



CHEMICAL IMBALANCE
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Beneath The Surface

By

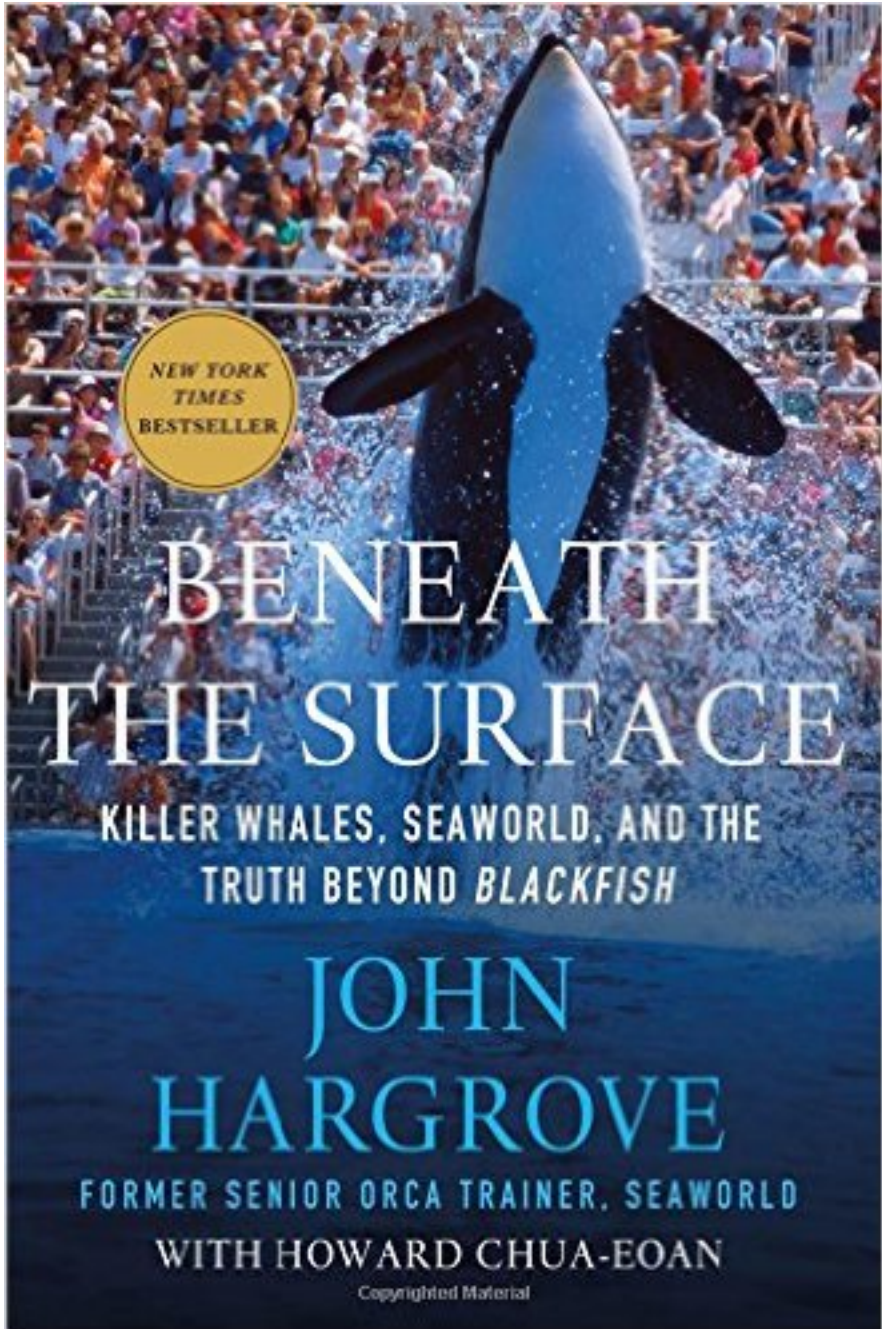
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Story By

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*Based on the book by John Hargrove – Beneath The Surface: Killer
Whales, Sea World, & The Truth Beyond Blackfish*

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NEW YORK
TIMES
BESTSELLER

BENEATH THE SURFACE

KILLER WHALES, SEAWORLD, AND THE
TRUTH BEYOND *BLACKFISH*

JOHN
HARGROVE

FORMER SENIOR ORCA TRAINER, SEAWORLD
WITH HOWARD CHUA-EOAN

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Nothing is more sad than the death of an illusion.

-Arthur Koestler

DEEP VOICE (V.O.)
Do you dream of giants?

INT. DOUBLE WIDE TRAILER - TV ROOM - NIGHT

YOUNG JOHN (10) kneeling in praise of a Zenith TV.
His eyes glisten over. His lower lip drops an inch.

TV (V.O.)
Adventure?

He leans closer to the screen, brushing streaks of brown hair away from his eyes. Behind him, CRYSTAL (40s) paces back and forth. Tears trailing mascara down her face.

SUPER: Texas, 1983

CRYSTAL
He's my husband and I can --
(DIAL TONE)
Hello? Frank?

Young John's tiny hand grabs the volume knob on the tube, twists it, and drowns out all background noise.

SEAWORLD COMMERCIAL SEQUENCE

We're underwater. A TRAINER holding tight to the rostrum of a twelve ton killer whale propels towards us.

TV (V.O.)
Discovery?

80s pop music bursts through the ambiance...

CUT TO:

DOLPHIN STADIUM

Fans RISE to their feet, applauding as another TRAINER waterskis alongside a trio of dolphins.

TV (V.O.)
Come to SeaWorld San Antonio, where
dreams meet reality.

SPLASH TO:

CHILDREN petting the backs of manta rays in a pool carved out of blocks of marble.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Above the over-joyed faces, stands ROY MILLER (40s). We know this guy. He's Walt Disney, Ray Kroc and Hemingway rolled into one.

ROY
SeaWorld was a dream that popped
into my mind when I was just a boy.

FLYING over 250 acres of theme park. Roller coasters
CROSSING beneath each other. DOLPHINS leaping out of the
water with FIREWORKS popping in the background.

CUT TO:

INT. DOUBLE WIDE TRAILER - CONT'D

Crystal steps forward out of the kitchen, through the doorway, and into the living room. Her eyes, rounded by smeared makeup, stare at the TV like a raccoon contemplating the raid of neighborhood trash bins.

ROY (V.O.)
Sitting out on the beach at night,
watching the moon ripple across the
ocean. I knew...

BACK TO:

SEAWORLD COMMERCIAL - SHAMU STADIUM

The MASSIVE pillars of Shamu Stadium. Down at its base, Roy waits, dressed in a silver suit fit for a Burt Reynolds movie.

ROY
...a whole world was out there.
Something different. Mysterious.
(smile)
And I've brought that world to you.

The TV turns off. John's reflection bounces off the screen.

CRYSTAL (O.S.)
John. We're going to play a game.
We'll be a team. You and I.

CUT TO:

INT. DOUBLE WIDE TRAILER - CONT'D

Crystal's hand grips the knob, slowly, she pulls it back to her side. Squinting her eyes with uncertainty.

YOUNG JOHN
What about dad? Is he playing?

CRYSTAL
Yes. He's trying to find us.

Young John's stare cracks. He looks over at his Mother, wiping tears off her face, palms black with makeup.

YOUNG JOHN
Like hide and seek?

CRYSTAL
(nods)
Winner gets tickets to SeaWorld.
But we have to leave tonight.
So Pack. Fast.

Young John grabs the first thing he can think of, ejecting the VHS TAPE from a VCR.

YOUNG JOHN'S ROOM

A poster of a baby-faced TRAINER surfing the back of a killer whale. His autograph's scribbled next to his face: David.

The door opens, and Young John rushes inside tossing the tape onto his mattress, next to a stuffed Shamu Plushy.

He RIPS a large PARK MAP off the wall, rolls it up and shoves it into a backpack. Looking back at the autograph, his room's tour de force.

Before he can reach for it, Crystal pokes her head in, crying, she smiles at Young John, and raises her index finger to her lips. *Shhhh!*

YOUNG JOHN
Mom?

She shuts the door. Young John is shocked, motionless. The front door of the house opens, shoes rush inside.

CRYSTAL (O.S.)
Damn it Frank.
You shouldn't be here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRANK (O.S.)
You need to get John and go.

CRYSTAL (O.S.)
I can handle my damn husband.

FRANK (O.S.)
(stern)
I don't know what he's going to do.

Young John backs away from the towering door.

FRANK (O.S.)
I've never seen him like this.
It scared me, Crissy.

HEADLIGHTS shoot across his face, shining through blinds.
Young John rushes over to the window, pulls a cord to open
the blinds just enough to see his Dad's TRUCK.

The engine shuts off, the lights go with it, and out exits
JOHN'S FATHER (40s). His fiery eyes dash over to Young John,
who leaps back from the window.

The front door opens and slams shut again.

JOHN'S FATHER (O.S.)
You want to tell me why you're
here?

FRANK (O.S.)
We all need to talk.

JOHN'S FATHER (O.S.)
Good. Start with telling me why the
fuck you're in my house?

SOMETHING shifts, Young John's eyes glaze over, anticipating
what could be going on in the silence. Then, a GASP...

JOHN'S FATHER (O.S.)
I don't think there's much you
could say, you son of a bitch.

CRYSTAL (O.S.)
Stop that!

FRANK (O.S.)
Put that down! Damn it!
Put it DOWN!

CRYSTAL (O.S.)
You don't want to do this!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHOES again scatter through the trailer. The front door opens and shuts. Young John returns to the blinds, through which we see FRANK (30s) sprinting across the yard. Again, the door opens and shuts as John's Father chases after him, moonlight reflecting off the REVOLVER in his hand.

Young John turns away from the window. His door swings open and Crystal's arms reach in, grabbing his wrist.

YOUNG JOHN

WAIT! WAIT!

He REACHES for the autographed poster still taped to his wall. Drifting further away, he manages to grab his backpack, but it isn't fully zipped. His Mother PULLS, and Young John hurries to zip the bag before it empties.

EXT. DOUBLE WIDE TRAILER

A beat up Chevy truck waits parked in the lawn. Crystal BARGES out of the house, Young John over her shoulder. Kicking and screaming.

She places him down beside the car. JUMBLING through her purse, turning it over and dumping out the contents. She digs through the wreckage, popping back upright with the car KEYS in hand.

She scratches the door trying to stick the key in. John looks off to the horizon as she finally opens the door. Moonlight rippling off the pavement.

CRYSTAL (O.C.)

John. Get in.

He pays no attention to her, eyes pinned to the road. As he turns to her, his childhood is desecrated...

BANG! BANG! Gunshots ring out. Young John's face, as still as death, mouth ajar, eyes wide slowly begins to AGE FORWARD...

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - X-RAY ROOM - MORNING

JOHN (40), sleepless eyes staring up from beneath us. Wheels squeak as he's wheeled along on a tray. A lead vest covering the upper half of his body. Stubble rounding his face.

SUPER: New York, Present Day

SOFT VOICE (O.S.)

And, smile!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He does. CLICK, a light flashes from above.

CUT TO:

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM

The door handle jiggles, John straightens his posture, and a DOCTOR (40s) enters, manila folder in hand. Clean shaven, blue eyes, and blonde hair parted like a 60s salesman. He's the kind of guy who spends weeks on his boat.

DOCTOR

John! I was just talking about you.

He extends his hand with a smile. John grabs it firm, and the Doc places his free hand on top.

DOCTOR

Saw a pod out on Rockaway last weekend, you ever go out there?

Smiling through his Texas drawl, John pulls his hand back.

JOHN

I haven't had the chance.

DOCTOR

You aren't offended by that, are you? I know it might not be easy for you to see them.

JOHN

(quickly)

I want to go. That's the only way I want to see them. Just a matter of finding the time.

DOCTOR

You are a busy man. I saw CNN this morning, are you going to LA?

JOHN

(nods)

Flying out tomorrow.

The Doc pulls a X-Ray out of the folder, and slaps it up against a viewer. John's knees, replacement pieces shining white on the image.

DOCTOR

Huge step for the whales. You too. Some serious validation.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

Hopefully so, it's still riding on
the outcome of a vote.

DOCTOR

Well, that's why you're there.

Doc yanks the X-Ray off the viewer, turns back to John.

DOCTOR

To make it happen.

(smile)

Knees look great. And the pills?
Any concerns?

JOHN

I need a refill. I have to take
them when I fly. Cabin pressure's a
bitch.

DOCTOR

Sure, that's easy enough.
Still running every day?

John's phone chirps to life, stopping him in his tracks. He
pulls the phone out just far enough to see who's calling:
DAD.

John sends the call to voice-mail and slides the phone back
into his pocket. He looks up at the Doctor...

JOHN

(nods)

Every day.

CUT TO:

INT. UPSTATE NEW YORK HOME - BEDROOM CLOSET - DAY

Light bulb shines down from the ceiling, illuminating John's
face as he reaches up to the top shelf. He squints, pulling
back an old Nike shoe-box, circa 1996.

BEDROOM

The dog's wet nose sniffs over the shoe-box lid. A SUITCASE
plops down next to her, she whimpers, lying down, her face
buried in her paws.

John unzips the bag. We stay with the Dog's watchful eyes as
he walks back into the closet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN (O.S.)
Don't give me that look.
I'll be back before you know it.

He returns, dumps a handful of clothes into the bag. Organizing them, the Dog's eyes move as John's hands move. She yawns. His attention shifts to the shoe-box, he opens it, unveiling dozens of documents and photographs.

Sifting through them, he takes a few stapled pages and drops them on top of the clothes.

Beneath the pages, we see a picture that stands out: John, as a CHILD, sitting on top of a massive KILLER WHALE, a well beloved photo opp. SeaWorld San Antonio etched into a plastic frame, a souvenir from his youth.

John sighs, grabs the picture and plops down onto the bed. The Dog whimpers again, nudging her nose underneath his chin, driving his attention from the picture to her.

JOHN
You want to go see the Orcas?

She licks his chin.

JOHN
Yeah?

Again, another lick. He smiles, pressing his forehead against hers. The ROAR of a jet engine invades our tranquility, transitions us to...

INT. AIRPLANE - MORNING

Rolling down the center aisle atop a suitcase. Passing by CHILDREN, a GUY trying to force his carry-on into the overhead storage and ending on a battered John, tucked away in his window seat. He grabs his knee, winces, already able to feel the pending pain.

A backpack open at his feet, he grabs a pill bottle, dumps two painkillers into his palms and quickly throws them into his mouth. Leaning back, he grabs the foam coffee cup, and GULPS down the remaining latte.

Dropping the bottle back into the bag, he returns with a clear covered printed manuscript. He flips to the middle, leans down and pulls a red pen from his bag. Scribbling on the margins. Striking through sentences.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN
(to himself)
By passing this bill.
You will not only --

He TAPS the page, looks outside at the runway.

JOHN
By passing this bill, you will
further the efforts of --

A LITTLE GIRL (8) HOPS into the center seat, startling John.
Her MOTHER (30s), out of breath, sits down in the aisle
seat.

MOTHER
Sorry.

John smiles and nods. The Mother takes a few deep breaths,
looks over at the Little Girl whose eyes catch the cover of
John's document. Her face brightens...

