

I RECOGNIZED YOUR SCREAMS

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AUDIO OVER BLACK:

Over darkness, we hear a cell phone ringing once, then twice. A man, Elliot, picks up. Background sounds hint he is in a loud, populated place. His girlfriend, Helen, is on the line.

ELLIOT (V.O.)
Hello?

HELEN (V.O.)
(tearful)
Elliot... you have to come over here.

ELLIOT (V.O.)
Helen?

HELEN (V.O.)
Elliot, I need you to come over here
right now.

ELLIOT (V.O.)
What's going on?

HELEN (V.O.)
Just come, for Christ's sake!

Click.

EXT. HELEN'S BUILDING - NIGHT.

ELLIOT, 27, moves down a sidewalk, approaching the front entrance of an apartment building. He punches four digits on a keypad and the glass door opens for him.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT.

Now he moves down a long corridor, and the end he descends a flight of stairs. When he gets to the bottom, he pushes through another door.

He raps on the door to Helen's apartment three times. Then he turns the doorknob.

INT. HELEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT.

Elliot pushes the door open, hesitates, then steps into the dark foyer of Helen's place.

ELLIOT
Helen..?

He moves into the dark living room, visibly uneasy.

An upended dinner plate sits on the living room floor. Food has been spilled on the carpet.

Elliot moves into one of the spacious apartment's hallways.

ELLIOT
Helen...?

He moves toward the bedroom at the end of the hall. There's a tiny light on in there.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT.

HELEN, 27, sits on the edge of her bed--turned away from Elliot ominously, hiding her face.

ELLIOT
Helen, what the hell's *wrong*,
you *terrified* me...

Helen turns around slowly, cheeks streaked with tears.

HELEN
My mother died. She had an embolism.
She died.

ELLIOT
God... I...

HELEN (*rising*)
I have to go to Providence. I have
to leave tonight.

ELLIOT
I'm sorry.

HELEN

There's no flight until ten-thirty.
Can you get some things together
before then?

Elliot hesitates.

ELLIOT

I can't go. I mean, if you want me
there for the funeral... there's so
many things I need to do to get ready
for the scholarship...

HELEN

I need you to come with me.

ELLIOT

Helen... it's not *possible*. I have to
be on a plane to London on Wednesday,
it's just not--

HELEN

Do you hear what you're *saying*?
You would seriously consider not
coming with me?

ELLIOT

It's... unworkable.

HELEN

My God, you don't see anyone but
yourself. Do you have so little
feeling for anyone else that you'd
let me go alone?

ELLIOT

It's not my family. Your mother--

HELEN

Then get the fuck out of here. Get
the *fuck* out of here if you won't
do this for me, and don't come
back here anymore. You hate human
beings, Elliot. I have no use for
you.

Elliot seems to have a dark realization.

ELLIOT
I think you're right.

He turns around and leaves the room.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT.

Having left the apartment, Elliot traverses a clogged back alley in the city alone. But we see, far in the distance, that there is one person standing toward the end of it, under a sickly light. A woman.

Eventually Elliot must pass her, but he pays no notice of this woman.

WOMAN
Sir? Sir?

Elliot stops, turns around.

The woman has long, scraggly hair. She looks to be in an absolute daze. There's a nasty cut on her forehead. She is dressed for very cold weather, yet it's obviously warm out.

WOMAN
Can you tell me how to read minds?

ELLIOT
What?

The woman lifts one arm slightly and reveals something to Elliot.

She is holding a sword at her side--an actual, full-length sword.

Elliot stares at it, deeply confused.

The woman makes a sudden movement, taking three swift steps toward Elliot, lifting the sword even higher, in both hands, like a baseball player holds a bat, and she begins to swing it forward, low and lethal, at Elliot--who has no time to react.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY.

Elliot, head on a pillow, stares out the window at the rain. His right leg is heavily bandaged as he lays in a hospital room. His sister, Jen, sitting in a chair nearby, speaks to him.

JEN

What's the pain like?

ELLIOT

It's bad if they don't give me enough stuff.

JEN

When do you start the rehab?

ELLIOT

The cuts were so deep, it might be another two weeks.

JEN

I don't know if I should even tell you this, but they caught her last night, in a bus station. The police told me she's insane, she's utterly insane.

Elliot, visibly depressed, says nothing.

JEN

After the therapy, why don't you move back with me and Dad for a little while, get yourself situated. And then you can go to London, catch up on school.

ELLIOT

I can't be around Dad right now. I'll hurt him somehow. I'll be all right.

JEN

But your lease is up...

ELLIOT

It's fine.

A single tear slides down his cheek.

CUT TO:

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT.

Elliot comes into a seedy little place on crutches, limping badly. With some effort, he takes a seat at the bar. The bartender comes over, takes his order, and disappears for just a moment.

Elliot looks at no one. When the bartender comes back with his drink, he simply nods empty thanks.

He takes a sip of his drink and sets it down again, pressing two fingers up to his forehead as if staving off an intense headache.

CUT TO:

INT. DIFFERENT BAR - NIGHT.

Another night of drinking. This place is almost empty.

Elliot sits at the bar with two fingers pressed to his forehead, exactly as he had before. He is sitting in the exact same position. This time he has an almost empty glass in front of him, and takes a very long, slow drink.

CUT TO:

INT. DIFFERENT BAR - NIGHT.

This time, it's the bar at a lousy chain restaurant. Elliot sits alone at a side table, unnoticed. His crutches lean beside him.

He watches a packed mass of human beings babbling at each other. Flirting, chatting, laughing, networking.

The sound cuts out entirely. The screen is utterly silent. Elliot has blocked these people all out mentally yet he stares and stares, the expression on his face one of disgust, confusion, loneliness.

He gets up, heads to the men's room. His limp is very pronounced.

CUT TO:

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY.

Elliot sits on an exam table.

DOCTOR

I'd like to go in and clear out the scar tissue, but I really don't think it'll be the first time we're going to have to do that. The important thing is, we have to make sure to minimize the chance of an infection. In a wound this deep...

ELLIOT

Is this major surgery?

DOCTOR

Well, we have to get to the bone, so it does take some time and care.

ELLIOT

Will it help with the pain?

DOCTOR'S

Ah... eventually. Are you anything more than a social drinker?

ELLIOT

Not now. I... well, I was in a treatment program when I was seventeen. Why?

DOCTOR

It just makes us more careful about what sort of pain meds to work with.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY.

Elliot, a heavy backpack slung around his back and carrying two suitcases, is paying a cab driver for his fare. The cab pulls away from the curb and Elliot starts to walk into a small, decrepit brownstone on a grim section of city street.

ELLIOT (V.O.)

Sis: Just wanted to let you know I'm all right. I've moved to D.C. I

got a little six-month efficiency.
I'm going to start arranging
for the scholarship to be
pushed back to January.

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY.

Elliot struggles up a dank, grimy staircase with his baggage.

ELLIOTT (V.O. CONT'D)
Thanks for the offer of money,
but I think I'm going to get a
part-time job to tide me over.

INT. ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - DAY.

He enters his new apartment, a very seedy-looking place.

ELLIOTT (V.O. CONT'D)
I may not have a phone for a while.
I'll see you at Christmas. Love,
Elliot.

Elliot sets his bags down and looks around. It's a bleak atmosphere.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT.

Elliot is attempting a knee bend. He grits his teeth and lowers himself. With every inch that his legs bend, he seems to be in more and more excruciating pain, sweating.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT.

Now he examines his leg in a tall mirror. His pant leg is rolled up and we see the very ugly, twisting scar left by the sword wound.

Elliot's closes his eyes, unable to look.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR - NIGHT.

Yet another dive bar. Elliot, a little drunk, is talking to an older woman.

WOMAN

What was your major?

ELLIOT

Anthropology.

WOMAN

What were you going to be doing
in England?

ELLIOT

Studying Druids for a year.

WOMAN

Wow. So does the leg still hurt
after all that therapy?

ELLIOT

Yes.

The woman drops her voice.

WOMAN

Do you know about Z-Sominol?

CUT TO:

INT. ELLIOT'S CAR - NIGHT.

Elliot's hands open a bottle of pills, shake two out into his palm. The label on the pill bottle says ONE REFILL ONLY.

He swallows the two pills, then lifts a bottle of beer from the passenger's seat and takes a swig.

He starts his car and pulls away.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. YARD - DUSK.

Elliot's car pulls up to a small house in a dumpy suburban neighborhood: overgrown lawns, junked cars in muddy driveways. At this particular house, we see a man working in his open garage.

Elliot gets out of the car, wearing a jacket: Since his accident, it has become late autumn. He walks up the driveway toward the man in the garage. His limp is getting better.

The man in the garage, PETER, 60, is odd-looking. He has dyed his hair a ridiculous jet black, and he is extremely thin. His arms are covered in tattoos.

ELLIOT

Hi, I'm Elliot.

PETER

I'm Peter. My brother tell you what the job is?

ELLIOT

Basically, on the phone.

PETER

You still want it?

ELLIOT

I think so. About twenty hours a week?

PETER

Yeah. In the middle of the goddamn night, you know.

ELLIOT

That's okay, I'm a night person.

PETER

How's your stomach? You're gonna be seein' a lot of nasty things.

ELLIOT

I'll hold up.

PETER

This is the van.

He gestures to the vehicle in the garage, which bears the words EXECUTIVE RESTORATION SERVICES.

PETER

You won't have to drive. You don't even have to be trained up that much, I'll show you as we go. It's just cleanup. They feed me the jobs, you just come along and help. Ever

seen a dead body?

ELLIOT

In a lab.

PETER

Well, we'll give you a try for a couple of nights, see how you deal with the blood, and if it doesn't work, no hard feelings.

ELLIOT

I'll be ready next week.

CUT TO:

INT. VAN - NIGHT.

The landscape of suburban Washington DC rolls past outside the passenger window. Elliot is sitting in the van, wearing a jumpsuit, as Peter drives them.

PETER

I saw this woman at O'Shea's the other night, man. God, if you'd seen this woman's rack, in this green dress, you woulda died. You ever been to O'Shea's?

ELLIOT

Yeah.

PETER

Smokin' hot fuckin' women in *that* fuckin' place.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT.

Peter pulls the van in front of a large house in the suburbs and kills the engine. He checks his cell phone.

PETER

All right, where's the cops? They split?

ELLIOT

Do they ever do that?

PETER

Sometimes, if they know I'm comin'
and it's just a suicide and they
don't have to bag up all that
much evidence. All right, come on,
leave the shit for now.

They both get out of the van and cross the lawn. Peter opens the front door.

PETER

Coulda at least locked the place,
Jesus be my *Christ*.

Elliot peers over Peter's shoulder. Right away, we see something sprayed on the rear wall in the living room, something that looks like a chaotic fan of blood. Elliot looks ill, but he keeps moving.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

Inside the living room, that red substance is sprayed everywhere. The walls, the floor, the furniture. But there are also other substances staining other surfaces. There's food strewn about too.

Elliot stops moving, takes it all in.

PETER

This isn't too bad.

ELLIOT

What happened?

PETER

They said he killed himself in
his garage, carbon monoxide.
But first he went off his nutter
and threw his food around
everywhere.

Elliot approaches one wall, slowly sticking out a finger toward what looks like blood. He draws it back after making contact, rubs the substance between his thumb and forefinger.

PETER

What is that, spaghetti sauce?

Christ. This is gonna be an
easy night, at least. Not like
last night, huh? Holy *fuck*.

CUT TO:

INT. ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - NIGHT.

Elliot is reading at his tiny desk alone in his apartment, very late. He has a bottle of vodka at his right arm, and as he reads, he pours himself a glass.

He then reaches for a bottle of pills on which someone has written the word **Z-Som** in marker.

Elliot downs two of the pills and washes them down with vodka.

From outside on the street, there comes a crazed, angry male shout. Elliot flinches.

VOICE

*I'll put you in the ground,
motherfucker!*

The distant sound of running feet. Elliot gets up from his desk and walks over to the window.

Nothing out there now. Elliot turns away from the window, breathing unusually hard. He looks terrible: unshaven, thin, pale.

INT. ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - LATER.

Elliot is sitting on the edge of his bed, talking into his cell phone.

ELLIOT

Hello, this is Elliot Lem calling
for Doctor Spinosa. I've been
having a lot of unexpected pain
in my leg recently and I was
wondering about getting an
extension of my prescription...
um, I'll call back during office
hours. Thanks.

He lies sideways on his bed.

CUT TO:

INT. PETER'S HOUSE - NIGHT.

Peter and Elliot sit on opposite sides of Peter's small, messy living room, watching a football game on TV. Each has a beer.

