

BRAIN

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FADE IN:

EXT. NEW ENGLAND SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT (MID 1970'S)

A northern winter gnaws at a row of modest HOUSES set amid other unassuming HOUSES. All different yet the same in the way that they are all occupied by families experiencing, without luxury, the common comfort of shelter and the revered premium of privacy.

The peace and stillness give way as we near a particular HOME.

A tolling derangement of SOUNDS caused by the pawing of PIANO KEYS bombinate nearby.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

By the dim light of night, restless, absorbed, ZACH(10), a genuinely curious boy with bright, hopeful eyes that seem to bear a constant expression of wonder even as he stares into a universe of anxiety. His BED-SHEETS have become unmade in a wrinkled swirl underneath his writhing PAJAMA covered body.

Engrossed in what seems to be a nightmare, he focuses on the phantasmagoric SOUNDS coming from the hallway just outside his bedroom door.

The droning PIANO stops.

His daunted imagination contemplates the nearing SOUNDS of yelling and inaudible moans imbricated with horrible cries.

A MALE VOICE groans, then exhales a long gasp of agony. Quick steps and the weight of a body ricocheting off of a wall resounds through ZACH'S bedroom.

Hallway LIGHT forces a glow under and around ZACH'S bedroom DOOR. We concentrate on ZACH'S frightened face as he perceives what he hears.

Desperate VOICES call out to each other as they suffer something horrible.

WALTER (O.C.)

Stop it! Evelyn! I can't take this!
We need help!

EVELYN (O.C.)

I can't! I can't! No more! Just
leave him! He doesn't know!

Frightened, ZACH weakly calls out to his Mother.

ZACH
Mom... Mom.

Without further hesitation, ZACH musters the nerve to get out of bed.

The loud crashing SOUND of a struggle emanates from behind the door. It sends him wincing back in the direction of his bed.

EVELYN (O.C.)
Walter! Your blood pressure.

The desperate SOUND of his Mother's VOICE draws him back toward the door.

ZACH opens the door only to find his frantic teary Mother in absolute distress, confronting something unseen.

She is holding a BLOOD-STAINED TOWEL and has BLOOD smeared on her hands and arms.

PEPTOAST, the family's small Terrier DOG fearfully scurries into Zach's room and jumps onto the bed.

EVELYN
(distraught)
Stop! Please God...

She turns her head and looks directly at Zach.

In the same breath, Evelyn changes her tone to one of false calm.

EVELYN
(composedly to Zach)
It's just a nose bleed. Shut your door and go to sleep Honey.

She suddenly ducks a FLYING OBJECT that ricochets off of the wall and lands at her feet. The object is a WHITE SNEAKER with a BLOODY HANDPRINT on it.

Again, ZACH sees his Mother reel back in fear before he slams the door shut.

CUT TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

EXT. BALLARD RESIDENCE - DAWN

[Principal Title Sequence]

Tightly bundled in winter clothing, ZACH softly shuts the front door behind him. His short careful breaths cut into the frozen air billowing small clouds just beyond his lips.

He adjusts his cable-knit POM-POM HAT down over his ears as he leans his forehead against the door, locking the dead bolt with the KEY that's attached to the short BALL BEARING CHAIN around his neck.

ZACH walks along the sidewalk and momentarily stops by the empty lot beside his house as he notices a huge, streetlight-lit, rudely built, SNOWMAN. The deep black eyes of the armless behemoth seem to watch Zach as he passes by.

Aside from an occasional pair of passing headlights, he walks on as the only sign of life on the street. ZACH continues walking along a GUARDRAIL on a stretch of road without a sidewalk. Oncoming cars pass him closely, illuminating him momentarily, before the slush from their tires reach his feet.

He arrives at a corner where LINDY MORANVILLE, (11), an unkempt but undercover-cute GIRL stands holding BOOKS. Against the ashen aura of winter, she appears to be dressed somewhat like a rodeo clown, off color in fruity plaid mismatched with bright stripes and a chartreuse goose-down vest. Amidst this flagrant lack of fashion sense, her SWEATER still manages to stand out. It is a remarkable, hand-knit, menagerie of uncomplimentary colors that appear as if they were chosen in the dark.

LINDY
Wanna know what?

Zach persists in his pace, passing her without acknowledging her. He walks on pretending to entertain himself by studying his steamy breath in the cold air.

She follows him with her eyes as he walks out of view.

Zach stops and sits on a low STONE WALL along the side of the road. Commuting CARS intermittently pass in front of ZACH, momentarily obstructing our view of him. As a TRUCK passes, it unveils two CHILDREN holding BOOKS. They stand waiting not far from Zach by the wall. Dawn has become morning light. Another CAR passes revealing another KID sitting on the wall checking the contents of his brown-bagged LUNCH.

Another passing truck leaves four more kids in view. A SCHOOL BUS stops in front of the wall, obstructing all view of the KIDS.

[End Principal Title Sequence]

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL BUS - CONTINUOUS

From the back of the SCHOOL BUS we see CHILDREN coming up the steps, filing down the aisle, and taking seats in the middle of the already loud BUS. Zach makes the unlikely choice to sit at the back of the BUS where the older, BIGGER KIDS domineer.

The BUS DRIVER(40), an easily provoked, bushy-eyebrowed, simpleton of a man, wearing a WOOLEN STOCKING HAT, keeps a watchful eye through the large REAR VIEW MIRROR. But he doesn't see REGGIE(13), Afro-American, a chameleon of a prankster who may have stayed back a few times, stretching his leg across the aisle prohibiting Zach to pass.

The BUS begins to drive on while Zach is still standing.

REGGIE

You sit past here and your ass is grass.

Still hoping for a seat near the very back, Zach's passage is constrained by Reggie's LEG. The Bus Driver continually checks the REAR VIEW and is getting annoyed as to why someone is still standing.

BUS DRIVER

Sid-dow-n-n-n!

Zach sits in the only nearby empty seat directly in front of Reggie.

Reggie checks to see if the Bus Driver is watching. Reggie grabs the POM-POM on the top of Zach's head and yanks his HAT off exposing his static effected hair. He throws Zach's HAT toward the front of the BUS.

REGGIE

(odious)

Go get it and stay up there.

Zach remains seated, barely breathing.

REGGIE

You don't wanna move?

Reggie inhales deeply, snorting back some thick snot into his throat. He stands up and SPITS a huge clam onto the ceiling of the BUS right above Zach's head.

Zach touches the back of his head expecting to feel SPIT in his hair. He looks up to see the dangling SPIT threatening to fall on him.

REGGIE
(menacing)
Move.

The BUS drives over bumps in the road which jiggle the dangling SPIT.

REGGIE
Sit up front where you belong.

Zach avoids eye contact and is immobile.

The wad of SPIT falls on the arm of Zach's COAT. He looks at it for a moment, then is halted as he motions to wipe it off on the SEAT.

REGGIE
Leave it there! You wipe it off,
I'll make you lick it.

The BUS DRIVER'S face appears in the MIRROR as the BUS slows to a stop.

Only one STUDENT boards the BUS; LINDY, the girl dressed in the foul, fruity-colored SWEATER.

All eyes are on Lindy as they wait for her to take her seat.

BOY
(pointing)
It's the Smellbinder!

The STUDENTS on the BUS erupt in laughter.

Lindy walks slowly down the isle shyly looking for a place to sit. It is evident that she's been through this ordeal before.

Flushed with embarrassment, she eyes an empty SEAT next to a GIRL, but the GIRL silently refuses to move her BOOKS that are conveniently stacked on the edge of the SEAT like a barricade.

Lindy turns to another SEAT, but a BOY is sitting on the isle side of the SEAT like a stone and will not let her sit.

Simultaneously, Zach overhears a demeaning conversation behind him.

OLDER BOY (O.C.)

She wears that same ugly sweater everyday.

REGGIE (O.C.)

(laughing)

That thing is like a woolen "Kick Me" sign.

Another BOY is sitting sideways with his legs across the SEAT. He shuffles his feet to shoo her away when she tries to sit.

Lindy sits on the edge of a SEAT with a YOUNGER BOY who is helplessly holding his breath while pinching his nose.

OLDER BOY

(laughing)

You have to sit with the Smellbinder!

Lindy, embarrassed and uncomfortable, chooses to make eye contact with Zach. She gives him a subtle wave hello. Reggie notices.

REGGIE

(to Zach)

Why don't you go sit with your girlfriend.

The BUS rolls on and is really getting loud with the SOUND of youth.

BUS DRIVER

Stay in your seats and be quiet!

We see the Bus Driver's EYES looking back through the REAR VIEW MIRROR. Whispering can be heard. The Bus Driver's EYES return to the road. The volume of voices raises back up as if someone cranked a huge knob to the right.

Shyly avoiding Reggie's harassment, Zach gazes through the window at the blur of HOUSES and CARS as the BUS speeds past them.

The blur of HOUSES come into better view as the BUS slows again.

The BUS stops in plain view of the deformed SNOWMAN from the empty LOT beside Zach's HOUSE.

A group of KIDS are teaming up to force a large leafless TREE BRANCH into its side to create the appearance of an ARM.

Several KIDS, large and small of various ages, dangerously crowd the path of the oncoming BUS. The lack of parental supervision allows them to shove and trample each other as they anticipate how to align themselves with the BUS DOOR as it comes to a halt, all risking life and limb for the ineffable urge to be the first on the bus.

Zach suddenly shrinks into his seat to hide himself from SOMEONE he sees outside waiting at the BUS STOP. The origin of his sudden nervousness is revealed as he fixates on a mysterious MASKED INDIVIDUAL, who's face is concealed by a SKI MASK worn askew.

The MASKED INDIVIDUAL is much larger and more physically mature than the other STUDENTS at the BUS STOP. Awkwardly, he stands hunched over in a food-stained winter COAT and rubber snow BOOTS.

This strange person doesn't seem to be affected at all by the fact that only one of the EYE-HOLES of his SKI MASK is aligned around his eye. The other EYE-HOLE is positioned on the side of his head defined by a thick lock of HAIR jutting from it. The would-be MOUTH-HOLE is twisted back in the direction of his mouth and hooked over his stubbly chin. He gauchely skulks onto the BUS and sits in the very first SEAT behind the BUS DRIVER.

Zach has become extremely uncomfortable with the MASKED INDIVIDUAL being on the BUS. Zach's surveillance is obstructed by other STUDENTS, who are bustling to find their SEATS on the crowded BUS.

GUNTER(13) bantam, with a menacing personality of absolute consequence, approaches Reggie and slaps him hard on the head. From under his cockily worn, winter HAT that has been lightly placed on his carefully feathered hair, Gunter states his demands.

GUNTER

(to Reggie)

I told you to save me a seat. Move!

Zach uses this distraction to quickly wipe the ARM of his JACKET on the seat smearing the SPIT on the seat back.

Reggie gives up his seat and unknowingly sits with his back against the SPIT beside Zach.

Zach, focusing on the mysterious MAN in the front seat, momentarily snaps out of his trance and moves over to give Reggie some room.

REGGIE
 (threatening)
 What are you looking at?

Zach faces forward ostensibly to avoid eye contact.

With his elbow, Reggie gives Zach a nudge in his side.

REGGIE
 (relaxed)
 I'm only playing with you.

Zach fixates once more on the mysterious MAN.

The MAN has become restless and intrusively touches the BUS DRIVER'S HAT.

Zach watches the BUS DRIVER become annoyed and attempt to swat the MAN'S hand away as if it were a fly.

Again, the MAN leans forward, persistently reaching for the HAT.

Viewed through the large REARVIEW MIRROR, the BUS DRIVER'S face reveals his terror.

Suddenly the MAN stands up!

From behind, the MAN pulls the BUS DRIVER'S HAT down, covering his eyes with the full weight of his power. Swaying from side to side, the MAN awkwardly wrestles The BUS DRIVER'S HAT downward leaving him blinded and hunched over the STEERING WHEEL.

None of the other CHILDREN aboard seem to notice the overcome BUS DRIVER struggling to maintain control of the BUS.

Two KIDS are sitting sideways behind the MAN playing a "Mary Mack" hand clapping game. One KID is doing his HOMEWORK, another is sleeping, the rest are consumed in loud conversation.

CHILDREN walking to school scurry away to avoid the oncoming BUS.

The BUS careens as it jumps the CURB and stops suddenly when it jars into the chain-link FENCE surrounding the SCHOOLYARD.

Zach's head strikes the WINDOW beside him with enough force to spider-crack the GLASS. The remainder of the STUDENTS appear largely unharmed.

BUS DRIVER
Remain in your seats! Is anyone
hurt?

REGGIE
She's gonna blow!

Kids overreact. They scurry to disembark from the BUS as the BUS DRIVER tries to perform a head-count. The CHILDREN flow from the BUS out onto the sidewalk.

The mysterious MAN begins to walk away. The BUS DRIVER is hesitant to leave the scene in an attempt to stop him.

Zach pays close attention to the MAN.

BUS DRIVER
(to the MAN)
HEY! Are you trying to kill
someone?!

The MAN continues to walk away.

BUS DRIVER
(to MAN)
STOP!
(addressing the kids)
Does anyone know his name?

Zach moves himself out of the BUS DRIVER'S line of sight.

Suddenly, a little GIRL is heard crying.

Fearing the worst, the BUS DRIVER springs into a panic as he searches under the BUS.

In a desperate attempt to locate her, he tries to pinpoint the origin of her cries.

The BUS DRIVER raises his head and follows her wailing to a large group of STUDENTS, standing in a circle. All of their eyes are pointed downward to something on the sidewalk.

He muscled his way through the barricade of onlookers only to find that they are standing around a cartoon-decorated, tin LUNCH-BOX that has been flattened by the BUS.

The BUS DRIVER is relieved to find that the young GIRL is unharmed and only mourning the loss of her lunch.

The KIDS begin to disperse and head into the schoolyard.

Exhausted and relieved, the BUS DRIVER heads back onto the bus leaving only Zach, Lindy and the crying GIRL at the scene.

Lindy watches Zach offer his BAGGED LUNCH to the GIRL. Offset by this kind gesture, the GIRL accepts it and stops crying.

No longer upset, the GIRL stands near Lindy as they both watch Zach walk alone into the schoolyard.

CUT TO:

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - CONTINUOUS

On her morning drive to work, EVELYN(38), attractive, naive, yet determined, sips a coffee from a MUG balanced on the dashboard of her salt-covered 70's WAGON.

From the oncoming direction, an approaching CAR flashes it's HEADLIGHTS and slows, cueing her to stop. She recognizes the CAR as her husband Walter's big white CORDOBA.

Both vehicles slow to a stop just past each other. Evelyn backs up her CAR in order to align their WINDOWS.

WALTER(42), worn, with kind eyes, caring, but tormented, manually rolls down his WINDOW wearing an orange D.P.W. (DEPARTMENT of PUBLIC WORKS) JACKET. He waits for Evelyn to lower her window.

There is a moment of silence between them.

EVELYN
How was work?

Walter searches for something new to say about the same old thing.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
Tired?

Walter nods in agreement.

WALTER
More like wired. What am I going home to?

EVELYN
Long night?

Ignoring small talk, Walter waits for his question to be answered.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
It's fine, I got most of it cleaned
up this morning.

WALTER
Most of it?

EVELYN
(off his look)
I made breakfast. I left a plate
for you in the oven.

Aware of the time, Evelyn inches her CAR forward mal-aligning
their view of each other.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
I'm late, I've got to go.
(warmly)
Get some sleep.

Evelyn drives away.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

A long line of STUDENTS lines one side of a school hallway.
Down some steps and closer to the DOUBLE DOORS, ZACH is
surrounded by others, yet waits alone. As the line inches
forward, it is not obvious where Zach's mind lies. His stare
veers off out a window, not up ahead toward the lunch room
where most the other STUDENTS focus their waiting attention.

REGGIE moves his way toward the front of the line, student by
student, canvassing himself a surplus of LUNCH MONEY in his
own personal "March of Dimes". Reggie excuses the GIRLS as he
advances along the perimeter of the line, he taps only the
MALE STUDENT'S POCKETS with the back side of his hand in an
effort to predetermine their assets as he hails his
repetitive mantra of solicitation.

REGGIE
Dime-nickel-quarter-penny? Dime-
nickel-quarter-penny?

Reggie solicits his next customer not far away from where
Zach is standing. He taps a STUDENT'S POCKET, hears the
miniscule clink of two pieces of CHANGE clanging together,
snakes his hand into the frightened BOY'S POCKET and fishes
out FIFTEEN CENTS.

Zach's attention becomes focused on the floor by the DOUBLE DOORS. He bends down and shimmyes the RUBBER DOOR WEDGES out from under each door. With each DOOR WEDGE now carefully concealed in his back pockets, Zach's expression changes to one of purpose.

Reggie approaches.

REGGIE
Dime-nickel-quarter-penny? Dime-
nickel-quarter-penny?

He gives both of Zach's front pockets a routine shakedown only to find a NICKEL. Reggie adds the NICKEL to the overflowing fist of warm change in his left hand.

REGGIE
I'm going to take this nickel.

Reggie holds up a DIME for Zach to see.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
But, I'm gonna give you this dime.

Unsure of how to feel, Zach appears seemingly unphased as the transaction is made.

Zach is compelled to leave the line after Reggie recommences his collection.

Zach makes an effort to remain inconspicuous as he walks through the cafeteria. Preoccupied, he pays close attention to the vicinity of the nearby SPECIAL NEEDS TABLE.

He seats himself at an empty table with a secure vantage point in the corner of the room just beyond a TABLE of OLDER BOYS. Zach sits motionless. He carefully surveys his surroundings and continues to pay particular attention to the SPECIAL NEEDS TABLE by keeping watch through the obstruction of the TABLE of OLDER BOYS in between.

A HUSKY BOY, wearing a backwards CAP, arrives at the table of older BOYS with a mountain of FOOD on his TRAY. As he sits, Zach listens to their conversation.

HUSKY BOY
I'm freakin' starving!

OLDER BOY #1
(excited)
Check out the meals on training
wheels table.

HUSKY BOY

Shut up man. I don't want to look
at those retards, it's freakin'
disgusting.