LITTLE GIRL
Shamu!

MOTHER
(to John)
Big SeaWorld fan.

JOHN
So was I.

John shifts, showing more of the cover image: a picture of
him on the rostrum of a killer whale. The Little Girl
catches this, cheers in excitement. The FASTEN YOUR SEAT-
BELT sign chimes three times.

LITTLE GIRL
Wow! You work there? Cool!

JOHN
I did.

The propellers kick on.

LITTLE GIRL
Is there really only one Shamu?
I heard there are a lot of them.

The Mother, trying to keep her from bugging John...

MOTHER
How about some peanuts sweetheart?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LITTLE GIRL

I'm just asking!

(to John)

I know there's more than one, it's so obvious. Nobody else sees that?

JOHN

People don't want to look.

(beat)

Sometimes the more you know about something, the less sense it makes.

John slides the headphones over his ears. He grabs his knees and shuts his eyes, as the engines rev, and the plane begins its ascent. Through the window, the SKY RIPPLES away to...

INT. DOLPHIN STADIUM - SEAWORLD SAN ANTONIO

WATER, rippling in the same pattern.

SUPER: SAN ANTONIO, 1993

Pulling back, and we see the scope of the ripples, running throughout a 700,000 gallon tank. Huge Roman pillars hold up a fragmented roof, over an island stage. Shading restored statues of Zeus, Poseidon, and Shamu on top of faux marble flooring. FOOTSTEPS enter...

TWENTY FIVE APPLICANTS, all in awe of their surroundings. All similar: thin jawed, athletic builds. JOHN (20s), wide eyed and bushy tailed, gawks at the empty stands. He's home.

Across the pool, DAVID (40s), head of the killer whale program, clears his throat. We recognize him as the trainer on John's poster, *with less hair.*

DAVID

You're diving forty feet beneath the surface. Your sinuses are exploding. Your ear drums, banging away into temporary deafness. Your knees shake. Bracing you on the back of a twelve thousand pound killer whale. A whale that trusts you. Because you're more than its trainer. You're its family.

He walks from one end of the stage to the other, locking eyes with each hopeful.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID

I've seen them rush glaciers.
Knocking seals fifty feet into the
air before swallowing them whole.
The fiercest predators in the
world, and one of you will make it
your daily goal to earn their
trust. If you can do that --

A loud WHISTLE carries us forward in time, to the base of a
ladder. John's BARE FEET enter, and we follow them thirty
feet up to the top tier of a diving board. From here, we can
see out over the park, over the amphitheater stage.

Shamu Stadium stands nobly in the distance. Calling to us.

DAVID (O.S.)

You will be among those whose
spirits have intertwined with the
grandest example of God's majesty
on Earth.

(beat)

You will be illuminated. You will
achieve greatness.

John looks down at his landing pad, an ice cold pool.
His breathing quickens. His tan face goes paper white. He
takes a few, slow steps, his arms swing forward, and --
he -- JUMPS! DIVING, he forms a perfect straight position.

As he hits the water...

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSTON BAR - NIGHT

The tip of a POOL STICK slams into a CUE BALL, which hits
the 8-BALL towards the back left pocket.

We float over a CROWDED BAR-TOP to a TV SCREEN: local
Houston news. An ANCHOR holding a mic in front of the Texas
Capital building in Downtown Austin.

ANCHOR (V.O.)

A historic day for civil rights
leaders as the Don't Ask Don't Tell
policy is being championed through
federal courts.

Down from the TV, to a cold mug of beer, FOAM nearly
toppling over the rim.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANCHOR (V.O.)

Experts say that the current public opinion is tipping the scales for a policy that would ban discrimination from closet homosexuals in the military.

The BARTENDER wipes the excess and hands the brew to John, seated next to CLINT (20s), baby faced and well groomed, collared shirt popping out of an argyle sweater.

CLINT

That's one small step for mankind...

John laughs, takes a gulp of beer.

JOHN

And one giant leap *backwards* for all the hateful bastards in this world.

ON THE MONITOR: protests outside of courthouses.

John and Clint CLINK their mugs together in a celebratory cheers. Both smiling as wide as their faces allow.

CLINT

You deserve this.

JOHN

It hasn't set in yet. I don't believe it, I can't believe it.

CLINT

Believe it! You did it!

(smile)

You're going to swim with --

They're interrupted by a bellowing larger voice...

PLAYER 1 (O.S.)

God don't hate the **fags**.

LAUGHTER erupts behind them, John looks back at a group of HICKS. Tall, ugly, beards trying their damndest to cover multiple necks, and all wearing FLANNEL SHIRTS like a hick version of the *Village People*.

HICK 2

To Hell he don't!

HICK 1

We got to live with them.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HICK 1 (cont'd)
He hates us.

John pulls a wad of CASH out of his pocket, puts it next to his mug. His eyes: wielding the same FIRE as his Father's. Clint's keen on this, he's seen it a hundred times before.

CLINT
(firm)
John.

John stands, Clint grabs his wrist...

JOHN
I'm just going to talk to them.

CLINT
What good will it do?

John looks over to our trio of HICKS, all laughing, BEER spilling down into their beards.

CLINT
Don't validate them. You go over there and you start some shit and you're validating them John.

One of the Hicks walks over to the bar, sloshing his pitcher down next to John, nearly FALLING into him.

CLINT
Let's go.

HICK 1
Hey! You got this faggot shit on TV just to piss me off?

He starts laughing, and John can't hold back any longer...

JOHN
Watch your mouth.

The Redneck looks over at John. Beard full of beer.

HICK 1
Excuse me?

Clint intervenes...

CLINT
Ignore him he's had a bit to drink. He's a little upset. Nothing to worry about.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hick 1 scoffs, turns back to his beer and drinks it. Clint leans over the bar between them. He locks his eyes onto John's, who's staring at the Hick over Clint's shoulder.

CLINT

John. Please. Not tonight.

The Redneck eyes Clint and then John. Watching them.

CLINT

Let's go home. Come on.

John's about to get up when...

HICK 1

Oh I get it.

(toothy smile)

Faq.

John grabs a bar stool and SMASHES it over a billiards table. The room goes silent. Clint grabs John's hand and leads him towards the door. They're BLOCKED by Hick 2, cue stick in hand.

Hick 1's GIANT HAND grabs John's shoulder, pulling him around and planting his FIST right between John's eyes.

WE JUMP TO:

INT. AIRPLANE - PRESENT DAY

John's eyes open. To his right, the Little Girl's eyes are FIXATED on a picture that's fallen out of his portfolio. It's John, face covered in blood, slumped over the wall of a SeaWorld tank.

John quickly shuts his portfolio, stuffs it into his backpack. The Mother and Little Girl's faces freeze, eyes digging into John.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER THAT DAY

Key card slides into the door from the hallway. It opens, and John enters, wheeling his luggage along. He shuts the door behind, locks both the DEADBOLT and the SECURITY CHAIN.

He sits down on the edge of a bed, rubbing his knees, stretching his legs out forward. Across the room, an envelope waits atop a stack of local magazines.

CONTINUED:

CUT TO:

John, standing over the envelope. He opens it revealing a printed THEATER TICKET paper-clipped to a programme. A handwritten note at the bottom:

John, if you have time. Pete.

INT. WAREHOUSE THEATER - CONT'D

Lights hanging from tall rafters. Laughter. We float down to PETE (40s) whose skin has aged backwards via a few botox injections. Center stage of an in-the-round play, he circles an ACTRESS. Both speak in thick, well trained English accents.

PETE

What?

ACTRESS

I'll rush into the sea and let the
surf splash me clean. Its
frothiness will...it will fizz all
over my skin.

Pete's eyes catch John's, sitting in the front row. John smiles, subtly waving his hand above his knee. Pete does nothing, keeping in character.

CUT TO:

INT. DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES - BAR - LATER

Pete laughs, sitting on a stool next to John.

JOHN

Who told you I was coming?

PETE

Come on! You're a celebrity now.
Who didn't tell me.

JOHN

You're the actor.

PETE

We've always been acting. The whole
job was an act. This was a natural
progression. But you --
(smirks)
From SeaWorld Rockstar to headline
news whistle blower.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They both laugh. The BARTENDER drops off two beers. Pete grabs his, downs a gulp.

JOHN

They ever come to you?

Pete laughs to himself.

PETE

Month after I left, I started getting letters. Month after that, phone calls. By the end of my first year out, I was turning away money from SeaWorld.

JOHN

What do they want?

PETE

The journalists, you know, from the paper or any animal rights groups, they all want to know about Elska, but SeaWorld.

(beat)

They ask about you.

JOHN

No surprise, I bought my house with cash from the owner. No trace of any transaction, a completely private deal and a few months later I was getting hate mail. They're probably watching us right now.

Pete lifts his watch up to his mouth pretending it's a spy device.

PETE

We got him!

They both laugh, John looks Pete in the eyes...

JOHN

I envy you, Pete.

PETE

What for?

JOHN

You got to leave.

Pete downs the remainder of his beer, wipes beading sweat off his forehead and focuses his gaze on John.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETE
I never got to leave.
 (beat)
 I still hear them. Every night.
 Clicking, like they're looking for
 me. Like they need my help.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

John sits on the room bed, back up against the headrest. Binder open on his lap, a photo album. He throws one onto the comforter: he and Pete when they were younger.

In his hand: John and JACKIE (20s), both wearing SeaWorld wet-suits. Below that, on his lap, the open binder. Dozens of pictures in protective sleeves like baseball cards.

He flips a page, and a DVD DISC falls out. John picks it up, and we see, crudely scribbled on the side in black marker: BE-INTRO-RIP. He looks up from the DISC to the in-room TV...

FUZZY STATIC...

Sizzles away to a the SeaWorld COMMERCIAL from earlier. It's a DVD rip of John's VHS Tape. We recognize it, and it's exactly where we left off: Roy's smile, which fades away to a CELEBRITY HOST. Someone we instantly recognize.

CELEBRITY HOST (V.O.)
 SeaWorld is not *just* where you
 work.

The image TRACKS, the lines match, and we pull back, through the glass tube of a TELEVISION, into...

INT. SEAWORLD - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY - 1993

John's shoulder, leaning his elbows onto a desk in what looks like a high school classroom. Everyone's eyes are glued to a thirty inch box TV at the front of the room. On it, our Host welcomes us from Shamu Stadium .

CELEBRITY HOST (V.O.)
 We're a family. And like any great
 family, we push our own to achieve
 their full potential.
 (smile)
 Whether you're assigned to Dolphin
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CELEBRITY HOST (V.O.) (cont'd)
 Stadium or Shamu Stadium , you're
 about to embark on an incredible
 journey. Welcome to the next
 chapter of your lives.

A KILLER WHALE jumps out of the tank, and in mid-air it
 morphs into an Orca shaped topiary. The static fades away to
 blue sky, clear as ever.

EXT. SEAWORLD HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICE - SAME DAY

Adjacent to the whale bush DOLPHIN and POLAR BEAR shrubs
 line intricately landscaped pathways. EMPLOYEES walk by, all
 wear the same pastel blue shirts, even the golf carts have
 blue roofs.

The tinted doors of the HUMAN RESOURCES office slide open
 and John exits, rocking the same blue shirt. A white Chevy
 truck pulls up, David's driving. He rolls down the passenger
 window and smiles at John.

DAVID
 Let's get to work.

CUT TO:

INT. DAVID'S CHEVY - MOMENTS LATER

John in the passenger's seat of David's truck, windows down.

DAVID
I dreamed of giants.

JOHN
 What?

DAVID
 (smiles at John)
 You wrote that on your application.
 You're a true believer. Most
 applicants just went to the parks a
 lot when they were kids.

Blowing past store-fronts and foliage, as they round a
 corner, John sees his destination: Shamu Stadium.

INT. UNDERGROUND PARKING

John exits the car just after David, following him past HARD
 HAT EMPLOYEES, electrical switches, and tons of vehicles --
 to what looks like a large service elevator.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID

Anyone can be a fan, but if you're a true believer, you're different. You're committed to this, and have been for your entire life.

Doors open, they step inside.

DAVID

That commitment.
That's what makes you a TB.

Rising, floor after floor, shafts of light hitting their faces as the ascend.

DAVID

You out-swam all other applicants. You have an associates degree in behavioral psych. You committed to this long before being selected. You look good on paper. And shit...

David shakes his head, his smug grin returning.

DAVID

We almost didn't hire you.

The elevator stops. John squints.

JOHN

Why?

Doors open.

DAVID

I thought you might be a faq...

John's pulse slows nearly to a halt, he gulps down a dry mouth, ready to vomit. BACKING into the wall of the elevator car -- light hits him from the outside.

DAVID

Glad I was wrong.
You're clearly one of us.

David exits, walking confidently into the light.

John's eyes focus, he looks outside and slowly GRAVITATES towards the doorway. Stepping fully out of the elevator, OPEN MOUTHED and WIDE EYED. Down his line of sight...

Dozens of pillars reaching one hundred feet into the sky. Hoisting a massive JUMBO-TRON screen. Sunlight glistens off the surface of tank water. This is the Shamu Stadium tank.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

John walks forward, reaching the glass barrier. He presses his hand against it, in almost a whisper...

JOHN

Wow...

Water SPRAYS out of an unseen BLOWHOLE. John jumps back, racing to a set of stairs. Running up to the surface level where he sees him:

MATTUR, A 12,000 pound Orca, the largest SeaWorld owns. Swimming through a 998,000 gallon tank, behind the main stage.

DAVID (O.S.)

Welcome to the family.

The whale swims down to the bottom of the tank, surfacing with MIGHT, bursting through the water. Light bounces off the black of its collapsed dorsal fin as it turns mid-air, and SLAMS back down into the tank, DRENCHING John.

We SAIL over the pool to...

INT. SHAMU STADIUM BLEACHERS - SPLASH ZONE - LATER

John and David, seated eye level with the tank. A SeaWorld towel draped over John's shoulders, his hair still wet from the splash. As David speaks, John watches him, almost cringing, his mind replaying his bigotry over and over.

DAVID

I was just a surfer, I saw an ad
for the job and they hired me
because I could stand up on a
board. Figured it would translate
well to the back of a killer whale.

(smile)

When did you know you wanted to do
this?

John looks over at the water, a dorsal fin glides by. His eyes track it from right to left. He drifts back into awe, drinking the Kool-Aid, remembering where he is...

JOHN

It's all I ever wanted to do. I'm
at the point now where I feel like
there's nothing else I can do. I've
studied it. I've read everything
there is to read, I --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID

You dreamt about it, I know.
Everyone who makes it here, is
searching for something deeper.
A meaning, a purpose. SeaWorld...

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - TANKSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Mattur swims alone on the far side of the tank. John steps up to the glass and presses his ear against the barrier. We hear, *as he does*, Mattur's song. Clicking along the walls like an alien language. John places his hand on the glass, and the Orca sees him, gracefully swimming to him.

DAVID (V.O.) CONT'D

It's what you're looking for.
It's the cure.

EXT. SAN ANTONIO MISSIONS - GOLDEN HOUR

Through the viewfinder of a Fuji-QuickSnap: John in Mission Concepcion's towering shadow. The shutter closes, freezing the image.

Clint rolls the film back, smiling.