PETER

(eyes glued to the TV)

I saw this guy once... and he kinda just exploded when the cops were picking him up. There's gases in your body, and he just kinda went phhhhhhhhhhhhhh all at once, all this stuff started coming out of him. Be glad we get there after it's all gone, let me tell you.

ELLIOT

Yeah.

Elliot casually tilts his head back against the wall behind the sofa.

After a moment, there's a scratching sound from behind his head, as if one long fingernail is trying to get Elliot's attention.

Elliot frowns and turns his head to look at the wall.

The creepy scratching stops.

Peter laughs.

PETER

(doing Scarface, badly)

Say hello to my little friend.

Elliot puts his head back against the wall again, looking at Peter ... and almost instantly, the scratching begins again. He lets it go for five, ten seconds.

When Elliot lifts his head one more time, it stops.

PETER

Ha!

ELLIOT

What *is* that?

PETER

I have no fucking idea, it started two months ago. Watch this.

Peter straightens up and tilts his head back against the wall.

For a moment, nothing happens. Then, more quietly, the finger scratching begins again.

When Peter leans forward again, the scratching continues for a second or two ... then fades.

ELLIOT

What the hell?

PETER

Don't ask me, I'm tryin' not to think about it. It doesn't always come.

ELLIOT

It's not a squirrel or something?

PETER

Isn't no squirrel.

Peter gets up and starts to leave the room.

PETER

More beer.

Elliot waits a few seconds until Peter's gone, then carefully tilts his head back against the wall again.

This time, there's nothing. Elliot waits. Then he gives up and leans forward again.

As soon as he does, the scratching returns, faintly. It goes for a few seconds, sounding as if it's less than an inch behind the wall, then it stops.

Peter comes back into the room.

PETER

Now don't be egging it on, for

the sake of fuck, 'cause it can go all night! I can hear it from my bedroom.

He sits back down and looks at the TV. Elliot stares uneasily at Peter's wrinkled face.

After a moment, Peter's cell phone buzzes on the sofa next to him.

PETER
That was quick.

He picks up the phone, looks at the number on the screen.

PETER
Fuck a duck, we gotta go.

CUT TO:

EXT. PETER'S VAN - NIGHT.

Peter and Elliot are in their jumpsuits now. Peter is driving; Elliot is trying to read a map by the dome light.

ELLIOT
You want to turn left right here,
I think... right here, right here!

PETER
All right, I got it.

Peter makes a left onto a lonely industrial access road. Elliot turns the dome light off and peers through the windshield.

A couple of darkened buildings loom up ahead. There is a single official-looking vehicle parked in front of one of them, something designated as SYMSOL SECURITY.

A severe-looking woman is standing beside the vehicle, illuminated by the approaching headlights of Peter's van.

The van stops and Peter and Elliot get out and walk over to the woman.

PETER
What's up?

SECURITY GUARD

Yeah, you just need to power-spray
the sidewalk and this tree here.

Elliot looks down at the sidewalk. There's a huge splash of what
is definitely blood. A single barren tree grows very close to
the building.

Clumps of a dark material are stuck in the branches.

PETER

What happened?

SECURITY GUARD

Some dog was having some kind of
operation and he went crazy
and ran down a hallway up
there and crashed right out the
window.

Elliot sees that part of a window on an upper floor above the
tree has been clumsily taped over with brown paper.

SECURITY GUARD

Dog got stuck in the tree, it was hanging
there for like three minutes before it
fell.

PETER

What the hell were they doing to it?

SECURITY GUARD

I don't ask those questions around here.
But these people in lab coats got out
of here pretty fast after they got him
down and took it back inside. They
just want this cleaned up right away.

PETER

We gotta get up in that tree,
I need a ladder. What is that, fur and
skin and such? Elliot, you wanna
get the hose out?

Elliot just stands there for a moment, looking up at the
branches and the remains of the dog.

EXT. BUILDING - NIGHT.

Peter is now hosing down the sidewalk; he has two bags full of unidentified material beside him.

Elliot has slipped away. Looking back at Peter over his shoulder from a distance, he moves around the side of the building, sticking close to the hedges.

He moves very close to one of the windows, peers in. Through thick glass he sees a long, empty, sterile corridor.

He moves on, visibly cold. He approaches another window. Looks in.

Another sterile corridor, stretching away from Elliot's point of view.

The floor of this one is marked with a thin, wavering bloodstain that must go for thirty yards or more.

Way down the corridor, a man in a white lab coat is sitting on the floor outside an unidentified room. Elliot squints to see him better.

The man is just sitting there in a complete daze, arms around himself as if trying to give himself comfort.

Before Elliot moves away, he turns his head and is able to read one of the small metal signplates on a door just inside the window.

DIVERGENT BEHAVIORS, it says.

CUT TO:

INT. BOWLING ALLEY - NIGHT.

Elliot sits at the bar, again alone. He has a beer in front of him. He takes a sip of it and begins to scratch his fingernail on the bar. Scritch scritch scratch ... almost unconsciously.

CUT TO:

INT. VAN - NIGHT.

Peter's van sits in an ugly industrial-looking area, a fenced property in the distant background.

Inside the van, Peter's got one foot up on the dashboard and he's drinking a beer.

PETER

Fuckin' E.P.A. dumpster is supposed to be open till four fucking a.m. Un-fuckin-believable. Goddamn fuckheads. Like I wanna haul this crap back to my house. I'll throw it behind fuckin' Rite Aid first.

He stares sullenly through the windshield.

PETER

Finger kept me up last night. It was really going.

That gets Elliot's attention. Peter peers into the dark, seeming haunted.

PETER

I wonder if it's that guy who drowned on our ship that time. Maybe he still thinks it was my fault.

Elliot sees a tear in Peter's eye, one he is utterly unaware of.

PETER

It's a hard, hard old world, is what I'll tell him.

CUT TO:

INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - DAY.

Elliot is walking amongst the silent stacks, looking for a particular something on a high shelf. He passes a couple of students. We hear his cell phone buzz. He answers it.

ELLIOT

Hello?

MAN'S VOICE

Hi, is this Elliot?

ELLIOT

Yes.

MAN'S VOICE

Yeah, it's Jerry Seitz. Look, I can't reach my brother, do you know what the hell's going on?

ELLIOT

Um... no, I haven't heard from him in a few days.

JERRY'S VOICE

Well, I'm starting to get calls, he's missing jobs ... you have no idea where Peter is?

ELLIOT

No.

JERRY'S VOICE

Could you do me a favor, could you run out to his house, he's not answering his phone. I gotta know if something's up, if he got arrested for something or what.

CUT TO:

EXT. PETER'S HOUSE - DAY.

Elliot's car pulls up to the curb, and he kills the engine and gets out. It's pouring rain. He notices that the work van is parked in the garage, which has been left open.

Elliot starts across the lawn, looking left and right for signs of life.

He walks up to the front door, and, as before with Helen's door, he knocks on it and waits for an answer. He knocks again.

His hand reaches out to the front knob, just like at Helen's. But unlike the first scene, this time the door is locked.

Elliot goes around the back of the house. The lawn is splotchy, derelict. Elliot steps up on the rickety porch and sees right away that the back door of the house is ajar.

INT. PETER'S HOUSE - DAY.

The back door leads into the kitchen. There's a half-empty glass of something brown on the kitchen table, and a tiny radio sitting on a table against the wall is on and set at a very low volume level. It's mostly just static.

Elliot moves past the kitchen table and takes a few steps down the short hallway that leads into the living room. He peers up the staircase leading upstairs and starts to ascend it... then stops cold when he gets a good look at the living room.

There's a huge amount of debris strewn across the carpet. Pieces of drywall, big and small, mixed with white dust.

The wall where Elliot rested his head that other night has been completely ripped apart, from corner to corner, as if someone went at it with rage. Huge vertical and horizontal gashes have gutted it, creating huge holes and random tears.

Sitting on the sofa is a chain saw, covered in white dust.

Elliot stares intently at the wall, and moves his face quite close to it, as if waiting for the scratching to return ... but though he waits, it never does.

He turns and walks briskly through the living room toward the front door. He turns the knob but it won't give; he has to unlock it and does so clumsily, shaken. He opens the door and leaves the house, pushing open the screen, not bothering to put his umbrella open again.

CUT TO:

INT. ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - NIGHT.

In a montage, we see his unmade bed, dirty dishes in the sink, his empty desk, cereal boxes crammed into the trash ... and other shots of a life being squandered.

HELEN'S VOICE

(V.O., ON A CELLPHONE)

Elliot... it's Helen. I sent you a letter but you didn't respond, so I called your sister. She hasn't heard from you either, she says she thinks your phone doesn't work.

We need to talk about your life.

Our life. If you want to call me,
I promise I won't mention
anything about the past. That's my
gift to you.

Please... take it.

There are empty bottles of liquor stacked clumsily in the bathroom trash can ... and four or five empty bottles of fully Z-Sominol lined up on the bathroom counter.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT.

Headlights peek over the horizon. A car is moving very, very slowly, its right wheels straddling the line separating the pavement from the shoulder.

INT. CAR - NIGHT.

Inside the car, Elliot is virtually asleep at the wheel, trying to guide the car along almost by feel, bumping along with pathetic slowness. He is deeply drunk.

He stares at the low cover of fog ahead. The road, bordered on both sides by barren forest, is straight, but the car keeps nosing to the right as Elliot has difficulty keeping control even at fifteen miles per hour.

Now he simply hits the brakes awkwardly and the car stops. He bucks forward slightly and closes his eyes.

After a moment, Elliot opens his eyes wide and touches the gas pedal again, creeping forward.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT.

The road has now opened up. A row of tombstones drifts by, lit faintly by the red glow of Elliot's taillights.

Elliot looks deeply confused about where he is.

Somehow he has gotten inside a cemetery. He bumps along a gravel path on a slow curve. On his left and right, tombstones march in all directions. The fog is more prominent here, eerie.

Elliot stops the car. He feels for the keys, has trouble turning them, then realizes he's not in Park. He pushes the shift lever into the proper position and kills the engine.

He staggers out, leaving the headlights on. He walks unsteadily off to the side of the gravel path and sinks to his knees, his head down, seeming sick.

Close by, there's a large stone monument completely silhouetted by the night sky. Atop the monument is the figure of some unidentifiable man, his arms outstretched. In the dark, however, the beckoning seems frightening, reaching out to Elliot.

The high beams of Elliot's car shine well down the path. In the distance there is a figure, almost nothing more than a dot, just barely lit by the furthest reach of the headlights. It looks like a man.

Elliot starts to get to his feet, but cannot. He's just too drunk.

The figure approaches. Weirdly, it seems to be moving toward Elliot without making contact with the ground, drifting virtually atop the cover of fog, though the figure has legs.

Elliot, terrified but entranced, holds his breath.

Now the figure is very close--and it is, in fact, a man, nothing magical or sinister. The man takes a few more steps--real steps now--and then stops and shines a flashlight onto Elliot.

MAN

What are you *doing* here?

Elliot remains on the ground in the fog-laden cemetery, helpless.

CUT TO:

INT. BREAK ROOM - NIGHT.

In a standard break room lit with cheap fluorescents, a fat man in a lumberjack shirt and hiking boots is lying atop one of four cafeteria tables, sleeping.

Elliot is sitting at another one of the tables, his head in his arms. There are law enforcement posters on the wall behind his head.

Elliot groggily lifts his head from his arms when he hears footsteps.

A policeman is bringing someone into the break room: a tall, thin man with very long black hair and a ratty t-shirt. The policeman gestures for him to sit down at one of the tables, and he complies. Then the policeman turns and leaves the room.

From the table beside Elliot's, the young man, MAURICE, 30, looks at Elliot after the cop leaves, and grins.

MAURICE

Can you believe this, that the jail is so overcrowded they have to keep us in here with a guard outside? How hilarious is that?

He gets up and has a seat across from Elliot.

MAURICE

I'm Maurice. I defaced a fountain. What's your name?

ELLIOT

Elliot. Drunk driving.

MAURICE

Yeah. You a student?

ELLIOT

I was. Why?

MAURICE

You just look like one. Did you go around here?

ELLIOT

I went to American.

MAURICE

So did I, for a couple of years. What'd you study?

ELLIOT

Um ... anthropology, mostly.

MAURICE

Yeah, like primitive cultures
and such?

ELLIOT

Uh huh, that was pretty much what
I was focused on.

MAURICE

Really. I happen to be a bit of
an expert in that stuff myself,
if I do say so. I read all kinds
of things all the time. We have a
lot to talk about.

CUT TO:

INT. BREAK ROOM - NIGHT.

Later. Both Elliot and Maurice are sleeping wherever they have
found a flat spot, stretched out awkwardly.

