's too bright.

DARLENE
No, sweetheart. That’s how he needs it. You shouldn’t be doing that. (*beat*) Time for bed, yeah?

51 **INT. UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER** 51

Max is brushing his teeth vigorously. His gums are bleeding. He looks in the mirror. His eyes water.

MAX
(while brushing)
You're okay. You're okay. You're okay. You're okay...

He spits out BLOOD. As he heads out the door to his room, he spots TOMMY'S NIGHTLIGHT BLARING.

52 **INT. TOMMY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS** 52

Max sneaks in, smiles longingly at a sleeping Tommy, looks ominously at the nightlight. He bends down and pulls it out. The room goes BLACK as we -

CUT TO:

53 **INT. CAPTOR'S BASEMENT - THE RECENT PAST** 53

A FLASH OF LIGHT.

Max sits on a stool, dressed in a cheesy argyle sweater, up against a bare wall. A DIGITAL CAMERA rests on a tripod a few feet away. The Captor, dressed in an identical cheesy argyle sweater, snaps away, the flashes illuminating the room.

CAPTOR
Hold still.

The Captor sets the camera, then runs around and stands behind Max, his hands on Max's shoulders.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
It's a self-timer. Say "happy."

MAX
Happy.

CAPTOR
Happy.

They hold the last syllable and smile. The flash goes off.

MAX
Do I have to undress?

CAPTOR
No. No, *these*, are *family* photos. It will help him ease into everything.

MAX
Him? I don't understand.

The Captor runs around to the camera and begins taking some more pictures of Max. FLASH, FLASH, FLASH.

CAPTOR
Turn left. There. Hold still. (beat) Didn't I tell you? We're growing our family.

FLASH, FLASH!

MAX
But you said - you said I was here so no other kid would.

CAPTOR
You're not a kid anymore.

FLASH! Max winces.

MAX
Aren't I enough?

CAPTOR
But we have so much to give. Isn't that only fair? To protect him. From the war. And the dogs. And only we can grow food that's safe. (beat) It's our right. Our responsibility. And there's nothing more important than family.

MAX
But you said -

CAPTOR
And now I changed what I said. So?

MAX
(by rote)
So you can change what you say if you choose to, and that's the new thing to know.

FLASH, FLASH, FLASH! As Max processes the new situation.

CAPTOR
And you're going to help me grow our family. You're so lucky. Now look into the camera and smile.

Max looks into the camera and attempts a smile.

MAX
No.

A FLASH GOES OFF.

CUT TO:

54 **INT. WHEELER HOME - DEN - MORNING** 54

The TV FLASHES across Max's face, as he flips through channels. He's fixated. Overwhelmed by the hundreds of choices.

TOMMY
(O.S.)
Come on.

Max lands on some early morning cartoons and turns back to Tommy on the floor of the den, where the two are playing JENGA. Both are in pajamas.

Tommy takes a piece out. The puzzle wobbles.

MAX
You have to be more confident. If you want one, you can't move another. Or it will all fall.

DARLENE walks in, in a bathrobe, spots the TV, doesn't hear Max and Tommy on the ground. She moves closer to the TV, then sees Max. She jumps a little.

DARLENE
You scared me.

MAX
Morning.

DARLENE
I was thinking after breakfast, we could take a trip to the supermarket. Get some fresh air?

Max stares then smiles.

MAX
Yeah. That would - I'd like that.

Darlene smiles and heads into the kitchen.

Tommy moves toward a piece, hand shaking, and is about to grab it when Max grabs Tommy's wrist, HARD.

MAX (CONT'D)
What did I say? Don't touch another.

TOMMY
You're hurting me.

Max pauses a beat, then lets go, apologetically.

55 **INT. DARLENE'S CAR - ONE HOUR LATER** 55

Darlene and Max are in the car as it pulls through a hoard of PRESS TRUCKS and WELL-WISHERS stationed at the ENTRANCE TO THEIR GATED COMMUNITY. Max ducks his head.

56 **INT. DARLENE'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER** 56

They drive through a more secluded area, woods on either side.

DARLENE
Remember you used to love coming here with Mike and Scotty? Make forts and all the rest.

Max stares out the window, mesmerized.

57 **EXT. FOOD EMPORIUM SUPERMARKET - LATER** 57

Darlene and Max sit in the car, in the parking lot of The Food Emporium. There is silence between them.

58 **EXT. FOOD EMPORIUM SUPERMARKET - SECONDS LATER** 58

Darlene and Max walk toward to entrance. A DOG BARKS in the distance. Max jumps, gets closer to Darlene. She rubs his shoulder.

Max then notices a LITTLE BOY (6) playing on one of the coin-operated rides outside. The LITTLE BOY'S MOTHER (35) pays no attention to the boy, yapping away on her cell phone.

Max locks eyes with the LITTLE BOY, then turns away, looks at Darlene. Smiles.

59 **INT. FOOD EMPORIUM SUPERMARKET - CONTINUOUS** 59

Darlene and Max wheel the cart in silence. Soon, the shoppers around them begin to nod, smile, stare.

Max tightens his grip on the cart as Darlene wheels. He becomes uneasy.

DARLENE
Only $3.99 for blueberries. Well that's a steal.

MAX
How can you tell?

DARLENE
They're usually over 5.

MAX
No. I mean, if they're safe to eat?

Darlene looks at him puzzled.

DARLENE
They're safe sweetheart. All of the food here is safe.

Max notices the LITTLE BOY, walking quickly down an aisle. Shoppers surround him, walking close to him, arms dangling, swiping the boy at points. Max grows concerned.

They start walking down the FRUIT AISLE, as Darlene points out the different foods to him.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
The fruit section. You remember? Apples, tangerines, kiwis, papaya, grapefruit, oranges, limes -

MAX
Mom, I know.

DARLENE
Of course you do.

Max looks to follow the LITTLE BOY, but soon becomes overwhelmed himself by the frequency of the other shoppers.

Max and Darlene continue down the aisle, when Max spots the LITTLE BOY again, walking down AISLE 3. A SUPERMARKET EMPLOYEE follows the boy closely. Max grows worried. He tries to shake the impulse to follow them. He does, for a second, but then looks back. Impulsively.

MAX
I think I'd like to pick out a cereal, if that's OK?

Darlene smiles.

DARLENE
Of course, sweetheart.

She turns the cart toward AISLE 6.

MAX
Maybe I can go alone?

DARLENE
(apprehensive)
Sure, sweetheart. Of course. You know what - you pick up a cereal, and meet me by the Deli.

Max disappears. She watches him, nervous, but proud, hopeful.

AISLE 3. Max walks down the aisle, after the LITTLE BOY. The stares of onlookers and the presence of strangers debilitates him. He spots the LITTLE BOY moving past the DELI COUNTER.

AISLE 5. Max anxiously FOLLOWS the LITTLE BOY down another aisle, the SUPERMARKET EMPLOYEE now hot on the LITTLE BOY'S TRAIL.

AISLE 6. Max nervously maneuvers around carts and old women and babies. Now it seems the SUPERMARKET EMPLOYEE won't leave the Little Boy alone. He has his hand on the boy's shoulder and shows him where the cereals are. Max panics, chases them.

Max catches up to the Little Boy and the Supermarket Employee. They're alone. The Supermarket Employee goes to pull a cereal from the top shelf for the Little Boy.

As Darlene turns the corner, she sees Max grab the Little Boy's hand and drag him quickly down the other end of the aisle, away from the Supermarket Employee. She stops. Frozen.

The Supermarket Employee stares after them, confused. As Max reaches the end of the aisle, pulling the frightened boy along, they BUMP INTO the LITTLE BOY'S MOTHER.

LITTLE BOY'S MOTHER
What the hell are you doing?

MAX
I was just -

LITTLE BOY'S MOTHER
What the fuck do you think you're doing?

Darlene watches in shock as the woman yells at Max. The Little Boy pulls away from Max and hugs his mother's leg.