Licking his fingers, the HUSKY BOY hurriedly tends to his
mountain of FOOD while purposely trying not to catch a
glimpse of the group of IMPAIRED STUDENTS.

OLDER BOY #2

Ooh! Look at that one, his mouth is
almost crusted shut.

HUSKY BOY

(truly upset)

Aw, man! I can't eat now!

Taken instantly to the edge of his squeamishness, the HUSKY
BOY shoves the untouched TRAY of FOOD away from himself. He
angrily jerks back in his CHAIR with his arms crossed in
front of him.

OLDER BOY #1

(instigating)

Easy, don't you have a retarded
cousin?

HUSKY BOY

(aggravated)

Hell no! I ain't related to no
retard...Too bad I can't say the
same for you. I was with your
Mother last night and it took her
two and a half hours to watch 60
minutes that retarded bitch!

The rest of the table erupts in LAUGHTER.

OLDER BOY #1

(defeated)

Shut up.

Unaffected by their humor, Zach continues to mind the
perimeter of the cafeteria as if in anticipation.

CUT TO:

EXT. BALLARD RESIDENCE - AFTERNOON

Zach stands on the sidewalk in front of his house and looks
up to survey the WINDOWS of the second floor.

They are completely void of noticeable activity. He hesitates before building the fortitude to silently enter.

CUT TO:

INT. BALLARD RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Just beyond the doorway, near the bottom of the STAIRS, ZACH stands reluctant to venture into the house.

One step onto a squeaky STAIR-TREAD commences the SOUND of scurrying FEET and the SOUND of HEAVY BREATHING descending upon Zach from an unknown direction. Without time to escape, Zach fearfully braces himself. He is warmed over with rapid relief as he sees PEPTOAST, the loving DOG, fleetly approaching.

Peptoast prances playfully around Zach, pleading for a proper greeting.

In an effort not to give up his position, Zach refrains from petting or speaking Peptoast's name.

Zach takes to the stairs with the excited DOG on his heels.

Wasting no time in the forboding hallway, Zach retreats to his bedroom.

Aghast, Zach flinches at the sight of a GAS CAN that has been left on his bed by an intruder. It appears ominous against the simple back drop of a typical young boy's bedroom.

CUT TO:

INT. WALTER & EVELYN'S BEDROOM- CONTINUOUS

Zach hurriedly slinks down the hallway to his parents bedroom. He lightly knocks on the DOOR to no answer. He carefully opens the DOOR to reveal his FATHER asleep in BED.

With pulled SHADES and drawn CURTAINS, the measure of the gloomy room is consumed mostly by the large BED that allows only a narrow path around it. There is a BEDSIDE TABLE with an old, bell-style ALARM CLOCK next to a GLASS of water and a BOTTLE of SLEEPING PILLS.

ZACH
(in a hushed tone)
Dad.

No movement.

ZACH
(a little louder)
Dad.

WALTER does not budge but manages a response.

WALTER
(irritated)
What now.

ZACH
I'm scared.

A moment of silence.

WALTER
I'm scared of what I might do if
someone wakes me again.

Zach stands corrected. He turns to leave the room.

Walter, checking his tone...

WALTER
Hey Buddy, why don't you go
outside. It's probably a nice day.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY/ STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS

Zach quietly heads to the bottom of the stairs and carefully surveys the room. He suddenly notices STAINS of BLOODY FINGERPRINTS on the PIANO KEYS while simultaneously a shrieking SOUND causes him to jump. Zach spins around to find PEPTOAST gnawing on his SQUEAKY TOY. The SOUND of the PHONE rings in the background as Zach runs out the front DOOR.

CUT TO:

INT. WALTER'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The SOUND of a PHONE ringing can be heard in another room. Walter listens, but does not stir.

The PHONE pauses for a moment, then begins to ring several times again. Walter opens his eyes again. The ringing stops.

The PHONE starts ringing again.

WALTER
(irked)
Zach answer that!

CUT TO:

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Banished by his fears, ZACH lingers near his house in the cold. Nearly frozen stiff, Zach's attention is snared by an AMBULANCE pulling up at the house next door. Without sirens sounding, it creeps to a stop at the NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE with only its lights announcing its arrival. The PARAMEDICS remove a STRETCHER from the back of the vehicle.

A PATROL OFFICER stands by the AMBULANCE in an effort to keep traffic moving.

Zach watches the paramedic scene and notices that his MOTHER is slowly creeping by the AMBULANCE in her CAR, rubbernecking as if her life depended on it.

The OFFICER picks up his gesturing to hurry Evelyn along.

Zach runs to the GARAGE SIDE DOOR, jams his KEY into the LOCK and runs into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

ZACH readies himself once inside. The only light in the kitchen is dimly and hauntingly spilling from the open REFRIGERATOR.

Zach shadows the wall for security. Cautious, he looks around the kitchen. The REFRIGERATOR DOOR is open and illuminating a TRASH CAN, tipped on its side with its contents spilled about the kitchen floor. With no time to spare, Zach flips on the lights, darts across the room, piles the debris on the floor into the overflowing trash can and shuts the REFRIGERATOR DOOR. As he starts to move away from the REFRIGERATOR, he notices that there is a collection of CELLOPHANE WRAP that is spilling out of the fridge. Zach reopens the REFRIGERATOR, stuffs the CELLOPHANE in the TRASH and quickly closes the DOOR.

ZACH hurriedly makes his way to the kitchen table and scatters the contents of his BACK PACK in an attempt to look well settled in the space, all the while keeping a close watch on his surroundings.

As he is trying to put some fine touches on the fabricated scene, Evelyn comes through the door.

EVELYN
Hi honey.

She sets her PURSE on the kitchen counter and walks over to ZACH, bending over to give him a kiss.

EVELYN
(curious)
Oooh! Your nose is like a popsicle.

Evelyn looks over at the TRASH CAN which is overflowing and looks like an animal may have gotten into it.

EVELYN
Well, it's not because you took the
garbage out.
(accusing)
Were you outside?

ZACH
No.

Evelyn studies Zach for a moment while removing her COAT. She puts on an APRON then begins purposefully removing the elements required to prepare dinner. She pauses momentarily to turn to Zach.

EVELYN
(befuddled)
You're not done with your homework
yet? It's getting late.

ZACH
I am almost done.

EVELYN
Well do a good job, but hurry so I
can get the table ready for dinner.

EVELYN resumes making dinner. She opens the REFRIGERATOR.

EVELYN
(baffled)
I swore I...How does something that
big disappear?

EVELYN digs around in the REFRIGERATOR.

EVELYN
That's odd...I must have left it at
the store.

ZACH sits at the table pretending to finish his homework as EVELYN sidetracks herself with the duties of preparing dinner. She puts away the ingredients she was working with and improvises a new idea for dinner.

EVELYN

Finish your homework, your Father
will be down for dinner soon.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN/ LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

While dinner is cooking, Evelyn leaves the kitchen and heads to the living room. She sits down at her FENDER RHODES ELECTRIC PIANO with BOOKS stacked on and all around it. Using her APRON and her FINGERNAIL, she scrubs and scrapes the dried BLOODY FINGERPRINTS, polishing the PIANO KEYS clean. She moves a few of the BOOKS out of her way and puts on a pair of oversized HEADPHONES connected to the piano by a coiled cord.

Zach looks up from his homework. He can see his Mother at the PIANO in the other room taking a moment to enjoy herself. His eyes glance over noticing a MAN'S FEET that are just visible at the top of the STAIRS where they meet the second floor.

Suddenly Zach is riddled with fear.

Threatened, Zach cautiously gets up and makes his way toward his Mother. He stands behind her back to back and tries to find the comfort of being in close proximity to her without disturbing her. He carefully watches the threatening FEET as the TOES wiggle creepily.

Unaware of Zach standing right behind her, Evelyn continues to quietly sing as she plays the PIANO.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

WALTER walks into the room wearing his PAJAMAS, his hair matted and misguided as he has just woken up to join his family for dinner.

Walter drifts to his seat at the head of the table, stumbles into his chair and dishes himself a plate.

ZACH sits at the table as EVELYN carefully puts the finishing touches on their MEAL.

WALTER
I thought we were having...

EVELYN
I think I must have left it at the
store.

WALTER
That was an expensive roast.

EVELYN
I still have the receipt, I'll have
to pick it up tomorrow.

Walter, Evelyn and Zach continue to serve themselves and
begin eating.

EVELYN
Did the ambulance wake you earlier?

WALTER
No.

EVELYN
Something happened to our nosey
neighbor.

WALTER
And which nosey neighbor would that
be.

EVELYN
Very funny...She was taken away in
an ambulance.
(beat)
She lives alone you know.
(under her breath)
I hope nothing bad happened to her.

Zach is paying close attention to his parent's conversation.

Evelyn looks at the empty PLACE SETTING at the table.

WALTER
You know he's not coming.

EVELYN
Where is he?

A knock comes from the front door.

Peptoast is startled and immediately springs to life,
barking, and carrying on.

EVELYN
Was that the door?

WALTER
Must be.

Peptoast snarls defensively.

EVELYN
What should I do?

WALTER
Answer it.

EVELYN
What a time to show up. We're in
the middle of dinner!

CUT TO:

INT. FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

EVELYN carefully approaches the front door and opens it only
a few inches getting a partial view of a MAN'S FACE.

SOLICITOR
Good evening, Pardon me ma'am, I'm
not here to sell you anything. But,
for just a few moments of your
time, I would like to make your
life easier...

EVELYN
(interrupting)
I can't let you in.

SOLICITOR
Not an issue ma'am. My name is Don
and I'm canvassing the neighborhood
looking for one lucky family to
earn a free 30 day in-home trial of
the new Kirby classic III Vacuum
system...

EVELYN
We don't have much money.

SOLICITOR
Not going to cost you a thing,
ma'am.

(MORE)

SOLICITOR(cont'd)

I'm so sure that you and your family will love the new Kirby Home cleaning system so much, that you will tell all your friends and neighbors...

EVELYN
(interrupting)
Peptoast!

Meanwhile, Peptoast barks and is almost un-restrainable as Evelyn continues to sweep him away from the door with her foot.

SOLICITOR
That is some guard dog you have there.

Peptoast attempts to lunge at the solicitor.

EVELYN
He is not used to strangers.

SOLICITOR
Let me ask you this. How many live in your household?

Evelyn suddenly closes the door on the SOLICITOR, picks up Peptoast to console him and walks back to the dining room.

As Evelyn enters the dining room, Walter is close to nodding off right into his dinner.

EVELYN
Walter!

Walter opens his eyes and sits upright.

EVELYN
You need to take it easy with those sleeping pills.

Walter steadies himself.

WALTER
(drowsily)
What did he want?

Evelyn's demeanor becomes more serious.

EVELYN
He wanted to know how many live here.

WALTER
What did you tell him?

EVELYN
What do you think I told him.

In front of his barely touched plate, Zach scans back and forth between his parents for the answer that never comes.

EVELYN
(to Zach)
What's the matter Honey? Aren't you hungry?
(beat)
Finish up, so you can start getting ready for bed.

CUT TO:

INT. ZACH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Zach opens the DOOR to his room, checks both ways and slips inside. He then turns around to check if the hallway is clear. Zach closes his DOOR and quickly heads to his closet to retrieve his BACK PACK. He pulls the BAG out of the closet and dumps its contents. Six DOOR-WEDGES fall to the floor. Zach pounds the DOOR-WEDGES under the DOOR with his fist, then tests the DOOR by yanking on it hard to see if it will hold.

Zach turns off the light. There are SOUNDS of fumbling around in the dark as Zach settles into BED.

The DOORKNOB begins turning...

Zach bolts upright and stares at his DOOR-WEDGES, counting on them to hold.

ZACH
(meekly)
Dad?

The DOOR-WEDGES hold, but the DOOR intermittently flexes open toward the top, allowing a sliver of flashing hallway light to seep in.

The sliver of light leaks from behind what seems to be a DARK FIGURE standing on the other side of the DOOR.

The DOOR stops moving and everything goes silent...

Zach catches his breath in temporary relief and settles back into bed.

Suddenly, just outside the door, Zach hears a series of familiar squeaking noises.

ZACH
(whispering)
Peptoast?

The squeaking continues.

ZACH
(raised tone)
Peptoast, no.

The squeaking continues, then stops suddenly.

Zach lies still, momentarily surprised, listening to the silence he has demanded.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Darkness gives to dawn. ZACH, still in bed, lies eyes open, motionless, under the covers. He quickly pulls back his BLANKET, revealing that he is already dressed with shoes tied. He stands up, puts his winter COAT on, dons his BOOKBAG and puts his ear to the DOOR to listen. He removes the DOOR-WEDGES and puts his ear to the DOOR to check again.

Zach pokes his head out the DOOR to check the hallway. The coast is clear. He exits his bedroom and quietly closes his bedroom DOOR. Zach is immediately startled by a MURAL of MAGIC MARKER scribbling all over his DOOR. The word BRAIN is written on the DOOR in creepy, child-like, handwriting.

Zach quickly and quietly makes his way through the hallway and down the stairs.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

ZACH locks the front DOOR with the KEY around his neck.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STOP - MORNING

ZACH sits alone on the wall trying to quickly finish his HOMEWORK at the bus-stop.

REGGIE, makes his way over.

Before Reggie reaches Zach, GUNTER comes riding up on a BICYCLE with another boy, DOUGIE, pedaling not far behind. Gunter calls for Reggie hastily.

GUNTER
Reggie give me your homework. I
need to copy off you.

REGGIE
(alarmed)
Oh! I forgot.

GUNTER
What do you mean you forgot?

REGGIE
I didn't do it.

GUNTER
Now what am I supposed to do you
retard?

REGGIE
Sorry!

GUNTER
If they call my house, I'm done!
(beat)
Well we can't go to school now.

Gunter notices Zach who is well within earshot of their conversation.

GUNTER
And he's coming with us.

REGGIE
Why?

GUNTER
If we don't take him with us, he'll
tell.

The rest of the KIDS at the bus-stop start to stir and tighten up the line.

This prompts the BOYS to look down the road where they see the faint outline of a big yellow BUS making its way toward them.

GUNTER
We're out of here.

Gunter picks up his BIKE and chucks it deep into some BUSHES, as to stash it. He grabs Zach by the COAT and hauls him into the woods with Reggie following close behind. DOUGIE(12), a vulgar, mealy tube of flesh, who would typically pee in the pool, but insist on swimming in a T-shirt, pursues without invitation.

CUT TO:

EXT. BALLARD HOME - DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

RICHARD(40), a freeloading, pack-rat type of a neighbor, crosses the street and greets WALTER at the open entrance of the garage. Walter exits his recently parked car.

RICHARD
Walter. Got a sec?

With a lot on his mind, Walter finds the patience to be neighborly.

WALTER
Hi ya doin' Richard?

RICHARD
(neighborly)
Good. I wanted to show you something.

WALTER
Let's have a look.

Walter follows Richard to the rear of his recycled-looking (60's) model VAN, complete with traces of faded, but almost legible LETTERING reminiscent of the business that had once owned it.

RICHARD
My brother-in-law was getting rid of it.

Richard opens the back doors to his VAN to reveal an old rusty WOOD STOVE complete with spider-webs and leaves.

RICHARD
(proudly)
Free.

WALTER
(automatically)
I can get that rust off for you.

RICHARD
(agreeing)
And then I could paint her up all
new with some stove paint.

WALTER
(agreeing)
Do you know where exit eleven is
off of 195?

RICHARD
Sure.

WALTER
Bring it by around 1AM if it's not
too late for you.

RICHARD
No, that'd be great. Thank you.

WALTER
See ya then.

They shake hands.

CUT TO:

EXT. VACANT FACTORY BUILDING -DAY

The BOYS run behind an abandoned factory BUILDING. ZACH struggles to keep up. GUNTER makes a SNOWBALL and throws it high breaking a WINDOW. The other BOYS throw their SNOWBALLS, each breaks a WINDOW. Zach stands there watching.

REGGIE
Aren't you going to throw one?

Zach shakes his head no.

REGGIE
Okay.

GUNTER
Yes he is. If he don't he'll tell.
(to Zach)
Throw one.

ZACH
It's okay.

GUNTER
What's okay? I said throw one.

Zach just stands there.

Without taking his eyes off Zach, Gunter makes a SNOWBALL and fires it in Zach's direction hitting the green garbage DUMPSTER behind him, making a loud hollow BOOM noise.

Zach flinches. Gunter whips off his GLOVES, scoops up some SNOW, and immediately makes another SNOWBALL. He fires it again, intentionally just missing Zach. Boom! It hits the DUMPSTER. SNOW SHRAPNEL hits Zach warning him of how close it came to hitting him.

Gunter has another SNOWBALL ready to go. He fakes a throw at Zach.

Zach flinches.

Gunter underhand tosses the SNOWBALL to Zach. Not ready, Zach misses the catch and it falls to the ground.

GUNTER
If you don't break a window, I'll
break you.

REGGIE
Let him throw one then.

Zach makes a weakly packed SNOWBALL and throws it up to the windows. It comes apart in the air and falls short.

GUNTER
Wuss.

Reggie makes a SNOWBALL with a ROCK inside of it. He compacts it as tight as he can and hands it to Zach.

REGGIE
Throw it as hard as you can.

GUNTER
You better break one.

REGGIE
He's trying.

Zach stares at the WINDOWS high above.

REGGIE
(to Zach)
Move back a little.

Zach throws as hard as he can and still falls short.

Pow! Gunter hits Zach in the back with a SNOWBALL. Gunter and Dougie laugh. Zach is fighting back tears as he looks up at the windows. He is afraid to turn around and make eye contact with Gunter.

GUNTER
(aggressively)
He's faking it.

Reggie notices something...

REGGIE
(mesmerized)
Guys... look.

The BOYS all look to where Reggie is pointing.

Zach catches view of it, and suddenly recoils behind the group in fear.

DOUGIE
(fascinated)
Retard.

Up the hill, on the other side of the chain-link FENCE, is the strange SKI-MASKED MAN.