A policeman comes in.

POLICEMAN

Elliot Lem ...

Elliot wakes up right away and rises. Maurice wakes too,
standing politely.

MAURICE

Hey man, you got my address, right?

ELLIOT

(as he leaves)

Yeah, thanks.

MAURICE

Seriously, just come over Friday
night. You'll like these people.
And I'll lend you that copy of
the Bellhavre book.

ELLIOT
Yeah, I'll try to make it. See you
later.

Maurice waves and watches him go.

CUT TO:

INT. ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - NIGHT.

Elliot lies in his bed, asleep ... dreaming:

EXT. LAKE - DAY.

Elliot sits in a small wooden boat on a quiet lake on a dark, gloomy day. He is just drifting, having no oar.

On the shore, about fifty yards, away, there's a man standing with his back to Elliot. He is holding a giant stick, a staff of some kind, and with it he seems to be drawing huge letters in the sand as the waves roll up near his feet.

INT. ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - NIGHT.

He wakes.

INT. ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - NIGHT.

Later. Elliot is methodically putting several full bottles of liquor into his garbage can.

INT. ALLEY - NIGHT.

Elliot comes around the corner of the alley beside his building. It looks so much like the alley where he was attacked that he noticeably hesitates.

He is holding a black garbage bag. He walks up to a dumpster, opens it, and tosses the bag inside.

Inside the lid of the dumpster, someone has messily scrawled these cryptic words: OUT WITH THEIR EYES.

Elliot turns away.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT.

A car cruises slowly through a very dicey residential neighborhood, worse even than Peter's. Elliot is inside, being driven by an Uber driver.

He is let out at a house at the end of a cul-de-sac. It doesn't even have a real driveway; a couple of cars are parked on the lawn. We hear rock music coming from inside the house.

INT. MAURICE'S HOUSE - NIGHT.

In the living room, six or seven people are sitting around quietly, watching a foreign film while music plays in the background. The people look rather gothy. Maurice is sitting on the sofa; Elliot sits beside it, somewhat by himself, watching the movie idly.

His eyes happen to catch on a shelf full of videotapes. He squints a little in the dark to read the handwritten labels.

Many of them have labels marked GROUP MASS, and others have labels marked TRANCE, with dates beside the word. These are mixed in with normal videos, foreign and obscure films.

Maurice taps Elliot's shoulder.

MAURICE
(*rising*)

Hey, let me show you something.

Elliot gets to his feet and follows him.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT.

Elliot walks behind the much taller Maurice down a long dark hallway toward a bedroom. At one point Elliot happens to look back over his shoulder and can just see back into the living room.

Most of the guests are still watching the TV, but a couple of them follow his progress down the hallway with rapt attention.

INT. MAURICE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT.

Maurice closes the door behind them. The bedroom has virtually no decor or furniture. Instead, there are piles and piles of books, stacked against three of the four walls, up to his waist in some cases. A cot is in one corner of the room.

MAURICE

Let me get that book for you.

Maurice walks over to one of the stacks and starts to look through it. Elliot notices a large piece of paper spread out over a card table: a very complicated pencil drawing has been started.

The drawing is of a doomed horse scrambling madly to get back onto a high cliff but unable, certain to fall to its death.

MAURICE

Here we go.

Maurice hands Elliot a book. Elliot flips through it in awe.

ELLIOT

This is an original copy..

MAURICE

Yeah.

ELLIOT

God, how did you get a hold of it?

MAURICE

Took it out of the Penn State library when no one was looking.

ELLIOT

When do you need it back?

MAURICE

Keep it man, I'm done with it.

ELLIOT

Jesus..

Maurice has taken something out of his closet.

MAURICE

Check this out.

It's an exotic knife, very strangely curved and tapered. Maurice holds it near the lamplight.

ELLIOT

What is it?

MAURICE

Just something I got to mess around with. It's designed for marking the skin without cutting too far in.

Elliot casts another glance at the piles of old books.

ELLIOT

So ... are you a Satanist or something?

MAURICE

Yeah, actually... we all are, all of us who live here. Is that the kind of thing you're interested in?

ELLIOT

No, afraid not.

Maurice sits on his cot, in almost total darkness.

MAURICE

But you must have done some reading about it, you told me so.

ELLIOT

Just a little.

MAURICE

Well, it's all lies. What people have to understand is that it's not about hurting people or praying to some other god. It's about confronting your fears, getting in touch with the darkest parts of life so you lose your terror of them. People walk around horrified at the things that might happen to them. What we do is we look those things right in the face, so we can really start living.

ELLIOT
(*disinterested*)
Oh yeah?

MAURICE
What happened to your leg, that didn't have to fuck you up. You could have used that to improve yourself. We don't brood about anything that happens to us. Good or bad, we see it all as an opportunity. The darker we go, the freer we become.

ELLIOT
It's a bit over my head.

MAURICE
You want to write a book about the dark side of human nature, you can't do it without at least seeing how we're able to let it grow and seize total control of it.

ELLIOT
How do you go about doing that?

Maurice stands again, comes a little closer ... uncomfortably so.

MAURICE
Hey, do you need something for the leg?

ELLIOT
No... not really.

MAURICE
If you do, just let me know.
Do you know about Z-Sominol?

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

Later. The TV is off. There's just three people in the living room now. Two of the goth types who live with Maurice are playing some kind of card game and smoking marijuana.

Elliot is in a corner chair, asleep. He suddenly wakes up with a snort and looks around him.

EXT. FRONT YARD - DAWN.

The night sky is just breaking up. On the front stoop, Elliot is putting on his coat. Maurice is standing beside him, smoking, wearing no jacket at all.

ELLIOT
Thanks for the book.

MAURICE
No problem. We're having a thing tomorrow night if you're interested. Just something we do once in a while, the six of us. It's a good little window into our method. Why don't you come by?

ELLIOT
Do you think you'd really have some of that pain stuff?

MAURICE
By tomorrow night, sure.

ELLIOT
Okay, I'll have money by then, I'll try to make it over.

MAURICE
Swing by around midnight, 12:30.

Elliot--who has no sign of a limp anymore--crosses the lawn and begins to walk down the road.

Maurice smokes and watches him go, contemplative.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY.

Elliot is standing in front of an ATM in a rundown section of the city. He punches some buttons and waits for his cash, shivering.

A ways down the sidewalk, a man is half-watching him. He looks strange.

Elliot averts his gaze. When the money emerges from the machine, Elliot takes it quickly, then grabs his receipt.

He takes a stubby pencil out of his coat and presses the receipt against the top of a mailbox nearby. He does some quick calculations, looking confused and frustrated.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT.

Elliot is driving himself once again, down the road where Maurice lives. It is very late; the entire dumpy neighborhood seems asleep.

INT. MAURICE'S HOUSE - NIGHT.

In the cramped and dirty kitchen. A few people from the night before are standing around drinking and talking quietly.

MAURICE (O.S.)
Everybody ready?

Elliot turns. Maurice is here. He has worn the exact same thing every time we've seen him.

MAURICE
All right, let's go into the basement.

He crosses the kitchen and opens a door, holding it open for everyone. One by one, his roommates step onto a creaky wooden staircase and head downwards. Elliot gets at the back of the short line and is the last one to go.

MAURICE
Here, man.

Maurice has held out, low to his side, a bottle of pills. Elliot takes them.

ELLIOT
Thanks.

Elliot heads down. Maurice follows him, closing the door tightly.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT.

The unfurnished basement is lit by a single bulb dangling from an overhead chain. The floor is cracked cement and the walls are filthy cinder-block. The group fans out in the center.

Maurice parts the gathering and turns to face them.

MAURICE

Okay. Let's all get down.

Elliot looks to the people beside him to follow their cue. They start to get down on the obviously cold floor and lie on their backs, face up. Elliot joins them uncertainly. Everyone lies down in a natural circle.

MAURICE

Everyone close your eyes.

Everyone complies--except Elliot. Maurice does not seem to notice. He steps over to the light bulb and pulls the chain.

The lights go out. Elliot is left wide-eyed in the dark. He turns his head on the pavement to look at the girl beside him, just a couple of feet away.

Maurice takes one long, slow revolution about the human circle, looking down. As he approaches Elliot, Elliot closes his eyes.

MAURICE

I want you to imagine yourself
alone in the woods, late at night.
It's winter, just like it is now.
And in the trees in front of you,
there are white sheets hanging
from the branches every fifty feet
or so, torn into ribbons. And
these fragments of sheets are all
more or less in a line, just
waving in the wind. You're
going to follow them.

In the dark, Elliot opens his eyes briefly, nervous. Maurice's legs drift past him on one of his many revolutions around the circle.

MAURICE

So imagine yourself in the woods, walking forward between them, stepping on leaves and twigs and branches. And as you pass by the torn sheets, the wind ruffles them and they touch you as you go by. You walk and walk, and eventually there's a break in the woods, and you step out into a clearing. The clearing ends in a long hill that slopes upwards for two hundred feet. You're looking up, and at the top of that hill, there's a palace standing there against the sky, a glorious palace, with jewels embedded in the stones over the entrance, and more windows than you can count, and the palace is made of ancient but flawless brick. There must be two hundred rooms in the palace, and it's lit up with a thousand candles along the roof. Imagine yourselves walking up toward that palace, up the grassy hill, and crossing a drawbridge over a serene moat, and entering through the tall doors. But once you get inside, something's strange, because it's not very welcoming at all. It's dark and kind of dusty, and there's not much of anything in the grand foyer but ornate furniture no one's used for a long time. You go up a stone flight of steps, and on the second floor it's even darker, and there are cobwebs everywhere. You see that there's one flight of stairs leading to the top level. Do you want to go up

those stairs?

The people in the room, except for Elliot, all answer him simultaneously and loudly.

THE GROUP

Yes.

This causes Elliot's eyes to open again, just for a moment.

MAURICE

You climb that last flight of steps, and you see that there's blood on the steps, and something smells foul when you reach the top. And at the top of the palace it's almost totally dark. Do you want to keep walking forward?

THE GROUP

(louder)

Yes.

MAURICE

All around you in this hallway, there are hands on the floor. Severed hands. As you walk forward, you can hear screams from behind the walls, and the smell is terrible, and you feel out for something, anything, but there's nothing there. Finally you bump into something in the dark. It's a wooden door. You can turn back now, and run away, but do you want to open it?

THE GROUP

Yes!

Now Maurice stands still at the back of the basement, barely visible.

MAURICE

You open the door and you enter a tiny room. It's very hot in the room, and around you are

the whispers of people begging
for your help, and they're also
telling you that you shouldn't
be here, it's too dangerous.

Elliot is breathing deeply and with real effort.

As Maurice's voice seems to become tinged with the effect of speaking from down a hallway, we hear the rushing of blood inside Elliot's body--a low, chaotic sound, and we realize he is in some distress.

MAURICE

Fingers reach out to touch you,
and though you can't see anything
you can feel the blood on their
hands, and you can barely breathe,
and this is the very last chance
to turn back and leave the
palace, because all that waits for
you now is a trap door in the
center of the room.

On the floor, Elliot squeezes his eyes tight and the rushing of his blood gets louder inside his head.

MAURICE

If you open that door and go
down through it, you will know
all the secrets of the palace.

Do you want to open that trap door?
Do you want to know its secrets?

THE GROUP

Yes!

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING.

Elliot is stretched out on the sofa in Maurice's living room.
His eyes open.

He's alone. The place is quiet.

With great effort, Elliot sits up. He slowly gets to his feet as if waking from a week-long sleep.

He walks slowly over to the front door, takes a last look back at the empty room, then pushes the screen door open and heads out.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - DAY.

Elliot is sitting in a cubicle, taking notes, some books spread around him. He looks exhausted.

He reaches inside his backpack, roots around in there. He comes up with a bottle of Z-Sominol. This bottle does not look like the one he got legally.

He shakes one of the pills out into his hand and then dry-swallows it. As he starts to screw the cap back on, he catches notice of his right wrist.

There are some marks on it, on the underside, a curious broken line of redness. He looks at his left wrist too, for good measure.

Roughly the same marks are on that one too. It looks like something was tied around his wrists, perhaps, and cinched too tightly.

Elliot sits there for a moment, thinking.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Elliot sits across from a man in an academic-looking office. The man is reading some of Elliot's notes.

ADVISER

Where would you want to go for this?
Could it be done in the same semester?

ELLIOT

Yeah, it would be County Cork, and I'd want to try to get in a few weeks at the Wesleyan Center while I'm

here.

ADVISER

I don't know about some of this comparative fringe religions research; they might think some of it is too obscure.

ELLIOT

I could just do a monograph on that. I was thinking more along the lines of a book sometime anyway.