CLINT

For someone who's wanted this his
whole life you're not showing a
whole lot of enthusiasm here.

JOHN

It's a lot to digest.

CLINT

Did you see them?

JOHN

See what?

CLINT

The whales!

JOHN

I did.

CLINT

And?

Clint walks over to John, side by side, they trek along the walking path around the grounds.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLINT
Something wrong John?

JOHN
It's just. It's real now. I mean, I
saw them. I'm there. I'm doing it.

CLINT
Yeah, of course you are. This is
your destiny. We've always known
that.

Clint smiles, but it isn't enough to lift John's spirits. He
looks away at a bird fluttering over a row of trees.

CLINT
John, talk to me. Please.

JOHN
I had a hard day.

CLINT
What happened?

John pauses, contemplating honesty.

Clint, pure care and worry in his voice, grabs John's hand
intertwining their fingers.

JOHN
I got a call today. From my mother.
She hasn't called me in, I don't
know, four, five years. Last time
we spoke she told me she wouldn't
call me again unless it was a birth
or a death.

John rolls Clint around to face him, grabbing his other free
hand.

JOHN
She said he called her.
I hung up on her once she told me.
Didn't have anything else to say.

Clint presses his forehead against John's.

CLINT
It's okay. It's okay. You're in a
good place now. Stay here.

JOHN
He's out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLINT
Stay in this place.

John pulls back. Clint grabs his shoulder.

CLINT
It's normal to feel this way.

JOHN
I'm fine Clint.

CLINT
You're not fine, you need to talk about it. You need to get it off your chest. You know what happens when you let shit sit there.

JOHN
How do I know if he's going to accept us?

John looks down at Clint's hand. Silver promise ring GLISTENING in the sun.

JOHN
I just want to know that. I don't want to meet him if he's not going to accept us.

CLINT
Just be you. If you do that, he's going to be so proud to be your father that acceptance won't even be a question.

John smiles. Clint leans in for a kiss and as he does TRUCK LIGHTS hit them along with the sound of RUBBLE grinding under tires.

John jerks back, looking over at a parked Ford.

A FAMILY jumps out, the FATHER filming his wild children on a camcorder. Disappointed, Clint rests his head on the inside of John's shoulder. He shuts his eyes and we...

CUT TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - SHOW POOL - EARLY MORNING

David, arms crossed, eyes shielded by aviator sunglasses. Looking out over the empty stage, empty pool.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Footsteps JOG over to his side, David looks over his shoulder, greeting John.

DAVID
You're early.

JOHN
I couldn't sleep. Been awake since three.

DAVID
Anxious. You'll get over that.

He pats John's shoulder and NODS up to the tinted windows of a SHOW TOWER. The eye in the sky.

DAVID
Relax. I'm glad you're early. Gives us time to make introductions.

A HORN sounds off, startling John. Some sort of CHAIN MECHANISM comes to life off-screen. John turns, and we follow his eye-line...

At the far end of the pool, two GATES slice through the water opening into a pool in the back. SHADOWS move beneath the water.

John, mouth wide, eyes tearing up, smiles. A feeling of validation washes over him, and then we see why...

Two COLLAPSED DORSAL FINS glide through the water. Beneath them, massive black shapes that we can't yet make out.

John's eyes drift lower as the whales SURFACE off-screen. He steps forward, and we revolve around to his shoulder, over which we see two Orcas, mouths open so wide they look like they're smiling.

Gyoja, the runt, pushes back from the tank wall. She turns and NUDGES Mattur, popping back up for air and to click violently at David and John.

DAVID
Gyoja. Still learning her way around the tank. Got most of the basic commands down. But she doesn't perform.

David points to Mattur, who patiently floats like a prop.

DAVID
She's not Mattur. He's the one every kid in Texas calls Shamu.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID (cont'd)
Has been for thirty years. The
easiest to train with, and he will
likely be the first whale you'll
ever swim with.

Mattur clicks playfully at John, who laughs, and then
catches something at the back of the tank. Past Mattur, he
sees ELSKA, swimming alone.

JOHN
Who's that?

David looks off at Elska, sighs.

DAVID
Elska. Stubborn and stronger than
the other two. Nobody can crack
her. She's special.

JOHN
What's the problem?
Is she aggressive?

DAVID
No, not like that.

David takes a deep breath.

DAVID
She wants to create her own pod,
but has had three miscarriages
trying.

JOHN
They don't breed here. Do they?

DAVID
Not historically, but I've never
seen a whale quite like her.

John watches Elska swim to the bottom of the pool, splashing
up next to Gyoja. Her eye rolls over to John.

DAVID (O.C.)
One that wants a family so bad, she
will defy all data and research and
try to force one. But at the same
time...

John takes a step forward, closer to the pool. He leans
over, holds his hand above the water.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID
She isolates herself.

John SLAPS the surface. His eyes slide down the water to Elska, facing him, but paying zero attention. He tries again, and Elska turns her back to him, splashing her FIN down angrily.

John stands up, steps back away from the tank.

DAVID
Patience. You're better off with Mattur to start.

Mattur rolls onto his back, seemingly sunbathing his stomach, but actually being corralled onto a rising platform.

JOHN
Is he alright?

DAVID
He's just having some preventative work done. He's the healthiest he's ever been.

John watches SeaWorld STAFF inspect Mattur's mouth. Poking around like dental hygienists.

LATER

PETE (30s), clipboard in hand, watches JACKIE (20s) toss fish into Mattur's mouth.

PETE
They get the same amount of food everyday. A strict diet, between two percent and four percent of their body weight. Herring and smelt here, San Diego and Orlando whales get squid.

JOHN
Why?

PETE
(shrugs)
Cause Roy loves them more.

Pete grins. Jackie moves on to Gyoja, CLICKING and tongue WAGGING. She dumps a handful of fish into her mouth. Gyoja lowers her jaw, and lets the fish sink to the bottom of the pool.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACKIE
(loud)
She's splitting.

DAVID
Push her dinner to after show two.

Gyoja dives down to the bottom of the pool, picks the fish back up and surfaces, SPITTING it into the air like a science project Volcano.

DAVID
Recall.

Jackie nods, walks over to a RED BUTTON and smacks it. A HIGH PITCHED tone bounces off the walls of the tank, echoing up above.

The gates open again, and the whales all swim back to their homes. SLAMMING SHUT like cell doors once the last Orca is safely in the back.

INT. SEAWORLD - KITCHEN - MORNING

A HUGE block of ICE, fish heads sticking out in every direction. RUSH of water sprays down onto the chunk from an industrial faucet in John's hand.

Jackie stands at an adjacent sink, gloved hands pushing the hammer of a SYRINGE, the tip inserted into a fish mouth.

JACKIE
We have to take measures to keep the whales at optimum stability. Their diets are specific to their weight. We infuse the fish with tagamet and water to cut down the risk of ulcers. They're common, and can be fatal if the infection gets out of hand.

JOHN
We do this everyday?

JACKIE
The whales have to eat everyday.

She tosses the fish into a pile of a dozen others. John looks back at his block of ice, slowly thawing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACKIE

If you want to get in the water with them, you have to appease David and the whales. It takes time.

JOHN

How long did you wait?

JACKIE

(smiles)

Patience, John.

She grabs another fish and begins injecting it with the SeaWorld cocktail.

JOHN

(smiles)

Come on, how long?

JACKIE

Three years.

JOHN

Damn, and you were this close to them the whole time?

JACKIE

(laughs)

It's worth it.

JOHN

I want to jump in every time I see them.

Jackie tosses the fish onto the pile, plants her palms down and takes a deep breath. Looking at John...

JACKIE

It never becomes normal. It's never just another day at the office. When you're holding tight onto their fins, flying through the water, it's magic.

(beat)

You'll never feel it anywhere else.

As she looks back at her work, we roll around John, and catch sight of a large, refrigerated box. **NOT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION** stamped on the side.

CUT TO:

EXT. SEAWORLD SAN ANTONIO - PARK ENTRANCE - EARLY MORNING**MONTAGE SEQUENCE**

The SeaWorld LOGO waves on a FLAG, we descend down the flagpole to the front gates. JANITORS sweep up stray leaves. EMPLOYEES stand at the turnstiles, PLUGGING away at a shoddy digital interface.

John enters, we TAG along, following him through a turnstile. He flashes his employee badge.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN'S SAN ANTONIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

Clint FLIPS a pan full of stir-fried vegetables over a stove burner. Across the room John watches, leaning on a counter, beer in hand. SeaWorld Employee Handbook open at his elbows.

INT. SEAWORLD SAN ANTONIO - CONTINUOUS

A MASCOT, bottom half a Shamu costume, stands with their head exposed smoking a cigarette, John rounds the corner, nods, and ducks into a GIFT SHOP.

We push along the outside of the shop, the SUN goes down, and when it rises back UP, it's raining. Time has passed. John exits out the other side wearing a poncho.

He passes by a few PARK GUESTS and enters a tunnel to the Penguin Habitat, disappearing into darkness.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN'S SAN ANTONIO APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Pictures of John and Clint line their bedroom walls. We roll past various framed memories, over to their bed, where John and Clint are lying next to each other underneath a blue quilt. Fan turning above them.

JOHN
I love you.

CLINT
How much?

JOHN
More than anything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLINT
(mimicking)
More than anything.
(smirk)
More than SeaWorld?

John rolls over onto Clint, pinning him down with tickles.

CUT TO:

INT. SEAWORLD - PENGUIN HABITAT

John rides an escalator down, removing his poncho beneath fluorescent lights, they flicker off and on.

He looks a bit older now. A thick stubble rounds his chin. The escalator hits floor level, and he steps onto a moving platform, scrolling by a glassed-in Arctic environment.

Behind the glass, FIFTY PENGUINS shake, dive and swim. One PENGUIN slides down a mountain of snow, landing next to a BABY PENGUIN.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN'S SAN ANTONIO APARTMENT - BEDROOM

Clint and John lie awake next to each other in bed. Clint, reading American Psycho, and John penciling in answers on a take-home SeaWorld Workbook.

CLINT
It doesn't make you mad?

The lead snaps off John's pencil, annoyed, he throws it off the bed. Clint jerks back, almost hiding behind the book.

JOHN
(angry)
Nope. Just like yesterday.
Nothing's changed. You don't want
to come to the park, you don't have
to.

CLINT
I don't think you're being totally
honest with me.

JOHN
(scoffs)
Oh, of course not.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

John rolls over, turning his back to Clint.

CLINT
It just scares me John.
What if you get hurt?

JOHN
I'm not in the water.

CLINT
But you will be.

JOHN
I plan on it, yes.

CLINT
And that's what scares me.

JOHN
My dream, the job I've wanted my
entire life, that's what scares
you?

CLINT
So it does make you mad.

Frustrated, John jumps out of bed.

JOHN
It makes me mad that you're going
to judge without seeing it for
yourself.

CLINT
I've been there, I've seen them.

JOHN
So it should be easy for you to go
back.

CLINT
It's different now.

JOHN
How?

CLINT
You're there.

Clint closes his book.

CLINT
This scene keeps playing through my
mind.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLINT (cont'd)
You're in the tank and it's a bad
day or something, and the whales...

John steps in, sits down on the bed and grabs Clint's hand.

JOHN
It's okay. Nothing will go wrong.

CUT TO:

MANTA RAY POOL - DAY

John rises up out of the Penguin Habitat, sunglasses on, as well as a NEW WET SUIT.

KIDS pet the Rays, smiling back at John as he hops into a Golf Cart. Riding over a horizon, hot sun rays dancing on pavement fades away to...

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - MEDICAL POOL - DAY

The base of the MEDI-POOL lifts up through the water, Mattur on the platform, rising up to surface level where David and Pete wait.

Pete pats Mattur with a wet palm and Mattur opens his mouth.

David lifts up a large DENTAL DRILL, and as it revs, we drift over to John, standing with a chart, eyes staring at the procedure. David, in-between drills...

DAVID
His teeth are breaking and wearing
down.
(drill)
Exposing holes.
(drill)
Exposing the pulp.
(looking at John)
If he gets an infection, it could
kill him.

John slowly nods. The drill tip BURROWS into one of Mattur's molars. The whale doesn't make a sound, but his eye, staring back at David, it says everything for him.

Jackie walks up to John's side. The sound of the drill still bouncing around the tank. A TECH (30s) intervenes...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TECH (O.S.)
David. David! Oh Christ.
(shouting)
DAVID!

The drill shuts off, David looks up.

TECH
David. We've got a problem.

DAVID
Yes?

The Tech looks at Mattur. The whale's chest quickly puffs up and out as Mattur rapidly breathes.

DAVID
What is it?

TECH
The vendor. They're pushing the
camera install.

DAVID
What? That's not possible.
We just confirmed this morning.

TECH
They won't come out.

DAVID
That's not the answer I want.
What about another vendor?

TECH
I already tried that.
Corporate shot it down.

David pulls back from the whale.

Pete packs up the equipment, pats Mattur on the head. The Medi-Pool lowers back down into the water and Mattur swims off as Pete and David exit the tank.

DAVID
When can they do it?

TECH
Tomorrow.

DAVID
That doesn't work. There's nothing
available today?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TECH

I asked.

DAVID

Ask again.

TECH

I begged. It's not going to work out. We're going to have limited to zero surveillance on the tanks. You'll have to pull an over-night.

DAVID

(sigh)

Alright. Whose turn is it?

JACKIE

That's you Pete.

PETE

Can't, I have plans.

DAVID

You'll cancel them.

PETE

I'm getting married and Joy's up my ass about planning and cake tasting and locations and --

DAVID

This is your job.

Pete looks at Jackie, pleading...

PETE

Do me this solid?

Jackie shakes her head no.

JACKIE

I was here in the pouring rain last month, locked out of the offices for an entire night. I slept on a bench.

Pete turns his back to Jackie, hands on his hips. Like a light bulb bursting over his head, he looks at David.

PETE

Have John do it.

Both Pete and David look at John.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TECH
He'll need clearance.

PETE
I'll show him the protocols.

JOHN
What's this about?

DAVID
An opportunity.

JACKIE
He's not ready for an over-night.
(to John)
Sorry John. I love you.
But you're not.

PETE
He's there *just in case*. Okay?
Nothing will happen.
(to John)
Don't lock yourself out of the
office, don't panic if you need
help, just call one of us.

JACKIE
David, please be realistic.
He's not ready for this.

David looks at Pete and Jackie, then to John...

DAVID
What do you think? Are you ready?

John looks at the whales' dorsal fins, sunlight bouncing off
the surface of the water. He's been ready. The Sun fades...

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - BACKSTAGE POOL - AFTER HOURS

...into the Moon, rippling on the same water. Large lights
SHINE on overhead, illuminating a picnic basket atop a large
blue quilt ten feet back from the tank.

CLINT (O.S.)
What about cameras?

JOHN (O.S.)
They're busted. Getting fixed
tomorrow, that's why we're here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PUSHING through lush foliage, passing by a DOWN SECURITY CAMERA, well hidden among the swaying leaves. A RED BEAM flickers to life. Nothing is left to chance.

John and Clint enter, Clint's eyes squinting to see the whales. Clint catches sight of the basket.

CLINT
(smile)
You sly son of a bitch!