Darlene snaps out of it, leaves the cart and rushes over.

DARLENE
Excuse me!

The woman spins around.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
That's my son!

LITTLE BOY'S MOTHER
He took my son's hand. He had my son's hand.

MAX
I'm so sorry, I thought he was lost and the man -

LITTLE BOY'S MOTHER
What man?

DARLENE
I'm very sorry. He didn't mean to.

Darlene grabs Max and pulls him away, as the Little Boy's Mother yells after them.

Max tries to grab their cart as they pass it.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
Just leave it.

Darlene is silent, in shock, as they head toward the exit.

60 **INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM - LATER** 60

Darlene is lying down in bed, with a WARM COMPRESS on her forehead, COVERING HER EYES. Frank walks in quietly, he lies next to her.

FRANK
Just a headache?

DARLENE
Yeah.

FRANK
Are you sure?

DARLENE
Yeah.

FRANK
Good.

Darlene smiles as if at an illusion.

DARLENE
Remember when we'd see other children. The ones that looked like him. In a car on the highway, or, Home Depot that one time.

FRANK
Yeah.

DARLENE
They said that would be the hardest.(*beat*) But it was nice, wasn't it? Made me feel good. Because we knew it was never him. Not really anyway.

Darlene and Frank lie in silence for a moment.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
I saw someone like that today.

FRANK
It's been a tough few days.

DARLENE
Frank, please hear me -

FRANK
But you're doing it. And he's good. And he's right. And he's here.

DARLENE
I didn't want to see it. But I know what I saw.

FRANK
It's something, isn't it? He's just like if we made him.

DARLENE
Please just listen to me.

FRANK
(all smiles)
But I heard you, sweetheart.

Silence.

FRANK (CONT'D)
I think you're right. It's just a headache. I'll re-heat the compress.

Frank pulls his hand away from Darlene's. He pulls the COMPRESS off of Darlene's face, and gets up without looking at her face.

If he had, he'd have discovered TEARS streaming down it.

61 **INT. WHEELER HOME - DINNER - LATER** 61

There is a loud silence as the family eats dinner.

Darlene gives Max three-quarters of "real dinner" with a quarter of the plate reserved for canned peaches.

Max eats the real dinner first. He looks to Darlene for approval. Darlene struggles with all her energy, then smiles.

Max smiles, it's an act. He struggles. He looks at Tommy and the smile drops a bit, as he becomes fixated, remorseful.

62 **INT. WHEELER HOME - DEN - LATER** 62

Max and Tommy are playing Nintendo Wii. Max is mesmerized by the world on the screen. One no longer has to pretend.

TOMMY
(re: the video game)
Come on, kill him!

He looks at Tommy remorsefully. A beat.

MAX
I don't think this is working.

TOMMY
You can have my controller, it's easier to use. (back to the game)
Oh! Get the guy on the right!

MAX
No, I mean -

TOMMY
NO!!!

Game over. Max and Tommy lost this round.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
The Orcs come fast, so I need you.
OK? Cover me.

Max is arrested by this. A moment of realization. Max nods.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
Ok. I'm gonna press start.
(re: the controller)
Do you want to try with this one?
Here. Take it.

As Max reaches for the controller, he grabs Tommy's HAND just for a moment. He's transfixed, determined. He smiles.

He inches closer to Tommy. They play as "Til There Was You" from "The Music Man" starts to play and continues, as we...

CUT TO:

63 **INT. SUBURBAN HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT** 63

Detective Morrison sits among cuckoo clocks and Judaic tchotchkes in her mother's kitchen, as MORRISON'S MOTHER - RUTH - (82) brings two bowls of CHICKEN SOUP to the table.

They start slurping the soup.

RUTH
You eating OK?

MORRISON
Yeah.

RUTH
Why aren't you wearing the sweater?

MORRISON
It's July, Ma.

RUTH
And so they blast the air-conditioning everywhere you go. Do me a favor - wear the sweater OK? So I could sleep at night.

MORRISON
Sure.

RUTH
So any dates recently? Anyone I should know about?

MORRISON
You know I've been busy, Ma -

RUTH
We're all busy.

MORRISON
Yeah? What are you so busy with? Canasta? Shul?

Morrison stops herself, ashamed.

RUTH
Worrying and praying. For you. That's enough to fill a lot of my days. (beat) I do wish you'd go out with Deborah's son. He saw you on the TV. Said you were very pretty.

MORRISON
Where, at Bobby's press conference? He thought I was pretty? Don't you find that a little creepy, Ma.

RUTH
It's charming. That he noticed you, among all the meshuganah goings on.
(MORE)

RUTH (CONT'D)
You need to get out, to get your mind off all this.

MORRISON
A little boy is missing. And every day we don't find him, our chances of even recovering a decomposed body drop fifty percent. (beat, sarcastic) So what night did Deborah's son say he's free?

Ruth looks at her daughter, stunned.

RUTH
Well I have a child too. And I just want the best for *her*. So tell me - why doesn't she deserve that? I mean what is so wrong with *her*?

MORRISON
We're close, Ma. We're gonna bring him home.

RUTH
And then what, Hildy? (*beat*) He's not yours. They never are.

MORRISON
I gotta get back.

RUTH
Honey, you may not be ten years old. You may not be cute and innocent and get air time. But your life matters. And you, too, are so very lost.

MORRISON
I'm just trying to save a child.

RUTH
So am I. (*beat*) So find *my* daughter. Bring *her* home.

64 **INT. MORRISON'S CAR - LATER** 64

Morrison is driving on a busy road, passing strip malls and chain restaurants, when she spots a LITTLE BOY in a RED CAP and LIGHT'EM'UP SNEAKERS struggling as he's pulled into a CHUCK-E-CHEESE by a tall man whose face we cannot see.

Morrison turns the car around and grabs the police radio.

MORRISON
(on the radio)
Yeah, it's Morrison. I got a possible spotting. 10-19. Right off Northern, near Old Country Road. Chuck-E-Cheese. I'm not waiting for backup.

65 **EXT. CHUCK-E-CHEESE - MINUTES LATER** 65

Detective Morrison approaches the front entrance.

66 **INT. CHUCK-E-CHEESE - SECONDS LATER** 66

Morrison enters slowly, takes a look around - skee-ball, arcade games, a pizza party in the far corner. She walks around slowly, scanning for BOBBY and the CAPTOR.

Morrison continues deeper inside. Passing vending machines, animatronic puppets, children and parents.

Then - by the back corner, she spots the YOUNG BOY with a RED HAT and the TALL MAN. Their backs are turned to Morrison. The YOUNG BOY looks uncomfortable holding a cup of tokens.

Morrison follows closely, as the YOUNG BOY moves to the POP-A-SHOT. He inserts two tokens and grabs a basketball, as the TALL MAN gets more change from a machine just a few feet away.

Morrison, shaking, rushes toward the YOUNG BOY, pushing patrons aside. She grabs the YOUNG BOY from behind, pulling him in close to her. She then removes her pistol from its holster and aims it at the TALL MAN.

MORRISON
Don't fucking move! Don't you fucking move! Put your hands behind your head, where I can see them.

The TALL MAN does so. The YOUNG BOY starts to cry and scream as he tries to escape her grip. Morrison holds him tight.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
Turn around!

The TALL MAN turns around slowly. She sees his face. It's not the Captor.

She drops her arm with the gun and turns to look at the Young Boy. It's not Bobby.

YOUNG BOY
Dad!!!!

The Young Boy, crying, runs into the Tall Man’s arms. They watch Morrison, shaken, as she slowly drops to the floor.

67 **INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT** 67

A CAR ENGINE PUTTERS outside as it TRIES TO START.

It wakes Max who FREEZES IN HIS BED. HE CAN'T MOVE AN INCH. He slowly gets out of bed and looks out his window, when the LIGHTS from the CAR TURN OFF and the ENGINE REVS as the car pulls away.