The rest of the BOYS quietly watch him walk along the road.

REGGIE
Let's huck snowballs at him.

GUNTER
(whispering)
Are you freakin' tapped?

DOUGIE
We gotta' mess with him.

Gunter gives a look of concern, but can't resist.

GUNTER
(whispering)
Hide. C'mon!

Gunter, unusually apprehensive, leads the BOYS to hide behind the DUMPSTER. Reggie and Dougie appear excited, but Zach looks terrified.

GUNTER
(whispering)
OK, here's the plan...

REGGIE
(sonorously)
HELP!

THE MAN stops when he hears the distressed cry, but is unsure where it's coming from.

GUNTER
(whispering)
Shut the hell up, he'll find us.

REGGIE
We're over here!

The BOYS laugh excluding Zach and Gunter. Gunter grabs Reggie by his ear, causing enough pain to halt his laughter.

GUNTER
(forced whisper)
Shut Up! Don't call that crazy
freak over here!

The MAN follows the SOUND of the voices as best as he can. He comes through the HOLE in the FENCE and clumsily runs down the hill through the knee-deep crunchy SNOW. He falls down and quickly gets up, head to toe covered in SNOW.

Reggie and Dougie chuckle. Gunter silently motions to keep them quiet by rearing a very serious fist. Shrinking with fear, Zach stares at the MAN.

The MAN gets closer, but still doesn't know who or to where he is being summoned. As he passes the DUMPSTER, the BOYS are forced into silence by his proximity. The MAN continues closer to the edge of the RIVER.

DOUGIE
(whispering)
Dumb-ass thinks we're in the river.

REGGIE
 (suppressing laughter)
 We're drowning!

Reggie and Dougie laugh quietly. Zach is paralyzed in fear, watching from behind.

DOUGIE
 Help us! Were drowning!

The MAN walks a few steps out onto the ICE, closer to the edge of the WATER.

GUNTER
 (whispering)
 If you talk too long he's going to find us.

DOUGIE
 (quietly)
 No look, he's going in!
 (out loud)
 Help us!

The MAN walks out further onto the ICE.

Gunter's enthusiasm for the prank begins to pick up when he sees that the cries for help are leading the MAN further away from them.

GUNTER
 (experimentally)
 Help us, we're drowning!

The MAN makes an unintelligible noise of distress.

DOUGIE
 Help! We can't swim.

One of the MAN'S LEGS breaks through the ICE. He lifts his wet LEG out of the HOLE and takes another step forward. His LEG breaks through the ICE again. As Gunter notices that the MAN is not able to locate where the VOICES are coming from, he joins the fray.

GUNTER
 (laughing hysterically)
 Help us!

The MAN's other leg breaks through as he struggles to get his trapped leg free. He pushes forward waist deep into the river where flowing WATER and ICE-FLOWS are drifting by.

DOUGIE
 (laughing hysterically)
 We're under here!

The MAN is up to his chest in the ice cold river. He picks up pieces of ICE to move them out of his way. He reaches and tries to move WATER in search of the helpless VOICES.

The CURRENT is starting to move him sideways. Pieces of flowing ICE are beginning to pile up against him.

GUNTER
 (seriously)
 He's gonna die and we're gonna get busted if we don't get out of here.

DOUGIE
 (giggling)
 He must be freezing his ass off.
 What an idiot.

GUNTER
 Let's get out of here.

Dougie and the BOYS start to follow Gunter up the hill. Zach lags behind undecided what to do.

Zach looks back at the MAN, who is somewhere between trying to rescue someone from the river and trying to rescue himself. Zach appears momentarily brave as he takes two automatic yet unsure steps toward helping the MAN.

GUNTER
 (to Zach)
 Let's go! We're outta here! We're gonna get caught!

Zach takes a long look back at the MAN, who is still blindly searching, but slowing down and beginning to fatigue. Zach looks up the hill at Gunter again and then back in the direction of the MAN. The MAN looks like he will certainly drown or freeze to death.

REGGIE
 (yelling)
 Z-A-C-H!

At the SOUND of Zach's name, the MAN turns his head and looks directly in the vicinity of the BOYS. Through the EYE-HOLES of his SKI MASK, the MAN's dark EYES lock onto Zach.

They stare at each other for a moment as the MAN drifts further down the river into deeper water.

GUNTER
Let's go!

Zach turns and runs up the hill following Gunter and the BOYS through the HOLE in the FENCE.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODED AREA - CONTINUOUS

The BOYS walk single file through the SNOW on a narrow secluded trail. GUNTER leads REGGIE, then DOUGIE, and ZACH follows.

GUNTER
Nobody says dick to anyone.

DOUGIE
He saw us.

REGGIE
No he didn't.

DOUGIE
Yes he did!

GUNTER
Doesn't matter, he's dead.

DOUGIE
Maybe, but he definitely saw us.

REGGIE
Cut it out, he did not!

Zach pipes up shyly.

ZACH
I want to go home.

GUNTER
You can't go home until 3:15 or your parents will know you skipped.

REGGIE
There's no way he saw us...

GUNTER
Will you shut up! He looked right at us!

DOUGIE
He looked right at Zach.

Zach appears heavy as a look of paranoia settles on him.

ZACH
I need to go home now.

Gunter turns and grabs Zach by his FACE, squeezing his cheeks together with his hand. Zach looks like a frightened blowfish.

GUNTER
(building ferocity)
Did you hear me? We wait until school lets out first. Say you want to go home again. Please. I dare you.

Zach is barely able to nod his head in Gunter's grip.

GUNTER
Thought so!

REGGIE
What time is it?

No one responds.

DOUGIE
It's going to get dark.

The BOYS stop walking when they reach a pile of large SNOW-CAPPED ROCKS that have been SPRAY PAINTED with GRAFFITI. Gunter sits on a ROCK.

GUNTER
We can wait here.

DOUGIE
Hey guys, watch this excellent spit!

Dougie puts forth a pathetic looking attempt to "hock a clam" which dribbles out his mouth and onto his chin.

Gunter and Reggie keel over laughing in his face.

REGGIE
Ahhh, you suck.

In the commotion, Zach takes off running. By the time the other boys notice, he is a hundred yards off.

GUNTER
 (despising)
 That little chump.

CUT TO:

EXT. BALLARD RESIDENCE - DAY

Zach is walking home from skipping school. As he approaches his home he sees that his MOTHER'S CAR is parked in front of the house. She is home early.

Zach halts. He knows he's in trouble now.

CUT TO:

INT. BALLARD HOME - DAY

ZACH tiptoes into the house and softly shuts the DOOR behind him. He can already hear his Mother ranting from the other room.

EVELYN (O.C.)
 (angry)
 ...where have you been!

Zach sheepishly removes his BOOKBAG and COAT. He hangs it on a HOOK.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
 So you just think you...
 (angry)
 Take that hat off!

Zach quickly removes his HAT. He walks towards the kitchen door with guilt, nervously fidgeting with the HAT in his hands.

EVELYN is there wearing an APRON, rushing around the kitchen cooking. She is aggressively manipulating her cooking utensils, slamming a bowl down and throwing a spoon on the counter.

Zach, reluctant to enter the kitchen, watches his Mother momentarily.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
 (angry to herself)
 I am not pleased.
 (beat)
 At all.

She notices the SOUP boiling over into the flame. Flustered, she takes the overflowing POT off of the stove and scoops some into a BOWL.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

(angry)

We'll see how your Father feels
about you not going to school
today!

Zach stands there silent with his head down looking at the floor in shame. He can't believe how much trouble he is in.

Evelyn looks up and suddenly takes notice of Zach.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

(sweetly)

Oh, Hi dear. Are you hungry?

(angry)

I said take that hat off!

Zach, with his HAT in his hands, flinches in confusion, then makes his way around the DOOR FRAME into the kitchen. In horror, he sees the MAN from the river sitting at the kitchen TABLE fidgeting with the SKI MASK that is pulled down concealing his face.

Zach is shocked into defensive terror.

As he yanks off his SKI MASK, the MAN captures sight of Zach. He stares coldly into Zach's eyes. There is something strange behind his deep vacant stare that debars any indication of meaningful eye contact. His messy dark hair and spotty whiskers intensify his pallid complexion. He begins to excitedly rock back and forth, building intensity, as he continues to fixate on Zach.

Zach nervously readies himself as if anticipating an attack.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

(to Zach)

You won't believe what your Brother
did today.

(beat)

Do you know how embarrassing it is
to get a call...

(beat)

To have to leave work early? This
is it you know. I'm letting your
FATHER deal with this when he wakes
up.

She turns to Zach with the POT in her hand.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
 (softer tone)
 Do you want some tomato soup Honey?
 (beat)
 Your BROTHER decided not to go to
 school today.

The Brother stands up! Zach's back presses hard against the wall behind him.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
 Brian! Sit down!

Brian sits hard in his seat staring at Zach.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
 ...And I get a call at work from
 our nosiest neighbor telling me
 that my son is soaking wet in his
 back yard freezing to death. And
 you think that he could help him
 until I got there?

Evelyn sets a HOT BOWL of SOUP in front of BRIAN.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
 No. He'd rather let him die in the
 cold like an animal.

Brian stands up again.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
 SIT!

She turns her back and walks to the stove to prepare a BOWL for Zach.

Brian flashes a fit of rage that culminates in him striking both his clenched fists down on the TABLE. One of his hands catches the edge of his BOWL of SOUP and sends the boiling contents splashing onto Zach, scalding his neck.

Zach wraps his hands around his own neck and begins to jump up and down. He gasps for air and is near going into shock.

Evelyn carefully turns around with Zach's BOWL. Seeing Brian's SOUP tipped over and spilled across the TABLE, she gives the look of a frustrated Mother, then notices Zach in trouble. She quickly sets down the BOWL to tend to him.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
 What happened? Honey what
 happened!?

Zach is becoming red in the face and hasn't had a breath.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
Are you OK Honey? Breathe! Are you
choking!?

Evelyn begins to beat Zach repeatedly on the back.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
Breathe! Breathe! Oh my God,
Breathe!

Zach musters a breath and begins to cry uncontrollably.

Evelyn kneels down and looks him in the face.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
Honey, what is it?!

She discovers the splattered SOUP on his SHIRT and tries to pry his hands away from his neck. With resistance she gets a look at the severe BURN on his neck.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
Oh my god!

She shoots a look over to the now empty seat from where Brian has disappeared.

In confusion, EVELYN reaches for a DISH TOWEL, then throws it on the floor after quickly changing her mind. She yanks Zach by the hand in the direction of the front door. She pulls Walter's D.P.W. Jacket off of the coat rack and frantically fights to get his hands through the sleeves.

CUT TO:

EXT. BALLARD HOME - CURBSIDE - CONTINUOUS

With her hands on his shoulders, Evelyn rushes Zach across the front yard directing him to the passenger door of her CAR. Her frantic tone lacks surety as she attempts to calm him with words of comfort.

EVELYN
(desperate)
You'll be fine.

Evelyn turns away from Zach suddenly as she becomes possessed with a sudden idea. She quickly removes her APRON, falls to her knees, and piles handfuls of SNOW onto the APRON.

She twists the APRON around the SNOW, then smacks it with her palm, swiftly fabricating a makeshift ICEPACK. Springing to her feet...

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Put this on your neck!

Immediately wanting to reject the ICEPACK, Zach continues to wail in pain. She places it on his neck, then by force quickly directs his hand to hold the ICEPACK in place.

A nearby POLICE OFFICER, late(30's), sound, with grey-templed handsomeness and sincere eyes, watches her from his POLICE CRUISER as she fumbles with her KEYS.

The POLICE CRUISER lunges forward stopping abruptly beside Evelyn. She is startled as he hurries to manually roll down his window to speak with her.

OFFICER

Is there an emergency?

Evelyn answers him with her eyes, letting him know the severity of the situation the way only a mother can. With nervous awareness, she quickly checks her surroundings in hope that this moment may somehow remain private as she opens the rear DOOR of the CRUISER. She follows Zach into the back seat.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE CAR - SAME

ZACH'S loud cries are blaring beyond some unintelligible CB RADIO exchanges.

A wire CAGE separates Zach and EVELYN from the POLICE OFFICER in the front seat.

Zach wails with each breath as the OFFICER smoothly whips the CAR around corners.

EVELYN

Shh. Shh. OK. Don't touch your neck.

Talking over his shoulder in a tone hoping to attract a child's attention, the OFFICER makes it known that he is gentle.

OFFICER

Do you want to see the lights?

EVELYN

Zach listen to the Officer. He's
trying to show you something.

Zach's crying subsides as he looks out the window in wonder.

Bright blue and red LIGHTS coruscate around the VEHICLE
illuminating the snowy TREES and CARS on the roadside.

CARS pull out of the way to let them pass.

Zach views different people's FACES as they turn to watch the
POLICE CAR go by.

Only the creaking of the Officer's leather JACKET can be
heard in the car.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - LATE EVENING

EVELYN paces around the waiting-room hallway just outside the
ER.

A GURNEY is wheeled by that captures Evelyn's attention. She
hides behind a DOOR and watches through the small FIRE-GLASS
WINDOW. EVELYN clearly sees that the patient on the GURNEY is
her neighbor MRS. GOSSARD, who was taken away by an ambulance
the night before.

EVELYN watches as one of the NURSES moves out of her line of
sight to hand off a CLIPBOARD.

EVELYN is shocked to see only a BANDAGED STUMP just below
MRS. GOSSARD'S knee.

EVELYN

(to herself)

Oh no.

DOCTOR (O.C.)

Mrs. Ballard?

Evelyn's attention is summoned by a DOCTOR emerging from the
room outside of where she was waiting.

DOCTOR

Mrs. Ballard, may I speak with you
for a moment.

CUT TO:

INT./ EXT. HOSPITAL - LATER

Hand in hand, EVELYN and ZACH are leaving the hospital lobby.

Evelyn stops and places a COIN in a PAY PHONE.

ZACH
Are you calling Dad?

EVELYN
I really don't want to wake him.
(beat)
Hello? I need a taxi at Children's
Hospital...Ah, Ballard. Thanks.

Evelyn and Zach walk toward the exit to wait for their Taxi. As they approach the AUTOMATIC DOORS, something catches Evelyn's eye. She makes an effort to see around PEOPLE and OBJECTS to get a clear view ahead. She pulls Zach a little closer to her.

The AUTOMATIC DOORS open to reveal the same POLICE OFFICER waiting next to his CAR. He smiles at Evelyn.

OFFICER
Looks like our hero is going to
make it.

Evelyn is gracious yet guarded.

EVELYN
Yes, the doctor says it will most
likely heal up with minimal
scarring.

OFFICER
That's good news to me.
(to Zach playfully)
How about you?

Zach exhausted, shyly hugs his Mother tight.

EVELYN
(to officer)
Thank you.

OFFICER
(genuinely)
You're welcome.
(beat)
May I give you a ride home?

EVELYN
(surprised)
Oh, that's OK. We have a taxi on
the way. Thank you though.

OFFICER
It would be my pleasure if I could.

As an invitation, the officer opens the passenger side door
of his CRUISER.

EVELYN
(realizing)
You didn't wait out here for us all
this time?

The Officer smiles.

Evelyn appears a little awkward and coy.

EVELYN
(continued)
Shouldn't you be stopping crime?

OFFICER
(genuinely)
Some might say it would be a crime
to see you wait in the cold for a
taxi.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE CAR - CONTINUOUS

ZACH sits between EVELYN and the OFFICER in the FRONT SEAT.
They are driving at a regular speed. It looks warm and it's
very quiet in the CAR.

Zach quietly examines the Officer's BILLY CLUB. He grips it
tightly by its handle.

The Officer looks over at Evelyn, she looks back at him but
coquettishly diverts her eyes to Zach.

EVELYN
(softly)
Zach that's not a toy, let's not
touch things.

Evelyn looks back up at the Officer, their eyes meet again.
The Officer smiles.

The CAR gently stops in front of the BALLARD HOUSE.

EVELYN

Thank you very much Officer.

The Officer hands a BUSINESS CARD to Zach.

Zach looks at the CARD. It reads: "PATROL OFFICER STEPHEN L. SILVA - 555-6465"

Officer Stephen searches Evelyn's face for a little eye contact.

OFFICER STEPHEN

If you ever need anything, my number is on the card.

EVELYN

Thank you very much for your help.

Officer Stephen motions to get out of the CAR to open Evelyn's DOOR.

EVELYN

Oh no, please. I can get out myself. We're fine.

Evelyn opens the DOOR and gets out of the CAR with Zach.

OFFICER STEPHEN

I eat lunch over at Orrick's Grill almost everyday at noon.

Evelyn smiles.

EVELYN

Thanks again.

Evelyn closes the door.

Officer Stephen watches Evelyn and Zach walk up the porch to their front DOOR. He waits until they get inside the DOOR.

Evelyn takes notice of this courtesy and with a simper, closes the door.

CUT TO:

INT. PARENTS BEDROOM - NIGHT

EVELYN quietly and softly gets into bed with WALTER, as to not disturb him. Walter does not stir. She looks at him for a moment. He is sleeping heavily.

Evelyn's attention is alerted to ZACH. Standing in the doorway, He quietly calls out her name.

ZACH
(meekly)
Mom.

Evelyn puts her finger to her lips to signal him to be quiet and then motions him into the room.

ZACH
(whispering)
Can I sleep with you?

Evelyn nods in approval. Zach carefully climbs over Evelyn to the middle of the bed between Walter and Evelyn. Once Zach is no longer obstructing Evelyn's view of the door, she notices PEPTOAST in the doorway who has mistaken this action for an open invitation for a slumber party.

Peptoast leaps onto the bed landing directly on Walter's shins, startling him awake.

Walter sits bolt upright and blinks hard until his gaze finds Peptoast already curled into a ball between his legs.

WALTER
(Startled)
GET OFF THERE!
(Beat)
I don't want the dog on the quilt
my Mother made! How many times do I
gotta say it?

Peptoast sullenly drops his head and jumps off the bed. Walter notices Zach lying between him and Evelyn.

WALTER
What's he doing here? Does anyone
care that I have to be to work at
midnight and have very little time
left to sleep?