Clint gives John a huge hug, looks out past the food, at the circling fins. John walks to the edge of the tank.

CLINT
They're huge.

JOHN
The little one's eight thousand pounds.

CLINT
Little?

John's eyes stare at the water, he kneels down.

CLINT
What are you doing?

JOHN
I'm going to try something.

CLINT
John, don't!

John slaps the water. Nothing happens.

CLINT
Cut it out! You'll lose your job!

John slaps the water again. And a FIN turns towards them. Swimming forward, we can't quite make out which whale it is.

Elska's head pops up a few feet from John and Clint. Surprised, John backs up from the tank. Elska opens her mouth and CLICKS to them playfully.

JOHN
Elska.

CLINT
Elska?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN
It's Icelandic. It means to love.
(smile)
She's sort of the outcast.

CLINT
Must be why she likes you.

He grabs a fish and tosses it to her. Elska gulps it down, lifts her tail fin up and slaps it down.

CLINT
Why's her fin like that?
It looks broken.

JOHN
Their fins are a lot like our ears.
Cartilage, no bone. They spend a
lot of time at the surface, so
naturally tall, heavy boneless fin
will collapse accordingly.

Elska opens her mouth, wagging her tongue.

CLINT
She -- likes you.

JOHN
(smile)
Yeah. I think she does too.

John excitedly runs to the office and brings back a bucket of fish. Grabbing a handful, he tosses them to Elska, who swallows them whole.

Clint laughs. He kneels, getting a better look.

CLINT
This is amazing.

JOHN
Nobody can swim with her.
She won't let them.

Elska opens her mouth again and we see holes in her molars.

CLINT
Are those holes in her teeth?

JOHN
We drill the teeth. Few times a
week. Prevents cavities and
infections.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Clint stands, takes a step back, baffled.

JOHN
It's preventative medicine.

CLINT
Are you kidding me?

JOHN
It's for their own good. Wouldn't
you want a whale in the wild to
have this kind of care?

CLINT
What do they do in the wild, go in
for monthly cleanings?

JOHN
It's a controlled environment
Clint.

CLINT
I'm just asking, where in nature do
we see this?

JOHN
Are you an expert? Do you know more
than years of research?

CLINT
Years of SeaWorld research.

John stands as does Clint. He gets about an inch away from
Clint's face. He's not the loving, caring, promise making
man Clint knows. He's changing.

CLINT
(taken aback)
I didn't mean to offend you.

JOHN
You're jealous.

CLINT
Jealous?

JOHN
I've noticed. Ever since I started
working here you've --

CLINT
Don't be such a narcissist.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

Not of me. Of SeaWorld.
It gives me something you can't.

Clint, quickly cutting him off...

CLINT

Something that isn't real John?
It's a show. Drilling their teeth?
They're wild animals! What else do
you do? Pump them full of vitamins
so they don't catch colds?

JOHN

That's not fair.

CLINT

What's *not fair* is that you don't
see it. You see what you want to
see. And you know something, there
is something I've been meaning to
ask you. This is the first time
you've brought me here. I haven't
met any of your co-workers. I've
heard all about them. But I've
never met them.

(beat)

I think I know why.
But I want you to say it.

JOHN

The timing just hasn't been right.

CLINT

They don't know you're gay.

John looks over at Elska.

JOHN

I can't tell them.

CLINT

You can't tell them?

JOHN

It's complicated.

CLINT

Well then please, explain it to me.

JOHN

You'll only get angrier.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLINT

I don't think that's possible.

John looks back at Clint. Takes a deep breath...

JOHN

On my first day of work, they told me -- David told me -- that they almost didn't hire me because he thought I was gay.

CLINT

What?

JOHN

I can't tell them.

CLINT

You have to. He can't say that to you, you need to stick up for yourself.

JOHN

I'll get fired.

CLINT

They won't fire you because of that, they'll fire him!

JOHN

It doesn't work like that you don't understand.

CLINT

You're willing to walk into this place with blinders?

JOHN

Just until I can get situated and I know a bit more about the company...

CLINT

I was stupid to be afraid that this would **become** your life.

(beat)

It's always **been** your life.

(softer)

And that's a life I don't fit into.

JOHN

Clint, please...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLINT

You want it to be something it
isn't. And you want it so bad that
you'll sacrifice who you are?
I love you John, but --

Clint's lip quivers, his eyes get teary.

CLINT (CONT'D)

I can't be your *friend*.
I can't be one of the guys.
I know who I am, and I thought I
knew you, but this isn't the man I
fell in love with.

John looks away. Tears pour from Clint's eyes as he RIPS the ring off his finger and PLANTS it into John's hand. John looks down, staring at it.

Clint walks away. John shuts his fingers around the ring. Once Clint is fully out of view, the clasped hand turns to a fist.

In a RAGE, John throws the ring into the bushes, knocking up against the camera, red light still shining. He grabs a bucket of fish and TOSSES it across the deck. Veins POPPING on his forehead, fists CLENCHED.

CLICK! CLICK! CLICK!

Elska, head above the surface, clicking. A soft, warming tone. She does it again, BLOWING water out of her blowhole.

John turns back, looking at his new family. He walks to tankside, where she waits, smiling, wagging her tongue.

He kneels, slowly extends his hand. She JERKS towards it and he whips it back to his side. She dips her head down into the water, and then brings it back up, smiling again. Clicking.

John, again, reaches out his open palm.

JOHN

It's alright.

She turns away, unsure about him, but she doesn't swim off. She's curious.

JOHN

It's okay Elska. I won't hurt you.

He reaches farther, making himself completely vulnerable to her GRABBING him and dragging him to the bottom of the tank.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

But this time, Elska NODS her head forward, rubbing the top of it up against John's hand. He smiles, teary eyed, laughing to himself in amazement. She gently clicks now, reminiscent of a cat's purr.

John looks over her, noticing various scratches and bite marks. Parts of her skin peeling back a bit from sunburn. Before he can soak this in too much, she turns, locking eyes with his.

Elska pushes herself away from him, diving down into the tank and rising back up. She looks at John, clicking, wagging her tail fin. He stands, and again she SPLASHES. She wants him to swim with her. He looks down at the water, which...

FADES TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - BACKSTAGE POOL - MORNING

A WAKE rushes forward followed by Jackie's FACE, determined, her arms holding tight to Mattur's fin. He hauls her across the pool. She TAPS his fin, he ROLLS OVER, dunking her beneath.

The force is too much, she lets go and is left behind. Pete, SPOTTING from tankside, mockingly claps. She laughs, swimming to the side of the tank where John leans against the glass.

PETE (O.S.)

Alright, let's do it again.

He's paying no attention to Jackie, we follow his eye-line to David, arms crossed listening to an ATTORNEY (40s), Armani suit in the middle of a theme park.

Water SPRAYS out of Mattur's blowhole, splashing the pavement in front of John. He looks at the whale through the tank wall, then back at David who's looking right at him.

David nods, smiles, John nods back.

We FOLLOW JOHN, walking from one end of the tank...

In the background, Jackie gets back up on Mattur, and again she rides, dunking beneath the water, and FALLING off.

PETE (O.S.)

Get back on. Come on.

She hops onto Mattur, taps his fin and ZOOMS to the other side of the tank, alongside John, and just as determined.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

John hovers over David and the Attorney.

PETE (O.S.)
There you go!

JOHN
David, I need a word with you.

DAVID
I'm sorry John, you'll have to
wait. See me in my office in, I
don't know, twenty minutes?

David smiles, pats John on his shoulder, but John cuts the
bullshit short...

JOHN
I want you to lock Mattur and Gyoja
in the back. Leave Elska in the
tank with me.

David's hand slides off John's shoulder, his smile fades.

DAVID
Excuse me?

JOHN
I'm ready.

David looks at the Attorney, checking his watch, then back
to John.

DAVID
Don't bother me with your delusions
right now, I'm busy.

JOHN
She wants to swim with me.

DAVID
What are you talking about?
(beat)
Did you do something stupid last
night, John?

JOHN
She came to me.

David, speechless for a beat, then...

DAVID
Now is not the time for this John.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

I need to get in the tank with her.

DAVID

You're speaking out of turn.

JOHN

I'm serious. I want you to --

DAVID

(stern)

You're not going in the tank.

David turns his back to John and jumps back into conversation with the attorney. John GRABS his shoulder, spins him around to his piercing stare.

JOHN

I'm not going to be some monkey, waiting on you to make a decision when I'm putting my goddamn life on the line. I can make this decision. You chose me because you know I'm meant to do this.

DAVID

There's still more for you to learn. It's not that simple.

JOHN

What I'm looking for -- the cure -- it's in that tank. She came to me David. That means something.

David looks John in his eyes, swirling with rage. He means it, he's not messing around. To the Attorney...

DAVID

I'll see you in my office in an hour.

The Attorney exhales a deep sigh -- nods, exits.

DAVID

You've got balls John. Better pray to God you have them when she's finished with you.

FADE TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - BACKSTAGE POOL - MOMENTS LATER

The pool water, disturbed by John as he steps down onto a ledge. The water SWALLOWS his legs, then stomach, until he's wading chest-high in the tank.

He looks across the surface: nothing, not even a fin.

David, watches with his arms crossed, sweat beading on his forehead. John looks back at him, David nods.

John turns around and sees Elska's fin, now just a few feet away. His eyes narrow on it, it sinks down, out of sight, and then she POPS her head up right in front of him. Her FACE is close enough to give him a kiss.

Startled, he jerks back, but catches himself as she opens her mouth wide and wags her tongue. Playfully clicking.

He smiles, SLOWLY places his hands on her head. She begins to purr again, and then, she turns, gently jabbing his chest with her fin: an invitation. He takes hold, and slow enough for comfort, she PULLS him further into the pool.

David steps up to the edge of the tank. His eyes shoot over to the recall button, but he doesn't move towards it.

Elska rolls onto her back, TWISTING John onto his.

OVERHEAD: we look down, at John and Elska -- floating, hand and fin. Two, in unison, calm as can be. She turns back over, and with John at her side, she THRUSTS forward with just enough heft to make it exciting.

Pete and Jackie SMILE from tankside, Jackie looks at David, whose face doesn't shift from a stern stare.

JOHN (V.O.)

It was like riding a bike for the first time. Something new. Something dangerous.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN'S SAN ANTONIO APARTMENT - THAT NIGHT

A champagne CORK pops, contents POURING out over Pete's hands, noise-maker in his mouth -- Jackie SHOVES a cup underneath. The room is full of SeaWorld STAFF.

A ping-pong BALL flies across one side of a table, RINGING around a cup, landing inside.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN (V.O.)
The craziest part of it, was that
she was totally comfortable.

BALCONY

John standing next to Pete.

PETE
Nobody outside of here will ever
understand what you're doing. They
won't get your dream. But here,
you're family.

LIVING ROOM

John, one arm around Pete, the other around Jackie.

PETE (V.O.)
We get you. We understand. David's
a little harsh, but he's a True
Believer. Like you. Like all of us.

In SLOW MOTION, they playfully JUMP, BOOZE spilling out of
their cups. As their shoes hit the ground we resume normal
time.

DING-DONG...

Jackie and Pete look at each other. Jackie begins to smile,
and Pete does the same. They know something John doesn't.

JOHN
What?

JACKIE
She wouldn't come to anyone.
Not even David.

JOHN
Yeah?

PETE
We have some traditions here.

DING-DONG...

PETE
Think of it as an initiation.

DING-DONG...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETE

If you answer the door, you accept
that your life has changed. You
acknowledge that you've connected.

DING-DONG...

JACKIE

It won't ring again.

John looks at Pete and Jackie, and then the door. He walks
over it, his hand grabs the knob and he opens it. David
stands at the door, he smiles.

DAVID

It's time you make the jump.

CUT TO:

INT. DOLPHIN STADIUM - NIGHT

The Wind BLOWS a harsh chill through the air. The trees sway
with each gust. Zeus, the same statue as before, looks over
the water. His face eerie in the shadows. David walks past.

DAVID

Do you remember the first time you
were here John?

Across the water, Pete, Jackie and John all stand, shivering
in their UNDERWEAR. A BASKET OF SWIM WEIGHTS sits between
Pete and Jackie.

JOHN

Yes. I was a boy.

DAVID

Do you remember how cold the water
was when you did your swim test?

John, shivering too much to speak, says nothing.

DAVID

Forty two degrees.

Pete drops his boxers. Jackie reaches around her back and
unlatches her bra. She looks at John, who doesn't move.

JACKIE

It's okay.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

John looks down at the water. Pete tosses his boxers into the pool, Jackie does the same with her bra, and then panties. John shivers, he looks over the water at David, who crosses his arms.

DAVID

You don't have to be shy.

JOHN

What's the point of this?

DAVID

The more questions you ask, the longer this will take.

PETE

I'm freezing!

DAVID

Are you cold yet John?

Pete's boxers and Jackie's bra float in the pool. After a beat John's boxers join them.

DAVID

Jackie. The honors.

She grabs some weights and ties them around Pete's ankles, and then does the same with John's.

DAVID

John, if you would kindly tie the weights around Jackie.

John looks at her, his teeth CHATTERING in the cold.

JACKIE

Go ahead.

John, clearly uncomfortable, grabs a couple of weights and secures them around Jackie's ankles. As he rises back up, Pete and Jackie begin walking towards the edge of the pool. John follows.

David raises his FIST into the air. He waits. Watching the three Trainers shiver, a sadistic voyeur. Jackie exhales, and we see her breath being swallowed by frost.

He DROPS his fist and the three Trainers JUMP into the pool, their feet breaking the surface, weights driving them down to the bottom.

Up from the water, on David, an eerie smile forms across his face. In his hand is CLINT'S RING.

INT. STATE ASSEMBLYMAN'S OFFICE - MORNING - PRESENT DAY

Framed photograph of DICK (50s), tall, graying hair, brown eyes enlarged by round, wire-framed glasses, shaking hands with PRESIDENT OBAMA.

Dick's desk, PAPERWORK SCATTERED everywhere. John's book being used as a paperweight. An Orca plushy wearing a tiny PETA T-Shirt. The office door opens, Dick and MARK (30s) enter, led by Mark's caffeinated walk.

MARK

John. So happy you could make it.
Flight was okay?

John stands and shakes Dick's hand and then Mark's.

JOHN

Slept for most of it.

DICK

It's been a long week.

Dick smiles and sits down. Mark leans on the edge of his desk. John sinks into a large leather chair, backpack on the floor in front of him, and winces as his knees bend.

JOHN

They're all long.

Dick smirks, nods.

DICK

I saw you were in France last month. What's the latest there?

JOHN

The park flooded. They didn't get Hetja out before outside sediment got into his tank. He's dying.

MARK

That's the whale from your book?

JOHN

One of them. Another is in San Diego. I've contemplated going to check in myself.

MARK

Wouldn't they throw you out?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

I've done it before. I went a lot the year after I quit. Thought it would be cathartic.

DICK

That's something we've never really talked about. Why did you leave, exactly?

JOHN

After the accident, they spun the PR. Media went from questioning captivity to lies like the whale wasn't at fault, it was a trainer mishap. The whale was reacting to a command. They said I was an inferior and pretentious trainer, but the truth is...

John reaches into his backpack, and pulls out a stack of documents. He drops it on Dick's desk. Mark grabs it and flips through the pages.