Max shakes as he tries to fall back asleep. He can't. He gets up and looks out the window. Worried. He rushes out the door.

68 **INT. TOMMY'S BEDROOM - SECONDS LATER** 68

Max stands over a sleeping TOMMY, relieved. He's safe.

MAX
(whispering)
You up?

Max shakes him gently. Then a little harder.

MAX (CONT’D)
(whispering, louder)
You up?

Tommy opens his eyes and looks at Max.

69 **INT. WHEELER HOME - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER** 69

CLOSE ON Max sitting in a dark room. He smiles.

MAX
(whispering)
You can't tell anyone about this.
We could get in really big trouble.

CLOSE ON Tommy. He nods and smiles. Then takes a spoonful of ICE CREAM to his mouth.

PAN OUT to Max and Tommy, eating ice-cream at the kitchen table.

They sit in silence. Smiling as they eat together. Max nods to the WHIPPED CREAM, as if to ask Tommy if he wants more.

TOMMY
(bashful)
I don't want to -

MAX
Just do it.

DARLENE
(O.S.)
What's going on?

Max and Tommy spin around, spooked. DARLENE is standing there, eyes squinting from the light, in her robe.

MAX
(calmly)
It's OK.

DARLENE
Why are you not in bed?

MAX
We couldn't sleep.

DARLENE
(to Tommy)
Bedtime.

MAX
We'll finish up. Just go back to sleep, we didn't mean to wake you.

Tommy doesn't move. He looks at Max.

DARLENE
Max, honey, Tommy needs to go to bed. And so do you.

MAX
But he wants to eat ice cream.

DARLENE
But I decide the rules here. And you both need to go to sleep.

Darlene grabs Tommy's arm.

Max jumps up, grabs her arm, holding it.

MAX
(calmly)
Please don't grab him. If you just ask him, he'll do what you want.

Darlene is shaken by Max. Tommy thinks this is all fun.

DARLENE
You can't be doing this here, sweetheart. Now finish your ice cream and get back to bed.

Darlene walks out with Tommy in her arms. Max sits down and finishes his ice cream, as we -

CUT TO:

70 **INT. CAPTOR'S BASEMENT - THE RECENT PAST** 70

Max paces around the basement, his body and face covered in welts and bruises. He begins rehearsing, trying to approach imaginary children.

MAX
(rehearsing)
Hi...*Hi*...Hello, hi...Do you - are you...What's your name? Hi, what's your name?...Hi, I like your backpack...What's your...Hello there...What's up?...I'm Max...Hey man, I'm Max...You like sports? You like - you like candy?...You play any sports...Soccer, me too...Hey, what's up? Cool t-shirt...Hey have you seen my brother? My sister?...Are you waiting for someone?...Hey, what's up, do you need a ride? Well do you?

CUT TO:

71 **INT. WHEELER HOME - FRONT HALLWAY - NEXT MORNING** 71

The doorbell rings, just as Max walks by door. THREE FIGURES ARE OUT FRONT. He retreats into the living room.

DARLENE
(O.S.)
Just a second! Frank!

TOMMY
(O.S.)
Dad's at Bagel Hut.

The doorbell rings again. Tommy runs to the door, with Darlene close behind him.

DARLENE
Just a minute!

Tommy opens the door with Darlene behind him. LISA BROCKTON (45) is standing with a tin-foiled meatloaf in her hand. Next to her are her TWIN BOYS, SCOTT (20) and MIKE (20).

DARLENE (CONT'D)
(warmly, almost as if seeking refuge)
Ohhhh.

Darlene hugs Lisa close. Tommy is excited to see the TWINS.

MIKE
Little man!

SCOTT
Hey dude.

LISA
They wanted - we all wanted - to see if he was home? If he's ready.

Max watches from the LIVING ROOM, slowly creeping toward them landing behind Darlene, invisible to her, but not the others.

DARLENE
(hesitant)
Of course - MAX! MAX! Can you -

Darlene turns around to see Max standing there. She jumps.

The visitors don't know how to break the ice. Then-

LISA
Hi, Max, it's Lisa - Lisa Brockton.

Max stares for a moment.

MAX
I know.

He then goes up to Lisa, giving her an awkward hug.

SCOTT
Hey, Maxxie.

MIKE
What's up Max?

MAX (CONT'D)
(smiles)
Hi.

DARLENE
Why don't you guys get some fresh air? (beat, re: the front door) But it's this way to the backyard if those sneakers aren't coming off.

Mike and Scott laugh as Max leads them outside.

72 **EXT. WHEELER BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER** 72

Max, Scott, and Mike are playing basketball, a game of UTAH. A RINGING OF CICADAS overpowers the silence.

Max studies Mike and Scott - what could have been.

MIKE
(breaking the ice)
You know, they made this made-for-TV movie about you. And these two actors played me and Scotty, but the dude who played Scotty was some ugly fuck. It was hilarious.

SCOTTY
We're identical twins, dipshit.

MIKE
So?

SCOTTY
So, so were the actors.

Max forces a shy smile, then laughs. Scotty and Mike laugh.

MIKE
So what was it like? To be missing all that time.

SCOTT
Mike -

MIKE
I feel like it must be like some weird sci-fi movie, like Planet of the Apes, the end, you know? Where you come home and everyone is a talking monkey.

MAX
I don't know. I mean, you're never really missing if you're the party concerned. To me, I guess I was always found.

CUT TO:

73 **INT. WHEELER KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS** 73

LISA and DARLENE sit at the kitchen table drinking tea.

LISA
You sleeping OK?

DARLENE
Yeah.

LISA
Eating OK?

DARLENE
Yeah, yeah.

LISA
Well make sure you have this tonight, don't even need to heat it or nothing. My special meatloaf.

DARLENE
Did Yolanda make it?

LISA
Yeah. *My* special meatloaf.

They share a laugh.

LISA (CONT'D)
You know, the news people? They're starting to call me.

DARLENE
God, I'm sorry, we disconnected all the phones -

LISA
No, don't be sorry. Are you kidding? But Darlene, you should be getting out there, don't you think? Telling people -

DARLENE
I'm not looking to be a cause or anything.

LISA
But you are. You already are.

DARLENE
It makes for a nice story. But it's not true. It's not him, Lis.

A long beat. Darlene looks to her for something. For what? Darlene puts her hands over Lisa's. Cradles them.

LISA
Honey -

DARLENE
I like where I am now. I've come a long way, remember? I mean, I'm in the P.T.A., and I run the bake sales, and Tommy's such a sweet kid. All the mothers know me...and they trust me, for play-dates, for school trips. Everybody says hi to me. Not because they have to now, but because...I've come a long way.

Darlene pauses. Then -

DARLENE (CONT'D)
When it first happened, I started growing him up with me, you know? What would he be now? How tall? How handsome? And for a while it made me feel better. It made me feel like things were alright. But one day I started thinking that if they found the body, I'd be grieving for two boys. Then and now. And so one morning I woke up and I decided to accept that he was gone. Dead. Lying in the dirt somewhere, in the ground. But that he was happy. That he didn't suffer. That there wasn't any pain.

Darlene is holding back tears.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
So why am I still grieving for two boys?

LISA
Honey, he's right outside.

Darlene shrugs, shakes her head, smiles.

DARLENE
You have to understand - I don't want him gone. But he isn't back. Not yet.

74 **EXT. WHEELER BACKYARD - SECONDS LATER** 74

SCOTT
(to Max)
...We've been dating for like a year. She's pretty hot, I guess.

Max nods shyly, unprepared for this kind of talk.

MIKE
(to Max)
Where's Tommy at?

A beat.

MAX
What? How do you know Tommy?

MIKE
What do you mean?

SCOTT
Your little bro's the man. He’s hilarious.

MAX
You spend time with him?

SCOTT
Yeah. Well now, just when we're back from school. Basketball. Video games. Shit like that.

MAX
Why?