ADVISER

It might be better if I left that part out for now. You can only put the scholarship off for so long. You won't be ready in January?

ELLIOT

You think May would be a real problem?

ADVISER

You'll have to describe your circumstances, probably directly to them. Are you comfortable in doing that?

ELLIOT

(uncertainly)

Maybe in a little while.

INT. STUDENT CENTER - DAY.

Minutes later, Elliot walks down a hallway dotted with people. He stops when he sees a group of students talking up ahead. He consciously heads in another direction.

One of the students seems to half-recognize him. Elliot turns away quickly, trying to evade him.

STUDENT

(calling down the hall)

Hey, Elliot..?

Elliot hears him but moves on. The student watches him go, disappointed.

INT. STUDENT CENTER - DAY.

Elliot sits in a niche in a quiet hallway, sipping coffee and looking through a high window down at the quad below. Hundreds of students are walking around, talking, laughing, walking briskly.

Elliot can't hear them except very dimly. He watches them go by, safely separated from them.

His cell phone rings. He looks at the screen, and hesitates. Finally, he answers.

MAURICE

Elliot, it's Maurice. I just wanted to tell you about an event on Wednesday night. Hey, I think you passed out or something the other evening. You all right?

ELLIOT

I'm fine.

MAURICE

Wednesday night. Same time.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT.

Elliot emerges from a used bookstore, carrying some old-looking textbook. He starts to head down the sidewalk.

He walks past a liquor store. His head cranes up to read the sign, then quickly he looks forward again, moving on.

But he only gets another ten or fifteen steps when he stops. He hangs around a deserted bus stop for a moment. Finally, he turns and walks back toward the liquor store, entering.

CUT TO:

INT. ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - NIGHT.

Elliot's hands are in his kitchen sink. The water runs for a time, the level rising to about three-quarters full. Then Elliot's hand stops the faucet and disappears from the frame for a moment.

When his hand re-appears, it holds his cell phone. Unceremoniously, he drops the phone into the water. It sinks quickly to the bottom of the sink.

Elliot stares into the sink dully. He lifts a bottle of beer to his lips and takes a deep swig.

INT. ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - NIGHT.

Elliot lies in his bed, head turned to one side on the pillow. His clock radio reads 3:19.

He seems barely asleep. His eyes open, heavy-lidded.

Near the front door there's a small bookshelf and a pair of Elliot's shoes. Beside these things, sitting on the floor, is a dark object the size of a softball. It appears to be a small sculpture of some kind. A human head, maybe.

Elliot seems unnerved to see this object.

Now, the small dark head has very obviously moved a few inches closer to Elliot. There can be no mistaking this.

The head, a wooden carving, is almost featureless. It barely has eyes or a nose or a mouth.

Elliot starts to lift his head off his pillow but seems physically unable. He swallows hard.

The strange head is now just a few feet away. Almost as if it were moving, in fits and starts, methodically, inch by inch, toward Elliot.

Elliot squeezes his eyes shut. After a long moment, he opens them again.

There's nothing there but a bookshelf and his shoes and the door into his apartment.

Elliot stares at that corner, eyes wide.

INT. BATHROOM - MORNING.

Elliot stumbles into the room, groggy.

We can see in the mirror that there are some very faint reddish marks on Elliot's neck. They are much like the ones that we saw on his wrists. He leans closer to the mirror. They're nothing much ... but still very strange.

Elliot then examines his wrists once more. The marks that were there have faded considerably.

INT. ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - NIGHT.

Elliot stares out the window and downward. A car, old and dented, is pulling up to the curb.

EXT. ELLIOT'S BUILDING - NIGHT.

Elliot emerges from the front door of his apartment building into the cold. Maurice stands at the driver's side.

MAURICE

Hey. I was wondering if maybe you had the rest of that money.

ELLIOT

(taking out his wallet)
Yeah, sorry.

MAURICE

Couldn't get a hold of you. What's up?

ELLIOT

Nothing, I've been kind of ... sick.

He holds the money out across the roof of the car.

MAURICE

If you still need this for a while, that's cool. It can wait.

ELLIOT

No, not at all.

Maurice shoves the bills into his pocket without counting them.

MAURICE

Hey, tonight's our proxy crawl.

ELLIOT

What's that?

MAURICE

It's something you really have to see for yourself. I know you're not really into the vibe, but it's pretty interesting.

ELLIOT

I'm pretty tired.

MAURICE

It only takes like a half hour.

ELLIOT

Was it you who carried me upstairs the other night when I passed out?

MAURICE

Yeah. We were a little worried.

ELLIOT

Something's up with my wrists. Do you know if anyone else touched me?

MAURICE

How do you mean?

Elliot displays his arms for Maurice, who looks at them intently.

MAURICE

No, I'm sure no one else did. Strange.

ELLIOT

You're sure?

MAURICE

Definitely.

ELLIOT

I think there's a couple of marks
on my neck too.

MAURICE

Let me see.

ELLIOT

No ... it's nothing, don't worry
about it. I may have cut myself or
something. I had a blackout last
week. I have to stop drinking.

MAURICE

Maybe you had blacked out in the
basement.

ELLIOT

Could be.

MAURICE

I stopped drinking a long time ago.
I don't do any of that stuff now.
So hop in, warm up, I'd really like
you to see this. It'll be excellent
for your notes.

ELLIOT

Which way are you going?

MAURICE

Over towards Benton Park.

ELLIOT

Could you maybe run me over to A.U.?
I think I have too much beer in
my system, I don't want to drive,
I technically don't have a license
right now.

MAURICE

Yeah, sure, let's go.

Maurice gets in the car. After a slight hesitation, so does
Elliot.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT.

Maurice drives them through a desolate stretch far from the city.

MAURICE

Our practices have really opened up some new doors this year. You know about astral projection?

ELLIOT

I've read about it.

MAURICE

I've become able to do everything I need to do to keep up appearances, but I'm almost never here when people think I am. The people who think they see me, it's not me they're talking to. They just get the shell.

The dark landscape becomes ever more wooded.

ELLIOT

What happened after I passed out? Was there more to the ceremony?

MAURICE

Not too much.

ELLIOT

I remember ... you were walking around with a chain, and you were pulling it across our chests.

MAURICE

A chain?

ELLIOT

Yes.

MAURICE

No, it wasn't a chain. It was just ribbon.

ELLIOT

It felt really heavy, like a piece of chain. I heard it on the cement.

MAURICE

That's weird, because it's just a long piece of ribbon. It's right there in the back seat. It felt like a chain to you?

ELLIOT

I heard it clinking.

MAURICE

No ... it's really just ribbon.

Elliot regards him closely.

MAURICE

That reminds me of something I read at some point ... that has some significance, I think. That kind of misperception.

The road goes on and on.

ELLIOT

Are we going to A.U.?

MAURICE

Could you do us a big favor and videotape the crawl?

ELLIOT

It's in the woods?

MAURICE

Yeah. I'll definitely make it worth your while.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT.

Maurice's old car comes to a stop on a wide dirt area bordering the woods, and he cuts the lights and the engine. He and Elliot get out. Maurice walks around the car and opens the trunk.

Maurice brings out a small video camera and holds it out to Elliot.

MAURICE

Just carry it for now, that's fine.
It's only a half mile.

Maurice and turns and starts to walk into the woods. Elliot follows him.

In just a few steps a path begins through some low scrub brush, leading to the deeper stuff. Elliot looks back over his shoulder and watches the road disappear behind him.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT.

They walk, Maurice leading. The trees are barren. The path twists and winds. Sometimes the branches are so close that Elliot has to twist his head out of the way.

Maurice's pace is unflagging. Elliot plunges his cold hands deep into the pockets of his coat, stares up at the moon nervously.

Now someone is waiting for the two of them just up ahead. We recognize him as one of the young men from the house the two times Elliot has been there. He nods to Elliot ... and then, without anyone uttering a word, he simply falls in behind and walks with them.

They press on. The wind picks up.

Around a turn up ahead, there are sheets hanging from the branches of the trees ahead of them.

They have been stretched out and billow softly in the wind. Nine or ten of them, in a loose line leading down the path, so close that they almost touch Maurice and Elliot as they pass. A surreal sight, white sheets in the barren woods. Just as Maurice described them the other night.

A young woman, also recognizable from the other night, has been waiting for them against a tree. Now she joins them, walking side by side with Maurice down the thin path.

ELLIOT

(to Maurice)

What are the sheets about?

Maurice answers without turning back to look at him.

MAURICE

You know, when we die, they wrap
our bodies in one.

Elliot glances back at the man behind him. That man seems to very intentionally not return his gaze.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT.

It must be a few minutes later, because now Maurice and the man are behind Elliot and the woman; they've switched places.

Maurice seems to drop back a bit as they go, and Elliot doesn't notice. They pass another white sheet.

Elliot, breathing hard, looks up to see that the woods are ending; there's a clearing up ahead.

And then he becomes aware that he's at the front of the pack.

Maurice and his two friends have already stopped. They're looking at him quietly. Far behind them, the sheets rustle.

ELLIOT

We're there?

MAURICE

Yeah. Go on ahead. This is your
crawl.

ELLIOT

What do you mean?

MAURICE

We're following you. We're all
going to the palace tonight.

ELLIOT

What?

MAURICE

Tonight we're really going to
see it. But you're going to lead us
there.

Elliot looks cornered now ... and deeply afraid.

MAURICE

You're going to take us into the palace, and we'll celebrate. A celebration, for you. It's just a few more yards.

ELLIOT

Why me?

MAURICE

It's your crawl. It's your release. Keep going.

Elliot hesitates. He turns and looks toward the break in the woods.

Very slowly, he begins to walk toward it. The others follow.

With those strange people well behind him, Elliot emerges into the clearing. He looks up and freezes in place.

There, sitting in the clearing, high on a hill, is a small old house. It is not a palace but a ruined, burned-out husk of a place, abandoned long ago, rotted and empty. The windows are boarded up, the front porch is all but demolished. Even in the dark we can see graffiti strewn all over it.

Elliot turns.

The group stands there, watching him. Maurice is closest. They say nothing.

Elliot turns back to the house. He casts one more long look at it. And then ... he begins to run.

He runs in the direction of the house but veers off to the right, where the field slopes away toward more woods. Elliot runs as fast as he can, chugging and panting. We hear his feet and his breath, quite loud. He tosses the video camera onto the ground.

The house becomes bigger and bigger in the frame but then it disappears as Elliot runs beyond it in a panic.

Just before he gets to the woods, Elliot turns his head back for a split second, his face a mask of terror.

Well behind him, the group has begun to run after him. They're coming for him.

Elliot crashes into the woods. He runs through the dark, his feet kicking up leaves as he whips past trees, dodging them, jerking left and right, always plowing forward. Branches reach out and he slams into them, breaking them off, putting his hands out to stop them from cutting his face.

The sound of the wind and his feet in the leaves slowly drops out, leaving only his desperate breath on the soundtrack.

Elliot runs. He stumbles across a path, takes a hard right, and starts to run down it, picking up speed. He looks back over his shoulder, but we never see what he sees there.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT.

Elliot breaks out of the woods onto the grounds of an elementary school. He is panting wildly, wheezing. Then he starts to run again, toward some street lights and possibly safety, beginning to limp badly.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT.

In front of a convenience store, Elliot is pacing slowly, trying to keep warm. After a moment, a cab pulls up. He gets inside quickly and the cab pulls away.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT.

Elliot exits the cab in front of a skeezy place called Sleep Tite. He walks down the sidewalk toward the office.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT.

A disheveled Elliot walks down the hallway of one of the interior floors, holding a room key.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT.

Elliot lies on top of the motel bed, half-dressed, staring out the wide picture window. Out there, traffic moves on a distant highway. He is safe; the nightmare is over.

CUT TO:

INT. COLLEGE LIBRARY - NIGHT.

Elliot is in a cubicle, slumped over his books, asleep. A man comes up behind him, gently touching his arm.

MAN
Sir? Sir?

Elliot wakes up, embarrassed.

MAN
We're closing up.

The man walks away. Elliot starts to get his things together.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEEHOUSE - DAY.

Elliot is the only customer. Outside, rain falls heavily.

Looking even more haggard than usual, unshaven for several days, Elliot is looking through a newspaper as he drinks coffee. He flips a couple of pages and stops when he sees a certain headline.

ONE-CAR CRASH CLAIMS WALDORF RESIDENT, it says.

We see a small segment of the brief story. It tells us that Maurice Aikens, age 35, died in a crash the night before when his car swerved off the road trying to avoid hitting a deer.

And there is Maurice's photograph.

Elliot lowers the newspaper, his face blank.