JOHN

Elska killed a trainer in Mexico.

Mark and Dick look up from the pages to John, face beat red with intensity. His hands WRAP around his kneecaps like gloves.

JOHN

She killed him before SeaWorld acquired her and those documents prove it. They knew and they put us in the tanks. It wasn't all Elska's fault. She didn't start out violent. Being in the tank drove her to it.

John, distracted by the Orca toy on Dick's desk, calms down.

JOHN

(softer)

They've done everything in their power to build a tank around me. No matter how far I go, they're right there to try to stop me.

He looks up from the toy to Dick, places his hands onto the desk and leans back in his seat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

I saw Pete last night. He's got a new career, a new life, and still, he feels like I do.

DICK

How do you feel?

JOHN

Like I never left.

FADE TO:

SEAWORLD COMMERCIAL SEQUENCE - 1996

FLYING over Shamu Stadium , SWOOPING down to the show-pool, where Mattur EXPLODES out of the water, with John RIDING his rostrum, arms out, DEMANDING applause from the CROWD.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

SeaWorld San Antonio!

QUICK SHOTS OF:

John SURFING the back of Mattur. Some time has passed, he's no longer just a lackey -- he's swimming with whales now.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Get soaked at the ALL NEW Shamu Encounter!

KIDS in Shamu shirts getting SOAKED tankside.

A MOTHER pointing towards the tank over her SONS' shoulder. THEN, tankside, after a performance, John stands, still dripping wet.

He looks straight into the camera, and like a true STAR...

JOHN

Being a killer whale trainer is hard work. I consider myself the luckiest man alive to have such a unique and amazing connection with these fantastic creatures here at SeaWorld San Antonio!

A LITTLE GIRL (8) pokes his side, he kneels down eye level with her. She hands him a POSTER with John surfing Elska's back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LITTLE GIRL
How can I become a killer whale
trainer like you?

John grabs the poster, magically has a Sharpie.

JOHN
(smile)
Well sweetheart, it takes years of
studying and training to get into
the tanks with a killer whale.

He signs it, hands it back to her and then looks at the
camera, yes -- the commercials are that cheesy, but hey,
John's a team player...

JOHN
But the first step is visiting me
and Shamu at SeaWorld San Antonio!

CUT TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - SHOW POOL - DAY

Passing over the heads of FAMILIES, all rushing to find
their seats in the bleachers. The water is bluer than we've
ever seen, lights up above ROLL over the crowd.

Down in the splash zone...

A FATHER pulls a poncho down onto his DAUGHTER.
A DRINK VENDOR tosses a bottle of a water to a WOMAN.
A CLOWN squirts the back of a MAN with a water-pistol and
then quickly tucks it away as he turns toward him.

BACKSTAGE

We're LOW on a bucket of fish, following all the way to...

John, zipping up his WET-SUIT. The bucket passes by, in the
hands of a TECH. John cracks his neck, stretches his arms.
Pete rounds the corner.

PETE
You ready?

JOHN
Yeah. How is she?

PETE
She's ready. Responding well.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

Good. She was giving me some shit earlier.

PETE

Don't be nervous, you're a unit. The two of you are real solid. She trusts you.

JOHN

She's pregnant.

PETE

She's fine. You spoke with the doc, you heard what he said. Elska's never been better. The hormones might give you an extra kick, but you can take it.

He laughs, as does John.

The roar of the crowd grows to a deafening RUMBLE.

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - SHOW POOL - SHOWTIME

The lights STROBE.

The Clown runs off, waving to an applauding CROWD. KIDS stand, looking out into the water. Pointing.

The JUMBO-TRON sparks to LIFE with a score that sounds like something off John Williams' sketch-book. On the screen: The SUN SETTING over rolling hills. Scene TILTS down to a humble, single-story home.

Tall white fence encloses a POOL. Orca swim-toy FLOATING. A BOY (8) dives into the pool, swimming around the toy.

Video CUTS TO his BEDROOM.

The Boy, lying on a bed, Orca plushy gripped in his hands. Staring up at his ceiling, where toy-store GLOW IN THE DARK stars GLIMMER, igniting his imagination.

As his eyes slowly begin to shut, the WHITE of the ceiling turns to the endless BLACK of space, and the stars SHINE to life!

The Boy SITS UP, smiling -- excited, as his room dissipates into space and HUGE ORCAS swim through star-dust towards him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The screen goes **BLACK**. We pull back into the crowd. The pool gates OPEN and John SPRINTS OUT from behind the screen, microphone draped around his ear. Holding his hands out, hamming it up.

We PUSH DOWN onto the stage, from his POV: the crowd, cheering. He's a rockstar.

Elska LEAPS from the show pool – soaring through the air, through camera flashes and GASPS. Diving back under with all her weight slapping against the surface.

John claps, smiling broader than ever.

Alongside his shoulder: we dive off the stage, into the pool. The noise is gone, all we hear now, is Elska's echolocation.

Clicks and SQUEAKS pierce through the depths.

She SWOOPS us up from underneath. Gliding through the bubbles, TOWARDS the ruckus...

We break the surface, FLYING through the air atop an Orca.

SOARING in slow motion, CAMERAS flash, reflecting back off Elska's SLICK skin. John extends his arms to the audience, who SCREAM back at him in amazement.

Falling back under the water, John moves around to Elska's belly. He wraps his arms around her as she SPEEDS back up into the air.

ROLLING – **TUMBLING** across the pool, splashing water up over the glass, soaking tourists. Back into the depths of silence. John taps Elska's side and she slows, allowing John to move into position underneath her. Hands HOLDING fins.

As soon as he's secure, she dives down to the bottom of the pool – DRIVES both of them upwards with a force unlike anything we've ever seen and...

BREAKS through the surface, propelling John HIGH into the air. Time SLOWS as WE dive, in unison with Elska, back into the water. He swims to a central point in the pool.

Elska swoops John up again, this time giving him her back – rising up out of the water as John stands, surfing, with comfort and ease that should be alien to any man.

TEARING through the waves of our own wake, blowing past clapping hands and snapping cameras. John leans left, aiming towards the stage – where he hops off, sliding to his knees like a pop star, arms wide.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Elska, on the opposite side of the pool, leaps up onto a wet bar — a smaller stage built INTO the stands. The crowd goes wild.

John smiles, heart beating, breathing faster than ever. He claps down towards Elska, who gives us her best attempt at a smile, at least -- that's what it looks like.

CUT TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - BACKSTAGE POOL - MOMENTS LATER

John, catching his breath, runs backstage. He grabs a towel, wipes off his face and grabs a bottle of water.

ROY (O.S.)
Don't think a show's made me feel
like that for, well since this
place opened.

John turns around to ROY (60s), wearing a full suit, dapper as any old school American businessman, but with large sunglasses and cowboy boots. We recognize him from the earlier commercial.

CUT TO:

INT. THE RAINBOW LOUNGE - NIGHT

A 100-year-old cabin restaurant with FISH, BUCK-HEADS and other HUNTING MEMORABILIA hanging on the walls over insanely large fireplaces and decadent table settings.

John and Roy sit across from each other. A WAITER pours them wine.

ROY
Wine drinker?

JOHN
Occasionally.

To the Waiter...

ROY
Sea bass. For both of us.

Roy smiles and shifts his attention to John, whose nerves SEEP through the nicest shirt he owns.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROY

Had to get the bass. Was on the boat that caught it today.

JOHN

Can't wait to try it.

ROY

You'll love it.

Looking around...

ROY

You ever been here before?

JOHN

No, never.

ROY

It's a real Texas staple. You're from around here, right?

JOHN

I'm a Texan, but where I'm from a decent meal is usually handed to you through a drive-through window.

John laughs.

ROY

Small town boy.

John nods.

ROY

That's good. You have a different kind of knowledge. You're a survivor. David's got a real tight program. He's a great trainer -- but he's always been missing something. I could never put my finger on it.

(leans in)

But then I saw you and that whale. And I looked around me -- at the audience, at the faces of children. They weren't just cheering John.

(beat)

They were by your side. Their hearts intertwined with yours. You took them from their seats and put them into that tank. That is what I've been looking for.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

After a beat, Roy takes a sip of wine. Wipes his mouth.

ROY

What do you really want to get out of this experience? I know the thrill of the whales. But I want to know what John's getting out of this whole thing. Inside.

John looks over at a FAMILY dining across the restaurant. A YOUNG BOY watching as his MOTHER slices his steak dinner.

JOHN

I dreamed of having this conversation with you. I believed it would happen, but it wasn't easy. I never really had anything. Except for SeaWorld. It was my escape. It's where I went when things were falling apart.

(beat)

This is what I'm meant to do.

Roy soaks this in, after digesting for a beat...

ROY

My mother and father never got married. They met when they were in high school, fooled around, and there I was.

(beat)

They couldn't handle me, they were still kids themselves so they dumped me into foster care. For five years I spent entire days sitting by the window, waiting for them to return. They never did. Others were adopted, brought back, kept. But I -- I lost hope. Then, one day, my parents showed up. Not the ones I had expected -- the ones I needed.

(smile)

They were wildlife photographers. Amazing people, and they adored and revered the whales. Ruthless hunters, and smarter than anything I'd ever seen. I needed to get closer to them. Closer than a picture could take me.

(beat)

See, their whole existence revolves around the one thing I needed most. A family.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

On John, taking this all in the best he can.

ROY (O.C.)
That's what you need, John. A
family.
(beat)
That's your cure.

The Waiter returns with a bucket of iced champagne.
John's eyes never leave Roy's. Casually...

ROY
I'm bringing my board of directors
to the San Antonio park. I want
them to see you perform. I think
you're going to be the biggest star
the SeaWorld family has ever seen.
(smile)
And I always take care of family.

Off the champagne we...

FADE TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - BACKSTAGE POOL - MORNING

A bucket of fish. PEOPLE rush by, and we follow them: Pete,
Jackie, John and David.

PUSHING into the GLASS, as Elska swims, circles.
THROUGH THE GLASS, we HEAR her SONG...

Tail FLUKES slide out of her as she makes another round.

THEN, more of the CALF -- until it's completely free of
Elska, and swimming underneath her. She sinks down to the
Calf's level, nudging it. Her song BRIGHTENS, as the Calf
joins her, albeit a much smaller voice. The miracle of life.

It opens its eyes. We can't help but collectively awwwww.

RISING up out of the tank to the SURFACE, where the entire
CREW stands. Teary eyed. Cheering. Even David smiles.

Jackie wraps her arm around John, whose hands are planted
onto his face covering a FATHER'S smile.

JACKIE
Think it's only fair if you name
him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

David, watching his team excitedly crowd around John, leaving him a few steps back: in John's wake. David slides his hands into his pockets and walks away.

CUT TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - SHOW POOL - LATER THAT DAY

John, in the middle of the pool, FLOATING on his back with Elska on one side, and Hetja on the other. HOLDING a fin in each hand, they float in unison. As a pod.

We HOLD on this for a few beats. PURPLE sunset REFLECTING down onto the water.

FADE TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - SHOW POOL - PRESENT DAY

Down by the entrance, John leans against the wall, headphones over his ears, Yankees hat down low. A FAN exits past him, the last one in the stadium.

John walks to the glass and on the far side of the tank we see a WHALE, covered in scars and sun burns. John presses his hand against the glass. The whale doesn't move.

Pitifully floating like a pool toy.

JACKIE (O.S.)
Our pride and joy.

John turns, shocking Jackie, towel around her neck. She stops, gripping both ends of the towel with her hands.

JACKIE
What do you want?

JOHN
Those scars don't look good. What are they from? Scraping up against the tank walls? Fighting with the other whales?

JACKIE
You need to leave.

Jackie looks back at the stands. They're alone.

JOHN
I don't blame you for staying.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACKIE

John, seriously, you need to go. I don't want you here. Nobody wants you here. You're a liar.

JOHN

I don't blame you. But if you can look at that whale and tell me she's fine. That makes you a liar.

Jackie looks at the whale, exhales, hands on her hip.

JACKIE

I won't let you see her John.
I know that's what you're here for.

JOHN

I'm here to see you.

She's taken aback by this.

JACKIE

I have nothing to say to you.

JOHN

I left. Pete left. You stayed.
I want to know why.

JACKIE

That's none of your business.

JOHN

I know you. You're a good person.
You're compassionate. You love them, and I know how hard it is to come to terms with the reality of this place.

JACKIE

It's the best chance they have.

JOHN

I thought that too, but this is captivity. It's a cell Jackie.

JACKIE

(pissed off)

It's a controlled environment.

John pulls back from the glass, begins to walk away. Jackie looks at the whale through the glass. Part of her knows he's right, but that part isn't strong enough yet.

He stops, turns back to her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN
It breaks my heart.

JACKIE
You abandoned her, John.
She's suffering because of you.

JOHN
She's suffering because you won't
wake up. I did the best thing I
could for her. Not for me, it
destroyed me, but she doesn't
deserve this. She's alone. Isolated
from the others, she comes out for
a splash and that's it. Back to her
cage.
(beat)
I didn't abandon her.
I fight for her everyday.

A SECURITY TEAM approaches, and John turns back, puts his
headphones on and follows them out.

CUT TO:

INT. SEAWORLD SAN DIEGO - PARK ENTRANCE

John, turns a corner, walking by rows of PALM TREES, benches
and flowerbeds. The TURNSTILES wait for GUESTS. EMPLOYEES
watch John, the snake in their grass.

A GROUP OF SCHOOL KIDS walk by. TEACHERS ushering them
along. John looks over at them, the smiles on their faces
are all too familiar.

FADE TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - SHOW POOL - MORNING - 1996

INSIDE THE TANK, looking through the glass at FACES OF
CHILDREN. Cheeks PUSHING against the barrier.

Wide smiles, OPEN eyes, not one kid above a FIRST GRADE age.

JOHN (O.S.)
Killer whales can live up to thirty
years old. Some, even live into
their forties!

OUTSIDE THE TANK, John walks down the row of kids...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

They live in families, called pods,
mostly led by females. They're a
lot like us, they love their moms.

A few KIDS laugh.

JOHN

Conservation efforts, like the work
we do here at SeaWorld San Antonio,
will keep these gentle giants from
ever going extinct.

A LITTLE BOY looks back from the glass.

LITTLE BOY

Will they ever go to the ocean?

JOHN

Unfortunately the ocean is not a
safe place for our whales. They
need controlled environments, like
SeaWorld, to stay healthy.

The Little Boy looks at the tank, thinking about John's
answer. Another LITTLE GIRL chimes in...

LITTLE GIRL

Are you a scientist?

JOHN

(laughs)

No, not quite, but all of the
trainers at SeaWorld San Antonio
are well equipped to care for all
of the animals we have at our park.

LITTLE BOY

But -- it's not as big as the
ocean. Don't they miss their
families?

JOHN

We have our own family right here
at SeaWorld San Antonio. In fact...

The Little Boy turns back to the tank...

JOHN

We have a bit of a surprise for you
today. Our newest addition to the
SeaWorld San Antonio family --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The GATES SLIDE OPEN. The KIDS all watch, partially scared, partially ecstatic. HETJA, the calf, follows Elska into the show pool, swimming gracefully at her side.

JOHN
Our new baby, Hetja!