MIKE
I don't know, it makes him happy when we play with him.

MAX
When you play with him.

MIKE
Yeah.

SCOTT
Maxxie, you OK?

MAX
You think you're so fucking smart. You need to stay away from him. OK? I'm here now.

MIKE
What happened to you, bro?

SCOTT
Max -

MAX
No, I know what you do. Why do you play him, Mike? Why would you do that?

MIKE
What? Because he likes it.

Max PEGS the BASKETBALL INTO MIKE'S FACE, HARD, breaking his nose. Mike starts screaming, blood now pouring down his face.

MIKE (CONT'D)
What the fuck!?

Scott panics as he sees the blood. He darts toward the door, as Darlene and Lisa run outside. Lisa screams at the sight. Darlene is frozen in shock.

Just then, Frank wanders into the back with Tommy and a bag of bagels, dropping them. He takes in the scene and runs over to Mike.

LISA
(to Mike)
What the fuck did you do? What did you say to him?

Frank holds Mike's head back, trying to stop the bleeding.

Max appears dazed. He's fixated on Tommy, who is scared by the whole incident.

LISA (CONT'D)
I am so sorry, Frank.

Lisa, Mike, and Scott rush toward the front of the house.

Darlene is crushed, motionless, defeated.

Max runs into the house quickly.

75 **INT. WHEELER HOME - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS** 75

Max bursts through the door. Darlene follows close behind, as Frank follows after them, carrying Tommy, who's now crying.

FRANK
(to Max)
What the hell happened?

MAX
How could you let that happen?

FRANK
What? What are you talking about?

DARLENE
Frank -

MAX
Let them around Tommy like that. Don't you even realize -

DARLENE
(to Max)
You're creating these things, sweetheart. This isn't you.

Tommy is now bawling in the corner. His cries grow louder.

FRANK
Darlene -

MAX
You need to re-think everything you're doing. All the rules. He should be inside. I mean, how else are you gonna watch him?

Tommy cries out, louder.

DARLENE
Frank, take Tommy upstairs!

FRANK
He's not safe with this behavior, Max, do you see that -

MAX
This behavior's the only thing that's keeping him safe.

DARLENE
Frank, take him up! Max, sit down!

MAX
You're not watching. You're not. You're not listening!

DARLENE
We are sweetheart. We are. And we know how to take care of him.

MAX
Oh you do? Cause you did such a good job with me.

Darlene slaps Max across the face. Everyone stops. Tommy begins to bawl.

DARLENE
Frank - take him upstairs!

Frank gathers Tommy in his arms and takes him up.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
Sit down. I'm the mother. I make the rules here. Sit down.

Max sits at the kitchen table. Darlene stands over him, manic almost.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
Do you remember when you were two and the dog bit you. And there was blood everywhere and you were so scared.

MAX
No.

THERE'S A LOUD KNOCK AT THE FRONT DOOR.

POLICE OFFICER #1
(O.S.)
Mr. Wheeler?

DARLENE
Well you were. Say you remember.

MAX
I remember.

POLICE OFFICER #1
(O.S.)
Mr. Wheeler? Please open the door.

MORE LOUD BANGING.

DARLENE
That's right. And what about when I took you swimming for the first time at Parkwood. And that little boy was found at the bottom of the pool. And for the smallest second I thought it was you.
(MORE)

DARLENE (CONT'D)
And I wouldn’t stop hugging you for the whole car ride home. Do you remember that?

MORE KNOCKING.

MAX
I remember that.

DARLENE
And remember when I used to lie with you when you were sick. And you would say no, Mommy, you’re gonna get sick too. And I said a mom can’t get sick from her child.

Max grows emotional, he does remember.

MORE KNOCKING.

FRANK
(O.S.)
Darlene, the door!

MAX
Please stop.

DARLENE
That’s real. Not what he did. Not any of that...Remember when I would rub your back? Remember when I would hold you close? Remember when you would lie on my chest, just right, and hear me breathe, in and out, and ask how my heart knows to beat.(beat) The rest isn’t real. Look at me. The rest isn’t real.

Darlene cries.

DARLENE (CONT’D)
Remember who loves you?

Max can’t speak, he becomes overwhelmed.

THE KNOCKING grows louder.

FRANK
(O.S.)
For fuck’s sake, get the door!

DARLENE
Who loves you?

KNOCK! KNOCK! Frank is heard running down the stairs.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
Say it.

THE FRONT DOOR is finally opened. Murmuring in the foyer can be heard.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
Who loves you? Say it. Who?

Just as Max tries to say something, Frank and TWO OFFICERS walk in. Darlene is sitting on the kitchen table, crying.

FRANK
It's him. (beat) They found him.

Max stands, stares at Frank, then at Darlene.

We CUT TO BLACK as we hear the V.O. Of a news report:

TV NEWS ANCHOR
News out of Jericho, NY this morning. J. Harold Carter, the man suspected of kidnapping 10-year-old Max Wheeler ten years prior has been found dead. Details are still unconfirmed, but it appears that Carter's body was discovered early this morning in the backyard of his former middle school teacher...

76 **EXT. SUBURBAN MANSION - BACKYARD - DAY** 76

Morrison peers over The Captor's dead body, laying in a bush of begonias as the sprinklers, on a timer, hit the body every thirty seconds. A self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head is visible.

OFFICER HAYES (early 30s) covers his nose and mouth with his shirt, standing beside Morrison.

MORRISON
I imagined him differently. More...*something*.

OFFICER HAYES
She's ready for you inside.

77 **INT. SUBURBAN MANSION - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER** 77

Detective Morrison sits on a plastic covered couch. The living room is beautifully decorated - tchotchkes, paintings, plates, etc.

MRS. SCHWADRON (95) sits across from Morrison. A senile silence.

Her aide, JUANA (50), walks in, a teapot and saucer in hand. She hands it to Morrison.

MORRISON
Thanks.

JUANA
(Guatemalan accent)
Oh yes. Yes.

MRS. SCHWADRON
(loudly)
What'd you say?

As Juana and Morrison begin their conversation, Mrs. Schwadron begins a story, CONCURRENTLY. Oblivious to the conversation going on around her.

MRS. SCHWADRON (CONT'D)
I was at the store last week. On Old Country Road.

MRS. SCHWADRON (CONT'D)
Used to be the Anne Taylor. I went in with Shirley and we were looking around for different things.

MRS. SCHWADRON (CONT'D)
We didn't really need anything, but it was close to Shirley and we thought why not?

MRS. SCHWADRON (CONT'D)
I found a pair of pants. They were $20 but they said they were on sale.

MRS. SCHWADRON (CONT'D)
So I asked the girl for the discount and they said that the discount was already listed.

MORRISON
Miss Zacapa, when did you spot the body?

JUANA
Oh. 10. 10 AM. Because I know, because I bringing in groceries for Miss Evie and I see something in backyard.

MORRISON
And you are positive you didn't see a child anywhere nearby? In the street before you parked? In the bushes?

JUANA
No. No child.

MORRISON
This man was a former student of Mrs. Schwadron's. Thirty years ago. Do you know if she ever had contact with him? Did you ever see him around?

MRS. SCHWADRON
The sale was $20. There wasn't more of a sale.

MRS. SCHWADRON (CONT'D)
And so I didn't get it.

MRS. SCHWADRON
But you know what? I should have gotten the blouse. It was only $20.

JUANA
No. No. Many the former student come because they love Miss Evie, especially when she lose memory. They say she always inspire to do great thing. One man come is doctor. But no, no him.

MORRISON
Did Mrs. Schwadron happen to hear the gunshot?

JUANA
No. She no hear good.

Mrs. Schwadron puts her finger in her mouth. Chews on it.

JUANA
I pray for child. To St. Nicholas.

Juana shows Morrison a charm bracelet with a St. Nicholas charm.

JUANA (CONT'D)
And I pray for man. To St. Nicholas also. Saint for child and thief.