The front door of the coffeehouse opens. A man steps in from the rain, backlit, in silhouette.

He is tall, thin, with very long black hair.

Elliot looks at him intently. He looks a lot like Maurice.
But as he steps into real light, we see it isn't him after all.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY.

Rain falls as Elliot drifts along aimlessly, no umbrella. He doesn't seem to care about, or even be aware of, the fact that it's raining.

EXT. BUS SHELTER - DAY.

Elliot hunches under an overhang, still seeming lost.

A bus approaches and stops in front of the shelter. We hear the doors open.

Elliot gets up quickly and walks away as people emerge from the bus, as if he can't deal with their presence for a single moment.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPORTS BAR - DAY.

Elliot is now totally drenched. He approaches a small sports bar. After a moment's pause, he opens the door and enters.

INT. SPORTS BAR - DAY.

Inside the place, it's very quiet. There is one man at the bar, but no one at any of the cheap-looking tables.

Elliot walks past the bar. Music plays softly on a jukebox, and a couple of televisions show sports with no sound.

Elliot ducks into a small alcove and sits in one of the booths.

WAITRESS (O.S.)
Hi. Would you like a menu?

ELLIOT
Yeah. And just some water to drink.

Elliot takes a menu from her and opens it without much interest. He takes his coat off. His face is soaked and his hair is matted down. He looks at the menu.

There is a man sitting in a booth across the aisle from Elliot. He has short black hair specked with gray. He is wearing the clothes of a priest. No jacket. There is neither food nor drink in front of him.

Elliot looks briefly up at the man. The man nods at him, and Elliot nods back, then goes back to the menu.

PRIEST

I think I may have been stood up.

Elliot looks up again, but says nothing.

PRIEST

Do you mind if I sit with you for a bit? I feel silly.

ELLIOT

(reluctantly)

Sure.

The priest stands and slides into the booth, across from Elliot.

PRIEST

I'm Anton Hall. How long have you been walking around out there?

ELLIOT

Oh ... about ... an hour. I was just kind of in a daze.

FATHER HALL

Are you sick? You don't look so well.

ELLIOT

I think I'm coming down with something.

The waitress comes over and sets a glass of water in front of Elliot.

WAITRESS

Do you know what you want?

ELLIOT

Yeah, can I get a hamburger,
no cheese, just lettuce on it,
and fries.

WAITRESS

Sure.

She takes the menu without asking Father Hall any questions, or even looking at him, perhaps having dealt with him earlier.

FATHER HALL

Day off work today?

ELLIOT

I'm a student.

FATHER HALL

Oh. Are you from Washington
originally?

ELLIOT

Yeah.

He sips his water.

FATHER HALL

You look down.

ELLIOT

No, I ... it's been a rough couple
of months.

FATHER HALL

Really. Can I ask why? I think my
friend is not showing up today.

ELLIOT

It's hard to explain. I had an accident
with my leg some time back, and ever
since then it's been hard.

FATHER HALL

In what way?

Elliot stares into his water glass.

ELLIOT

Oh, I ... started a bit of a drinking problem, and I had a really terrible job, and then ... I met a friend who turned out not to be a friend at all. Not at all.

Elliot sniffs, voice dropping.

ELLIOT

Rough time.

Father Hall looks at him quietly.

INT. SPORTS BAR - DAY.

Later. Elliot has gotten halfway through his hamburger; the two men have been talking for a while.

FATHER HALL

What did you think they'd do to you if they caught you that night?

ELLIOT

I think they were going to hurt me.

FATHER HALL

Have you ever heard from any of them again?

ELLIOT

No. I stayed out of my apartment as much as I could. And today ...

Father Hall watches him, waiting. He himself still has nothing to drink, or eat.

ELLIOT

... today, I read that Maurice died in a car wreck. It just happened last night. So he's gone.

FATHER HALL

That's terrible. That's very sad.

ELLIOT

Yeah. But when I read that ... at first I felt so good. I don't even want to tell you. I was so glad he was dead. To me it meant it was one less person to come after me.

Elliot starts to visibly break down.

ELLIOT

I just want everyone to go away. Just keep walking ... and never stop.

He is crying now, staring at the table. Tears run down his cheeks. Father Hall's expression remains exactly the same.

At some point Elliot begins to truly weep, body shaking, all of the agony of the past months finally coming out. It takes him a long time to collect himself.

FATHER HALL

I don't want to push the church on you, I won't do that. But it sounds like you really need someone to talk to on a regular basis. You should talk more about your drinking and your father.

ELLIOT

(ashamed, wiping his eyes)
I don't like to talk, I don't know why I'm saying anything.

FATHER HALL

I'm not in the city for long; I'm working at a shelter south and east of here. But you could come talk to me anytime you feel like it. Nothing about religion if you don't want. Just if you want a friend for a while.

ELLIOT

Thanks. I might.

FATHER HALL

Why don't you write this address down.

Elliot reaches beside him and takes a pen from his jacket. As Father Hall speaks, he writes on a napkin.

ELLIOT

Okay.

FATHER HALL

1230 Okie Street, Space F.

ELLIOT

Okay.

FATHER HALL

It's not a church, it's the shelter. I know of some programs that might be good for you, but I promise, no mention of any of that.

ELLIOT

Yeah, I don't know if I could take being in any kind of group right now, or--

FATHER HALL

You shouldn't have to be. If you feel better when you're alone, then you should go with that. Just try not to drink, okay?

ELLIOT

I try every day.

FATHER HALL

I've got to go. You'll take a cab home?

ELLIOT

I think I can get the bus right outside.

FATHER HALL

Okay, if you're sure you'll be all right.

He stands.

ELLIOT
I feel better, thanks.

FATHER HALL
Come see me, anytime.

Father Hall walks past Elliot. He does not put out his hand.

Elliot digs into his wallet, puts a ten on the table, and takes a long drink of water.

CUT TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY.

Elliot, freshly shaved, hair combed, sits across a small table from a man in a tie. The man is looking over some papers.

MAN
Are you driving at all right now?

ELLIOT
No.

MAN
That's good. So you'd never been arrested before, right?

ELLIOT
No.

MAN
What's your driving record like?

ELLIOT
Just a parking ticket, I think.

MAN
Your BAC when you were picked up is supposed to cost you your license for a year, but what's happening a lot now is that the state is taking community service to shorten that. There's actually something in your neighborhood I want to put you in for.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL - NIGHT.

Elliot stands at the entrance of a large, and very old, school building, pressing a buzzer for entry and peering through the glass set into the windows.

A figure is seen appearing at the door. The door opens and Elliot steps inside.

INT. SCHOOL - NIGHT.

Elliot and a much older man walk down an empty hallway.

MAN

I want you to check the boiler a couple of times a night too, it gets a little screwy and the heat gets to be a problem. Old pipes. Otherwise you should just walk around every hour or so and make sure nothing's going on. There's some computers in that room over there, and once they went after the vending machine. Bob, he's the maintenance guy, he gets here in the morning at six, so that's when you could leave. I'll leave the gym open for you so you can shoot baskets or play ping pong if you want.

CUT TO:

INT. GYM - NIGHT.

There are no lights on at all inside the school gymnasium. We hear the furious bouncing of a basketball on the floor.

Elliot is here all alone. Moonlight shines in through a long row of windows. He dribbles a basketball and shoots it, over and over again, obviously trying to exert himself as much as he possibly can.

INT. GYM - NIGHT.

Now Elliot lies on an exercise mat in the darkness of an all-purpose storage room. He has plugged a lamp into the wall beside him and is reading a book. A small liquor bottle sits beside him.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT.

Upstairs, Elliot shines a flashlight across some locked classroom doors. He walks past one that's obviously a computer lab. He tries to turn the knob, but it's firmly locked. He turns and moves away.

CUT TO:

INT. ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - DUSK.

Elliot enters, carrying a small plastic bag of groceries. He sets them down on his small work table and takes off his coat. He leans over and switches on a lamp. But it does not come on.

He takes a quick look at the light bulb under the shade, twisting it to no effect, and then walks over to the wall. He flips a light switch. No light.

He walks quickly over to a small pile of mail. He sifts through it, and quickly pulls out a particular piece of mail--a bill.

CUT TO:

EXT. ATM - DUSK.

Elliot is standing at the ATM, waiting for it to spit out some money. It makes a beeping sound and Elliot, frustrated, hits a button. His card pops back out and he takes the receipt and looks at it long and hard.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT.

Elliot shoots baskets furiously in the dark. Three bottles of beer are sitting near the free throw line.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - NIGHT.

Elliot sits and reads by the light of a small lamp he's plugged in. A long empty corridor stretches before him, doors on both sides. No overhead lights on at all.

From far away, there is a sound like a door closing, with an echo. Elliot looks up, tilts his head to the ceiling.

The sound does not repeat itself. Worried, he closes his book and gets up out of his chair.

He starts to walk through the dark down the hallway, looking left and right. He's headed toward a certain door up ahead, seeming confident it's the source of the sound.

When he gets to that small door, he takes a small key ring from his pocket. He puts a key into the lock and twists, and the door opens.

A staircase leads downward.

INT. BOILER ROOM - NIGHT.

Elliot makes his way down. More and more of the basement is revealed. We see pipes and a barren cement floor.

Elliot flicks another switch when he gets to the bottom of the staircase but no light comes on ... and he must navigate by his flashlight.

He enters the boiler room. Heating pipes are everywhere.

He walks forward between the pipes, which thrum softly, and approaches a T intersection. He turns left.

The flashlight beam falls on something at the back of the boiler room. A chair is set against one wall.

Someone is sitting in the chair.

But no, not someone; some *thing*.

Elliot holds the flashlight higher, transfixed.

Whatever it is, it's swaddled in a black sort of cloak, all over its body, down over where the feet of a person would be. But

this isn't a human being. It's twice as big, enormous. It has recognizable arms, which rest on the chair's arms. It is sitting up. Its hands are enormous, doughy, dark-colored. It only has three fingers on each hand, and no fingernails.

The thing is perfectly still. The head inside the cloak is overly large, almost a featureless lump. There are eye sockets, but no eyes. The thing's face is a light gray, with a mottled texture. The head seems cocked toward the ceiling. It's as if the thing is dead.

Very cautiously, Elliot takes a couple of steps forward, holding the light steady.

Water runs through the pipes above his head; he flinches.

The thing doesn't move ... or so it seems. It might well be breathing. A faint, wet, thick sound seems to be coming from it, like the breathing of something deep underwater.

We next see Elliot emerging from the intersection, moving back through the maze of pipes. He is not hurrying. His face is a blank.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT.

Back in the long upstairs hallway. Elliot is shining the flashlight at the door he first entered, the one leading down. It's as if he's waiting for it to open after he's left.

But it does not.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT.

The beam of the flashlight enters the frame; Elliot is coming back down those same stairs. He obviously intends to return to the thing in the chair.

He moves just as slowly as before through the dark.

INT. BOILER ROOM - NIGHT.

Around the T-corner he comes.

The chair is still there ... but the thing is gone.

There is something new, though. Elliot trains the flashlight beam on the wall just above the chair. There's some kind of

substance streaked there that wasn't there before. It looks a little like blood.

When we get close enough, though, we can see it's not blood but a more greenish substance ... streaked on the wall, as if whatever left the trail behind was moving upwards.

Elliot tilts the flashlight up to the ceiling.

The ceiling consists of cheap tagboard squares. The one directly above the chair is missing, gone. Around the edges of the hole, more green streaks, as if the thing in the chair pulled itself upward somehow ... and got into the ceiling. Now it is gone.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - DAWN.

Elliot sits on the floor in the near dark with his back against the school's main entrance, as far away from the basement door as possible.

We hear some chinking sounds. Elliot flinches and looks behind him, then gets to his feet.

Someone is entering the building. Elliot picks up his coat and his book as the man enters. Bob, the maintenance guy.

BOB

Hey. Everything good?

ELLIOT

Yes.

Elliot is already moving past the man, out into the early morning.

CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY - DAY.

Elliot is the only one in a train car as it carries him above the city. Outside the window, it's a cold, steely day.

EXT. STREET - DAY.

Elliot walks along a street in the ugliest section of the city. Around him there are vast empty lots, low industrial buildings, garages, barely operational plants, abandoned storefronts.

A scarf covers Elliot's face.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY.

Elliot looks down at the napkin on which he copied Father Hall's address. He looks lost as he scans the buildings around him. There is absolutely no traffic.

Elliot starts to walk one way, stops, changes direction. He moves to his left uncertainly, then keeps going.

Way up ahead, someone is coming toward him. A man lifts an arm.

Elliot lifts an arm in return, unsure of who he's waving at.

In a few seconds we can see that it's Father Hall coming down the sidewalk.