Faces LIGHT UP!

KID
Cool!

ANOTHER KID
WOW!

John smiles, laughing to himself as the kids showcase the same response he had when he was their age.

JOHN
Hetja is still too young to perform
in our show, but he's learning
basic commands faster than any
other whale we've had in our care.

John walks past the children, around to the main tank stage. He opens the gate and stands at the edge of the platform where Elska leads Hetja. The children press their faces against the glass watching, some run back up to the bleachers to get a better view.

John, smiling, rolls his hand over and Elska rolls onto her side and begins waving her fin. Hetja, seeing this, mimics her, and a collective awww rings out from the kids.

JOHN
Great job!

Laughing, John steps back and waves the whales in. Elska hurls herself onto the stage, and Hetja, after trying a few times, sinks backwards into the water.

John rushes to the edge, leans over the tank and kisses Hetja's head as he tries again to make it onto the stage.

Elska lowers herself in and the two whales swim circles around the tank. She WAVES using her fin, and the little guy follows suit, perfectly acknowledging his audience.

The kids go wild, clapping, laughing, jumping up and down. John watches from the stage like a proud father.

Jackie walks up beside him, startling him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACKIE
David wants to see you.

CUT TO:

INT. DAVID'S OFFICE - DAY

David, looking through the blinds of his office window.
John enters.

DAVID
I just got off the phone with Roy.

John sits down at the desk, grabs a small ORCA KEY CHAIN
TOY, fiddles with him, anxiously waiting.

DAVID
We're opening a park in France. Roy
wants to do what Disney did. He
thinks there's a real market in
Paris, and he's secured some land.

He turns to John.

DAVID
He wants you to start a killer
whale program. Congratulations. I
can't say I didn't expect this, but
I didn't think it would happen so
quickly.
(beat)
Nobody did.

David extends his hand for John to shake, and John does.

JOHN
When is this starting? Do they have
any trainers already lined up or is
Pete coming, Jackie?

DAVID
They've got a team assembled.
Top athletes, but they've never
worked with killer whales.
You'll be showing them everything.

JOHN
How many whales?

DAVID
They have two now but --

David leans back, folds his arms across his chest.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID

They need a whale, for longevity.
A calf. Hetja.

(beat)

Roy wants to ship him over there
before you. Let him get used to the
new environment before training
starts.

JOHN

What?

DAVID

Investors need something that'll
guarantee a long term return. They
know the calf will buy them time to
market properly and get --

JOHN

David. He's just a baby.

He leans forward, trance-like stare digging into John's
soul.

DAVID

I need you to be on board with
this.

JOHN

He needs her, he needs us.

DAVID

He'll have you. Your relationship
with Elska and now Hetja make you
the prime candidate for this
position.

JOHN

They can't take him.

DAVID

Don't make this more difficult than
it needs to be.

JOHN

He trusts us. Elska trusts us.
They trust -- me.

DAVID

Look. You've had one major flaw
since you started here.

He opens a desk drawer and pulls out Clint's ring. He tosses
it onto his desk. John's face goes pale, he swallows.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID
You're naive.

JOHN
Where did you get that?

DAVID
Hetja's going to France.

John looks away from David, at the ring on the desk.
His hands open and grip the seat arms until his knuckles
turn white.

DAVID (O.S.)
With or without you.

FLASH TO:

INT. YOUNG JOHN'S ROOM - NIGHTMARE SEQUENCE

Young John being DRAGGED out of his room by Crystal. The
BEDROOM never seems to end, every length back we see more
remnants of John's life.

His entire world is dissolving. TOYS dripping away like INK
running down a canvas. POSTERS shredding themselves off the
wall as if a poltergeist were tearing them down.

Clint. Speaking, but we can't hear him. He begins melting
into the floor, until he's completely gone. The room ends,
and John is alone in DARKNESS. He looks down at his feet,
and the blackest dark we've ever seen begins to ripple.

INT. JOHN'S SAN ANTONIO APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

John wakes gasping for air. Immediately looking for Clint,
but finding a bare bed sheet. He sits up, holds his head in
his hands.

CUT TO:

BALCONY

Leaning over the balcony, he looks out at a gorgeous view of
Downtown San Antonio. We push in on his eyes which...

FADE TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - BACKSTAGE POOL - MORNING

Match cut: John's EYES. Sounds of large machinery surround him. PULLING BACK, the machinery is nearly drowned out by the FRANTIC CRIES of killer whales.

John watches from TANKSIDE with Pete and Jackie. Each of them fighting to remain unmoved. A TEAR rolls down Jackie's cheek, she bites her bottom lip and quickly wipes it away.

A huge CRANE sinks down into the tank, a large NET held at its end. Elska and Hetja SWIM around, DIVING down as the crane dips. Doing everything they can to get as far away as possible.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
She's blocking us.

Elska CRIES out, but there's nothing John or anyone can do. Pete looks away, Jackie stares forward, eyes wide. John steps backwards from the scene. Eyes pinned forward, missing nothing.

DAVID (O.S.)
Sedate her.

He stops, as an EMPLOYEE brushes by him and jumps into the tank, DART GUN in hand. John's hands ball into fists, his sorrow turns to anger, albeit subdued.

Beneath the water: the Dart Gun Employee aims his sights on Elska, who THRASHES sporadically around the tank, SCREAMING back at him. POP -- we ride alongside the DART as it pins into her side. Again, she SHOUTS out, startled by the impact.

On the surface: John's hellish stare fades to tears, his hands unravel from fists.

In the tank: Hetja swims away, DODGING the net. We follow him under the surface, he looks over at Elska whose cries dwindle into a SOMBER WHIMPER as the sedative kicks in.

He rapidly CLICKS for her -- BEGGING her to help. Confused. Afraid. With nowhere to go, he TWISTS back, and swims right into the net.

Elska, WAKING SUDDENLY, cries louder than ever. She RAMS herself against the tank wall. SHOUTING for her son in the only language she knows as he's LIFTED out of the tank. He cries back, TAKEN away from his mother. Elska slowly -- falls -- asleep, her screams silenced by the sedative.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

On the surface: Hetja, lifted fully out of the tank in the net, still crying.

DAVID (O.S.)
 Alright, bring him in easy. Slow.

Jackie turns away, looking back at where John was. Now just a group of HARDHAT EMPLOYEES waiting on orders.

JUMP TO:

INT. CALIFORNIA STATE CAPITOL - COURTROOM - PRESENT DAY

John and Mark sit next to a COURT REPORTER. Dick, on the other side of the room, is seated in a pool of THIRTEEN ASSEMBLYMEN. A CROWD gathered in every row behind John.

Dick grabs his microphone, bends it closer to his mouth.

DICK
 The bill before us proposes a ban on the breeding of captive Orcas in California. Today, we welcome input from the community. I know tensions are high on this subject, so I ask everyone to please remain quiet until it is your turn to speak.

(clears throat)
 First we will hear from a representative of SeaWorld Enterprises on why they feel this bill should not pass. We will then move on to members of our community and to a key proponent of the bill, an ex-senior killer whale trainer, who will give a testimony and answer questions from both sides of the argument.

He nods and SeaWorld's ATTORNEY (40s) stands, blue suit, hair combed to the side like a 60's ad-man.

ATTORNEY
 SeaWorld would like to first say thank you to all the amazing support we've received from the beautiful state of California since opening our San Diego park. No matter what testimony you hear today, the fact will remain that SeaWorld is a family and we consider all of the animals as part of that family.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ATTORNEY (cont'd)

We want to do what's best for them.
Our breeding program was designed
to help them as a species and we
believe ending our efforts now will
be a disservice to all orcas.

He looks at John and Mark, back at the crowd, and then sits.

DICK

Thank you. We'll now begin to hear
from the public. Go ahead.

He nods at an ADULT MAN (30s) wearing a SeaWorld t-shirt,
with a big round pin with SeaWorld FAN CLUB printed on it.

ADULT MAN

Yes, my name is Jeff and I'm a
lifetime fan of SeaWorld. I was
inspired by my visits to the theme
parks, getting a degree in marine
biology, specializing in behavioral
science. SeaWorld inspires people
everyday, and I challenge all of
you to name another organization
who has done more for the
preservation and conservation of
the killer whale species. Their
breeding program is the only thing
we have to ensure the longevity of
their species.

He looks over at John, and then returns to his seat. John
looks down at his manuscript in his hands. Flipping through
the pages as a WOMAN (40s) stands, wearing a hat that says
LET THEM GO. She approaches the mic, lowers it to her mouth.

WOMAN

I think we can all agree. There's
nothing worse than a liar except
for an entire organization of
liars. Men and women who lie to our
children...

FADE TO:

John, seated in front of the entire gathering. Mark sits at
his seat, the microphone lowered to his mouth.

MARK

When SeaWorld sent the calf to
France, what kind of an impact did
that have on you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

I felt responsible. I felt like everything I'd been working towards at SeaWorld was really just part of a bigger machine.

MARK

At any point did you feel like you should leave? I mean, did you ever really feel like leaving?

JOHN

Of course.

MARK

Then why did you stay?

JOHN

The whales were my family. I wanted to protect them, and I wanted to believe that somehow all of this could work out. It was the best thing that ever happened to me, and to be honest...

(beat)

I didn't know any better. None of us did. We didn't read textbooks, we didn't have access to anything but what SeaWorld fed us. Being around the whales, it was blinding. I wanted to believe it was all for the greater good.

MARK

What finally broke you?

John looks out over the crowd and sees Jackie in the audience. She looks at him and then away. John shuts his mouth, exhales through his nose...

FADE TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - BACKSTAGE POOL - MORNING - 1996

John, now sporting a beard. He looks older, like a President after two terms. Down his line of sight...

Jackie, stretches a few feet from the tank. Across from her is Pete, who zips up his wet-suit, and then applies SUNSCREEN to his face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

John enters, already suited up. He says nothing to his crew-mates, walks to the edge of the tank and looks out over the water at Elska, floating STILL on the far end.

JACKIE

John. I don't think Elska should swim today. She's not responding to any of our commands.

JOHN

I'll get her up.

PETE

She's going to take some time before she comes back around man. I'm sorry.

JACKIE

Maybe you should take some time off too. Go somewhere. Vacation.

JOHN

She needs me to work through this with her. She needs to trust me again.

John looks over at Mattur and Gyoja, swimming around each other in a playful dance. He slaps the water. She doesn't come.

JACKIE

You're going to get yourself hurt.

PETE

John, come on man, listen to us. Hear us out.

Another couple of SLAPS and Elska's fin TURNS towards John.

JOHN

(to Pete)

Thaw some fish for me.

CUT TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - SHOW POOL - SHOWTIME

Elaska BURSTS through the water, John on her back.

The CROWD cheering, the music PUMPING.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Diving beneath the surface, she rolls over, and John slides to her belly. Wrapping his arms around her, BUBBLES flowing out of his nose faster than a Toddler can blow them.

He TAPS her side, DRIFTS up to her fins and holds on as she THRUSTS through the water, INTO THE AIR -- HIGHER THAN EVER.

CATAPULTING John more than thirty feet into the sky -- he arcs perfectly over Elska who begins to deviate from the plan...

SLOWING, she turns away from the path as John's hands HIT the water. Anxious, he turns. Elska, more like a shark than a whale, BARRELS towards him -- GRABBING HIM in her mouth.

Keeping calm, John holds on tight as Elska DRAGS HIM to the lowest depths of the pool. From his POV we see the surface dwindling farther and farther away. Air escaping his lungs.

Tankside, Jackie paces over to the recall button, met there by Pete who SLAPS it before she can. UNDER THE WATER, we hear the tone. John's eyes RAPIDLY dart around, he's running low on air.

Elska, John still in her mouth, looks back at the OPENING gates. She BRINGS John to the surface, TOSSING him up for air, and then swims ten feet away, keeping a slight distance as she CIRCLES him.

SLAPPING down against the water, he holds his RIBS, gasping for air. Eyeing Jackie and Pete who have no idea what to do.

He's in the center of the pool. Elska, still circling, CLICKS violently -- SPORADICALLY. She RUSHES him, slamming into his side. **CRACK**. He BITES his lips, holding back any sign of panic. The Crowd, now being escorted out, SHOUT at the tank.

From John's POV: eye level with the water, Elska, her collapsed fin slicing through like a blade.

STRAIGHT TOWARDS US. John knows he has a 50/50 chance of survival here. He PAINFULLY starts swimming to the side of the tank, and she slows, keeping a distance between them, TOYING with him.

Just as it looks like he MAY make it out, she ACCELERATES, grabbing him again, and driving him back DOWN into the pool. FORCEFULLY smashing him against the pool floor -- not enough to kill him, but enough to break his nose.

Jackie and Pete RUSH to the edge of the tank in a near panic. David joins them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Beneath the water, blood flows from John's nose, dissipating into the chlorinated blue. He places his hands gently on Elska's head.

She JERKS back at first, but as he pets her, she gives in. CRYING, not so angrily -- more of a SORROWFUL song.

He TAPS the side of her head, and she, defying the STILL RINGING TONE, brings him to the surface and DRIVES him to a wet-bar, where she gives him a FINAL NUDGE and pushes him to complete safety.

Jackie and Pete GRAB John, holding him up as PARAMEDICS rush the scene. David watches as Elska slowly sinks back into the water, out of view.

CUT TO:

INT. SAN ANTONIO HOSPITAL - DAY

John, stomach wrapped in GAUZE, propped up in a hospital bed. A NURSE (30s) jots some words down onto his chart.

NURSE

She's prescribed you OxyContin,
it's a strong painkiller. Have you
ever taken it before?

JOHN

No, I have not.

NURSE

Take two pills once a day, with or
without meals for the first two
months. After that, you'll be in
here again to see the doctor, and
we'll start reducing the dose as
necessary.

John doesn't acknowledge her, SHAKEN by what's happened.

NURSE

You have any questions?

JOHN

No.

NURSE

Alright. And there's a number on
the bottle if you have a problem
with them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

A problem?

NURSE

If you can't stop taking them.

She exits. Before John even has time to think, the door re-opens and David enters. John BLINKS for the first time in what seems like an eternity, and looks at David.

JOHN

This is our fault.

DAVID

Your fault. You saw that she was isolating herself and you swam with her anyways.

David sits, arms crossed.

DAVID

Pete and Jackie said that they warned you. It's in their report.

JOHN

We took her son away. Is that in the report? Does anyone think maybe SeaWorld's decision to do that had this effect?

DAVID

Don't be ridiculous.
I'll see you Monday John.
We're expecting record crowds.

JOHN

I won't be there. Get corporate to fly in a trainer from Orlando.

DAVID

(angry)

You don't have a choice. You will be there, and if you pull some backwoods bullshit on me I will have our lawyer eat you alive for bringing a companion to the park after hours. You'll be in jail. Just like your dad.

CUT TO:

INT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

Bells CHIME as John enters, eyes sunken in from insomnia. Glistening from the pain pills he's been religiously taking. Sweat beaded on his forehead beneath a shaved head.

He opens a fridge door, pulls out a 12-PACK of beer. Reaches in with his free hand and grabs another.

At the counter, the CLERK (50s) rings up the beer. John looks over his shoulder at a series of POSTCARDS.

JOHN

I'll take one of those also.