Morrison smiles blankly.

JUANA (CONT'D)
Oh, and I find this next to body of man.

Juana hands Morrison a CHILD'S PAINTING. It's a WATERCOLOR of two parents, a boy, and a dog. It has "BW" initialed on the bottom right corner.

MORRISON
You found this?

JUANA
Yes.

MORRISON
Next to the body?

JUANA
Yes.

MORRISON
You removed evidence?

JUANA
Yes. I didn't want picture ruin.

MORRISON
Why would the picture get ruined?

JUANA
(*She imitates the sprinkler noise*)
10:30.

MORRISON
Why didn't you just put the sprinkler on later?

JUANA
I no control. (*She imitates the sprinkler noise again)* always 10:30. Time no choose sprinkler. Sprinkler choose time.

Juana looks at the drawing. Then at Morrison.

JUANA (CONT'D)
(re: the drawing)
You look like the woman.

Morrison looks at Juana, ever gratefully.

78 **INT. MAX'S BATHROOM - LATER THAT DAY** 78

Max showers as "I'M GONNA WASH THAT MAN RIGHT OUT OF MY HAIR" by Peggy Lee blares.

He gets some shampoo in his eyes. It burns. He washes it out.

He shuts the water off, and opens the curtains as we...

CUT TO:

79 **INT. CAPTOR'S BASEMENT - BATHROOM - THE RECENT PAST** 79

Max opens the makeshift shower curtain of a makeshift shower. It's just a garden hose attached to the wall.

The CAPTOR stands outside the shower, watching. Max grabs a towel and dries off.

CAPTOR
How's the pressure?

80 **INT. CAPTOR'S BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER** 80

Max sits in a wooden chair, with an apron draped around his neck, as the Captor cuts the young man's hair. Max reads "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea."

A LOUD RUMBLING is heard upstairs. Max looks up, frightened.

More noises. Bangs. They sound like footsteps.

MAX
What is that?

The Captor hesitates. He notices Max's book.

CAPTOR
The clanging. Of the submarine. We're dropping quickly.

Max pauses, then smiles.

MAX
I guess that makes me Pierre.

CAPTOR
And what does that make me?

MAX
Captain Nemo.

CAPTOR
What do you see?

MAX
Water. All around.

CAPTOR
That's it?

MAX
It's enough.

There's a loud MOAN-LIKE NOISE from upstairs. Perhaps a chair being dragged across the floor. Max jumps again.

CAPTOR
I think I was wrong. This isn't a submarine. It's a whale.

Max smiles again, relaxes.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
And you're not Pierre. You're Jonah.

MAX
But what does that make you?

The Captor smiles. He finishes cutting and wipes the hair off of Max’s shoulders.

CAPTOR
God. I guess.

A beat.

MAX
What is it really?

CAPTOR
They’re delivering a bed. For him.

Max’s smile fades.

CUT TO:

81 **INT. MAX'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER** 81

Max is brushing his teeth, trying to smile in the mirror. He drops it. Smiles again. Then drops it. Smiles again.

Max stops brushing for a moment. He takes his hand and covers his eyes with his hand, as if in prayer.

MAX
He was somebody. He was. Amen.

Max opens his eyes and begins brushing again, staring in the mirror again. Resuming the routine.

He struggles to smile. Holds back tears. He then stares at the mirror, turns on the sink and spits out.

82 **EXT. WHEELER BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER** 82

Max sits in one of the lawn chairs. The BIRDS are CHIRPING LOUDLY. Frank comes out. Two beers in hand.

FRANK
For you.

Max jumps at Frank's voice. Frank hands Max the beer and sits next to him. Max takes it, smells it, takes a sip.

FRANK (CONT’D)
Cheers.

Max takes the beer and clinks Frank's beer. They sit.

FRANK (CONT'D)
This is nice, isn't it?

Frank takes a swig. Max notices the BASKETBALL with MIKE's BLOOD, still on the patio from the day before. The CHIRPING is still loud.

MAX
What kind of birds are they?

FRANK
Crows. Lots of crows.

A beat.

FRANK (CONT'D)
You doing OK?

MAX
Yeah. I'm fine.

FRANK
Yeah. (beat) Don't mind your mother. It's just been a tough few days for her. Nothing to do with you.

MAX
I am the past few days. It has everything to do with me.

FRANK becomes emotional.

FRANK
You were always such a sweet kid. I'd come home from work and all you wanted was a hug. Or to show me how you made some three-pointer during recess. And you'd stay out there for hours until you made it again. Just to prove it. As if I wouldn't believe you. Remember that? (beat) Remember when I used to make pancakes on Sundays. With the M&Ms in 'em.

Max nods his head.

FRANK (CONT'D)
And I used to pin you down, remember? And do the tickle thing with the bird?

Frank acts this out.

MAX
Yeah. Why'd you do that?

Frank shrugs.

FRANK
I'd get this image of us sometimes, out in a parking lot somewhere, and we're just playing catch. Not even saying nothing. We just throw - back and forth - like the waves or something. Just like we used to.

MAX
Dad?

FRANK
Yeah?

MAX
We never used to play catch.

FRANK
Didn't we? (*beat, more emotional*) You know you dream about something for so long, after a while it's hard to say whether you're dreaming about the thing or the dream itself.

Frank takes a swig.

FRANK (CONT'D)
After a while, you start to hedge your prayers. You bargain, you know? 'I don't need to hear his voice again if I can just see his face.' Impossible things like that. And at the end of it, the one thing that was off the table...The last holdout... I just wanted to hold you one last time. Feel the weight of you in my arms. Untouched. Here. Didn't even walk away with that.

Frank cries, Max tries to comfort him.

MAX
I'm here now.

Frank drinks his beer silently.

FRANK
(re: the Captor)
Did you love him?

MAX
No. (beat) But I understood him.

Frank takes a swig.

FRANK
You know I could still make you those pancakes. I could still pin you down and do that thing. We could still play catch, any day, you name a day, you know?

MAX
Yeah.

They sit, trying to watch the calls of the birds, if it were only possible.

FRANK
Maybe another day.

MAX
Maybe. But this is nice, isn't it?

The last holdout. And it's all okay.

Until the birds chirp again. And Max shudders.

83 **EXT. WHEELER FRONT YARD - DUSK** 83

Tommy and Max collect fireflies in glass jars. Tommy swings after them, but continues to miss them.

MAX
If you wait until you see them, you'll never catch 'em. You have to go where it's darkest and be patient. They'll come to you.

Tommy does so. He waits. Then catches one, just as MORRISON's car pulls up. She parks the car and walks over to Max.

MORRISON
You doing OK?

MAX
Yeah.

MORRISON
I should've been the one to tell you. I know it's all confusing and scary.

MAX
I'm not confused. And I'm not scared.

MORRISON
Well I told you we'd find him. I promised you, didn't I?

MAX
Not like you say. He found you. He made the choices.

MORRISON
A drawing of Bobby's was found next to Carter's body. It's been five days. We're twenty-four hours out from naming parks and preschools after him. You're all the kid's got. It's just you.

MAX
Look I don't know anything about him. I don't know anything about where he would take him. And I don't know anything about some stupid watercolor dog he drew.

MORRISON
Right. Well listen, sweetheart. I don't want you to worry. We're gonna run prints, test clothing, everything. And you know what, we'll find him. I promise you. It's just a matter of time 'til we know the truth. And that's a promise.

Max is spooked, rattled. Morrison smiles at him. She strokes his face, motherly. Forbidden and she knows it.

MAX
I don't know what you're going for. But I'm not your friend. I'm not your kid. I don't know you. And so whatever you think this is...it's not.

This hits Morrison hard. Her smile turns colder, professional.

84 **INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS** 84

Darlene watches Morrison and Max from the window, as Max and Morrison stare at each other.

TOMMY
(shouting)
Come on, Max!

Darlene watches Max run around back toward Tommy and Morrison get into her car and drive off.