EVELYN
He had a nightmare.

Walter looks at Zach and takes notice of the bandage.

WALTER
What happened to his neck?

EVELYN
It's fine. He splashed a little hot
soup on it.

WALTER
Who splashed soup on it?

Zach waits for his Mother to answer.

WALTER
(to Zach)
Who splashed soup on your neck?

Reluctant to answer, Zach looks to his Mother for help.

Surmising the truth, Walter throws the covers off of himself
and storms out of bed.

WALTER
GOD DAMNIT!

A frustrated Walter thrashes as he dresses himself.

Evelyn makes a forced attempt to change the subject.

EVELYN
Did you know that Mrs. Gossard next
door lost her leg?

Walter turns to Evelyn, giving her his full attention.

WALTER
(condescendingly)
And how'd that happen?

EVELYN
(unsettled)
I don't know.

Compromised, Zach tries to make sense of it all.

WALTER
Where's my soup? Is it too much for
someone to wake me for dinner?

Walter leaves in a huff.

CUT TO:

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Walter enters the garage in a huff as he manipulates his coat onto his agitated frame.

He gets into his CAR and tries to calm himself down.

Walter leans across the front seat, unlocks the GLOVE BOX and removes the OWNER'S MANUAL.

Walter opens the OWNER'S MANUAL and removes an ENVELOPE. Still agitated, he counts through a small stack of CASH.

WALTER
(under his breath)
20, 40, 60, 80, 1. 20, 40, 60, 80,
2...

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Zach lies beside his already sleeping Mother. Zach remains perfectly still and pretends to sleep, all the while, fearfully keeping close watch on what seems to be BRIAN'S anxious SILHOUETTE standing just a few feet away in the bedroom doorway.

The ominous dark FIGURE walks away.

CUT TO:

EXT. DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Walter is at the road's edge, ready to back into the street. Walter leans across the seats in order to safely back out. EVELYN'S CAR is directly to his right, parked on the street. There is just enough light for Walter to notice a NOTE tucked under one of EVELYN'S WINDSHIELD WIPERS.

Walter throws his CAR in park and jumps out to retrieve the NOTE.

He leaves his CAR DOOR ajar to use the overhead LIGHT to quickly read the NOTE.

"EVELYN, I WAS WONDERING HOW YOUR SON IS DOING. LET ME KNOW, MAYBE WE COULD HAVE COFFEE -STEPHEN"

Walter tries to make sense of the suspicious NOTE. He checks his surroundings.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT

A rusty WOOD STOVE stands on a sandy surface in an area curtained off by heavy TARPS.

A WORKER cloaked in an industrial, protective SUIT readies his WAND as the deafening SOUND of a generator kicks on.

With the hissing SOUND of high pressure SAND, one side of the WOOD STOVE is pumiced clean to the bright, bare metal with one stroke of the SAND BLASTER.

Through his HELMET, WALTER turns around and makes eye contact with RICHARD.

From 20 feet back, the excitement of seeing something so old become so new brings a smile to Richard's face.

With just a few more quick strokes, the entire WOOD STOVE looks as new as the day it was cast.

Walter powers down the MACHINE and pulls his HELMET back.

RICHARD

WOW! It looks great. I should leave it just like that and not even paint it.

WALTER

You could, but you'd be right back to rusted out in a week. Let me help you get it in the van.

Walter and Richard stumble along in the piles of soft SAND carrying the STOVE to the back of the VAN. They set it down. Richard opens the rear DOORS.

RICHARD

Sorry about this afternoon. Hope I didn't upset your wife.

Walter gives him a look like he just started a conversation in the middle.

RICHARD

Didn't your wife tell you?
(beat)

(MORE)

RICHARD(cont'd)

Your son.

(beat)

The older one. He was soaking wet in my backyard and I didn't know what to do, I didn't want to wake you, so I gave her a call at work. She seemed a bit put-off that I knew where she worked and was able to contact her.

(beat)

I wasn't quite sure how to help.

Walter gives a minimal nod pretending that this news is not new to him.

WALTER

One, two, three.

They both load the STOVE into the VAN, Walter gives it a final push to ensure that it is inside and closes the DOORS for Richard.

Walter turns around to give Richard a handshake and Richard has already fished a \$5 BILL from his pocket.

RICHARD

Thanks for your help.

Richard extends his hand with a tight grip on the \$5 BILL. Walter retracts his hand.

RICHARD

Oh please you've helped me out a lot here.

WALTER

I couldn't.

RICHARD

It's not much.

Walter stares at the MONEY in his hand. Richard begins to retract it.

WALTER

I couldn't... Well, only 'cause I could really use it.

An awkward moment ensues as Walter takes the MONEY.

Richard gets into the driver's seat of the VAN. He looks back at Walter.

RICHARD

Stop in and warm up by the stove
some time. Don't be such a
stranger.

(beat)

Bring wood!

Walter gives him a courtesy nod as he reflects on this new information.

Richard's VAN pulls away.

Walter waddles over to his car in his HAZARDOUS MATERIALS SUIT, opens the door, leans across the seats and unlocks the GLOVE COMPARTMENT. He opens the GLOVE COMPARTMENT and removes the OWNER'S MANUAL to reveal a stack of CASH with \$20 BILLS showing. He adds the \$5 to the stack and begins to count the MONEY.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

School has just let out. Doves of CHILDREN are making their way through the halls towards the doorway.

Zach is walking by himself. Reggie approaches Zach from behind without Zach knowing that he is there.

REGGIE

(to Zach's back)

I heard somebody's after you.

(beat)

You really shouldn't have run when
he told you to stay.

Zach acknowledges Reggie with a look, but continues walking.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

I don't know, maybe I can talk to
him...see if I can get him to lay
off.

(beat)

You may not have to worry though.
I heard that Avalino is going to
kill Gunter after school.

DOUGIE flanks along side of Reggie, following Zach.

DOUGIE
I heard that one time, Avalino
kicked the gym teacher's ass.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - CONTINUOUS

Steam dissipates into the sharp cold air emitting from the long line of CHILD laden BUSES waiting by the curb. A few STRAGGLERS intermittently get on board.

Along the inside of the chain-link fence surrounding the schoolyard, a CROWD of KIDS stands watching AVALINO and GUNTER confronting each other on the other side of the FENCE.

AVALINO is large for a sixth grader, very tall and a bit overweight for his knee-length, fur-trim, hooded PARKA. The acne on his cheeks hints that he is older and laboring an early puberty.

Next to him, GUNTER is a half pint who looks small even with his arms flared out. He is standing in big untied BOOTS, and his puffy down jacket is unzipped and draped over his shoulders like a cape.

AVALINO authoritatively stares down at GUNTER with his hands on his hips.

AVALINO
Get outa my face.

GUNTER defies the demand by dividing the inches between them while taking a moment to look down at himself as if to make sure he looks as tough as he feels.

Each fires their steamy breath into the others' face.

GUNTER
You talk shit.

AVALINO
Get outa my face.

GUNTER
You talk shit.

AVALINO
Why you think you're all big?

GUNTER
Why you gotta talk shit?

AVALINO

What are you gonna do about it?

AVALINO dismisses GUNTER by turning his back to him before walking away. He raises his hood and zippers his COAT all the way to the end of the hood, concealing his face in a foot deep, fur-lined tube.

AVALINO

(under his breath)

Don't make me slap you down.

GUNTER Scuffs behind AVALINO, taking nearly twice as many steps to keep up. He tosses his shoulders back letting his COAT fall to the ground, then gives AVALINO an explosive shove.

AVALINO falls over with his back against the section of the chain-link FENCE that is bus-damaged and leaning over at an angle.

GUNTER quickly grabs the FUR TRIM of the HOOD and holds it with one hand while repeatedly punching AVALINO in his concealed face. With each blow GUNTER'S arm rapidly disappears elbow deep into the tube looking like a piston hammering its way through a cylinder.

With his arms flailing by his sides, AVALINO'S big body bounces against the FENCE with the cadence of each blow. GUNTER pounds away long after AVALINO goes limp.

GUNTER

(short on breath)

Gentle giant!

GUNTER grabs the FUR EDGE of AVALINO'S HOOD with both hands, gripping it like a steering wheel. He pulls the EDGE of the HOOD to his own face, spits, then yells full volume:

GUNTER

You gonna talk shit?

GUNTER pulls hard and spits in his face again.

GUNTER

(yelling)

Huh? You gonna talk shit?

AVALINO

(muffled)

No.

GUNTER
 (yelling)
 What?

AVALINO
 (louder)
 No.

GUNTER
 (yelling)
 I thought so!

GUNTER drops AVALINO'S head back down and looks up to see ZACH, amongst a rapidly dissipating crowd, on the other side of the fence.

Pointing to Zach...

GUNTER
 Don't you run.

ZACH turns running full speed to the BUSES in the distance.

AVALINO is still on his back with his COAT hiked up and his bare belly exposed to the cold.

Gunter scales the FENCE and gives chase following Zach across the schoolyard and onto the BUS.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOLBUS - CONTINUOUS

ZACH runs midway down the isle and ducks into an empty seat. He crouches down on the floor between the seat and the seat-back in front of him as an attempt to hide or gain partial protection by wedging himself in a confined area.

GUNTER tears onto the BUS and down the isle looking for Zach in each seat.

Zach waits for his beating while holding his BACKPACK above his head for protection.

Gunter stops in front of Zach.

GUNTER
 Good hiding place.

Gunter rips Zach's BACKPACK from his hands leaving Zach's head unshielded for punishment.

GUNTER
You're gonna wish you hadn't run.

Gunter raises his foot to deliver a solid stomp to Zach's wincing face.

LINDY (O.C.)
Stop right now!

Gunter turns to see who dares challenge him.

LINDY stands on Zach's behalf with a determined look on her face.

LINDY
You leave him alone.

GUNTER
Shut up Smellbinder!

Cruel snickering resonates all around the bus.

LINDY
Zach, come sit with me.

Zach doesn't move at all.

GUNTER
Who'd wanna sit with you, you
roasted shoe!

Gunter enjoys his laughing audience.

Lindy stands momentarily trumped, feeling like a penny waiting for change.

Gunter yanks Zach to his feet and girds himself to deliver a blow.

LINDY
(serious)
If you hurt him, I swear I'll kiss
you.

Gunter gives her an expression of disdain.

LINDY
If I kiss you, that makes you my
boyfriend.

Laughter and SOUNDS of disgust detonate all around the bus.

VOICES (O.C.)
Ohhhhhh shiiit!

Gunter looks around the bus at the laughing witnesses.

Gunter suddenly recoils as if to dodge a kiss as Lindy steps in front of him only to sit guardian next to Zach.

Reggie hands the self-conscious and defeated Gunter his COAT as they move to seats at the back of the bus.

ZACH appears largely unphased by the entire event and continues staring straight ahead on the bus.

LINDY studies Zach carefully, looking for some sort of acknowledgement or any excuse to start a conversation.

ZACH continues to stare at nothing in particular.

The uncomfortable silence festers for a moment before LINDY finally grows tired of this and breaks the silence.

LINDY
Boy. Hey...Boy.

Zach waits a moment, then slowly turns in Lindy's direction.

LINDY
Do you want to get off at my stop
and I'll walk you home later?

Zach doesn't reply.

LINDY
You don't have to answer me in
front of these people.

A moment of silence falls between Zach and Lindy on the noisy bus.

Zach can't help but focus on Gunter talking in the background.

GUNTER
(despiteful)
I bet that sweater smells like a
wet dog's ass.

The BUS stops suddenly.

Zach watches Lindy get up and start walking off the bus.

As Lindy reaches the door, Zach jumps up and darts off of the bus.

Noticing Zach's break for it, Lindy stands on the sidewalk waiting for him. Zach walks right by her and continues down the sidewalk.

Zach looks up at the BUS as it pulls away. Gunter punches the WINDOW with his fist, causing a loud banging SOUND. Gunter points at Zach and mouths something in promise as the BUS rolls away.

LINDY

You can stay at my house if you want.

Zach pretends not to hear her as he makes his way up the street.

CUT TO:

INT. WALTER AND EVELYN'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

WALTER is in bed sleeping. The CURTAINS are drawn in the almost dark room.

Walter tries to ignore the SOUND of the repetitively ringing phone in another room. The RINGING stops...

The RINGING begins again.

Walter's eyes open as he listens to the phone. Agitated, Walter climbs out of bed and heads to the living room to answer it.

Walter approaches the PHONE and rushes to pick up the RECEIVER.

WALTER

Hello?

As Walter is listening, he hears the SOUNDS of someone hanging up on the other end.

WALTER

(perturbed)

Damn it.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD HOME - LATE AFTERNOON

ZACH stands alone outside of a neighbor's kitchen WINDOW. Undetected, he curiously watches a WOMAN(50), classy, "put together", standing in front of her kitchen SINK. With her back to her FAMILY, she turns on the FAUCET and guiltily pretends to be busy at the SINK. She removes a hidden FLASK from her BLOUSE and steals a DRINK.

An unsuspecting DAUGHTER(20), well dressed, pretty, approaches her from behind...

Sensing her proximity, the WOMAN quickly re-seals the FLASK and submerges it into the DISH WATER. With a SPONGE, she pretends to be washing it under the SUDSY water as if it were a dirty dish. The DAUGHTER embraces her Mother from behind and hugs her warmly. The WOMAN turns her head greeting her Daughter with a smile.

Zach shivers in the cold trying to understand what he has witnessed.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET/ BALLARD RESIDENCE - SIMULTANEOUS

While REGGIE watches from his BIKE, GUNTER is riding a wheelie from one TELEPHONE POLE to another. He falls backward off of the BIKE and gets hurt. He hops on one foot in pain.

GUNTER
Piece of shit!

Gunter picks up his BIKE, and attempts to hurl it over a neighbor's FENCE. It gets caught on the PEDAL and hangs upside down on the FENCE.

Reggie laughs to himself.

GUNTER
(in pain)
What's so funny, shithead?

REGGIE
Nothing. You threw your...

GUNTER
(still hopping)
How would you like it.

REGGIE

I wasn't...

Gunter limps quickly in Reggie's direction.

Still lighthearted, Reggie starts to ride away from him.

REGGIE

Lay off!

GUNTER

Come here. If you take off I'll...

Reggie slowly rides further away, keeping his distance.

Gunter snaps.

GUNTER

(yelling)

...If you run I'll jack you up
worse than if you stay.

Despite Gunter's injury he sprints after Reggie chasing him and punching him hard multiple times in the back as Reggie attempts to accelerate away on his BIKE. Reggie begins to put a little distance between himself and Gunter.

REGGIE

(screaming)

LAY OFF YOU PSYCHO!

CUT TO:

EXT. BALLARD RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Partially hidden from view, ZACH stands beneath a PINE TREE below Brian's bedroom WINDOW. He looks upward through the branches for a sign hinting that Brian might be home. Zach turns when he hears the SOUNDS of a commotion approaching from down the street.

He sees Reggie rushing down the road toward him on his BICYCLE with terror on his face. Gunter appears moments later giving chase on foot.

Without time to think, Zach runs up the porch to the FRONT DOOR of his house.

Reggie spots Zach and immediately alters his route and starts a line that will lead him directly to Zach's doorstep.

Zach sandwiches himself between the SCREEN DOOR and the FRONT DOOR in hopes to create the illusion that he has gone inside.

As Reggie and Gunter get closer, Zach is forced to re-evaluate.

Zach takes a breath and jams his KEY into the FRONT DOOR. He slips inside, locks the DOOR behind him, and throws his back to the DOOR.

CUT TO:

INT. BALLARD HOME - CONTINUOUS

PEPTOAST is on him immediately, prancing about and SQUEAKING at him affectionately.

ZACH quietly scans his surroundings for any sign of Brian.

Zach's attention is diverted back to the front yard by a SCREAM from Reggie. Zach looks through the window on the front door.

REGGIE bails off his BICYCLE at the foot of Zach's porch and charges up the steps. He throws open the screen door which recoils and hits him in the back as he POUNDS on the front DOOR.

Peptoast lights up, barking out a vocal "Beware of Dog" sign.

REGGIE
ZACH! OPEN THE DOOR!

Zach ducks and puts his back to the DOOR. He grabs PEPTOAST in an attempt to muffle his alarming yap.

REGGIE
(desperate)
Please! OPEN UP!

Zach keeps an eye on the interior of the house, hoping that the NOISE will not attract Brian from where he may be.

Reggie, confused and exasperated, looks back to see GUNTER, angrier than ever fast approaching. He tries the DOOR, turning the KNOB every which way it will turn.

Realizing that Reggie is not safely in the house, Gunter storms up the porch.

REGGIE
ZACH!

Zach doesn't budge.

REGGIE
ZACH!...Please.

GUNTER
Where you gonna run to now you
little pussy?

Reggie tries to protect himself between the DOORS as Gunter walks up to him and starts beating him in the back of his HEAD through the SCREEN DOOR.

With all the ruckus, Zach contends with his anxiety knowing that Brian could appear at any moment. He stands and looks out the DOOR and sees Reggie's FACE bounce off of the GLASS with each blow.

REGGIE
(despondent)
CUT IT OUT!

Zach turns away again and scans the room. He pauses for a moment to collect himself.

Zach throws open the FRONT DOOR. Reggie falls into the house. Zach quickly slams the DOOR closed and throws the DEAD-BOLT in place.

Gunter fiercely flings the SCREEN DOOR aside and pounds on the DOOR. Zach looks at Gunter through the glass.

GUNTER
(yelling)
You think I forgot about you and
your snaggletooth bitch! You hear
me in there?

Gunter, pointing through the GLASS.

GUNTER
That's your ass.

Gunter hustles down the steps to Reggie's BICYCLE and stomps the hell out of the REAR WHEEL, wrapping it around the FRAME of the BICYCLE.

The escalating SOUNDS of a growling dog can be heard.

Peptoast, in full "intruder alert" mode, mercilessly harasses Reggie.

ZACH

Peptoast.

Too afraid to move, Reggie freezes just inside the doorway. Zach tries to calm Peptoast.