FATHER HALL

Hello there.

ELLIOT

Hi.

FATHER HALL

Were you coming to see me,
by chance?

ELLIOT

Yeah, actually, I was wondering
if you had some time.

FATHER HALL

I was just on my way for a walk.
So I have plenty of time. Why
don't we just sit down across
the street here.

ELLIOT

Okay.

Father Hall gestures toward a bus shelter across the street. They start to walk over there.

EXT. BUS SHELTER - DAY

A few minutes later.

FATHER HALL

How certain are you that you saw what you saw?

ELLIOT

I'm not, at all. It happened before, that I saw something. I might have been halfway between dreaming and being awake...

FATHER HALL

What was it?

ELLIOT

Something in my apartment.

FATHER HALL

Do you think the drinking is contributing at all to these things?

ELLIOT

Maybe. But it's all so vivid. If it's not real, then it's almost a relief. I could just go and commit myself.

FATHER HALL

You've been back to the school since that night?

ELLIOT

Twice.

FATHER HALL

You haven't gone back into the basement.

ELLIOT

No, I ... I sit by the door all night. I don't even do the rounds

I'm supposed to. I try to stay awake
and I wait for morning.

FATHER HALL

So you're considering checking
yourself into a hospital.

ELLIOT

Otherwise all I have is getting
up and going right back into bed.
And I can't keep away from the
drinking.

FATHER HALL

What about the painkillers?

ELLIOT

I don't know how to get them anymore.
Without them, my body feels strange
all the time. My brain too.

FATHER HALL

All right.

Elliot stares into the distance, haunted.

ELLIOT

Something's coming for me. It's like
I can feel it.

FATHER HALL

I have something I'd like you to try.

ELLIOT

What is it?

FATHER HALL

I think that your experiences with
Peter, and Maurice, and the woman
who injured you, have weakened you
more than you know. People can do
that. And sometimes the only
solution is to remove yourself
from them. Entirely.

ELLIOT

How do you mean?

FATHER HALL

Almost everything we experience is through the prism of other human beings. It makes it tough to understand what we really need to make ourselves well. I'm talking about removing the human factor entirely for a while. If you can just keep away from the drinking, I really think it could help you. Maybe everyone should disappear. Including myself.

Father Hall's voice continues, but the visuals cut away to:

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY.

Elliot walks along in slow motion, wearing a scarf over his face, oblivious to those around him.

FATHER HALL (V.O.)

If you cut yourself off from all the voices, you'll begin to see how closely connected you truly are to all the things around you in your life. To the sun, the grass ... your food, your bed ... time moving past you, the changing of the days ...

EXT. WOODS - DAY.

Elliot sits alone in the woods, eating from a backpack.

FATHER HALL (V.O. CONT'D)

These things that are silent throughout your life, and totally accepting. It's people alone who can cloud these things with their demands that you become part of all that's going on ...

EXT. FIELD - DAY.

Elliot is standing in the field where the abandoned, rotting house is, the one he was lured to.

FATHER HALL (V.O. CONT'D)
But what's really going on, Elliot,
is the daylight, and waking up
and falling asleep, and your
senses. Walking, resting, animals ...
a table in your room. Objects and
nature are permanent. People can
hurt us, and they make us
hyper-aware of how lonely the human
soul can truly become.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY.

Elliot is now at the mouth of the alley where he was stabbed
months before. He stares at it, thinking.

FATHER HALL (V.O. CONT'D)
We need them to live, but right now
they could kill you. If you can put
off working just a little longer..

ELLIOTT (V.O.)
I have to keep going to the rec center.

FATHER HALL (V.O.)
But you have to see virtually no one
there, right?

Elliot walks to the exact spot in the alley where he was
attacked, crouches, places an outstretched hand on the ground.

ELLIOTT (V.O.)
What if I sink even faster? What happens
then?

FATHER HALL (V.O.)
Then I'll put you in touch with people.
How often do you really need to go out?
You come see me if you have trouble.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - DAY.

In a cubicle, Elliot turns the pages of a book.

The book is open to a very strange illustration, a disturbing one, an old painting by Egon Schiele showing a man enduring great pain.

Elliot focuses in on one passage of text in particular. We hear his inner voice.

ELLIOT (V.O.)

'The confusion of aural and visual experience is often the beginning of the descent into abstract possession. Thordale writes of drinking a quart of what was obviously water at the first satanic ceremony he attended, only to realize later that it was actually goat's blood he had consumed. Weeks later, colors began to dissolve in front of him as he worked in his laboratory, until the room was painted in black and white.'

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL - NIGHT.

Elliot sits with his back to the entrance. The light in the main hallway is now on. Elliot takes notes in a book and has a stack of others beside him.

We can see the door to the basement well down the hallway, closed.

Elliot tilts his head back against the entrance. He closes his eyes, and stays that way.

He dreams:

EXT. LAKE - DAY.

Elliot floats in the same tiny boat we saw in his first dream.

Elliot has stuck a fishing net off the right side of the boat and is letting it drift through the water. The boat barely moves.

Something catches in the net.

It's the crude, dark wooden head he thought he saw in his apartment in an earlier scene. Elliot reaches down into the net to take it out.

The moment he does, a hand reaches in from beside him and seizes his wrist.

MAN'S VOICE

It's mine, you thief. Give it to me.

Elliot looks up. Sitting in the boat with him is Peter.

Peter has severe rope burns around his neck.

Elliot wakes up in the hallway, startled.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY.

Bitter cold. Elliot stands on the platform in his scarf, well away from the closest person. He is looking down at the platform when someone passes him, coming from the other direction.

From behind, we can see only that it is a tall, skinny man dressed in jeans and a heavy jacket. As he moves past Elliot, he mutters something.

MAN

You need to come see me on the beach.

Elliot looks up, but at first he glances at someone else, a plump man nearby, thinking he is the one who has spoken. By the time Elliot rules him out and turns around the other way, that other man is well past him, blending into the crowd.

Elliot takes a few steps down the platform, trying to follow the man visually.

That voice sounded a little like Maurice's. Elliot sees what looks like long black hair but can't make out any more details, and very quickly, the man is out of sight.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING STAIRWELL - DAY.

Elliot walks up the steps with almost arthritic slowness.

A man appears behind him at the bottom of the staircase.
His landlord.

LANDLORD

Mr. Lem?

Elliot turns.

LANDLORD

Did you drop off your rent check
today? It's the fifth, there's a
late fee if not.

ELLIOT

It's going to be another couple of
days. I'll add the fee.

LANDLORD

It's ten dollars a day, you know that,
right?

ELLIOT

(turning away)

Yes.

Elliot continues to climb the stairs.

CUT TO:

INT. ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - NIGHT.

Elliot enters his dark apartment. There's no sign of any power
in the room. He walks right over to his bed and sits down on it,
still in his jacket and scarf.

He pulls the covers over him and scrunches down into his bed. He
stares into the dark.

ELLIOT (V.O.)

'Some of the Satanists in the Kilgore
Study described consistent errors in
perception as hidden doors opening
within the brain. They believed
if the doors were not closed with
their help, demons may have come through.'

Elliot's apartment is seen in its worst condition ever.

ELLIOT (V.O.)

'If these doors are opened too far,
a person will think nothing of seeing
demons on the street. His senses will
tell him to simply accept everything.
This acceptance leads to
insanity and helplessness ... and
then he is nothing but prey to
whatever will come at him from beyond.'

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY.

An unfamiliar car cruises slowly down a city block. We can't quite see who's behind the wheel. The driver of the car sees a space open and swings it in, then kills the engine.

Elliot's ex-girlfriend, Helen, gets out of the car, looks across the street, then starts to cross it.

She walks up to Elliot's building. She looks at the decrepit buzzer system, with eight possible apartments to choose from and only half of them labeled. She tries to make out the names but many are either completely faded or illegible.

She presses a button hopefully. A female voice squeaks through the speaker box.

VOICE

Hello?

HELEN

Elliot?

VOICE

No ...

HELEN

I'm sorry, I'm looking for Elliot
Lem, I think he lives here but
I don't see his name on the box.
Do you know him?

VOICE
What's the name?

HELEN
Elliot ... Lem.

VOICE
No, sorry.

INT. ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - DAY.

We look down through the window as Helen starts to cross the sidewalk again toward her car. She stops, turns around, looks up.

In the apartment, Elliot steps back from the window before being seen.

Helen turns around again, defeated, and walks away.

CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN - DAY.

The city passes by outside the train window. There is only one person in the subway car. It's Elliot.

He is more unshaven and alarmingly decrepit than he has ever been. His hair is askew. He looks pale and very sick. All the life seems to have gone out of his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY.

Elliot emerges from the subway station into an ugly area where he met Father Hall before.

Strangely, he is limping again. We have seen him heal slowly ... but now, inexplicably, the leg is getting worse.

He approaches a run-down building with no sign or identification of any kind. He opens a tattered door and enters.

INT. SHELTER - DAY.

Inside, one big room with about forty or fifty cots. There seems to be no one inside but one man, lying face up on one of the cots.

Elliot stands there awkwardly. A man appears at the back of the room, walking toward him.

SHELTER WORKER
Hello, welcome.

ELLIOT
Hi, ah ... I was looking for someone.
Father Hall?

SHELTER WORKER
Father Hall, ah ... I don't know
anyone by that name.

ELLIOT
He gave me this address, he
said he'd been working here.

SHELTER WORKER
No, I can't say I've ever heard
of him...

ELLIOT
Um ... okay. Sorry.

SHELTER WORKER
Do you have someplace to sleep
tonight? It's going to be really cold...

ELLIOT
Yes. Thanks.

He turns away.

EXT. SHELTER - DAY.

Elliot comes out the front entrance and stands there for a moment. The shelter worker comes out.

SHELTER WORKER
Excuse me, wait! Could you come back
inside for a minute?

INT. SHELTER - DAY.

Back inside. The man holds the door open for Elliot and he enters. Then he follows the man as he walks toward the back of the shelter.

SHELTER WORKER

That name rings a bell, could you wait here? I want to ask about it.

The man disappears around a corner.

Elliot looks around him. The man who was asleep on his cot is now awake. He looks at Elliot quietly.

INT. OFFICE - DAY.

Elliot enters a small office as the shelter worker holds the door open for him and closes it behind him. MICHAEL, 50, walking with a cane, comes around the desk to shake Elliot's hand.

MICHAEL

Hello, I'm Michael. I help run the shelter.

ELLIOT

My name is Elliot.

He sits. Michael sits on the edge of his desk as he speaks.

MICHAEL

Can you tell me a little about Father Hall?

ELLIOT

I met him about three weeks ago.
He said he'd been working here,
I forget where he said he was from.

MICHAEL

When's the last time you talked to him?

ELLIOT

It's been about ... ten days.

MICHAEL

What does he look like?

ELLIOT

He's about ... forty-five, very short black and gray hair.

MICHAEL

Okay.

Michael thinks for a moment silently.

ELLIOT

What's wrong with him?

MICHAEL

It's not that, ah ... well, about a year ago, we had a woman coming in here regularly, she was homeless and mentally unstable, and she came to me complaining about a man who was harassing her. He had been very kind at first, but then she said he kept implying that if she didn't come away with her, she would probably wind up dead on the street. I'm almost certain she said his name was Father Hall.

Elliot sits, absorbing this.

MICHAEL

Anyway, we thought she might have been more disturbed than we had even thought, since she started telling us that this Father Hall person kept "appearing" to her at night, at the foot of her bed. And then ... I forget, it was something like he was trying to get her to come away with her to go to some ... she kept mentioning he needed her in a "palace." So we didn't give much credence to what she was saying. Finally she just never came back. But now, with you coming in here ... I have to wonder about it a little. Are you sure the address was correct?

ELLIOT

Yes.

CUT TO:

INT. ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - NIGHT.

Elliot is lying in his bed in the dark, fully dressed. As he lies there, he is putting batteries in his clock radio. When they are fully in, he turns the radio on. Scratchy classical music begins to play softly from a station far away. He sets the time on the clock, and then puts the radio on the wicker basket beside the bed and pulls the covers higher over him.

INT. THE EFFICIENCY - NIGHT.

Elliot is coming out of the darkened bathroom, wearing a scarf and jacket, and walks across the apartment, past his bed and toward the window. The clock radio says 11:48.

He stands at his window, looking out at the moonlight.

The camera looks from the dark horizon downward, to where lamps light the street.

We see a man standing alone in front of a fence across the street. He is turned away from us, watching the lightless park beyond.

He is dressed in black and has short hair. It is Father Hall.

Elliot sees him. Stands perfectly still.