85 **INT. MORRISON'S CAR - MINUTES LATER** 85

Morrison slows, looking out the front window to see a quartet of YOUNG JAPPY MOTHERS (late 20s) in matching LULULEMON WORKOUT CLOTHES pushing four IDENTICAL STROLLERS in the middle of the street. Morrison grows frustrated as the women obliviously block the way for her now idling sedan.

Morrison HONKS THE HORN aggressively. The women turn around and stare obnoxiously as they part down the middle and make way for the sedan, the babies now starting to cry.

Morrison drives off, turns the radio on, EJECTS the TAPE inside, labelled "WHEELER, 7.15.03" and stashes it in the glove compartment. She then takes a DIFFERENT TAPE from the front console. It reads "WATERS, 7.10.13." She inserts the tape into the tape deck and hits PLAY.

911 DISPATCHER
911, what is your emergency?

BOBBY'S MOTHER
Um - yes, my son was supposed to walk home from camp and now it's late and I went to see where he was and he's not there -

86 **INT. MAX'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER** 86

Max runs the sink, dousing his face with water. He puts his face under the tap. As if drowning himself.

87 **INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - SECONDS LATER** 87

Max slams the door shut. He drops into bed.

The DOOR SLAMS SHUT once more.

Max spins around to find Tommy. Standing there. With a NERF GUN in his hand, aimed at Max.

TOMMY
Don't move. Don't move a muscle. Sheriff’s here.

MAX
Get out.

TOMMY
I know about you, partner.

MAX
Get out now.

Tommy aims the gun at Max. Max stands up and lunges at Tommy. Tommy shoots the NERF GUN and screams with excitement. Max knocks Tommy down, HARD.

Tommy hits his head against the bed-post as Max slams him onto his back. He instinctively grabs Tommy's THROAT, hard, subduing him.

Silence. Tommy stares at Max, as Max recognizes what he's done. Then - TOMMY GIGGLES. Max's hand on Tommy's neck is tickling Tommy.

Max's HANDS continue to TICKLE TOMMY MERCILESSLY, as the rest of him is horrified at his initial violence.

The tickle torture continues, Tommy laughing uncontrollably, as Max gets emotional.

Max lifts Tommy up and brings him in close. Holds him.

MAX (CONT’D)
(whispers)
You know that I'll never leave you. You know that, right? No one will ever touch you. Even when they come. You know that, right? You know that.

Tommy tries to break free. Max holds him HARD.

MAX (CONT’D)
Good.

Max hugs him tight. Too tight. Tommy can't escape it. He relents, goes limp.

MAX (CONT'D)
I want you to pack a bag. OK? Your toothbrush, some clothes, and a few of your favorite things.

TOMMY
Why?

MAX
We're going on an adventure later. OK?

Tommy smiles, nods, as we -

CUT TO:

88 **INT. CAPTOR'S BASEMENT - THE RECENT PAST** 88

BLACK.

Until we see frames from an old movie, perhaps "FRANKENSTEIN" projected onto The Captor and Max, sitting on Max's bed, watching the film on an old television with a VHS player, eating popcorn.

Silence.

HENRY FRANKENSTEIN
(on the TV)
"Oh, in the name of God! Now I know what it feels like to be God!"

CAPTOR
What do you think his name will be?

Silence.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
I asked you a question.

MAX
Frank.

CAPTOR
(laughs)
No. Probably not. But you get to choose whatever name you want for him. OK? So you can call him Frank if you want to. And he'll have to answer to that. I like Brandon I think. Or Murray, after my father -

The Captor stops himself, changes course.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
Will you show him the submarine? And the space station? I'm sure he'll love it.

Silence.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
And you'll have to learn how to share your things with him. And take care of him. Do you understand me?

Silence. They watch the film.

MAX
I'm not doing any of it. Unless I get to see them. Just once. Just so I can remember. That's what I want. That's what I wished for. And I don't care what the rule is. Or what you change it to. Or what you make me do. I'm not doing it unless I get that. Do you understand *me*?

The Captor considers this.

CAPTOR
All this time and we never gave you a name. I guess we didn't need to. You were always the only boy in our story. (beat) I'm so glad you're excited. I knew you would be.

The Captor takes the REMOTE and turns off the TV, as the room goes BLACK, and we...

CUT TO:

89 **INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT** 89

The house now asleep, MAX peers into Tommy's room, BLINDED BY THE NIGHTLIGHT.

90 **INT. POLICE STATION - LATER** 90

Morrison sits at her desk, pouring through the case file. An episode of WHEEL OF FORTUNE is on the TV in the background.

OFFICER PAULSON (30s) brings her a cup of coffee.

MORRISON
Growing up when I'd do something wrong, my grandmother used to tell me in Yiddish, "*Maidel shittern mogn ober shtyfer mogn, gezunt un tuches mogn mogn*." In a world of loose stools and constipation, it's fine to be a normal piece of shit sometimes. (beat) But it don't feel fine.

Morrison looks up at him, tears well in her exhausted eyes.

PAULSON
You afraid of losing him?

Morrison shakes her head, looks to confess to him.

MORRISON
I'm afraid of wanting to.

Morrison watches as the WHEEL OF FORTUNE CONTESTANT asks to solve the puzzle with just ONE LETTER on the BOARD. She guesses "I'VE GOT A GOOD FEELING ABOUT THIS." It's correct. Morrison collects herself, resumes her professionalism.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
Why the drawing?

PAULSON
A souvenir. A trophy.

MORRISON
Trophy means the game's over. That ain't something he'd celebrate.

PAULSON
Maybe he knew good finger painting when he saw it. Art appreciates quickly.

MORRISON
It was a watercolor. You should know that.

PAULSON
How would I know? I've never seen it. You brought it to the lab before showing it to anyone.

Morrison looks at him. A spark.

MORRISON
You wouldn't know if you never saw it.

Morrison stops herself.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
You never saw it.

She freezes.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
He never saw it. So he wouldn't know.

She turns to the Paulson.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
Stay here. I'll call from the car.

91 **INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM - DAWN** 91

Darlene and Frank are sleeping when suddenly there's a -

KNOCK! KNOCK!

FRANK
Shit.

DARLENE
Does he have to pee again?

FRANK
I thought we fixed that.

Frank gets up, pulls his sweatpants up, and leaves the room.

92 **INT. WHEELER HOME - FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS** 92

The KNOCKS grow louder! Frank is about to climb the stairs when he notices they're coming from the FRONT DOOR.

He squints outside and sees Morrison standing there, impatiently. He opens the door.

FRANK
What are you doing here?

MORRISON
Where is he?

Darlene now appears in a nightgown.

FRANK
What? It's 5 AM.

93 **INT. WHEELER HOME - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS** 93

Morrison, Frank, and Darlene rush into Max's room.

94 **INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS** 94

Morrison stares at an empty bed. Neatly made. Frank and Darlene look on horrified. They rush out of the room.

95 **INT. TOMMY'S BEDROOM - SECONDS LATER** 95

Darlene stands in front of another empty bed. Neatly made. In shock. Frank and Morrison shuffle in behind her.

FRANK
Oh my god.

Darlene sees the nightlight is gone.

DARLENE
I think I know where to find them.

96 **EXT. THE WOODS - LATER** 96

Max and Tommy, with backpacks, journey through the woods.

MAX
What name do you want?

TOMMY
For what?

MAX
Our adventure.

Tommy thinks for a moment.

TOMMY
Wolverine.

MAX
Like, X-Men?

TOMMY
No. Not like X-Men.

MAX
Okay, Wolverine...not like X-Men.

At once, Max stops, putting an arm in front of Tommy to stop him as well. Max looks up, smiles. It’s a giant rock, with a downed tree riding on top of it.

MAX (CONT’D)
Found you.

CUT TO:

97 **INT. CAPTOR’S BASEMENT - THE RECENT PAST** 97

“A White Sport Coat (And A Pink Carnation)” by Martin Robbins blares.