ZACH

Peptoast, it's OK.

Peptoast attacks Reggie, gnashing his teeth at his ankle, threatening to bite him. Growling, lunging, guarding, Peptoast transforms into a tiny possessed monster.

BRIAN unexpectedly appears from around the corner. Reggie and Brian exchange a discomforting look, but Zach is unaware that Brian is lurking.

Brian suddenly exits from view.

Reggie's attention becomes torn between the attacking DOG and the whereabouts of Brian.

With Zach's back turned, Brian reappears, peering through Reggie with heavy eyes.

Zach is oblivious of Brian's appearances due to the commotion that Peptoast is causing.

ZACH

Peptoast, no.

(to Reggie)

He's not used to people.

Peptoast can sense Reggie's magnifying fear and has become defensively vicious. He is inches from biting Reggie's leg.

Reggie is overwhelmed and tries to mind Brian while keeping an eye on Peptoast. Again, Brian disappears from view.

Zach perceives Reggie's divided attention and turns around fearing the worst. There is no sign of Brian.

Zach quickly opens the REFRIGERATOR and removes a BOLOGNA SLICE.

ZACH

Peptoast, look.

Zach can't seem to get Peptoast's attention with FOOD. He throws the BOLOGNA SLICE on the floor next to the DOG.

Peptoast sniffs in the direction of the BOLOGNA SLICE and quickly braces a new stance to ward off Reggie.

ZACH
(angry)
Noooooo!

BRIAN reappears, looming with EYES of torment.

ZACH
Peptoast, go lay down!

Zach reaches for Peptoast, and is surprised to see him snap viciously at his hand.

ZACH
(shouting)
No!

Brian comes barreling down the hallway towards them.

Zach reads Reggie's expression of overwhelming fear and shrinks to the floor by his feet.

Brian charges at them, and reaches for the DOG.

Peptoast is startled and lunges at Brian's HAND as it approaches.

Terrified as if now everyone is an enemy, Peptoast viciously snaps at Brian.

Brian grabs him and picks him up. Peptoast bites into Brian's wrist, writhing and chomping like a little shark. Brian slams him down on the floor like he's spiking a football.

Peptoast is quick to his feet, growling and staring at the three pairs of FEET surrounding him.

Brian stomps his foot on the floor initiating Peptoast to attack his foot.

Brian kicks Peptoast hard causing him to slide across the LINOLEUM floor and smack hard into a CABINET DOOR.

Peptoast rights himself next to Zach and growls at him.

Wide-eyed, Brian storms directly at Zach and stomps on Peptoast with his full weight.

Peptoast let's out a yelp and growls defensively.

In a flash, Brian stomps on Peptoast twice more, leaving him laying on his side with heavily labored breaths.

Zach bolts out the front door leaving Reggie alone in the house.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Petrified, ZACH stands on the sidewalk across the street, looking back at his HOUSE.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN/ FRONT PORCH - BALLARD HOUSE - SAME

WALTER appears in the Kitchen wearing only his UNDERWEAR. He looks tired and angry.

WALTER
(yelling)
What's all the racket?!

Walter's eyes quickly fall on REGGIE standing there alone.

WALTER
Who are you?!

REGGIE
Reginald Chumack.

WALTER
A What?
(beat)
What are you doing in my house?!

REGGIE
Zach...

WALTER
Where's Zach?!

Reggie points to the door. Walter immediately goes outside onto the porch.

WALTER
(spotting Zach)
GET IN HERE!

Suddenly, Reggie speeds by Walter down the porch. He picks up his BIKE and tries to ride off, but the REAR WHEEL is too warped to roll.

Without a word to Zach, he dismounts his BIKE and hurriedly pushes it down the street with the BACK TIRE skidding along the PAVEMENT.

WALTER
(to Zach)
Let's go, in the house, now!

Zach reluctantly ascends the steps, following his FATHER back in the house.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - BALLARD HOME - CONTINUOUS

Shaking off the outdoor chill, WALTER turns around to face Zach.

WALTER
You want to tell me what's going on here?

ZACH
Brian...

Walter cuts him off abruptly.

WALTER
(automatically)
I'll deal with Brian. Who was that?

ZACH
My friend, Reggie.

WALTER
You know better than that...

Walter notices Peptoast laying on the floor.

WALTER
(to Peptoast)
Who's a good boy?

He's curious as to why Peptoast is not responding...

WALTER
PEPTOAST!

Zach retrieves the slice of BOLOGNA from the floor and puts it in front of Peptoast's NOSE.

WALTER
What's wrong with Peppy?

Zach doesn't have an answer, he just waits for Peptoast to move.

Walter stands over Peptoast for a moment then squats down to touch him.

Walter goes from mild annoyance to a deep fearfulness of what the reality of the situation might be.

WALTER
What happened here?

ZACH
Peptoast...

WALTER
(losing control)
I want to know what happened here!

Zach freezes in fear.

There is rage in Walter's eyes, but he sees the confusion in Zach's delicate young face.

WALTER
(concealing anger)
Are you OK?
(beat)
Was there an accident?

Zach softly nods.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Who did this?

Zach looks into his Father's eyes and then down the hall. With the weight that comes with knowing already, Walter peers off.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD - BALLARD RESIDENCE - DUSK

WALTER stands sullen in front of a fresh pile of DIRT that is next to a HOLE that disturbs the otherwise pristine, white SNOW-COVERING of the backyard. His PANT LEGS are wet and stained from the knees down.

He is resting on the HANDLE of a SHOVEL.

CUT TO:

EXT. BALLARD RESIDENCE - FENCE - SIMULTANEOUS

ZACH watches his FATHER through a small KNOT-HOLE in the backyard FENCE.

PEPTOAST is carefully wrapped in GRANDMA'S QUILT by WALTER'S feet. TEARS stream down Walter's face while his shoulders convulse occasionally as he tries to fight through his emotions.

WALTER slumps to his knees and gently places BLANKET-COVERED PEPTOAST into the GRAVE.

Mournful, Zach turns and walks away from the FENCE.

CUT TO:

INT. BALLARD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

WALTER stands fire-eyed by the TELEPHONE, his face still wet with tears. He fumbles through a TELEPHONE BOOK with his cold dirty hands. He traces down the text with a finger stopping on the name of a "MENTAL HEALTH INSTITUTION."

Walter dials the PHONE with the same filthy finger.

He connects...

WALTER
(into phone)
Hello, my name is Walter Ballard.
I'm looking for a place to house my
son.

Walter's face expresses the anticipation of the given information as he fields a few questions.

WALTER
(responding)
He is 17.

Walter listens...

WALTER
No Medications.

Walter interrupts the voice on the other line to ask a question.

WALTER
(inquiring)
How much?

Walter's look indicates how expensive the facility is.

WALTER
Is that for the whole year?

He listens.

WALTER
Could I give you \$435 up front and
pay the rest later?

CUT TO:

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

ZACH stands alone on a neatly SNOW-SHOVELED WALKWAY in front of a neighbor's home. He is intrigued by a tiny CAGED BIRD in view beyond the WINDOW. The BIRD seems stressed as it fidgets and scurries from one side of its CAGE to the other.

Zach's increasing fascination with the BIRD draws him closer to the WINDOW. He closely examines the BIRD'S beauty, then is startled suddenly when he notices a CAT girded to pounce from below. Zach is entranced while observing the CAT'S focus on the BIRD.

Zach's attention is suddenly diverted by the SOUND of a nearing VEHICLE. He notices his Mother's CAR parking in front of the house.

Zach sprints toward his house.

CUT TO:

INT. BALLARD HOME -SAME

As EVELYN exits her CAR, WALTER watches from a WINDOW as ZACH bolts to the blind-side of the garage to avoid being seen by his MOTHER.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Bursting through the KITCHEN DOOR, leading from the garage, ZACH halts in surprise to find WALTER standing there curiously trying to make sense of his behavior.

The SOUND of the FRONT DOOR closing vibrates in the other room.

EVELYN
I'm home.

EVELYN enters the room and is surprised to find Walter and Zach engaged in an awkward silent moment in the middle of the kitchen. Walter's EYES are emblazoned and look as if he hasn't slept in days.

EVELYN
Hi...
(to Walter)
What are you doing up?

Walter speaks to her without breaking eye contact with Zach.

WALTER
We've had a really bad day here.

EVELYN
(alerted)
What's wrong?

WALTER
(vacant)
I had to bury Peptoast today.

EVELYN
(dismayed)
What?

Evelyn's sturdy posture buckles as she braces herself for this news.

WALTER
Brian killed him.

Evelyn does her best to collect herself.

EVELYN
Where is he?

WALTER
I buried him in the back yard.

EVELYN
I mean Brian.

Walter turns to Evelyn.

WALTER
(agitated)
I don't know. Where is he usually
this time of day? Wandering the
streets? Upstairs doing what he
does?

EVELYN
(to Zach)
Why is your coat on? Did you do
your homework yet?

WALTER
Did you hear me Evelyn? Our son
killed the dog today.

EVELYN
What happened?

WALTER
I just told you! Brian killed...

Frustrated, Walter stops himself.

EVELYN
(to Zach)
Did you see it happen?

Zach nods yes.

EVELYN
Tell me now.

ZACH
(diffidently)
Reggie was being chased and he was
going to get beat up and...he came
up on the porch and...he was
crying...and he wanted to come in
'cause he was getting punched...

WALTER
(interrupting)
Does it even make a difference?!...

EVELYN
Let him finish.

ZACH
Reggie got punched and he was
crying...

EVELYN
Who's Reggie?

ZACH
He's my...friend.

EVELYN
OK. Just tell me what happened.

ZACH
So I let him in and Peptoast tried
to bite him...

EVELYN
(upset)
You let someone in the house!?

ZACH
And Brian came down and...

EVELYN
What did I tell you about bringing
people in this house? Do you
realize what you've done?

WALTER
What are you getting on him for?
Do you even care about the dog?

EVELYN
(adamant)
Yes I care about the dog! This is a
perfect example of why we don't let
people in this house. Am I the only
one who remembers this? Is Brian
OK?

WALTER
Of course he's OK.

EVELYN
(to Zach)
Are you OK Honey?

Zach is unsure, but nods.

EVELYN
Do you think maybe you should go to
your room now?

Zach goes to leave and halts when Walter speaks.

WALTER
 (firmly)
 He can stay right here. It's not
 his fault.

Confused with how to handle the complexity of the aggrieving situation, Evelyn begins nervously clanging and slamming, FOOD and PANS as she removes them from CABINETS.

She appears lost and determined all at once while intermittently looking to Walter, hoping for comfort.

Agitated and unable to understand her odd behavior, Walter sits at the kitchen table and anxiously paws a NEWSPAPER.

Zach remains trapped in the purgatory of parental opposition.

EVELYN
 (to Walter)
 It's clear to me that YOU'RE not
 OK. You look like you should try to
 get some sleep. I have dinner to
 make.

WALTER
 Sleep? Yeah right.

Walter hides his frustration behind his NEWSPAPER.

Visibly flustered and still wearing her COAT, Evelyn prepares to boil water. Too preoccupied with cooking to look at him, she slides a JAR of MARINARA towards Zach.

Trying to make himself useful, Zach wraps an arm around the JAR like a headlock. He tries to unscrew the LID with all of his might, but the limits of his strength fail him.

EVELYN
 (preoccupied)
 Give it to your Father.

She turns and goes into the PANTRY.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN PANTRY - SAME

EVELYN tries hard to fight back her suffering.

EVELYN
(controlled)
I'm making bowtie pasta with
mushroom and onions. Does anyone
want garlic bread?

She takes a private moment for a breakdown.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

WALTER withholds his response. ZACH remains silent, unsure whether or not he should respond.

Humbled, Zach places the JAR on the table in front of the NEWSPAPER. Walter lowers one CORNER of the PAPER to see the JAR on the table in front of him.

Walter lays the PAPER flat, and struggles hard to remove the LID. He knocks the LID a few times against the EDGE of the TABLE and tries the LID again straining without success.

Zach watches his frustrated father place the unopened JAR on the table. Defeated, he raises his NEWSPAPER again, making excuses from behind it.

WALTER
My hands are slippery.

With both parents preoccupied, only Zach sees BRIAN suddenly enter the kitchen. Terrified, Zach back-peddles in fear at the sight of him as he intensely approaches.

Brian grabs the JAR off of the table and unscrews the LID with the ease of opening a cookie jar.

Brian, in a seamless flow, swiftly continues right out of the room like a ghost.

Walter lowers the CORNER of the PAPER shortly after the JAR'S POP SOUND and is surprised, assuming that Zach was able to get the JAR open.

Unaware of Brian's entry, Evelyn returns from the PANTRY and begins ruthlessly chopping MUSHROOMS.

EVELYN
(apathetically)
OK, no one wants garlic bread.

Walter suddenly abandons his NEWSPAPER, gives Evelyn a steely half of a glance and storms out of the kitchen.

Evelyn watches his abrupt departure. She tries to reach Walter with her voice as he stomps up the stairs.

Chopping...

EVELYN
(defensively)
Fine don't eat! Don't sleep! Have a
great night!

In her fervor, Evelyn drops a MUSHROOM on the floor. She quickly picks it up and automatically, tosses it into Peptoast's nearby FOOD BOWL.

Zach and Evelyn both stare in comfortless contemplation at the MUSHROOM in the empty DOG DISH. They find each other in an exchange of momentary mourning. Zach reads the tears welling in her eyes.

Evelyn, lost in emotion, re-examines the MEAL she was preparing. She softly sets the KNIFE into the SINK and rushes out of the kitchen after Walter.

Zach follows not far behind, nervously keeping an eye as to where Brian may be lurking.

CUT TO:

INT. ZACH'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

ZACH goes to his room, shuts his door, and listens to his parents argue.

Walter, gaining momentum...

WALTER (O.C.)
(angry)
I've made my decision. He's out of
here! IT'S TONIGHT!

INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

EVELYN senses that WALTER is on the edge. She is urgent to calm him.

EVELYN
(soothing)
What are you talking about? You
need to calm down.

WALTER
(unhinged)
I've made some calls, they're
holding a bed for him at the Saint
Mary's Home.

Evelyn is shocked to find that he has a plan and isn't just
overreacting.

EVELYN
(magnifying)
You made calls? You made a
decision? WE ARE A FAMILY!

WALTER
Why is it that when things go wrong
I'm always the last to know!

EVELYN
(confused)
What do you mean? I'm the one who
just came home to terrible news and
I'm not about to lose my head over
it.

WALTER
Why do I have to find out about our
problems from Richard across the
street? What else did Brian do?

EVELYN
(triggered)
Why can't people just mind their
own business!

WALTER
(convinced)
You're always hiding things from
me!
(beat)
It's tonight! He goes tonight!

EVELYN
(definitively)
No one in this family is going
anywhere.

CUT TO:

INT. ZACH'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

ZACH leans in closer to his bedroom DOOR, listening intently.

Zach suddenly hears a VOICE that sounds clearly like it is coming from somewhere in his room.

BRIAN (O.C.)
(eerily)
It's tonight.

Zach quickly scans his surroundings.

Walter and Evelyn's arguing continues...

WALTER (O.C.)
(reaching out)
Evelyn, Zach's gonna have friends.
We can't stop that...and we
shouldn't.

CUT TO:

INT. PARENTS BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

EVELYN follows WALTER in the room until he whips around to face her.

EVELYN
That is why we have rules in this
house. We cannot be responsible for
someone else's child in our house.

WALTER
Well, let's take a look at that
then!

(beat)
What if it wasn't the dog?

EVELYN
That's why we have the rule.

WALTER
What if it had been Zach?

Surprised, Evelyn is forced to consider the reality of Walter's concern.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Accidents happen, don't they?

CUT TO:

INT. ZACH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

ZACH goes to the closet. He is reluctant to open the door for fear that Brian could be in the closet. He hears Brian again somewhere behind him.

BRIAN (O.C.)
(eerily)
It's tonight.

Zach whips open the closet door and gives it a wide berth. Relieved to see that Brian is not there, he leaps to his knees to gather his collection of rubber DOOR-WEDGES.

As soon as his arms are loaded he notices something in front of him at the bottom of the closet. He recoils, and jumps to his feet, dropping all of the rubber DOOR-WEDGES, sending them bouncing all over the floor.

He takes another look at what he hopes he didn't see. On the closet floor amongst other SHOES, is a SEVERED LEG still in it's BOOT. Horrified, he slams the CLOSET DOOR shut and attempts to back away, but his SOCK gets caught in the "Through-floor" HEAT REGISTER.

He yanks his foot away from the HEAT REGISTER, but his SOCK comes off of his foot and sucks down disappearing into the HEAT REGISTER. Zach looks to see where the SOCK went.

He is terrified to see that the side of Brian's face is pressed up hard against the GRATE of the HEAT REGISTER and is bulging between the vents as if he intends to brake up through the floor with his face. His FACE and HANDS are written on with black MAGIC MARKER. One of his eyes fixates on Zach.

BRIAN
(eerily)
It's tonight.

Zach hides his own face in his hands for a moment as if to make it all go away.

BRIAN
(eerily)
It's...tonight.

Zach grabs the BOOKS from his DESK and drops them on the GRATE covering Brian's face. Zach jumps onto his bed. He trades stares between the BOOKS covering the HEAT REGISTER and the DOOR to his room. All is quiet for a moment...

BRIAN (O.C.)
(muffled)
It's tonight.

Zach hears his Mother crying in Brian's defense.

EVELYN (O.C.)
(blubbering)
He's your first son. He is your
first son!

Brian's FINGERS are creeping up from underneath removing the stack of BOOKS. Zach opens his WINDOW, climbs out, and closes it behind him.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORCH ROOF - CONTINUOUS

ZACH swings his body over the edge of the roof and hangs from the GUTTER. He looks down at the ground, it's just a foot or two more than a reasonable distance to fall.

He looks up at his hands gripping the GUTTER then through the window catches a glimpse of Brian's big body standing on the back of the COUCH. His head and hands are out of view, but he is still pawing at the ceiling.

Zach lets go...

He gets up quickly from his fall, running...