Father Hall's hands are at his sides and he looks through the chain link fence. He never turns.

INT. EFFICIENCY - NIGHT.

The clock radio now reads 12:14.

Elliot is sitting on the edge of his bed, looking through the darkness toward his door. He has lit two candles, placed them about the room.

There are two sharp knocks on the door.

He hesitates, then lifts himself off the bed, and walks to the front door. Opens it slowly.

Father Hall is outside. We can't see much of his face.

FATHER HALL

Elliot ... I'm sorry it's so late,
but I was worried for you.

ELLIOT

*(not opening the door more than he
has to)*

I never told you my address.

FATHER HALL

Yes, you did, actually, the last
time we talked. Remember?

ELLIOT

I was about to go to sleep.

FATHER HALL

How have you been feeling?

ELLIOT

I'm okay, I'm doing well.

FATHER HALL

Can I come in?

ELLIOT

I have no electricity, I have no
heat.

FATHER HALL

That's all right.

After a significant pause, Elliot steps back.

INT. EFFICIENCY - NIGHT.

The two of them stand about ten feet apart in the apartment, lit only by candlelight. It casts faint flickers on their faces.

FATHER HALL

There are organizations that can
get your utilities back.

ELLIOT

Yeah, I called them, it'll happen soon.

FATHER HALL

I wanted to invite you to something interesting. My father owns a farm on the eastern shore, and twice a year I drive out there with a group of parishoners for the weekend. We pray, we take walks on the property. You don't have to pray with us, but I'd like you to come if you can.

ELLIOT

You have parishoners here? I thought you were just visiting town for a while, helping out at the shelter.

FATHER HALL

They're from St. Martin's, on 17th Street. I have a friend there.

ELLIOT

I have to work at the school.

FATHER HALL

That's only on ... Thursday and Friday night now, right?

ELLIOT

Yes.

FATHER HALL

Maybe you could call in sick. I really think you'd enjoy this. You could skip our mass, of course.

ELLIOT

I'll see if I can go.

FATHER HALL

Excellent. Are you eating?

ELLIOT

A little bit more than I was.

FATHER HALL

Can I ask, have you ever been to church regularly?

ELLIOT

My aunt used to take me when I was a kid...

FATHER HALL

What did you think of the experience?

ELLIOT

I was scared of it. The echo and the walls and the priest in his black robe, standing above everyone. He was enormous, really tall, and fat, with bad skin. I was frightened.

FATHER HALL

I can understand that. But if you'd like to come with us, we're meeting in the parking lot of RFK stadium Friday night at eight. You don't even have to pack anything.

Elliot stares at him.

FATHER HALL

I'll leave you to sleep. Do you need anything?

ELLIOT

No. Thanks.

FATHER HALL

Want to let me out?

Elliot moves past him, giving him a rather wide berth. He opens the door for Father Hall.

FATHER HALL

Good night. Hope to see you on
Friday.

ELLIOT

Good night.

Father Hall leaves. Elliot closes the door ... and leans his head
against it.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT.

Elliot comes out of his building, putting his coat on. He looks
down the sidewalk.

If he was hoping to see Father Hall moving away, he's too late.
There's nothing there but streetlights, parked cars, darkness.

Elliot starts to walk down the sidewalk.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT.

As Elliot crosses a big empty field, lights in the distance, we
sense just how cold it is outside: frost on the ground, wind
whipping across the landscape.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL - NIGHT.

Elliot approaches the front door, takes out his key ring. A car
goes past and he stops, appearing nervous, watching it go.

When it's gone, he turns his attention to the door again.
Enters.

INT. SCHOOL - NIGHT.

He closes the front door behind him, trying to shut it as
silently as possible.

At the end of it, the door leading down into the basement is
open. A light is on.

Elliot crosses the hallway quickly toward the first door on his right. He tests the knob. It's unlocked. He opens the door, enters the room, closes it behind him.

INT. CLASSROOM - NIGHT.

Inside the unlit, empty classroom, Elliot moves to the nearest corner and sinks down to the floor, making himself small. He sits there and waits.

INT. CLASSROOM - NIGHT.

Later. Elliot's eyes are closed. He opens them when he hears a noise from out in the hallway. A large door opening. The wind is heard. Then the door closes again.

Elliot waits.

He peers out a window.

Outside, Bob the maintenance man is getting into his car. He starts it, drives away.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT.

Elliot emerges from the classroom into the main hallway.

He looks toward the end of the dark hall. The door to the basement is closed.

He starts to walk down the hall.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT.

The beam of a flashlight appears. It's so dark in this stairwell, Elliot has to climb the steps by its light.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT.

Elliot goes over to a particular door and turns the knob. It's locked.

He takes a bent and re-folded coat hanger from his jacket pocket, as well as a screwdriver. He sets the screwdriver on the floor with a faint clinking sound and goes to work on the doorknob with the coat hanger.

INT. COMPUTER LAB - NIGHT.

Five or six computer terminals sit in the dark.

The door opens. Elliot enters.

He closes the door behind him and walks over to the closest computer and turns it on, setting the coat hanger beside it.

INT. COMPUTER LAB - NIGHT.

Later. Elliot sits at the computer, the room lit only by the glow of the screen. He is typing.

The screen shows letters appearing in a search engine. The words he types are "FATHER ANTON HALL".

His search returns no responses.

He thinks for a moment. Then he types in a different search, using only the words "FATHER HALL".

His search returns more than eight hundred results. He starts to scroll through them.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT.

Outside the school, no traffic, no people.

INT. SCHOOL - NIGHT.

The upstairs hallway remains silent, shadowy.

INT. COMPUTER LAB - NIGHT.

Elliot is reading text off a website. He sees this:

**The terrible story of what happened
to Father Anton Hall began in 1937
at Fort Illard, a remote logging camp
in the wilds of Alberta, Canada.**

Elliot scrolls down until he finds something else of note.
The text reads:

**Since Fort Illard and its sister camp
downriver, Hulst, were comprised entirely
of men, drinking, fighting, and especially
gambling were problematic. The latter
activity eventually involved so much money**

**that it came under the watch of
a crime syndicate in Detroit.**

Elliot scrolls to see more text.

But then he hears something from outside in the hallway: a faint clinking sound, something like when he had set the screwdriver down on the floor ... but louder.

Elliot stops what he's doing and listens to see if the sound repeats itself.

Very slowly, he gets up out of his chair and walks over to the door.

EXT. HALLWAY - NIGHT.

The door opens slowly out into it. Elliot takes a step out, looks in both directions. Then he looks downward.

The screwdriver he set down is still there. But it seems like it's not in the same position as it was. Yet it's impossible to tell for sure.

Elliot bends down and picks it up. He gives the hallway one last glance, focusing on the ominous stairwell. Then he re-enters the computer room.

INT. COMPUTER LAB - NIGHT.

Elliot sits and looks at the computer screen, at an old black and white image of the logging camp mentioned on the site. Dusk sits over 20 or 30 shacks in an ugly clearing in the forest. We see that still frame ...

... and then, it DISSOLVES to the real thing, the camp as it truly was on the date below the photograph: **August 20, 1937.**

EXT. LOGGING CAMP - DUSK - FLASHBACK.

In the far background, the forest. Two or three men move about the camp.

INT. - REC HALL - DUSK.

Inside a rec hall and makeshift bar, 30 or 40 men sit at various cheap tables under dim lighting. Some throw darts, but most just sit and talk.

A man, MAYHEU, enters the rec hall, crosses its length, sits down with a group of three quiet men at a corner table.

MAYHEU

Is this a good time to talk
about Hall?

Another man, STURRIDGE, 50, merely nods.

MAYHEU

Listen, if his money isn't in the
next delivery to Detroit, they're
going to start asking me questions.
We need to fix this tonight or tomorrow.

STURRIDGE

He's still giving the same line?

MAYHEU

Keeps saying he was cheated.

STURRIDGE

How much?

MAYHEU

About nine hundred. At some
point another example has
to be made. And this is worse than
what Belangere tried to get away
with.

STURRIDGE

But this is a chaplain. That makes me
hesitate. Who's in Hulst who can solve
this?

MAYHEU

Depends what you mean by "solve."

STURRIDGE

I mean like Belangere was solved.

MAYHEU

Some guy came to me about it,
said he knew what was going on and
was willing to make this happen if
his own debt was wiped clean.

STURRIDGE

How much does he owe?

MAYHEU

That's kind of the weird thing.
Thirty bucks.

The other men exchange a glance.

STURRIDGE

Thirty bucks he's willing to kill a
priest for? What's this guy's name?

MAYHEU

Vello. Horatio Vello.

STURRIDGE

All right. Send the message through
James. Vello takes care of Hall,
we forget the debt. But I do
need to see some proof. He should
send something back on the Tuesday
boat. A finger, a thumb. I hope Hall's
not much of a priest.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOCK - DAY.

Several men mill about a dock on a river, in two groups. Two
boats are pulling up.

MAYHEU

We got the rear. We got the rear.

He leads two of his own men down the dock. Someone is standing
on the bow of that second boat, watching those men approach.

MAN ON BOAT

I got something on here for
Sturridge.

MAYHEU

I'm here for it.

INT. BOAT - DAY.

Down below in the hold, all three men from the dock shift wooden
crates around, slowly unburying one in particular.

MAN 2

Green slash, right here.

One of the boxes, a small one, 3" by 3" square, has a green slash mark on it. Someone produces a crowbar and goes to work popping the lid. When the lid is pried free, the men stare down into the box ...

... and their faces are overcome with revulsion.

CUT TO:

INT. SHACK - NIGHT.

Sturridge is sitting at a small makeshift desk under a feeble lamp glow, a glass of whiskey by his elbow, notebooks and papers stacked around. Mayheu is standing just inside the shack's door.

STURRIDGE

What instructions were given to this guy?

MAYHEU

Exactly what you said. Nothing more.

STURRIDGE

What ... *precisely* ... did he do.

MAYHEU

He chopped him up. Stuffed him in the box naked, put his head in his lap, and his feet too, his hands... cut all his fingers off, for Christ's sake.

STURRIDGE

You got rid of it all?

MAYHEU

Yeah. Of course we did.

Sturridge stares out the window of the shack.

STURRIDGE

If you hear anything about this guy at all that makes you nervous, we're going down to Hulst. You come tell me.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT.

A man, WAFFLES, stands under some industrial string lights very close to the woods, all alone. Others approach, including Mayheu.

MAYHEU

OK, what?

WAFFLES

It's time to tell Sturridge to come. Vello started talking a bunch of crazy things. I mean insane, scary stuff. And then he disappeared. I wouldn't trust him to keep quiet about anything.

MAYHEU

What crazy things did he say?

WAFFLES

He borrowed some textbook from the Doc and he was telling people ... I don't know, that he'd been chosen to find find where the soul is inside the body, and how he had work to do. Then gone, just like that. I think you gotta find him before camp breaks for the winter.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - DAY.

A party of men is making their way through the dense woods. It looks quite cold, desolate. No signs of human life out here. We recognize Mayheu, Waffles, and in front, Sturridge.

A small cabin is up ahead of them. Small garden, tiny chimney.

STURRIDGE

Who lives here?

WAFFLES

Trapper and his wife. Couple kids.

They all proceed across the modest property cut out of the wilderness. Sturridge knocks loudly on the cabin door.

No answer. He knocks again, looking around. No answer.

A man moves to a window to his left, puts his hands to the sides of his face to screen out the glare, and peers in.

CLAUDE

Oh, *Jesus...*

The other men look at him with growing awareness of just how horrified he is.

CLAUDE

I'm not going in there.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM - NIGHT.

Three men sit at a long table, looking offscreen. There is a tape recorder in motion before them. DETECTIVE 1 is the first to address someone we do not see.

DETECTIVE 1

Mr. Vello ... Mr. Ross, Mr. LeGrand,
and I have all read your diary now.
Are we to understand that you had no
homicidal thoughts before you offered
to kill Father Anton Hall?

HORATIO VELLO (O.S.)

Sort of.

DETECTIVE 1

Sort of. Was it the lack of finding
out what you wanted to know about
the human body that drove you to kill
the Gagnon family? And dissect them?

VELLO (O.S.)

Yes.

DETECTIVE 2

Mr. Vello, do you still believe that ...
if you were to dissect me, for example ...

that you might find my soul somehow?
Inside one of my organs? My brain? My
heart? Is that your belief? Was that
your goal?

The men, uniformly fascinated by the man we don't see, listen intently.

VELLO (O.S.)

Yes.

CUT TO:

INT. - COMPUTER LAB - NIGHT.

The flashback ends. Elliot has been reading the case history all this time. He finishes with one more snippet, reading off the internet:

Judged insane by a jury, Horatio Vello was nevertheless hanged in November of 1949 for his five murders and "dissections of inquiry." The photo here shows Vello just hours before he was hanged.