Max gels his hair, ensuring each hair is in place.

He does sit-ups in his underwear.

He then throws on an undershirt and socks, and begins to get dressed, as if a soldier readying for deployment.

He zips his pants up and fastens his belt snugly.

He laces his sneakers tightly.

He applies sunscreen to his entire body followed by bug spray.

98 **INT. CAPTOR’S HOME - FOYER - MOMENTS LATER** 98

Max stands in front of the front door. He takes breathes as if an astronaut in outer space. Darth Vader-like. He then readies himself, opens the door, as the SUNLIGHT BLINDS HIM. And all we see is WHITE.

99 **INT. CAPTOR'S VAN - THE RECENT PAST** 99

The van is slowly idling down a dirt road.

Max opens and closes the door lock. Open. Close. Open. Close. Max looks out the window. Squints his eyes. He hasn't seen daylight in years. He stares at the trees. Wondrously.

MAX
Why didn’t you just kill me?

The Captor looks at him. Confused.

CAPTOR
(incredulously)
Because I love you. (beat) Because you're my favorite thing.

The CAPTOR pulls the van to the side of the road and cuts the engine. The Captor nudges Max, who now notices a YOUNG BOY (11) walking home with a RED CAP and a NY GIANTS backpack on the dirt road. He's holding a watercolor drawing. It is ***BOBBY WATERS***.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
(re: the YOUNG BOY)
Found you.

He looks at Max. Max almost pauses for a moment, but doesn't. He unbuckles his seat belt.

MAX
Is it safe?

CAPTOR
The war is long over.

MAX
What about the dogs?

CAPTOR
Oh, they're long gone.

Max slowly gets out of the van and shuts the door.

CUT TO:

100 **INT. MORRISON'S CAR** 100

Morrison speeds as she follows Frank and Darlene's car which is also speeding through the mostly empty streets.

101 **EXT. WOODS - FORT - SECONDS LATER** 101

CLOSE ON: Max and Tommy's faces. Both are PUCKERED and TWISTED. Suddenly, Max spits out a small green candy - a WARHEAD SOUR.

Tommy smiles, throws his hands in the air, victorious. Max smiles. The smiles evaporate into a blank stare. Max and Tommy sit. Tommy looks bored.

CUT TO:

102 **EXT. DIRT ROAD - THE RECENT PAST - MOMENTS LATER** 102

Max catches up to BOBBY. Pretends to be walking as well. He approaches him, then backs off. Then reapproaches and is about to say something. But he backs off again, unsure of himself.

He then notices Bobby's NY GIANTS BACKPACK.

MAX
Hey, um, you like sports?

BOBBY
What?

MAX
You a...Giants fan?

BOBBY
Oh, no I'm really a Jets fan, but Jason Rothbaum said that anyone who says they're a Giants fan knows nothing about football and is just jumping on the bandwagon.

MAX
So why the Giants backpack?

BOBBY
Cause fuck Jason Rothbaum.

They laugh. Max becomes more comfortable, confident.

MAX
Hey, um, have...you seen my little brother on your walk by any chance?

BOBBY
Um, I don't think so.

MAX
About your height. Yankees hat?

BOBBY
No, didn't see him.

MAX
He usually takes this shortcut. I think it's this way.

Max indicates the woods.

BOBBY
Oh.

MAX
Would you mind helping me look for him? He's probably somewhere in there and I'm really worried.

BOBBY
I should really go home.

MAX
This is the way home. It's a shortcut. Please?

CUT TO:

103 **EXT. EDGE OF THE WOODS - MOMENTS LATER** 103

Darlene, Frank, and Morrison scour the woods, calling out Max and Tommy's names.

104 **EXT. WOODS - FORT - MOMENTS LATER** 104

Max and Tommy are just sitting there.

TOMMY
When can we go home?

Max looks at him. Confused. Smiles.

MAX
We are home.

TOMMY
No we're not.

MAX
We are, Tommy. This is where we're going to stay for a while. You're safe. Only here. And only with me. So I can watch out for you. And they'll never come for me. Or take me away.

A beat. Tommy grows uncomfortable.

MAX (CONT'D)
So let's go again.

TOMMY
I don't want to.

MAX
It’ll be fun. (beat) What’s your full name?

Silence.

MAX (CONT’D)
What’s your full name?

TOMMY
(apprehensively)
Wolverine.

MAX
That’s right. And where do you live? (beat) Where do you live?

TOMMY
In the fort. In the woods.

MAX
You’re good at this. And -

CUT TO:

105 **EXT. DIRT ROAD - THE RECENT PAST - MOMENTS LATER** 105

Max and Bobby are searching the woods.

BOBBY
I don't see him.

MAX
Me neither. My car is on the road, maybe you can help me...

Max is taken by a WATERCOLOR DRAWING in Bobby’s hands.

MAX (CONT’D)
What'd you make?

BOBBY
(growing uncomfortable)
It's a watercolor. I made it for my mom and dad.

MAX
Oh yeah? What's it of?

BOBBY
(more uncomfortable)
Our dog.
(MORE)

BOBBY (CONT'D)
He died last week, ran into the street right when a car came. We don’t know why he didn’t wait. But I think it’ll cheer them up.

MAX
Maybe he was waiting. Maybe that was the point.

Max stops, tears up. He stares at Bobby.

MAX (CONT’D)
Well that’s really beautiful. They're going to love it.

Bobby stares at Max.

BOBBY
(scared)
I should go home now.

Bobby makes to go back toward the road. Max is fixated.

MAX
You can't go that way.

BOBBY
(scared, impatient)
I should go home right now.

MAX
(desperate, fixated)
I promise, we'll get you home. Can you just show me again. Please. Show me the drawing.

Max inches closer to Bobby, who stands his ground, but begins to feel cornered. As Max takes another step, Bobby SCREAMS.

BOBBY
HELP!!!!!!!!!!

MAX rushes Bobby, grabs him, and COVERS his MOUTH with his hand, genuinely concerned for the boy.

MAX
No!

CAPTOR
(O.S.)
Boy?

The Captor is now nearly twenty feet away. Max grabs Bobby, still covering his mouth, as Bobby struggles. He begins running into the woods.

CUT TO:

106 **EXT. WOODS - SECONDS LATER** 106

Darlene, Frank, and Morrison frantically shout the boys' names.

107 **EXT. WOODS - FORT - SECONDS LATER** 107

Tommy sits, scared.

TOMMY
I don't want to be here.

MAX
But it's home. And - and there's a war outside. And the only food that's safe is the food that I can bring for you.

TOMMY
There's no war. And the food isn't bad. You're just making that up.

MORRISON
(O.S.)
Max!

DARLENE
(O.S.)
Tommy!

FRANK
(O.S.)
Boys!

Tommy looks to Max, Max to Tommy. Tommy is about to SHOUT when Max GRABS HIM and covers TOMMY'S MOUTH with his hand.

CUT TO:

108 **EXT. DIRT ROAD - THE RECENT PAST - SECONDS LATER** 108

Max runs with Bobby in his arms, as Bobby tries to scream, get out of Max's grip.

The Captor is closing on them, just paces behind, his breathing getting louder, more violent.

CUT TO:

109 **EXT. WOODS - SECONDS LATER** 109

Frank, Darlene, and Morrison suddenly hear a muffled scream –

TOMMY
(O.S.)
Mom!

The trio takes off toward the noise.

110 **EXT. WOODS - FORT - CONTINUOUS** 110

Max continues to wrestle Tommy, muffling his screams. Morrison, Darlene, and Frank's calls get louder and closer. They must be within ten yards now.

MAX
Listen to me. Bobby, listen to me –

CUT TO:

111 **EXT. DIRT ROAD - THE RECENT PAST - MOMENTS LATER** 111

Max frantically runs through trees and bushes. The Captor is now just paces behind when MAX TRIPS on a tree root, throwing Bobby and himself to the ground. The fall stuns Bobby for a moment.