He nods towards the cards. The Clerk turns, fingering through them...

JOHN

Yeah, that one.

Pulling one down, hands it to John and we see it: a SeaWorld postcard with John riding Elska's rostrum.

PUSH IN on the card until it fills our frame.

FADE TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - BACKSTAGE POOL - DAY

Elska ROLLS in the water.

PETE (O.S.)

Good girl! That's it!

Pete smiles, tossing her some fish. His eyes shift over past the bleachers -- where John enters, duffle bag in tow.

Jackie walks up next to Pete, also watching John.

PETE

He looks like shit.

Jackie nudges him.

JACKIE

(smile)

John!

PETE

How you feeling buddy?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN
Bruising's going down.

He forces a smile.

PETE
Good to hear.

John looks over at Elska.

JOHN
How is she?

PETE
Nobody's been in the water with
her, but she's been responding to
commands. Gave Jackie a little shit
yesterday but that's not entirely
out of the ordinary.

John drops his bag down, unzips a side pocket and pulls out
a pain pill. Dropping it down his throat, he swallows.
Jackie and Pete look away.

PETE
You sure you're alright?

John grabs a fish from the bucket, and walks to the water's
edge. He slaps the surface and Elska eyes him, keeping her
distance, but watching.

JOHN
It's alright girl.

Another slap, and she turns towards him.

JOHN
That's it.

SLAP. He smiles, as does Jackie.

He dangles the fish over the pool, but she turns AWAY,
swimming off to the far side of the tank where Gyoja and
Mattur are resting.

JACKIE
Give her some more time.

John's smile fades into a frown.

JACKIE (CONT'D)
She'll come back to you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID (V.O.)
I want to start off by thanking
everyone for staying late today.
We have some very exciting news to
unveil.

FADES TO:

INT. SEAWORLD CONFERENCE ROOM - CLOSING TIME

David, the ATTORNEY from earlier and a STAFF VETERINARIAN (40s) stand in front of a LARGE DIAGRAM showcasing TUBES, KNOBS and other DEVICES.

In front of them, on top of a cafeteria table, a MODEL of an Orca, three trainers, and the INSEMINATION TOOL. Brutal, but made up to look harmless.

The whale is flipped on her back with a TUBE protruding from her into the hands of two trainers. The third is pushing a button on a large canister attached to the tube.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Something I've been working on
personally for the past six years
of my life. I think you're all
going to be amazed by this
development. Some of you may even
call it job security.

David clears his throat...

DAVID
This is the future of SeaWorld. And
I hope you're both inspired and
take ownership over this future. We
couldn't have gotten to this point
without all of you.

Across from him: Pete, John and Jackie sit with the other EMPLOYEES. Each one paying extremely close attention, besides John. David looks over them, locking eyes with John's dead stare.

DAVID
Conservation has always been at the
heart of our company. Since the
very beginning, Roy has spoken
about how what we do here
undoubtedly leads to new insight
into killer whales. We have the
moral obligation to these whales as
a species.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID (cont'd)

Some of you may have heard rumors about what I'm going to reveal today. And I think it's certainly something that deserves that kind of word of mouth.

(smile)

Our artificial insemination program will enable us to better understand and preserve this magnificent species. And more than that -- we're going to give one of our own another opportunity to achieve the one thing she seems to want most.

(beat)

Parenthood. The love of a child. I know some of you are still bitter about what happened with Hetja, and I understand why that is. You're not thinking of the big picture. You're not thinking about innovation. SeaWorld is. And with progress like this, sometimes, extreme measures are needed to ensure that we continue moving forward. But, I want to clear the air and honor Elska with this new program.

The Veterinarian steps forward...

VET

We are going to start with Elska.

(beat)

She's shown great health on every test we've administered. She is of optimum weight, her eyesight is incredible, and she is one of the smartest problem solving Orcas I have ever worked with. She shows the amazing ability to remember things. She's important and it's important that we allow her to achieve her shown goal of motherhood.

JOHN (O.S.)

So you can strip it away again?

All eyes shift to John, mid-room, stoned.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID

Don't try to make this about you.
This is about what's best for the
species and what's best for
SeaWorld. None of us can forget
that this is also a business.

JOHN

She's angry.

DAVID

We've done more than adequate tests
to be sure her physical health is
up to the program and they've all
come back very optimistic.

JOHN

Optimistic?

VET

We've done everything we can to
prepare both our tools and Elska
for this.

JOHN

How did you prepare her for this?
You've never done this before.
You're playing God.

DAVID

We've done years of research.
This is the greatest thing to ever
happen in a controlled environment.
This is history. Be a part of it.

JOHN

You haven't been on a whale for so
long you've lost it. You've lost
the connection.

David, slightly mesmerized.

JOHN

You're reaching for your legacy.

VET

This is science, John, not a
performance.

JOHN

Raping the animals you used to
love. That's some science.

The Vet scoffs, rolls her eyes, and then, like a brat...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VET

I can't believe this, David.

The Vet pleads for David's attention. He takes a deep breath.

DAVID

Alright. You're all dismissed. If you have any questions, we've got pamphlets waiting for you on your way out.

Everyone but John and David leaves, even the Vet.

DAVID

You don't know what you've got in front of you. Maybe I haven't been on a whale in years, but I've put more people on whales than you ever will.

JOHN

It's wrong.

DAVID

Who fucking cares if it's wrong?

(beat)

It's history.

JOHN

It's rape.

DAVID

(stern)

You could be somebody John.

(beat)

Where did you come from? Did you fly in on your private plane? Chauffeur drive you? You crawled in from the gutter. Roy thinks you've got something the rest of us don't. He calls it grit.

(scoffs)

I think you've gotten lucky.

John digging his hand down into his pocket, he pulls out a bottle of PILLS, dumps a few into his hand and swallows them dry.

DAVID

You have potential. Don't think for a second you're not expendable. You want to be a senior trainer, fall in line.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

John waits a beat. Licks his lips.

JOHN

I'm not who I wanted to be.

(beat)

None of this is how I thought it would be. You care about them, some part of you does, I know it. Stand up for them David. Don't make me do this alone.

(beat)

It's not right.

David grabs the table in front of him and FLIPS it over like a spoiled child. Barking back at John...

DAVID

Who are you to judge?

David, breathing heavier than Kong at the top of the Empire State Building, huffs out one last bellow, pointing his finger at John.

DAVID

You work here. You're an asset.

(beat)

Just like the whales.

He walks past John and out of the room. True colors fully revealed.

John stands, walks over to the MODEL on the floor, the miniature trainer's face is modeled after David. John STOMPS down onto it and we...

CUT TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - BACKSTAGE POOL - AFTER HOURS

Lights beam on, shining down on the pool where our whales swim around aimlessly. John enters, dressed in his wet-suit.

Beer in his hand, he finishes the brew, tosses the can into a bin. His eyes, BLOODSHOT, he's stoned on a deadly mix of painkillers and alcohol.

FLASH TO:

INT. DOUBLE WIDE TRAILER - JOHN'S BEDROOM - FLASHBACK

Young John, looking through the blinds at his father. THE REVOLVER reflecting back.

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - BACKSTAGE POOL - CONT'D

John starts to cry, walking closer to the edge of the tank. Looking down at the DARKENED reflection of himself in the water. He FALLS face forward into the pool.

UNDERNEATH: we're looking up at John, silhouetted by the lights. Arms SPREAD OUT, eyes shut. Bubbles flowing from his mouth and nose. Sinking, and as it seems all is lost...

Squeaks and CLICKS invade the despair. Elska SWIMS over to him, and using her nose, she lifts him up out of the water. CRYING, he grabs hold of her. She gently PUSHES him to the side of the tank.

John pulls himself out, an additional nudge from Elska for safety.

JOHN

I'm sorry.

He presses his head against hers. She opens her mouth, a COMFORTING and understanding TONE squeaks out.

JOHN

I don't know what to do.

She clicks back, but this time, the tone is unmistakably mournful. Mattur and Gyoja mimic Elska's cries from the other side of the tank.

It's the closest thing to a wake they can have.

CUT TO:

INT. SEAWORLD BATHROOM - NIGHT

John leans over a toilet, face hidden by the bowl. Purging everything he's had to drink for the past few hours. He reaches up and flushes. Rolling onto his back, his pale face looks across the stall...

The door, open, has a straight view of a framed picture over the bathroom sink: Roy cutting the ribbon on opening day.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN'S SAN ANTONIO APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

John's insomnia plagued face staring back at us. His hand reaches in, and opens a medicine cabinet, the reflection swings away with the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Toothpaste and pain killers, guess which one he goes for?

Swiping the pain pills out of the cabinet, and dumping them onto the bathroom counter. He grabs two, tosses them down his throat. He turns on the bathroom sink faucet, ducks his head under the stream and gulps down water.

FADE TO:

BEDROOM

Falling onto his bed, he lays back, looking up at the ceiling. The popcorn texture vibrates with John's slowing heart-rate. Everything is slower.

He looks over at his wall: the park map he managed to salvage as a kid pinned next to a poster of John, full wetsuit, kissing Elska -- the dream realized. His eyelids droop until his eyes shut and we CUT TO **BLACK**.

FADE IN:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - MEDICAL POOL - MORNING

Elska rises on the Medi-Pool lift, John wading in the water as she rustles around. He pats her head, comforting her. What sounds like a small generator kicks on off screen.

John looks towards the noise...

Pete and Jackie readying the INSEMINATION TOOLS: a large robotic looking container with a CLEAR tube jutting out like the coiling extension of a vacuum cleaner.

Pete grabs the tube, and walks it over to John.

PETE

John.

(beat)

Let's get this over with.

He pats Elska's head and she nudges his face like a kiss.

PETE

Roll her over.

John gives a hand signal, but she DENIES him, instead again she nudges him.

PETE

It's alright John. We can do this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He pets her a few times and tries the signal again, and this time she ROLLS onto her back. He grabs ONE fin with his left hand, and the TUBE with his right. Tears form in his eyes. He lowers the tube.

PETE

Alright Jackie. Go ahead.

We stay with John, his eyes staring clear over everything. The insemination tool kicks on PUMPING, like a monstrosity of a turkey baster.

The water SHIFTS as Elska wiggles but at this depth, she can't swim away. She CLICKS rapidly, uncomfortable and angry. John shuts his eyes.

JOHN

It's okay. It's okay.

John holds her fin like he would Clint's hand.

JOHN

I know.

John shuts his eyes. Tears bead at the tips of his eyelashes. Elska cries out, but there's nothing he can do.

PETE

Almost done.

She cries again. Clicking for help.

JOHN

It's okay.

He opens his eyes, looks down at the water: Elska's eye is STARING back at him through the surface.

CUT TO:

INT. SEAWORLD - SHOWERS

John, sitting on the floor, SURROUNDED BY STEAM, the water pounding his face. Through the drops, we can see his tears -- he's BAWLING.

Steam FILLS OUR FRAME, and when it clears...

LOCKER ROOM

John exits the showers, towel around his waist, his BRUISED sides exposed. Pete shuts his locker door, looks over at John, who opens his locker and pulls out his uniform.

PETE
You alright?

John says nothing. Pete forces the subject.

PETE
We have a moral responsibility.

John stares vehemently at his locker.

PETE
We're diversifying the gene pool,
John. It's the right thing to do.

JOHN
(snapping)
We're breaking the one thing we've
worked for. Her trust.

PETE
I know it's hard to see, but we're
making history here. I've earned
this opportunity. David is right.
This is our legacy.

John's eyes stare ahead, inside the locker at the PICTURE of Young John on top of MATTUR, hanging on the back of his locker by years old brown tape.

PETE (O.S.)
We're a family. You have to be part
of this.

The PICTURE comes to life. Young John LAUGHS as his Mother takes another photo. FLASH nearly blinds both he and Mattur.

JACKIE (O.S.)
John.

Pete and John look over at Jackie, standing in the doorway.

JACKIE
There's somebody here for you.

CUT TO:

INT. SEAWORLD GIFT SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

The doors slide open and John stomps inside. Slowing as he nears the back of a MAN, streaks of gray hair draped over his shoulders.

JOHN
Can I help you?

The Man turns, and John instantly recognizes him, it's his Father. Cheeks still rosy, no longer because of booze. The head of a Shamu plushy sticks out from under his arm.

JOHN'S FATHER
Do you remember how many of these
you had?

John, taken aback, eyes his father from head to toe. He recognizes him as he would an old friend, slowly the realization sets in and he jumps to anger.

JOHN
What are you doing here?

JOHN'S FATHER
You'd lose them, and I'd have to go
out and get you another before you
realized one was missing. Your
mother got smart, bought a few and
hid them in the attic.

JOHN
If you've come here to try and --

JOHN'S FATHER
(cuts in)
Five minutes.
Just, give me five minutes.

John notices his Father's SeaWorld novelty watch. The face is water, and the hands are Bottlenose Dolphins.

INT. SEAWORLD SAN ANTONIO - WALKWAYS - SECONDS LATER

John and his Father walk past an EMPLOYEE with a SLOTH slung over her shoulder, cutting down to an amphitheater.

Its seats descend to a GLASS AQUARIUM WALL. HUNDREDS of FISH swim through artificial reefs.

JOHN'S FATHER
So, how does it feel?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He presses his hand against the glass as a school of CLOWN FISH swim by.

JOHN'S FATHER

(smile)

It's an achievement.

This was always your dream.

John's Father looks away from the glass, to John.

JOHN

It's complicated.

An awkward beat between them, John's Father hurries to find some sort of common ground.

JOHN'S FATHER

I called your mother a few times while I was inside. She'd pick up from time to time, depending on who she was with.

(beat)

Heard from her lately?

JOHN

We don't talk. She called me to tell me you got out, and we haven't spoken since.

JOHN'S FATHER

She called you?

JOHN

Yeah, first time in years. Figured someone was dead. Part of me thought it might be you.

John's Father turns completely facing John, light from the tank dancing on his face. John, still stares at the fish, balls his right hand into a fist.

JOHN'S FATHER

This hasn't been easy for me.

John turns, snapping at his Father.

JOHN

You destroyed my life. I won't let you do that again. Not now.

(beat)

I'm confused. I'm angry. I have no idea what to do, and I don't need you adding another layer to that.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN (cont'd)

(beat)

I won't let you.

John's Father takes this in, his eyes glaze over with regret. In the softest, most genuine voice...

JOHN'S FATHER

I've been afraid my entire life.

(beat)

Afraid that you would be like me.
I know you're angry John. I know
you hate me with every bit of your
being, and I don't blame you, but
right now, you have a look in your
eyes that I know too well. Right
now, you sound like me.

JOHN

I think you need to leave.

JOHN'S FATHER

Maybe you should try to see where
I'm coming from.

JOHN

Where is that exactly?

JOHN'S FATHER

I lost you too John.

(beat)

I lost both of you.

JOHN

Don't put that on me. Don't you
dare put that on me. What you did
is your fault. You knew what you
were doing when you pulled that
trigger. You knew you'd lose us and
you didn't care. Why would you care
now?

John turns to walk away, but is stopped by...

JOHN'S FATHER

There was one thing they let me
keep in my cell.

He turns back to his Father, who pulls his wallet out of his pocket. His hands shake, he knows this is his last chance.