Elliot's eyes shift a bit.

An extreme close-up of the photo as it is seen on the computer terminal.

The man in the photo, the killer Horatio Vello, looks exactly like the man who has been claiming to have the name Father Anton Hall--the first man Vello murdered, in 1937.

There can be no mistake about it. None.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRIDGE - NIGHT.

Elliot walks quickly over the bridge, sparse traffic passing by him. But we don't hear the traffic at all. The only sound is Elliot's breathing. The cityscape can be seen in the distance beyond him against a dark grey sky.

The sound of Elliot's breathing rises and rises. He has his scarf wrapped around his head, almost up to his eyes.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT.

Elliot walks precariously along the side of a highway. He is obviously outside the city now. Traffic passes close to him. The sound of his breathing fades.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT.

A large house by the side of a country road is silhouetted against the night sky. There are no lights on inside of it, no cars in the driveway.

Elliot looks up at it. Walks up the driveway.

Looking from within the house, we see his silhouette appear outside the living room window. He presses his face against it, looking in.

Back outside, Elliot backs away from the house, then becomes quite still. He pulls his scarf down and his breath billows outward.

Elliot's hand disappears into the newspaper box at the end of the driveway, and then pulls a newspaper out.

ELLIOT (V.O.)

Dad and Sis:

If I don't see you again, don't blame yourself. Things have just gone too far wrong for me. I may be going to a place no person has ever known before.

Elliot tears off a piece of the newspaper in his hand, takes a pen out of his pocket, and sits down on the curb. He begins to write.

ELLIOT (V.O.)

It could be that I'm doing something that takes courage, but it feels like I'm giving up. I'm very tired. But I want to know the end of this mystery.

I've found something that is horribly dark. I may die, or even worse. Whatever is coming for me, it will be immense. I'll find out, though.

I have always been curious;
you both gave that to me. And I
know it's me who has turned that
into something it was never meant to be.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE - EARLY DAWN.

Elliot stands on the edge of a lake. The water is perfectly serene.

He sits down slowly on the shore ... then lies down on his side, looking at the water.

EXT. LAKE - DAY.

Hours later. Elliot is in the same position. We don't see his face. It seems like he's barely moving. The sky is dull and gray.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD - DAY.

A car crosses a bridge, heading into Washington.

Inside the car, Elliot's sister Jen drives, stone-faced, staring straight ahead.

Beside her, a very old man sits in the passenger's seat, similarly expressionless, almost dazed. Their father.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY.

Elliot's landlord, who we saw before, is leading his sister and father up the stairs.

LANDLORD

Had I known that relatives were really
looking for him, I wouldn't have
been such an obstruction, I'm sorry ...

INT. - ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - DAY.

The landlord opens his door with a key. Elliot's sister and father enter, look around.

Elliot's possessions are all gone. There's nothing here.

LANDLORD

I don't know much about people, but ...
I got the sense he was trying not
to be found.

JEN

Dad, I want to go the police.

CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY - NIGHT.

On the subway one last time. Elliot is scrunched low in a seat on the virtually empty train. Now he wears no scarf, no ski mask, not even a jacket. He wears only a blank t-shirt. He stares out the window.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - NIGHT.

The train pulls into a station. Elliot exits and walks toward a staircase leading upwards, ignoring the escalators. He trudges up the stone steps.

EXT. STATION - NIGHT.

Elliot emerges, alone, and walks, limping, past the camera.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT.

The cracked and weathered parking lot outside RFK Stadium is a vast stretch of emptiness, surrounded by a barren winter landscape. The horizon is dark but for a thin stripe of red and purple. The unlit stadium looks gigantic in the background.

Elliot walks quite a ways toward one corner of the lot, near a driving range that borders it. He stands under an unlit streetlamp. We can see the headlights of highway traffic far, far away. But Elliot is completely alone.

He stands, waiting, peering at the horizon partially obscured by the edge of the empty stadium.

It's so dark that Elliot's cold breath makes his face almost featureless. He turns his head, sensing something.

The tiny, mysterious wooden head from his episode at the apartment is somehow attached to the streetlamp beside him.

Gazing at him, eyeless.

All sound cuts out entirely.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE - DAY.

A repeat of a shot from earlier in the film: The camera moves closer to the shoreline of a wintry, overcast beach.

A man stands on the beach, his back to us, holding a giant wooden staff. He is slowly, methodically making letters in the sand.

Elliot is in the small boat, drifting toward the shore, oarless, powerless. He looks intently at the shore.

In the distance, the man with the staff slowly turns around.

It is Maurice. Unsmiling, he lifts a hand toward Elliot. He opens his mouth to speak softly, and though he is at least fifty yards away, we somehow hear his voice perfectly.

MAURICE

Now I can tell you. Now I won't have to
write the words on the sand.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT.

Back to reality. Elliot looks to the far end of the parking lot.

Someone has appeared there. A man, little more than a dot in Elliot's vision. Walking toward him, getting closer.

EXT. BEACH - DAY.

Cut back to his dream.

Elliot and Maurice are sitting together on the beach, beside each other, looking out over the choppy water. A strong wind blows their hair back.

MAURICE

You became too weak. He's been on the other side for decades, waiting for someone to take. He isolated you in just the way he needed. He tried it once before and failed. If you submit to him, it will be very quick and very painful. You'll be gone ... and he'll live again.

ELLIOT

(desperately)

What do I do?

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT.

The man in the distance has come significantly closer.

On the other side of the parking lot, we see the headlights of a car poking through the darkness. The car has hesitantly turned off an access road and into the lot. It creeps forward, crossing dozens of white lined parking spaces, coming in on a diagonal.

Elliot turns away from looking at the approaching man for a moment, to spot and decipher the meaning of the car.

Then, back to the dream.

EXT. BEACH - DAY.

MAURICE

You can't be alone, not for a moment. Ever. Find as many people as you can, and stay with them always. That's the only way he can't get you.

ELLIOT

What if I do see him again?

MAURICE

Scream, Elliot. Just scream.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT.

The mysterious car stops about twenty yards away from Elliot. The driver's side window rolls down. We see a woman's face through the dark.

HELEN

Elliot...?

Elliot turns away from his ex-girlfriend. He looks into the other distance.

The man walking toward him, who we can now see is dressed all in black, now stops in his tracks. In another minute, he would be with Elliot.

But now he does not move.

EXT. BEACH - DAY.

Back to the dream:

ELLIOT

It was *you* who did this to me. You,
and Peter, and that woman. It was *you*.

MAURICE

(with great sadness)

Yes. I'm sorry I made you weak. I
was part of it. I did it to you ...
and years ago, someone else did it
to me.

ELLIOT

(shaking with rage)

All of you! Every single one of you!

Elliot stands up. Maurice remains sitting.

Elliot reaches a hand behind his back.

It reappears holding a long sword. The same one he was attacked with at the beginning of the story.

He raises the sword like a batter holds a bat, in both hands, and he takes two purposeful steps toward Maurice, swinging the sword forward with all his might, gritting his teeth insanely.

ELLIOT
Out with your eyes!!

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT.

The figure of Father Anton Hall, still far away, stands still on the beaten cement. His face is just a blur.

Elliot is inside Helen's car, in the back seat, as the car drives out of the lot, to safety.

We see the stadium far in the background, through the rear windshield, falling away. But we can't see where Father Hall might have been, or might be still.

The sound of the car engine slowly fades to nothing. The screen goes completely silent. We watch Elliot for any sign of change, but there is none.

The taillights of the car merge with some others as they leave the access road and get onto the highway.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL - NIGHT.

In the dark interior hallway ending at the door to the basement, nothing stirs.

INT. ELLIOT'S EFFICIENCY - NIGHT.

Elliot's landlord sits on Elliot's bed, thinking thoughts unknown.

INT. HOMELESS SHELTER - NIGHT.

Several people, nothing more than unidentified lumps on their cots, sleep soundly as the moonlight filters into the darkened room where Elliot once came to find Father Hall.

ELLIOT (V.O.)
My name is Elliot Lem.

INT. MEETING ROOM - NIGHT.

Elliot sits in a chair under some overhead fluorescents in a large room. He looks much healthier than before and his hair is different, neatly trimmed.

ELLIOT

I have a disorder. I can't be away from other people, not for a moment. Two years ago I had a trauma. Since then, I have to be around someone else all the time.

We see that he is sitting with six or seven other people in a traditional encounter circle.

ELLIOT

Sometimes I'll be on the street waiting for a bus and I'll realize no one is around, and I'll panic and run to the nearest store, or the nearest park where I see someone. But sometimes I have ten or fifteen minutes where I'm all alone and I'm okay. Maybe one day I'll be able to tell someone what caused this. But for now, I just want to get my life back.

The people around Elliot are silent.

ELLIOT

It's strange ... I had always known that I was loved, but when the trauma came, I felt the ... ferocity of it, for the first time. My sister, my father. My girlfriend. Her love for me ... it feels so deep ... that sometimes I feel possessed by it. And I get scared all over again, in a different way.

But I know my mind just needs to heal.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT.

Bright lights and shoppers everywhere. We see Elliot standing in one of the aisles, shelving books. A fellow employee comes up to him.

MAN

Hey, Elliot, I got here early, you can take off if you want.

ELLIOT

Okay, good, thanks man.

Elliot sets a couple of books on the shelf in front of him and then walks away.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT.

Elliot comes out of the store. It's in a bustling outdoor shopping complex. He quickly becomes part of a sea of consumers. He is surrounded by people and conversation.

INT. BUS - NIGHT.

Elliot sits packed between strangers, gazing out the window.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT.

We hear a key in the lock. Then the door opens inward and Elliot appears, entering a small house. It's dark and he immediately reaches beside him and flips on a light switch.

ELLIOT

Hello...!

It's just a general shout, but there is no response. Elliot stands there for a moment, not expecting this. He puts his keys in his pocket, frowning.

Something occurs to him. He digs his cellphone out of his pocket. Sees he has a voicemail. Exasperated, he accesses it with one button.

HELEN'S VOICE

Elliot, I guess you're busy at work. Look, there was a fucking disaster at this conference; the

entire deal with Bechtel suddenly went to hell and now we're scrambling to save it. I'm still here. I can't get on the road till 10, maybe, so I'll be home at maybe 1, 1:30. If I'm lucky. Can you find someplace to go till then? I'm so sorry ... call me back.

Elliot stands there, thinking, staring at the phone.

Instead of calling her back, he shuts it off.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT.

Elliot is sitting on the sofa in the living room, looking at the television but not really seeing it. We hear some sitcom playing on the TV. There is a plate of food in front of him but he doesn't even seem to notice it. He is staring, thinking, not moving.

The sound of the TV fades to nothing ... and then all sound fades out briefly.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT.

Elliot sits at his desk, hunched over a book. Every light in his room is turned on. His head is in his hands and he is concentrating.

We can hear the television set turned on very loud in the living room. The sound seeps into Elliot's bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT.

A clock reads 12:25 a.m.

While the lights in Elliot's bedroom are still on, Elliot has fallen asleep at his desk, his head in his arms. The television can no longer be heard.

There is a noise from outside the room.

It sounds like a door closing, but it could be something else.

Elliot comes awake right away, lifting his head and looking in the direction of the noise. He looks frightened.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT.

Elliot emerges from his room into the dark. He stands there, listening.

Nothing comes. He walks down the hallway slowly.

He crosses the living room. The TV is off, as are all the lights. Moonlight floods in through a large picture window. Elliot moves through the darkness towards the front door. Then stops.

There is something, some substance, streaked not only across the doorknob but on the lower part of the door, and on the floor leading up to it.

We know immediately it is the same dark greenish substance Elliot saw in the boiler room at the school, long ago.

Elliot moves closer to the door, and reaches a hand out to the knob. His hand closes around the substance, touching it for the first time. His hand turns the knob.

Elliot opens the door inward.

Outside, the light on the front porch is on, but it shines down on nothing. Beyond the sidewalk and the front lawn, there is only the empty street. No cars go by.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT.

Elliot leaves the door behind and steps out onto the sidewalk. It is a warm summer night in the pleasant suburbs. He keeps going, very slowly. He sets foot on the lawn and starts to move down a small slope to the road beyond.

When he reaches the road, he stops. He looks to his right, where the road stretches away offscreen.

Seconds pass.

Elliot walks off to the right, and very soon is offscreen entirely.

The camera does not follow him. It looks out from the dark interior of the house, through the doorway into the night outside. The only sound is the wind. The shot holds, holds, holds.

So much time passes that it seems that Elliot must ever not be coming back.