Zach unknowingly runs toward the nearby SNOWMAN. He is frightened by the appearance of its meandering TREE BRANCH ARMS convulsing in the wind like the onslaught of an angered beast.

Zach veers off into the darkness.

It has begun to snow hard.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

ZACH runs aimlessly along the dark road occasionally checking behind him. He passes by LINDY'S HOUSE then stops when he notices a yellow PEDESTRIAN SIGN on the side of the road. For a moment he studies the SILHOUETTED IMAGE of a DARK FIGURE walking alone.

CUT TO:

EXT. LINDY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

ZACH runs up to LINDY'S FRONT YARD. He stares at the HOUSE. There is only one ILLUMINATED WINDOW and no car in the driveway.

Zach approaches and peers into the ILLUMINATED WINDOW. LINDY is in her bedroom dressing a DOLL. Zach watches her care for the DOLL then taps on the WINDOW just as she seats it on the WINDOW SILL in front of Zach's face.

Without alarm, she moves the DOLL aside, then presses her forehead against the WINDOW. She cups her hands around her eyes cutting the glare. Their faces are just inches apart. They both wave to each other in wonder.

Lindy opens the WINDOW, but says nothing to Zach. He stands there in the cold.

ZACH
(whispering)
I'm running away. You wanna come?

Lindy quickly turns and softly closes her BEDROOM DOOR, then with a finger to her lips, vehemently signals for Zach to be silent. She waves to him, inviting him in.

ZACH
(hesitant to enter)
Do you have a dog?

Lindy shakes her head no.

LINDY
(whispering)
But my Mom needs to get one.

CUT TO:

INT. LINDY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

ZACH quietly climbs into the room.

While gently closing the WINDOW, Lindy signals again for Zach to be silent. Zach acknowledges with a concerned nod.

Zach looks around the room at the mess of CLOTHES and TOYS piled up around BOXES on the floor, then at a POSTER of a HORSE that is hung upside down on the wall.

LINDY
(whispering softly)
Where are you going?

Zach thinks about it, then shrugs.

LINDY
(whispering softly)
I'd go with you, but...

A shuffling noise snares Lindy's attention. She freezes as she stares at her BEDROOM DOOR.

LINDY'S MOTHER (O.C.)
Lindy?

The DOOR KNOB begins to turn.

LINDY'S MOTHER (O.C.)
I hear you. You should be sleeping.

Zach reacts quickly by opening the CLOSET. He attempts to hide himself in it, but it is completely filled with BOXES. He's trapped just outside of the closet with his back against the BOXES.

Lindy's MOTHER enters the room. She stands directly in front of Zach almost peering through him.

LINDY'S MOTHER
Are you OK?

Zach, shocked and frozen, nods positively.

Lindy unfreezes enough to answer.

LINDY
(choked up)
Uh huh.

Still peering through him, she leans in closer.

Zach, still frozen, stares in shock at the dark circles under her crazy eyes, and her wild bushy hair that defies gravity in the shape of Kentucky.

From the POCKET of her wrinkled HOUSE COAT, she holds out in front of him, a fan shaped wad of MONEY ranging from one to twenty dollar bills.

Zach, still frozen, breaks his stare to glance at the MONEY held under his chin.

LINDY'S MOTHER

While I remember, I need to give you some money.

LINDY

Tomorrow is Saturday, I don't have school.

LINDY'S MOTHER

Oh Right. Use it to get my things from the pharmacy.

Without taking a step, Lindy leans over closer to Zach to look at the money. Zach watches Lindy select a FIVE DOLLAR BILL, then sheepishly looks back at Lindy's Mother.

LINDY

(softly)
Thanks Mom. Good night.

LINDY'S MOTHER

(smiling)
Good night sweetie.

Her proximity gives Zach a dentist's view of her deflated bruised lips and thick yellow teeth.

LINDY'S MOTHER

(puckering)
My kisses?

Lindy positions her head in front of Zach's and kisses her Mother.

Lindy's Mother turns to exit. Her blindness causes her FEET to plow through the CLOTHING and TOYS piled on the floor as she shuffles around the BOXES to get out of the bedroom.

LINDY'S MOTHER

Get under the covers, it's drafty in here.

LINDY

OK Mom.

Lindy closes the door behind her mother, then desperately signals another gesture for Zach to be silent.

Zach eases his way to the window.

Lindy makes her way over.

LINDY

(whispering)

Why are you running away?

ZACH

(whispering)

My Brother is after me, he already killed my dog.

LINDY

(whispering)

Why?

Zach thinks hard.

Lindy digests the limited information, then tries to offer Zach comfort.

LINDY

(whispering)

Can't you just tell your parents?

ZACH

(whispering)

I have to go now.

LINDY

(whispering)

Where are you going?

Zach shrugs.

LINDY

(whispering)

Don't get caught.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

ZACH trudges through the snow along the side of the dark road. The area around him begins to illuminate as the HEADLIGHTS of an approaching CAR become visible.

He jumps over a GUARD RAIL and hides behind it, watching the CAR closely as it passes. He suddenly recognizes it as a POLICE CRUISER driven by the OFFICER that gave him a ride to the hospital.

Zach leaps back onto the road running in the TIRE TRACK behind the CRUISER. He flails his arms in the air trying to get the Officer's attention.

ZACH
(yelling)
Stop! Please stop! Stop!

Zach remains unnoticed as the CRUISER continues to crawl its way through the snow. Zach's frantic silhouette runs long after the CRUISER'S TAILLIGHTS disappear in the distance.

CUT TO:

EXT./ INT. FOUR DOOR SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

Lost in the night, Zach stands in the road shivering, covered in SNOW. He notices the rapidly falling snowflakes melting on the steamy HOOD of a recently parked CAR. This indication of warmth causes Zach to approach the vehicle. He places his hand on the HOOD, checking its warmth. Even though the CAR is soaking wet, Zach leans over and clings to the HOOD in order to absorb its heat.

Zach raises his head and peers through the WINDSHIELD. His curiosity leads him to check the car's DOORS. Finding the passenger side rear-door unlocked, he cautiously enters. Zach shuts the DOOR behind him and locks it.

Zach surveys the interior of the CAR in wonder. Although the CAR is not running, Zach leans forward and slides the LEVER on the DASHBOARD that would otherwise activate the heat. Next to him, he finds a half-eaten CAN of PEANUTS.

At this moment, a calm comes over Zach as he enjoys a hand-full of PEANUTS. He watches the SNOW accumulate on the WINDOWS.

CUT TO:

INT. WALTER & EVELYN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room is calm and quiet. In deep thought, EVELYN sits propped up in bed. WALTER lies with his back to her in silent protest. She gently rubs his back with one hand.

EVELYN
 (reflecting)
 I wonder if Zach heard us? I should
 have a talk with him. Will you
 check in on him?

WALTER
 It's late. Let him sleep.

In agreement, Evelyn reluctantly settles into bed.

EVELYN
 You're right. He must be tired.

Walter turns out the LIGHT.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT./ EXT. FOUR DOOR SEDAN - EARLY MORNING

ZACH is curled up sleeping in the BACKSEAT of the SNOW-COVERED CAR. His slumber is abruptly interrupted by a loud scraping SOUND.

He raises his head quickly, to see an ICE-SCRAPER take another strip of SNOW off the WINDSHIELD.

Not knowing what to do, Zach watches the car's OWNER, a tall, hardened MAN of his 40's, continuing to scrape the WINDSHIELD. Deep crevices around his eyes reveal his aversion to the inconvenience of snow. His mouth is fringed by the hyper-masculinity of his thick MOUSTACHE.

Suddenly, while leaning over the HOOD of the CAR, the MAN spots Zach in the BACKSEAT through the partially scraped GLASS. The expression on his face quickly transforms to anger.

MAN
 Caught you!

The MAN fishes for his KEYS in his POCKET and disappears from the clearing in the WINDSHIELD.

Behind the SNOW-COVERED WINDOWS, Zach panics, not knowing where the MAN has gone.

Zach notices the driver's side LOCK begin to raise up.

He reacts by pounding the LOCK STEM back down. Everything goes quiet...

Zach's eyes dart from DOOR LOCK to DOOR LOCK, waiting for another to pop up. The DOOR LOCK directly in front of Zach's face begins to raise. He holds it down as hard as he can. Suddenly the MAN scrapes an area of SNOW off the WINDOW, directly in front of Zach's face. Face to face through the WINDOW, the deranged MAN grits his TEETH at Zach.

MAN
(under his breath)
I'm gonna like this.

Zach recoils from the MAN'S view, just as the MAN'S face disappears again.

Zach's attention darts around the VEHICLE, from the DOOR LOCKS, to the WINDSHIELD, to the small clearing in the GLASS.

Zach nervously listens as to where the MAN might be next.

The ICE-SCRAPER clears another small area of SNOW on the REAR WINDSHIELD just behind Zach's head. Zach turns around to see just one of the MAN'S EYES looking in it.

Zach slides across the BACKSEAT to the other DOOR and listens, not knowing if the MAN is just outside the DOOR. Zach takes a chance and dives for the opposite side of the VEHICLE, pops the LOCK, throws open the DOOR and takes off running.

The MAN, just on the other side of the CAR, begins to run around the vehicle to catch up with Zach. Both struggle to gain speed in the shin deep SNOW.

Zach runs between SNOW laden, tightly planted, ARBORVITAE TREES.

Bursting through the other side, covered in SNOW, Zach has escaped.

Defeated, the MAN stops at the TREE LINE, hollering out ...

MAN
You little thief!

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY/ ZACH'S BEDROOM - MORNING

EVELYN stands at Zach's DOORWAY with a TRAY containing TWO lovingly-made BREAKFASTS: EGGS, BACON, TOAST, the works. She is dressed for the frigid outdoors. Evelyn calls to Zach through the door, assuming that he is still asleep.

EVELYN
Zach? Are you awake?

Carefully balancing the TRAY, she enters the room to find Zach's empty BED. Wondering as to where Zach may be in the house, she removes one of the BREAKFAST PLATES and places it onto Zach's BED.

Evelyn calls out loud...

EVELYN
Honey, I made you breakfast. I'm
going to leave it here on your bed.
Mommy's going to be late for work.
(beat)
Love you.

Evelyn picks up the TRAY with the other BREAKFAST still on it and exits Zach's bedroom and continues down the hallway.

EVELYN
(calling out)
Brian?

CUT TO:

INT. LINDY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

LINDY is sitting near her MOTHER by the front window. In the distance, ZACH walks up the driveway unnoticed. He is cautious as he approaches the house. Lindy and her Mother appear close and happy in each other's company. Their hands are busy, but out of view. It seems as if they might be playing a board game.

LINDY'S MOTHER
Help your Mother. What's it say?

LINDY
One twenty six...

LINDY'S MOTHER
(relaxed)
Alright. Go ahead.

LINDY
OK, I'll tell you when...

Zach softly walks onto the porch. Lindy takes notice of him and gives him a quick and enthusiastic wave. Zach returns the wave as he approaches the window and is surprised to see Lindy readying a SYRINGE.

LINDY
Ready.

Zach watches Lindy insert the NEEDLE into her Mother's bruised ABDOMEN. He is captivated.

LINDY (CONT'D)
All done.

LINDY'S MOTHER
Thank you.
(beat)
Sweetie, who was that in your room
last night?

Surprised, LINDY takes a moment to think about it, then looks at Zach waiting outside the window in the cold without his coat.

LINDY
My new friend from school.

LINDY'S MOTHER
A new friend?
(beat)
Will you be sure to tell me first
the next time you bring someone in
the house?

LINDY
Yes.
(enthused)
Do you want to meet him?

LINDY'S MOM
Is he a nice boy?

LINDY
Yes.
(beat)
He's waiting for me outside.

LINDY'S MOTHER
 A new friend outside?
 (beat)
 Does he know yet?

LINDY
 (pausing)
 Not yet.

LINDY'S MOTHER
 Well...he's welcome to use the
 front door this time.

Lindy jumps up and opens the DOOR.

LINDY
 Come in. My Mom wants to meet you.

Zach steps in the door timidly.

LINDY
 (excited)
 Mom, this is my friend Zach, and
 this is my Mom.

LINDY'S MOTHER
 A pleasure to meet you Zach.

Zach shyly reaches out for a handshake. Lindy's Mother instinctively raises her hand, but the two come short of touching. Lindy steps in and guides their hands together into a proper handshake.

ZACH
 (shyly)
 Nice to meet you.

LINDY'S MOTHER
 Zach, your hands are freezing you
 poor thing. Where are your gloves?

ZACH
 (hesitant)
 Home.

LINDY'S MOTHER
 Well you should remember them next
 time. What would your Mother say?

ZACH
 Wear your gloves.

LINDY'S MOTHER
 (smiling)
 Alright then!

Zach finds a smile.

LINDY'S MOTHER
 Lindy Sweetie, do you have the
 money with you to pick up my things
 at the pharmacy?

LINDY
 Yes.

LINDY'S MOTHER
 Dress warm.

Lindy goes to the COAT-RACK and grabs her COLORFUL SWEATER
 and VEST.

LINDY'S MOTHER
 Don't forget, Auntie Dettie said
 she would be here before TEN. Hurry
 Back.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROADSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Zach and Lindy walk along the road. Lindy is bundled up warm
 in her colorful SWEATER and VEST. Zach walks beside her bent
 over, feeling the cold without his coat.

ZACH
 Is your mom sick?

LINDY
 No. She just has diabetes. I help
 her with her insulin shots.

They continue to walk along the road.

LINDY
 Did you go home?

ZACH
 I'm not going back there.

LINDY
 Your lips are blue.
 (beat)
 (MORE)

LINDY(cont'd)

I think you should march home and
tell on your Brother.

Suddenly, Zach sees BRIAN headed toward them.

Walking along the sidewalk across the street, Brian appears
aimless. He is entertained by the repetitive SOUNDS caused by
the vibration of the empty GAS CAN he is dragging along the
CHAIN LINK FENCE.

Alarmed, Zach recruits Lindy by pulling her by her COLLAR to
a HIDING PLACE in the BUSHES behind a STONE WALL.

LINDY

What are you doing?!

Zach points to Brian.

ZACH

(whispering)

Don't say anything! Here comes my
brother!

LINDY

That's your brother!? He's that guy
from our bus.

ZACH

(whispering)

Don't move! Don't let him see us!

LINDY

Why? I'll say something to him
right now.

ZACH

(whispering)

No! Shhhh. He'll hear us.

Zach turns and looks Lindy in the eye. He is serious.

ZACH

(whispering)

I have something that I have been
waiting to tell you...

Lindy thinks about this for a second.

LINDY

(whispering)

Yeah, I like you too.

ZACH
 (serious whisper)
 My brother cut off my neighbor's
 leg.

LINDY
 (whispering)
 What? I don't believe you.
 (beat)
 I'm not afraid of him.

Brian comes to the corner of the FENCE and turns toward the
 ON-RAMP to the FREEWAY below.

LINDY
 (whisper)
 What's he doing?

ZACH
 (whisper)
 I don't know.

Lindy watches Brian very closely. Brian continues to drag his
 GAS CAN, following the curve of the FENCE down the road and
 onto the SHOULDER of the FREEWAY.

Zach leans in closer to Lindy for warmth and begins to
 closely inspect her COLORFUL SWEATER.

Zach leans in with his nose and sneaks a seemingly undetected
 sniff of Lindy's sweater.

LINDY
 (whispering)
 What are you doing?

ZACH
 (whispering)
 Why do they call you the
 Smellbinder? I don't smell
 anything.

LINDY
 (whispering)
 I don't know.

ZACH
 (whispering)
 Why do you always wear the same
 sweater?

LINDY
(whispering)
It's my favorite sweater. My mom
made it for me and I picked the
colors and she likes to knit.

ZACH
(whispering)
I won't pretend that I don't know
you on the bus anymore.

LINDY
You won't have to. I'm moving away
tomorrow.

Zach is surprised by this news.

LINDY
Promise me you'll come to my house
tomorrow to say goodbye.

Zach looks Lindy in the eye and nods.

ZACH
Where are you moving?

LINDY
Promise me.

ZACH
OK, I promise.

LINDY
I'm moving far from here.

Zach thinks as he watches Brain continue down the side of the
FREEWAY.

ZACH
Are you going to be the Smellbinder
at your new school?

Lindy goes to speak but cuts herself off, momentarily caught
in wonder.

LINDY
I don't know.

Lindy's attention shifts to Brian.

LINDY
LOOK!

Together, they watch as a MOTORIST slows and pulls over near Brian. The CAR'S REVERSE LIGHTS illuminate as it backs up alongside Brian. The DRIVER leans across the passenger side and opens the DOOR.

Brian gets right into the CAR.

LINDY

Why is he giving him a ride?

From a distance, Zach and Lindy watch as the CAR begins to drive away with Brian in the passenger seat. Brian is holding the GAS CAN on his lap.

LINDY

He doesn't look scary to me.

Suddenly, the CAR jerks to the SHOULDER and slams on it's brakes, locking up all four TIRES into a sliding stop in the slushy right-hand lane. Fearing for his life, the DRIVER opens his door and leaps out of the CAR taking to the middle lane of the FREEWAY on foot.

LINDY

Uh oh.

Zach and Lindy watch as the DRIVER fearfully backs away from his own CAR with TRAFFIC narrowly avoiding him by swerving into the left lane.

Brian remains patiently still in the passenger seat, facing forward, with the GAS CAN on his lap.

The DRIVER stands in the middle lane of the FREEWAY, pointing at the STRANGE MAN in his CAR in a desperate attempt to recruit the aid of other MOTORISTS that are forced to slow and go around him.

While the DRIVER is busy pleading for help, Brian opens the passenger side DOOR and exits the VEHICLE, leaving his GAS CAN on the SEAT. Brian begins to walk away along the FREEWAY as if nothing has happened.

The DRIVER quickly gets back into his CAR and begins to speed away when he hits the brakes hard once again, coming to an abrupt stop. The DRIVER leans over and whisks the GAS CAN out the open passenger DOOR onto the roadside and continues to speed away with the DOOR hanging open.