Just as the Captor is about to discover them, Max grabs Bobby and takes refuge behind a downed tree. Max covers Bobby's mouth hard, just before the boy thinks to scream. Bobby grows wild. Trying to shout or yell or just grab a breath.

CAPTOR
(O.S., in a loud whisper)
Boy! BOY!

The Captor is nearly on top of them. One small move, the Captor will catch them. They're stuck.

Max is holding Bobby's mouth shut, HARDER now.

MAX
(whispering)
You have to stop. You have to listen to me. I am going to help you, okay?

CAPTOR
(O.S.)
Bring him here. Come on.

Bobby's struggle gets more intense. Peeps of yells start to bubble from the sides of his mouth, wherever Max's hands can't cover.

MAX
(whispering)
I will get you out of here, just stop, just stop. Do you hear me?

Bobby continues to struggle. The Captor is inches from them, but still can't see them. There's nowhere to run now.

CAPTOR
(O.S.)
Let's get him home. Family dinner.

Max's hand over Bobby's mouth gets tighter. He's trying to quell Bobby's screams, to save him, but he's suffocating the child. Bobby struggles, harder and harder. Max meets his efforts with a stronger grip.

Then - The SOUND OF A LIMP BODY hitting the dirt. The Captor pounces at the noise, stumbling upon Max holding Bobby. Tears streaming down Max's face. The boy is dead. The Captor looks on in shock. Max's hand shakes as it continues to cover Bobby's mouth.

CUT TO:

112 **EXT. THE WOODS - FORT - SECONDS LATER** 112

CLOSE ON MAX shaking as his hand covers Tommy's mouth.

Morrison, Darlene and Frank burst into the "fort."

Max is holding Tommy close, his hand covering Tommy's mouth, but not so tightly. Tommy looks around, uncomfortable, but unhurt. Max is crying.

MAX
I just wanted to save him.

Frank runs over and eases Tommy out of Max's grip. Tommy goes to Frank easily. Max is shaking, crying.

Morrison takes a step toward him, but Darlene stops her. Darlene then steps towards Max, leans down to him, and brings him in close to her, hugging him. Holding him, his head in her chest, in just the right spot, listening to her breathing, her heart beat.

MAX (CONT'D)
I didn't mean to...I couldn't.

Darlene holds Max tight.

DARLENE
Neither could I.

Their breaths soon find one another. Mimicking syncopation and rhythm. Until their breaths are one. And in this moment, they're the same.

113 **INT. MORRISON'S CAR - LATER** 113

Max sits shotgun, staring out the window at the TOWN of JERICHO, the town he passed through when he first returned home. People are eating ICE CREAM, arguing with METER MAIDS. A woman has her YOUNG SON on one of those BACKPACK LEASHES.

Max stares with equal parts WONDER and DISINTEREST.

Morrison pulls the car onto a quiet suburban street and parks. She wipes lipstick from the sides of her mouth.

MORRISON
Where is he?

A beat.

MAX
You can find him in the backyard. Near the rose bushes. About five feet down. Cardboard box for a new bed.

Morrison stares ahead. Misty.

MORRISON
How do you know?

MAX
He made me bury him. (beat) And then he was gone.

Max gets emotional.

MORRISON
We're going to leave it here, Max. We'll search the backyard, standard procedure, and we'll pin it on Carter. No one will know. Not your parents, not anyone. We'll keep it between us. Just you and me.

Morrison starts the engine, pulls away from the curb.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
We're almost home.

MAX
It's not what you think. It's not stories and three-pointers and pancakes. It's not him or her. It's not me.

MORRISON
No. But it's something.

Morrison pulls up in front of Max's home. Darlene, Frank, and Tommy just beat them home. They watch Morrison's car, waiting for Max. Waiting for him to come home.

CUT TO:

114 **INT. CAPTOR'S BASEMENT - THE PAST - LATER** 114

Max and The Captor wash their hands. They sit down on the bed. Max, dried tears on his face. Having "wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart" or something like that. He shakes.

The Captor looks at Max. Max at him. Guilty, both. Accomplices. God and Man. Creator and Creation.

CAPTOR
He was just a kid. He was just a kid. You were just a kid.

Max stares at him. The Captor now cries. The Captor tries to speak again, but can't. Max lies down in bed, head on his pillow, exhausted.

After a moment, the Captor wipes his tears, looks at Max, stroking the young man's back as Max drifts off to sleep.

CAPTOR (CONT'D)
You and I are sitting on a cot in a basement in a house in a town. And I tell you a story...

115 **EXT. THE WATERS' HOME - LATER THAT DAY** 115

Officer Paulson knocks on the door. It's covered with a BIG YELLOW RIBBON. BOBBY WATERS' MOTHER (40) looks at Paulson. She then collapses into his arms, as he holds her close.

CAPTOR
(V.O.)
...In this story, people will come for you. They'll tell you things. And put you back with them. It'll feel close to the things you've known before. What you've seen or felt or heard. But it will be off by *this* much. Their bodies will be slightly warmer. The colors slightly darker. The voices will have an echo or a missed vibration. If you just listen. If you just hear...

116 **INT. MORRISON'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT - LATER** 116

Morrison and her mother eat soup in silence. Morrison begins to break down. She cries and cries, as her mother looks on. Her mother gets closer, holds her daughter tight.

MORRISON
They're not mine.

She tries to catch her breath.

MORRISON (CONT'D)
And it's such a relief.

She collapses in her mother's arms. Decades of heartache and delusions, failure and hopelessness. Gone. All gone. She's free.

CAPTOR
(V.O.)
...Because it's just us here. And the rest, all the rest - is just me telling you a story. It's just my voice. And it's just us. In that room. You and me. Our family...

117 **INT. WHEELER HOME - KITCHEN - EVENING** 117

Frank, Tommy and Max sit at the table, awaiting dinner.

The VOICE-OVER CUTS OUT, as if Max has turned it off.

He smiles at the scene. Giving it another chance. Finally. The home he's been waiting for. Could this be it?

Darlene then begins to bring over the plates for the boys. We soon see it's all CANNED FOOD on them - MEATS, VEGETABLES, PEACHES.

DARLENE
It’s all we had left.

The family begins to dig in. Max stares at the plate in front of him. He doesn’t take a bite. He can’t. His smile slowly dissipates. The perfection of what never was and what never will be shattered by the stuff of reality. He listens to them eating. Chewing. Devouring.

Then he hears something. As if something’s a little bit off. The sounds of his family eating. An echo or missed vibration?

118 **INT. CAPTOR’S BASEMENT - THE RECENT PAST** 118

Max wakes in his cot. He slowly turns over to see the Captor is gone. The basement now pulsates with an eerie silence. Max slowly gets up and creeps around his room. Trying to listen.

But it’s all silence. Quiet. Stillness. The stillness grows. Louder and louder. Until we hear it. Until it’s all we hear. Until -

Max notices something about the DOOR to the basement. He walks over, apprehensively. As he reaches it, he notices that it’s slightly ajar. Just a pinch.

He puts his hand on the door knob. Breathes in deeply. About to push it open. Freedom. Salvation. Escape.

MAX
(V.O.)
No. You’re not there. And neither are they. It’s just me. And I’m finally home.

He grabs the doorknob tight, clenching his fist around the metal, but instead of pushing it open he suddenly PULLS THE DOOR CLOSED. He stares at it. And smiles. Then twists the top lock, locking himself inside.

Satisfied he heads over to an old record player on a fold-up table. He takes a vinyl from its case and puts it on the deck. He drops the needle, but hears nothing.

He then turns the VOLUME DIAL clockwise.

Finally, “The Green, Green Grass of Home” vibrates, then hums, then plays, then pulsates. Then blasts.

And Max smiles. Because he can finally hear it. All of it. And it’s the sound of Home.

146 THE END 146