Lindy looks at Zach for his reaction only to see that his hands are covering his face and that he can barely stand to peek through his fingers.

LINDY

What are you going to do?

Zach takes a moment to think. He is shivering in the cold.

ZACH

I need to get out of here. You
wanna come with me?

LINDY

OK. Where are you going to go?

ZACH

I don't know. I need to go
somewhere far.

LINDY

Far? You don't even have a coat.

(beat)

I'd go with you, but I can't leave
my Mother.

(beat)

You could come to Maine.

ZACH

Main Street's not that far.

LINDY

No, to my Aunt's house in Booth Bay
Harbor, Maine where my Mom and I
are moving.

ZACH

How do you get there?

LINDY

I don't know. I've only been there
once.

(beat)

Maybe you can hide in the back of
the moving truck. We'll ask my Mom
if you can stay once we get there,
that way you will already be there
and she will have to say yes.

Zach thinks, then nods.

LINDY

Where is your coat?

ZACH

My house.

LINDY
You want to go get your stuff?

Zach thinks carefully.

ZACH
We should go now before Brian and
my Mom get home.

Zach and Lindy take off running.

CUT TO:

INT. LAUNDROMAT - SAME

Evelyn removes a load of LINENS from a DRYER. She begins
deftly folding them as she confides in JOYCE(50), thin,
sweet, lonesome.

EVELYN
I was already having one of those
days where I just wanted to be
somebody else.
(beat)
It just happened and I even said to
myself "Don't you do it."

JOYCE
Did you...?

EVELYN
And I ended up driving by there
anyway.

JOYCE
You better drive him by here so I
can see him.

EVELYN
(nodding)
I know I shouldn't do this, but
he's so adorable.

JOYCE
When are you picking him up?

EVELYN
Tomorrow.
(beat)
These are done.

She takes the folded STACK and places it into a PLASTIC BAG containing other folded clothing.

JOYCE

Where will you tell your husband you're going?

EVELYN

I don't know yet. I never go anywhere on Sundays.

JOYCE

Evelyn Dear, you can leave. It's slow. I'm here.

EVELYN

It's OK. Thank you though. I'm off in twenty minutes.

JOYCE

Really Dear, just go home. I'll clock you out.

Evelyn brushes some LINT off of her sleeve into a TRASH BARREL. She reaches behind the COUNTER and retrieves her PURSE and KEYS.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

It's no problem Dear. I'll see ya.

EVELYN

Thanks.

CUT TO:

EXT. BALLARD HOUSE - SAME

ZACH and LINDY cautiously approach the house. Zach checks his surroundings as he puts his KEY into the LOCK of the door on the side of the GARAGE.

Zach, like Lindy, is surveying everything as if it were his first time seeing it. They walk into the GARAGE where Walter's CAR is parked. Zach puts his finger to his lips.

ZACH

(whispering)

Shhhh. My Dad is home and my parents are probably looking for me.

Zach slowly opens the DOOR to the kitchen.

ZACH
 (whispering)
 I'm not supposed to let anyone in
 the house, but I need your help.

Zach and Lindy make their way through the kitchen and up the stairs to ZACH'S ROOM.

CUT TO:

INT. ZACH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

As they enter the room, ZACH is startled by a nearly empty PLATE with hardened EGG YOLK sitting on his bed. In the middle of the floor is a piece of TOAST with several large BITES taken out of it, proof again that Brian has been there.

Zach quickly looks around for intruders. When he determines that he and LINDY are alone, he quickly grabs a LAUNDRY BAG off the floor.

Lindy looks around in marvel as if she's never been in a bedroom other than her own.

ZACH
 Don't open the closet door.
 (beat)
 Take this bag, put my blanket in
 it.

He hands her his BACKPACK.

ZACH
 Put my clothes in this one.

LINDY
 OK.

ZACH
 I have to go downstairs, I'll be
 right back. If you see my Mother's
 car pull up, get out of the house
 as fast as you can.

LINDY
 What's her car look like?

ZACH
 Cream-colored Country Squire.

Lindy gives Zach a confused look.

ZACH
Never mind. I'll be right back,
keep quiet.

Zach maneuvers back downstairs. He heads to the front hall and reaches into the POCKET of the ORANGE D.P.W. COAT and removes a BUSINESS CARD.

Zach goes to the family room, picks up the PHONE and looks at the CARD which reads "PATROL OFFICER STEVEN L. SILVA".

Zach dials the PHONE NUMBER on the CARD.

Zach looks impatient while the PHONE rings several times.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - SAME

EVELYN drives up and parks in front of the house. She gets out of her CAR.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

ZACH stands with the PHONE pressed to his ear. A voice message machine picks up:

VOICE MESSAGE (O.C.)
You've reached the desk of Officer
Steven L. Silva. Please leave your
name, case number and a phone
number where you can be reached
after the tone.

At the sound of the beep, Zach moves the MOUTHPIECE closer.

ZACH
I don't know if you remember me, my
name is Zach, my Mother's name is
Evelyn, you gave us a ride, my
brother was the one...

Zach is interrupted by the SOUND of Evelyn coming through the FRONT DOOR. He quickly hangs up and hides the BUSINESS CARD underneath the PHONE.

CUT TO:

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - SAME

EVELYN removes her COAT and HAT.

EVELYN
I'm home. Where is everybody?

CUT TO:

INT. ZACH'S BEDROOM - SAME

ZACH rushes through the door. LINDY is startled. Zach deftly closes the door behind him and grabs the LAUNDRY BAG and BACKPACK.

ZACH
Is this everything?

LINDY
Everything but your coat.

Zach rushes the BAGS over to the WINDOW. He throws the WINDOW open, chucks the BAGS out and shuts the WINDOW.

Lindy screams...

LINDY
AAHHHHHHHHH!

Zach looks at Lindy in shock.

ZACH
(desperate)
What are you doing!?

Lindy backs away from the CLOSET DOOR.

WALTER opens the door to Zach's room. He is wearing nothing more than a TOWEL, his hair is wet.

WALTER
(authoritatively)
What's going on here?

Walter notices Lindy.

WALTER
Is she OK? Who is she?

Zach points to the open CLOSET.

ZACH
Brian cut off Mrs. Gossard's leg!

WALTER
Who?

ZACH
The neighbor!

Walter looks in the closet. He freaks out.

WALTER
What the hell is happening here?!

EVELYN comes rushing into the room.

EVELYN
Walter, what is it? Zach are you
OK?

Evelyn notices Lindy.

EVELYN
What is she doing in the house?
Zach I thought I made it clear...

Walter interrupts.

WALTER
Will you take a look at what's
happened here!

Walter points to the LEG in the closet.

Evelyn gives a wide-eyed stare at the LEG.

WALTER
I'm calling the police!

Zach stands a little closer to his Father.

Walter starts to leave...

EVELYN
My roast... Walter, that's my
roast! How did that get in here?!

Walter stops in his tracks. He takes a closer look at the LEG in the BOOT realizing that it is not really a leg. He turns to Evelyn...

WALTER
 (sarcastically)
 Gee I wonder?
 (beat)
 How do you think it got there!

Walter leaves the room.

Evelyn turns to Zach.

EVELYN
 You're in trouble mister!

Evelyn goes into the CLOSET and picks up the ROAST with the BOOT attached and walks back to the doorway.

EVELYN
 Tell your friend she has to
 leave...

Flustered, Evelyn reaches out and aggressively flips off the LIGHT-SWITCH which is already off.

EVELYN
 And you can go straight to bed!

Zach looks at Lindy and waves.

ZACH
 Bye.

Lindy slowly starts to walk out, arching a path as close as possible to Zach. She leans in as she walks by.

LINDY
 Hide in the back of the truck.

Lindy walks out the bedroom door. Evelyn closes it behind her.

Zach stares into the empty CLOSET for a moment.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - SAME

LINDY stands in the middle of the street with Zach's BAGS in her hands. She is looking up at his WINDOW. She calls out his name loudly.

LINDY
 ZACH!

Again.

LINDY
ZACH!

CUT TO:

INT. ZACH'S BEDROOM - SAME

ZACH is still standing in wonder. He does not hear Lindy outside calling his name.

He turns and catches a chance glimpse of Lindy. He goes to the window.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - SAME

Loudly...

LINDY
Remember the plan!

CUT TO:

INT. ZACH'S BEDROOM - SAME

ZACH cannot hear what LINDY is saying. He watches her walk backward for a few steps. Zach waves.

Lindy turns and walks down the street.

Zach stays by the window watching her get smaller and smaller.

Just as he is about to leave the window, Zach sees BRIAN come around the corner dragging a section of a thick, black, EXTENSION CORD.

Brian approaches a STOP SIGN, gathers up the CORD and repeatedly whips the SIGN with all his might.

Zach watches the SIGN violently flex back and forth.

Zach slowly backs away from the window. He quickly turns around, gathers the DOOR WEDGES and places them under the DOOR.

He checks the DOOR with his foot while pulling on the KNOB.

Zach climbs into BED with his SHOES on and pulls the SHEET over himself, laying there with his eyes open.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Wincing from the stench, EVELYN tosses the "LEG OF MEAT" in the TRASH. She throws the BOOT in the SINK and starts running hot WATER on it. WALTER approaches from behind...

EVELYN
What else. WHAT ELSE!

WALTER
Where's Brian?!

EVELYN
(argumentatively)
Who knows.

WALTER
Can you tell me why you are punishing Zach for this?

EVELYN
I'm not punishing Zach for this!

WALTER
Well why is he in his room right now?

EVELYN
Because I've had it!

WALTER
With who?

EVELYN
With everyone!

WALTER
You think you've had it?...I'VE HAD IT!

Walter storms out of the kitchen.

EVELYN

You know why he's in his room. You don't bring people into this house, that's the rule!...Where are you going, why don't you take this trash out, it stinks!

CUT TO:

INT. ZACH'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Reflecting, ZACH lies in BED waiting to fall asleep. He glances over to the DOOR and looks at the DOOR WEDGES before his attention drifts back to the ceiling. It appears now that a bit of calm has come over him as he begins to fall asleep. His eyes close for a moment, then gently open, then drift shut.

At the foot of Zach's bed stands the apparition of a DARK FIGURE. Zach's eyes open. As he becomes aware of the silhouetted FIGURE looming by his feet, he barely distinguishes its lineament as BRIAN.

The FIGURE slowly and deliberately pulls the BLANKET off of Zach. Inch by inch, the BLANKET slips off of Zach's body leaving him flat on his back, exposed, shocked, petrified.

Zach leaps from the BED and dashes out the door. The DARK FIGURE pursues him out of the room. Zach runs for his life toward the ILLUMINATED end of the HALLWAY. Brian's silhouetted FIGURE appears to be shrouded by its own towering shadow.

At his full speed Zach reaches the LIGHT. He stops suddenly and closes his eyes. He looks as if he has given up.

Brian's FACE quickly becomes recognizable in the LIGHT as he catches up to Zach. Brian expels an unintelligible CRY of frustration that could scare a dragon back into its lair.

CUT TO:

ZACH'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

ZACH opens his eyes. He has been dreaming...

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

EVELYN is sitting at her FENDER RHODES electric PIANO wearing a long NIGHTGOWN and an old pair of oversized HEADPHONES. She is playing a song that only she can hear. The only SOUND in the room is her FINGERNAILS clicking against the KEYS. Her body sways freely as she is immersed in her song.

ZACH enters the room approaching her from behind. He is half asleep and looks frightened. He stands behind her rubbing his eyes, unaware that he is out of her sight, yet hoping that she will notice him.

ZACH

Mom.

She doesn't know that he is there and continues playing while momentarily singing softly out of tune.

Zach cautiously reaches for her and touches her shoulder.

EVELYN

(startled)

Ohhh!

Zach is also startled and recoils in fear.

Relieved, she pulls down her HEADPHONES letting them rest on her neck.

EVELYN

Honey, what are you doing out of bed?

ZACH

I had a nightmare. Brian was a monster.

Evelyn is surprised.

EVELYN

(consoling)

Your brother's not a monster...

(beat)

and there's really nothing to be afraid of.

ZACH

Except monsters trying to get me.

Zach lifts his mother's arm around him and hides under it.

Evelyn gives him a little hug as he snuggles into her.

EVELYN

Sit with Mommy for a minute then
you're going back to bed.

Still under her arm, Zach sits beside her on the PIANO BENCH.

EVELYN

Look. Did you know that you can
play any song that you want on the
piano?

(beat)

Put this over your ear.

She spans the HEADPHONES across both of their heads clamping
them together ear to ear.

She sings softly to the melody of "If I Fell" by the Beatles.

EVELYN

I'm a scary monster- and no-one ev-
er wants to play with me-
I'm lonely cause I'm- so scary-
If I only had a friend-

Her eyes are shut as she plays while his eyes are wide open
with wonder as he listens.

Evelyn opens her eyes and removes the HEADPHONES. She looks
at Zach to see if he is OK. Evelyn reaches in front of her
for a framed PICTURE that is nestled into a pile of BOOKS and
other PHOTOGRAPHS on top of the PIANO.

The PHOTOGRAPH is of a smiling, "much younger" Brian, hugging
Zach "as a toddler", seated on his lap. Peptoast "as a puppy"
is licking Zach's face.

EVELYN

(sincerely)

Look how great everything was. Poor
Peppy. Look how much your brother
loves you. He would never try to
hurt you.

Zach gently takes over holding the PHOTOGRAPH from his Mother
as he listens intently to her.

EVELYN

(tenderly)

Your brother used to be a little
baby just like you were.

(MORE)

EVELYN(cont'd)

He got sick and he would cry and cry and cry...and Mommy and Daddy didn't know what to do. So we took him to the Doctor and he was so red that the Doctor put Brian in a bath of cold, cold water. And he cried and cried. Back then, we didn't know as much as we know now and there wasn't much the doctor could do 'cause Brian had a really high fever that hurt his brain. As he grew up, we knew that life would always be difficult for him and we really need to take care of him.

Zach is entranced by the story as she runs her fingers through his hair. Evelyn's attention goes to the bandage on Zach's neck.

EVELYN

Let's see how this is healing.

Evelyn begins to remove the bandage.

Zach wraps his arms around his mother's waist in a gentle hug. He closes his eyes and for a moment actually looks calm.

EVELYN

(softly)

Time to let it breathe.

Blowing on it softly, she gives the healing wound a gentle kiss.

EVELYN

(whispering)

Time for bed.

Zach holds her in his hug.

EVELYN

Give mommy a kiss good-night.

Zach obeys by standing slowly. He gives his Mother a kiss.

ZACH

(quietly)

Bye.

EVELYN

Don't say goodbye, say good-night.

ZACH
(pauses)
Good-night.

Evelyn lovingly watches her son climb the stairs as he heads back to bed.

CUT TO:

INT./ EXT. BALLARD HOME - DAWN

By dawning light, ZACH stands in the doorway silently watching his PARENTS sleep. He tip-toes downstairs to the front door and quietly steps outside. He stops to give a long look at the house, then turns away...

Zach disappears into the cold morning air.

CUT TO:

EXT. LINDY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

ZACH stands by a TREE at the edge of the property. He checks to see if there is any activity around the MOVING TRUCK that is parked in the driveway. Zach walks in some old FOOTPRINTS in the snow, as to not make new ones. He takes the open PADLOCK out of its hasp and places it on the rear BUMPER of the TRUCK. He gently unlatches the DOOR.

Zach climbs into the back of the TRUCK and pulls the DOOR closed as far as he can from the inside. The DOOR, still slightly ajar, allows a little bit of light to spill into the truck. Zach stands still as he acclimates himself to the truck's crowded cargo hold.

He brushes past a house PLANT and steps over a small TABLE to a pile of BOXES on the floor. Zach opens the top of a large, waist-high, moving BOX. It is almost empty except for some items that appear to be left for him by Lindy.

Zach reaches into the BOX and picks up a small FLASHLIGHT. Checking the door, he turns on the FLASHLIGHT, aiming it down into the BOX. The dim light illuminates its contents to reveal a PILLOW, a THERMOS, a jar of PEANUT BUTTER and a partially filled cellophane sleeve of SALTINES, twisted and cinched shut with a twist tie.

Zach uses a nearby CHAIR to climb into the box. He sits cross-legged at the bottom of the BOX with the PILLOW on his lap and props the FLASHLIGHT into the corner, pointing it upward.

Zach reaches up and closes the flaps of the BOX. He opens the THERMOS and pours himself a cup of still warm HOT CHOCOLATE. He takes a sip, then opens the package of CRACKERS and the jar of PEANUT BUTTER. He stares at the CRACKER in his hand as he spreads PEANUT BUTTER onto it with his finger.

CUT TO:

INT. WALTER AND EVELYN'S BEDROOM - SAME

EVELYN slowly gets out of bed, as not to stir WALTER. She looks back at him to make sure he's still asleep.

She goes to the closet and quietly removes a DRESS. She tiptoes out of the room.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

EVELYN dons her DRESS. She quickly adds some MAKE-UP in the mirror and adjusts her hair.

She looks good.

Evelyn twists open a LIPSTICK, stopping suddenly to listen for Walter. There is no sign of him.

She applies the LIPSTICK.

CUT TO:

INT. MOVING TRUCK - SAME

ZACH licks his fingers clean.

The dim light of the FLASHLIGHT flickers and fluctuates.

He puts the lid back on the PEANUT BUTTER, twists the remainder of the CRACKER PACKAGE, finishes his HOT CHOCOLATE and screws the cap back on.

Zach sits there, waiting patiently, thinking. The FLASHLIGHT is weakening. Zach turns the FLASHLIGHT off. Zach sits, waiting, in near total blackness.

Zach climbs out of the BOX. He opens the top on another BOX. It's packed with DISHES wrapped in NEWSPAPERS. He opens another BOX. He pulls out his LAUNDRY BAG containing his BLANKET which reveals his BACKPACK underneath.

Zach pulls out his BACKPACK to reveal Lindy's COLORFUL SWEATER, folded neatly on top of a stack of her CLOTHING.

Zach stares at the SWEATER for a moment. He picks it up, holding it in his hands. He thinks of Lindy.

CUT TO:

INT. WALTER'S BEDROOM - SAME

WALTER is sound asleep.

The PHONE begins to ring just loud enough to be annoying.

Walter doesn't stir.

The PHONE stops ringing for a moment...then starts to ring again.

Walter's eyes open. As the PHONE continues to ring, Walter rolls over to see that Evelyn is not in bed.

The PHONE stops ringing for another moment...then starts to ring again.

Walter lies on his back.

WALTER
Evelyn, you going to get that?

No answer.

Walter is lying on his back, wondering where Evelyn could be.

The PHONE continues to ring.

Walter throws the sheets off of himself and gets out of bed. He exits the bedroom and walks down the hall.

WALTER
(calling out)
Evelyn, aren't you going to get that?

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Realizing he is alone, WALTER approaches the PHONE. It is still ringing.

He picks up the HANDSET slowly and just listens.

VOICE
Hello?

WALTER
Hello?

VOICE
Good morning. Is this the Ballard residence?

WALTER
Yes it is.

VOICE
This is Susan Kaysinger,
Superintendent of Schools...

WALTER
My wife's not home right now...

SUPERINTENDENT KAYSINGER
Am I speaking with Mr. Ballard?

WALTER
Yes, but my wife usually...

SUPERINTENDENT KAYSINGER
(interrupting)
The reason why I'm calling so early on a Sunday morning is that Principal Boyer has made several attempts to reach you and your wife.

WALTER
My wife's usually home on a Sunday, I don't know where she is.

SUPERINTENDENT KAYSINGER
(interrupting)
Mr. Ballard, I regret to inform you that your son has caused a school bus accident and has been suspended from riding the bus until we can further review this case.

WALTER
(concerned)
Was anyone hurt?

SUPERINTENDENT KAYSINGER
 Fortunately no one so far, but
 there are some considerable
 property damages that will need to
 be addressed.

Walter is visibly agitated by this news and picks up the TELEPHONE BASE with his other hand.

WALTER
 I...

Walter interrupts himself as he finds the BUSINESS CARD on the table that was under the PHONE.

SUPERINTENDENT KAYSINGER
 Members of our staff have made
 several attempts to contact you.
 Your son Brian has been suspended
 from riding the bus since Thursday
 and will continue to be until
 further notice. Mr. Ballard, please
 do not send him out to the bus
 stop, he already tried to force his
 way onto the bus on Friday.

WALTER
 (distracted)
 ...right, goodbye.

Walter slams the HANDSET down into its BASE nearly breaking the PHONE.

He reads the BUSINESS CARD: "PATROL OFFICER STEPHEN L. SILVA."

Walter recalls the note left on Evelyn's car, and with all the bad news has become exceedingly angry. He looks distraught.

CUT TO:

EXT. LINDY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

LINDY, and her MOTHER come out the front door and wait on the porch. They are followed by AUNTIE DETTIE(40), practical, heavy-duty in high-waisted DOUBLE-DENIM, defiantly immune to low temperatures she rolls up her sleeves while closing the door behind her. Speaking in a Maine accent...

AUNTIE DETTIE
That's everything, truck's loaded
up, were ready to go.

Lindy is staring at the MOVING TRUCK.

LINDY'S MOM
(wistfully)
I'm ready.

AUNTIE DETTIE
Say goodbye to your old house.

Lindy breaks her stare from the TRUCK for a moment. She turns around to give a last look at her home. She can see clearly through the front window to the empty room where all their furniture used to be.

Lindy's Mother holds her hand up and touches the house. Her fingers trace the shapes of the ADDRESS NUMBERS nailed to the side of the house.

AUNTIE DETTIE
Goodbye old house.

LINDY
(whispering to herself)
Goodbye old house.

LINDY'S MOM
I'm gonna miss this house.

AUNTIE DETTIE
Why isn't the back of the truck
locked?

Lindy tenses up as her Aunt approaches the rear of the TRUCK.

AUNTIE DETTIE
(alarmed)
This door is open!

Auntie Dettie opens the DOOR and looks inside the TRUCK.
Lindy looks nervous, she quickly climbs up into the TRUCK.

LINDY'S MOM
Is everything there?

AUNTIE DETTIE
Looks like it.

LINDY
Let me check.

Lindy speaks softly in the direction of the closed up BOXES.

LINDY
 (whispering)
 I'll let you out when we get there.
 It takes 5 hours.

AUNTIE DETTIE
 Everything look fine?

LINDY
 Yep, everything is here.

Lindy climbs out of the TRUCK. Auntie Dettie shuts the DOOR and locks it.

CUT TO:

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - BALLARD HOME - SAME

WALTER bears a determined demeanor. He calls out...

WALTER
 BRIAN!

Again, calling out loud...

WALTER (CONT'D)
 Get in the car. We're going for a
 ride.

Walter marches down the hallway, toward Brian's bedroom.

CUT TO:

INT. MOVING TRUCK CAB - MOMENTS LATER

AUNTIE DETTIE is behind the wheel, LINDY is on the passenger side, with MOM sitting in the middle.

All three are bundled up for winter weather. Lindy is wearing her PARKA.

The TRUCK slows to a halt at a STOP SIGN.

In the distance up ahead, There are TWO BOYS on the sidewalk walking toward each other. Lindy tries to make out their identities.

As the TRUCK approaches the TWO recognizable BOYS, Lindy realizes one of them is ZACH! He is walking along carrying his two BAGS.

LINDY
(shouting)
Auntie Dettie, stop!

AUNTIE DETTIE
Why?

LINDY
That's my friend Zach!

AUNTIE DETTIE
(enthusiastically)
Everybody wave to Zach!

Auntie Dettie waves excitedly, while beeping the horn. Lindy's Mom waves excitedly, but slightly in the wrong direction. Lindy holds up one hand in a very confused attempt to wave.

Zach waves back to a confused Lindy with a smile on his face.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Zach looks back at Lindy in the moving truck as it is passing by and continues to wave.

The approaching boy turns out to be Reggie, who reaches Zach and continues right past him without saying a word.

Zach, surprised by this behavior, turns a step to follow Reggie.

ZACH
Reggie, where are you going?

Reggie doesn't answer

ZACH
Aren't you going to talk to me?

Reggie continues his pace and does not say a word.

ZACH
WAIT!

Reggie stops and turns deliberately with a perturbed expression.

REGGIE

What.

ZACH

(curious)

Are you coming from Gunter's house?

Reggie gives Zach a look that could translate to "are you insane?" With no answer, Reggie turns on his heels to leave.

ZACH

Wait! I just wanted to say sorry about my Brother and what happened at my house.

Reggie turns to leave again.

ZACH

Well if you're not going to talk to me, could you not tell anyone else about it either?

Reggie doesn't seem to react as he continues to walk away, except for shaking his head slightly.

REGGIE

(to himself)

White people.

Zach stands on the sidewalk, holding his BAGS.

CUT TO:

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

WALTER follows BRIAN into the garage. Walter takes the lead and helps negotiate the narrow passage between the passenger side of the CAR and the garage wall. He opens the door for Brian.

WALTER

Watch the door.

Brian squeezes into the CAR. Walter shuts the door.

WALTER

Look what I have.

He walks around the front of the CAR, holding up a CANDY BAR. As he makes his way around, Brian excitedly rocks back and forth fidgeting with one hand while picking his nose with the other. Walter climbs into the driver's seat.

WALTER
Stop picking your nose!

Walter pulls Brian's finger out of his nose. There is a small amount of BLOOD running from his nostril to his upper lip.

Brian reaches for the CANDY BAR.

WALTER
Hold on a second.

Walter wipes the BLOOD from his Son's nose with his thumb, then secures his SEAT-BELT. Walter hands him the CHOCOLATE BAR...

WALTER
This is for you, now don't eat it too fast.

Walter turns the KEY and the CAR struggles to fire. The CAR eventually starts up. Brian reaches to turn the RADIO on.

WALTER
Don't touch the radio. I know, I will put on the music.

Walter turns the RADIO on and typical complaint radio TALK SHOW comes on. Walter pushes a BUTTON to change stations. A SONG comes on. Brian reaches out to touch the RADIO.

WALTER
Ah, ah, I'll do it.

Brian recoils his hand. Walter pushes another BUTTON and another, switching from one easy listening station to the next. Brian is satisfied with a song and dives into his CANDY BAR. Walter adjusts the REARVIEW MIRROR and catches his own reflection.

WALTER
(to Brian)
You ready to go?

Brian begins to nibble on his CANDY BAR.

Walter puts a hand on the STEERING WHEEL and turns his head around as if in preparation to back up.

He looks at the GARAGE DOOR that is closed behind him. Walter looks back at Brian.

Walter opens the driver's side DOOR and climbs out, leaving the DOOR open.

WALTER
I'll be right back.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - CONTINUOUS

ZACH is nearing his home while walking past a NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE. He notices a MAN through a WINDOW whose right arm is flailing wildly up and down as he appears to be beating something open handed.

Zach gives into his curiosity and cautiously approaches the WINDOW.

Zach sees that the MAN is giving a severe bare-bottom spanking to a BOY.

When the boy's crying head rears, it surprisingly reveals that it's GUNTER who is taking the whuppin'.

Gunter's FATHER momentarily takes a break to shake the sting from his hand, then resumes the spanking.

Zach turns and crosses the street to his house.

CUT TO:

EXT./ INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Zach turns his KEY in the side DOOR of the GARAGE, opens it and walks in.

Zach is overtaken by thick plumes of SMOKE. He instantly begins to choke. He drops his BAGS and covers his face and struggles to make his way to the entrance of the house. He hits the BUTTON to open the garage DOOR.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - BALLARD RESIDENCE - SAME

EVELYN is getting out of her CAR carrying a TOTE BAG. She looks as if she is concealing something, yet she looks very satisfied.

CUT TO:

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

As the door opens, the light spills in, better illuminating Walter's CAR which is still running with the RADIO playing faintly. As the carbon monoxide afflicted air begins to dissipate, ZACH is startled when he sees BRIAN with his head slumped in the passenger seat. Brian is held upright only by his SEAT-BELT.

ZACH

Dad?

EVELYN suddenly approaches, quickening her pace, curious as to why the garage is open and the CAR is running. She's puzzled by the confused look on Zach's face.

EVELYN

Zach, where is your Father? Are you going somewhere?

Evelyn notices Brian in the passenger seat of the CAR.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Brian?

Brian does not respond and remains slumped over.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Oh my god. What's happened?!

Evelyn quickly sets down her TOTE BAG by Zach's feet. She leans into the CAR to check on Brian. She quickly turns around to Zach.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

(horrified)

Go find your Father now!

Zach suddenly notices an adorable PUPPY nestled on a TOWEL at the bottom of the TOTE.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
 (shouting)
 Hurry!

Zach peels off calling for his Father at the top of his lungs.

ZACH
 Dad! Dad!...Dad!

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN/ STAIRS/ HALLWAY/ BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

ZACH tears through the kitchen, his COAT hooks one of the kitchen CHAIRS and pulls it to the floor. He stops at the bottom of the stairs.

ZACH
 (upward)
 Dad!

Zach sprints up the stairs to the closed door of his parent's bedroom. He flings the door open.

ZACH
 Dad!

Zach looks at his motionless Father, who is laying in bed on his side with his back facing him. There is an empty BOTTLE of SLEEPING PILLS on the bedside table.

ZACH
 Dad!

Walter does not stir.

ZACH
 Dad wake up!

Walter remains still. Zach walks around the bed to get a look at Walter's face.

ZACH
 Dad!

Walter remains perfectly still with his eyes wide open.

ZACH
 (unsure)
 Dad?

Walter does not respond.

ZACH
(desperate)
DAD!

Walter, without moving or blinking:

WALTER
(remorsefully)
What is it son?

Zach is startled into flinching.

ZACH
(settling)
Come quick, Mom's in the garage!

Walter sits up slowly. He deliberately puts on his SLIPPERS and then his ROBE.

Zach takes off ahead of Walter.

Walter plods along behind Zach, carefully tying his ROBE.

ZACH
Hurry!

Zach rounds the corner and sprints into the garage.

CUT TO:

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

WALTER nears the garage entrance and with a distressed look, he pauses to collect himself before entering.

Entering...

WALTER
(authoritatively)
What's going on here?

EVELYN, moving away from BRIAN in an awkward panic, crawls backwards out of the driver's side of the CAR. She runs straight to Walter.

EVELYN
(hysterical)
Brian's in the car...running with
smoke...oh my god!

Walter immediately goes into the driver's side and turns off the motor. He unfastens Brian's SEAT-BELT and struggles mightily in an effort to drag him from the passenger seat, out of the driver's side door.

EVELYN
I'll call the police!

WALTER
No! Wait! Go to the passenger side
and help free his legs.

Evelyn dutifully runs to the passenger side and throws the DOOR as far open as it will go, slamming it into the garage wall. She crams her body into the VEHICLE and starts wrestling Brian's legs free as Walter pulls from the other end.

Walter gently lays Brian on the garage floor and kneels down beside him. Brian's lips and cheeks are discolored.

WALTER
Brian. Brian!

Walter shakes Brian's face. He then unzips Brian's JACKET and puts his ear on Brian's chest. Walter pauses. He sits up and clears Brian's airway and breathes a couple times for him, administering CPR. He looks at Brian who is still lying motionless on the floor.

Zach and Evelyn stand by dumbfounded.

EVELYN
Walter, do something!

Suddenly, Brian takes a deep breath and begins to cough.

WALTER
Brian! Brian! Are you OK?

As Brian regains consciousness, he appears to be clawing his way back into life. He grabs Walter by his SHIRT and starts clawing at the air in Zach's direction.

Startled, Zach takes a step backwards.

Walter grabs Brian, restraining him in a bear hug while burying his face into the nook of Brian's neck.

EVELYN
Oh my god! Is he going to be OK?

Walter can no longer control himself. He breaks down and begins a muffled sob into the nook of Brian's neck and shoulder.

Walter raises his head and is blubbering uncontrollably. He begins to lovingly stroke Brian's head.

WALTER
(wailing)
My son! My poor son!

Brian is conscious and breathing steadily on his back between them.

Still on his knees, Walter looks at Evelyn, who is also now crying.

WALTER
(assuring)
He's gonna be OK.

EVELYN
(frantic)
I should call an ambulance...

WALTER
(fearfully)
No, Don't!

Evelyn instinctively feels that something is still wrong.

EVELYN
(confounded)
Just to be sure...

WALTER
(nervously)
Don't! He's fine.

Evelyn unanticipatedly discovers Walter's poorly concealed guilt.

Zach stands in observation, oblivious as to what Evelyn now knows.

EVELYN
(in horror)
No!

Evelyn looks right through Walter as he nervously looks to her for some sort of forgiveness. She begins to stagger on her weakening knees.

EVELYN
 (possessed)
 No! Noooo!

Evelyn stumbles in Walter's direction and begins beating him frantically with wild, inaccurate swings. Without protecting himself, Walter deservedly takes all of her punishment. Evelyn fatigues quickly and begins to slump toward Walter. He takes her in his arms as she drops to her knees. She goes limp.

Walter holds her tight, hugging her as tears stream down both of their faces.

WALTER
 (sobbing)
 I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Evelyn musters the partial strength to deliver a few more weak blows to Walter's back which ultimately subside into a reciprocated embrace.

WALTER (CONT'D)
 (blubbering)
 I love you.

Evelyn becomes aware that Zach is standing beside them upset and confused. Crying, she looks at him and raises her arm to welcome him into their embrace. The three hover over Brian as the PUPPY has escaped the TOTE and has now come over to lick Brian's face.

Brian's countenance is calm as he traces the faces of his family with his eyes.

Walter opens his teary eyes and sees a blurry pair of MEN'S BLACK BOOTS. He raises his gaze to find a uniformed POLICE OFFICER standing in the garage beside them.

OFFICER
 Is anyone hurt?

All of the attention has shifted to the OFFICER.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
 Is everyone OK here?

Officer Stephen points to Brian who is flat on his back.

OFFICER
 Is he OK?

Walter is speechless. He trades looks between Evelyn and the OFFICER. He is unsure if mercy will be bestowed on him.

Evelyn composes herself slightly as she recognizes him as OFFICER STEPHEN.

EVELYN
(sniffling)
We're...OK.

OFFICER
Are you sure? I got a call from
your Son.

Walter and Evelyn look at Zach in wonder as to when that may have been.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
(to Zach)
Are you OK buddy? How's your neck?

ZACH
(entranced)
Good.

EVELYN
(composed)
Thank you for your concern Officer.
We're fine.

The OFFICER takes a moment to thoroughly read their faces. He then quickly re-surveys the perimeter of the garage with his eyes as he makes his exit.

OFFICER
(leery)
Have a good night.

Evelyn suddenly notices a WOMAN with a DOG on a LEASH who has stopped on the sidewalk in front of the house and is staring at the scene in the garage. Evelyn stands and transforms to emit a rigid "mind your own business" body posture. She activates the GARAGE DOOR causing it to slowly close. As the door descends, the curious woman bends at the waist at the same rate as the garage door to maintain her vantage as long as possible.

CUT TO:

EXT. BALLARD RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

The GARAGE DOOR finishes closing, cutting off the light that was spilling onto the driveway. Light leaks from the gaps on either side of the garage door and the gaps between the joints in the panels. The rest of the lights in the house are off. We pull back from the BALLARD HOME as it appears like all of the others on the street.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. RIVER - DAY

It is a warm sunny afternoon. The snow has melted. ZACH is standing by the edge of the river.

He laughs at BRIAN, who is nearby, running along a hillside and enjoying himself.

Brian is wearing a pair of "LOBSTER CLAW" OVEN MITTS on his hands. Their PUPPY, grown slightly, is playfully chasing him.

Zach opens his BACKPACK and pulls out Lindy's SWEATER. He looks at it momentarily before dropping it into the RIVER. He watches it as it begins to absorb water, but continues to float.

Zach picks up a nearby STICK and begins prodding at the SWEATER in order to sink it.

We hold on the SWEATER, which is floating just below the surface, down river.

FADE OUT.