JOHN'S FATHER

They're strict, you know. But they
let me tape this to my wall.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He slides out a copy of a picture: Young John on top of the killer whale, the same as in John's locker.

JOHN'S FATHER

Every day I would think about how I would apologize to you. I'd run scenarios in my head. How to say sorry. I never thought I'd get out let alone get the chance to tell you.

(beat)

You kept me going. Not guilt. Not shame. The thought of seeing you. This picture...

He holds the picture out for John, whose eyes narrow in confusion. He reaches in, grabs it, and all the same can't believe it's this picture.

JOHN'S FATHER (CONT'D)

Saved my life.

John lowers the picture to his side, eyes staring into his Father's.

JOHN

I don't know how to do this, how to start over. Where do we begin?

John's Father, expecting worse, begins to tear up.

JOHN'S FATHER

Are you married?

He laughs and a tear drops. John chuckles, also crying. His tears dry up quickly, he wipes his wrist across his nose, and looks his dad straight in the eyes.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I'm gay.

John's Father stops smiling, then, in all seriousness...

JOHN'S FATHER

I'm left-handed.

...which bends into a smile.

JOHN'S FATHER

Life is short. Too short to worry about the petty things. All that matters about the person you love is that they love you.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN'S FATHER (cont'd)
I may not know everything, but I've
spent a lot of time alone.
Thinking. And even I know not to
judge another man, you never know
what battle he may be fighting.
You're my son, and I can't lie and
say I know how to start over, but
I'm here, and I'll be here for as
long as you'll allow.

After a beat, John hugs his father. Acceptance.

We PUSH into the tank, through the REEF, and up to the
surface which turns from chlorinated blue to a MURKY, dark
GREEN.

ATTORNEY (V.O.)
Would you say the care you provided
during your career at SeaWorld was
better than other aquariums or
zoos?

FADE TO:

INT. CALIFORNIA STATE CAPITOL - CHAMBERS - CONT'D

SeaWorld's Attorney stands at his post, speaking across the
chamber floor to John, still seated before everyone.

JOHN
I've never worked for another
company or brand within the
captivity industry, but I would say
that as a trainer, I did everything
I could to protect the animals
under my care and to nurture them.

ATTORNEY
And SeaWorld provided you with the
tools to enable you to give such
amazing care?

JOHN
SeaWorld provided me with the
opportunities, not the tools. We
had to learn what was best for the
whales, and only they could show us
that. Anyone who was considered an
expert outside of SeaWorld was --
laughed about, laughed at.
Disregarded as loons, extreme
activists.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN (cont'd)

So all we had was SeaWorld's point of view, specifically in what was best for the whales.

The Attorney waits a beat, and then...

ATTORNEY

What do you believe is best for the whales, John?

JOHN

Freedom.

ATTORNEY

SeaWorld has agreed to expand the killer whale tanks at all parks if the bill is not passed. Do you feel that efforts like this are not a sign of growth?

JOHN

Conservation accounts for less than one percent of the profits. If you follow the money, you can see that SeaWorld spends more on sick programs like the artificial insemination program than they do on conservation. Hell, they spend more on TV advertisements than conservation.

ATTORNEY

(curt)

After you left, SeaWorld perfected the artificial insemination process and have since successfully bred multiple healthy Orcas.

John takes a breath, leans into the microphone.

JOHN

Nothing good can come from trying to impregnate a prisoner.

(beat)

They are alive.

(beat)

My experiences not just with the breeding program, but with the motives behind the program have shown me that conservation is a footnote in SeaWorld's agenda.

He looks over the crowd, at Mark, back at the Attorney.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN (CONT'D)

Elska, SeaWorld's infamous killer whale, the whale who only I could swim with. She was the guinea pig, and what happened with her still plays in my mind every night. Because I stood there.

(beat)

A witness.

(beat)

And all of this is something we can never disavow.

FADE TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - BACKSTAGE POOL

Elska swims alone across the pool.

Jackie THROWS her hand into the air, and Gyoja LEAPS out from the water, splashing down. Cheering, Jackie gives her some fish as a reward.

PETE (O.S.)

That's no good.

Jackie looks in the water, where Pete wades next to Mattur. Long TEETH MARKS carve lines down his side. Still bloody.

PETE

Looks like raking. His skin's raw.

Jackie looks out at Elska -- her eyes WIDEN with fear.

JACKIE

Shit.

Jackie DIVES into the pool. The water turns from crystal to a dark, cloudier shade of blue, and as she reaches Elska, we see it's blood from a miscarriage.

At the surface, John watches the chlorine attack the blood, quickly eating away at it.

CUT TO:

INT. DAVID'S OFFICE - DAY

The door opens, John, furious, storms inside. David, seated at his desk, looks up from stacks of paper at John.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN
Your science experiment didn't
work.

DAVID
What?

JOHN
She had a miscarriage.

DAVID
You're sure?

JOHN
Walk out there and see for
yourself.

David leans back in his seat.

DAVID
We need to make adjustments --

John PLANTS his palms onto David's desk, leaning in.

JOHN
You're going to call Roy.
You're going to tell him that Elska
needs to be cared for. That she
needs time to herself.

DAVID
You tell him. He's here. Investors
will be arriving within the hour.
He wants to see you and more
importantly, he asked to see you
and Elska. She has to perform.

JOHN
She's vulnerable.

DAVID
He has plans for her.

David smacks his hand down, leaning forward, scaring John
back a foot.

DAVID
She's part of the machine, John.
Just like you.
(beat)
You're swimming with Elska.
You've got not choice.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN
I won't do it.

DAVID
Then I will.
(beat)
I'll show everyone that I'm better
than you.

JOHN
Don't be stupid David, she will
tear you apart. You don't have the
connection with her. You haven't
even tried to build it.

DAVID
You don't give me orders.

JOHN
You're not going in the water.

DAVID
You don't get it. Somebody has to,
and if it has to be me than I'll do
it.

JOHN
Pete can swim with Mattur.

DAVID
He's going to sell her.

David's office phone rings.

JOHN
What?

The phone rings again.

DAVID
When you go to France. She's going
somewhere else. It's an enterprise,
John. It'll be a top facility,
better than ours even.

The phone rings again and David answers it.

DAVID
Yeah. Sure. He's right here, you
want to talk to him?

David glares at John, pulling the phone back an inch away
from his mouth, hand covering the receiver to block out
anything he might say.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID

It's Roy.

David hands John the phone. He pauses, looks down at it, hears Roy cough on the other end. John holds the receiver to his ear.

JOHN

This is John.

His eyes dart around. His mind computes everything as his ears hear it. Suddenly, they freeze. Dial tone cuts in from the other end.

He hands David the phone, leans back in his chair, unable to speak. He grabs the arms of the chair, his knuckles turn white.

DAVID

This is business. Now, get your wetsuit on.

CUT TO:

INT. SEAWORLD SAN ANTONIO - LOCKER ROOM

John's FIST crashes into his locker. He GRABS a bench, lifts it and THROWS it across the room, INSTANTLY gasping for air as he STRAINS his side.

Holding his ribs, he SHOUTS OUT in pain. John pulls the locker door off, grabs a bottle of pills. He dumps a few back and swallows them dry.

Tossing the bottle aside he YANKS the picture of himself as a kid off the locker wall and RIPS it in half, letting it fall to the floor like a feather as he exits.

CUT TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - BACKSTAGE POOL

Jackie wades in the water beside Elska, looking across the pool at Roy, hands in pockets on the surface.

ROY

I'm sure it's nothing our medical team can't figure out.

He smiles, the VETERINARIAN TEAM walks over to Elska, pushing Jackie out of their way. Elska is too weak to fight, but she clicks angrily.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Jackie walks over to Roy, she hesitates when she sees the team surrounding Elska, nearly sedated.

ROY

She just needs a little check up.
She'll be fine. I brought in our
best doctors, sure she'll be ready
for her first performance today.

Jackie regains her composure.

JACKIE

She may need more rest.

ROY

Nonsense.
(smile)
She's just fine.

DAVID (O.S.)

Roy. Always so nice to see you.

Roy turns back to David, shakes his hand. John and Pete walk over, John GRIPPING his side.

ROY

John. How are you feeling today?

JOHN

She can't perform Roy.

ROY

We will see what the experts say
about that. Right John?

The Vet walks up to them.

VET

She's going to be just fine. We're
giving her a full dose of vitamins
to replenish her system along with
enough cc's of fluid to keep her
hydrated. We'll do the same
tonight.

ROY

There you have it.

JOHN

Bullshit, what are you pumping into
her? Anti-psychotics? Diazepam?

MALE VET

It's just --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID
It's a killer whale B-12 shot.

JOHN
(to David)
Let him finish.

Roy's smile fades.

ROY
Are you hard of hearing?
They said she's fine.

JOHN
I want to be sure it's what's best
for the whale Roy. I'm doing my
job.
(to Male Vet)
What are you giving her?

Roy looks at the Male Vet, who nervously looks back.

ROY
(calm)
We don't need to disclose that.
David's your supervisor. He signed
off on this.

JOHN
You won't tell me what she's being
force-fed, and you want me in there
with her? You have any idea what
could happen, she could kill me
Roy.
(beat)
You told me you take care of your
family. Is that what you call this?
Am I not part of your family?

Roy clears his throat, smiles at the group.

ROY
I'll see you all before I leave.

As he walks off, the doctors follow. He stops at John, still
within earshot of his associates.

ROY
If you don't swim I'll end your
life at SeaWorld and you will once
again feel that piercing hole in
your queer heart.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Roy smiles, pats John on the back for show and exits. As soon as he's totally out of the picture, David GRABS John by his shirt collar. Pete PULLS David off of John and stands between the two of them.

John tries to RUSH David, but Pete pushes him back.

PETE

Enough!

DAVID

You're swimming with the whale
John.

PETE

Why don't I just swim with another
whale?

DAVID

It has to be Elska, John can tell
you all about that.

JACKIE

What's he talking about?

Pete and Jackie look at John.

JOHN

They're going to sell her.

PETE

What?

JOHN

When I go to France, these bastards
are selling her. This isn't the
family they made it out to be.
They're liars.

(beat)

We're all just assets.
Even the whales.

JACKIE

(to David)

Is that true?

PETE

Where are they sending her?

(to David)

David? Is she going to be with
Hetja.

Ignoring him...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID
Let's start prep early.

PETE
David. Answer my question.

DAVID
(stern)
There will be a debriefing on a developing project, but right now, I need you to prep the fucking tank.

PETE
(calm)
She's been through enough. Regardless of this news, she can't perform.

DAVID
I don't think that's your decision to make. I told you, our doctors have --

PETE
(stern)
Nobody is swimming with Elska. There's no need for anyone to get hurt.

Catches David off-guard, and angers him a bit.

DAVID
You're starting to sound a lot like John. Don't tell me you're a fag too.

PETE
What are you talking about?

Jackie looks at John, groaning, holding his side tightly and trying to stay upright. Stoned on pain killers. Wobbly.

CUT TO:

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - SHOW POOL - SHOWTIME

The lights dim over Roy seated next to a ROW OF INVESTORS. He leans forward in his seat, pulls a pack of gum out of his pocket and offers it to them

JOHN (V.O.)
Enough. I'm not swimming.

INT. SHAMU STADIUM - BACKSTAGE POOL - CONT'D

John looks out at the pool, at Elska.

DAVID
You're abandoning her.

John starts for the exit, David GRABS his shoulders, yanking him to the ground. John rolls around and PUNCHES David in the face. Pushing him back far enough for John to stand and tackle him to the ground.

Pete PULLS John off of David, blood trickling down his upper lip. John shakes Pete loose, pushing him back, but Pete quickly jolts in between them and offers a solution...

PETE
I'll swim with Gyoja.

David, locked in a death-stare with John, slowly shakes his head no. He stands, his gaze softens as a light bulb goes off in his mind.

DAVID
I don't get what he sees in you,
I've been on a dozen whales harder
to ride than Elska. You're nothing
special. You're half the trainer I
am. You got lucky.

PETE
David. Get a grip, this is insane.
We can't endanger someone's life
for money.

DAVID
Get the buckets ready.

CUT TO:

BACKSTAGE - BEFORE SHOWTIME

Jackie and Pete, suited, carry buckets of fish towards the main show pool. A packed crowd surrounds them, music blaring through giant speakers.

Jackie drops her bucket next to the recall button. She grabs the safety glass covering the button and lifts it open.

She turns to Pete, who drops his bucket. He sees the button over her shoulder and nods. They both walk behind a massive facade and see David, wearing a wet-suit that hasn't fit him right since he was John's age.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He stretches his hamstrings. Hops up and down in place, swinging his arms across his chest. He's a maniac.

AND THEN:

SHOWTIME

The GATES OPEN. The water ripples. The show music blasts out of the speakers, vibrating through the water. Beneath, we see none of the whales.

Jackie and Pete stand on opposite sides of the stage. We follow their eyes as they look down at the water where ELSKA swims through the gate.

The gates CLANK shut, locking. Pete and Jackie's eyes don't leave the whale, their heads moving as she swims around the show pool, meeting David as he runs out onto the stage.

In the audience, Roy sees David with Elska, and he flashes his fabricated smile, but his eyes widen with rage.

CUT TO:

MOMENTS LATER

David SURFACES on top of Elska, standing up and surfing her. The audience cheers, and he smiles, waving at the crowd. He falls flat onto her as they DIVE. Rising up...

In the center of the pool, again, David begins to stand, but this time, Elska THROWS him off her back. As he FALLS into the tank we...

CUT TO:

UNDERWATER

David, falling towards us silhouetted by stage lights. Elska's SHADOW darting around him, creating a vicious circular border.

FROM ELSKA'S POV:

The glass TANK WALL, through it, cameras flash, faces all blur together. Turning to David's lower half. We're locked on, weaving forward with the force of a steamroller.

BACK TO:

SHOW POOL

Neither Jackie nor Pete move, they only watch. John, duffle bag slung over his shoulder, walks out from behind the facade. Looking towards the pool where...

David pops his head up, sucking in air. He doesn't look scared, he's composed. He watches as Elska gets closer with every lap.

The crowd rises to their feet. Cameras flash.

David's eyes cut through all of this madness and lock onto John.

Elska ZEROES in on David. Her fin gliding towards him. She's not coming to play games. Pete's hand SLAMS into the recall. The tone pulses. Elska doesn't sway. She continues forward, within a few feet from David who shuts his eyes.

As she nears him she opens her mouth and -- CRUNCHES DOWN onto David's torso. She drags him down. Beyond the point of saving.

John turns away.

JOHN (V.O.)
I once dreamt of giants.

Eyes staring dead ahead. Audience SCREAMING all around him.

JOHN (V.O.)
I once yearned for adventure. For discovery. But I discovered that the dream I had in my heart was an illusion.

FADE TO:

INT. CALIFORNIA STATE CAPITOL - CHAMBERS - PRESENT DAY

John, standing before 13 members of the California State Assembly including Dick who smiles to Mark at John's side.

JOHN
I became a killer whale trainer because of my interest in the whales. I wanted to help them. But I was blinded by that ambition. I couldn't see past the smoke and mirrors.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN (cont'd)

I excelled because I thought I was doing the right thing, not because I was better. I believed in SeaWorld.

(beat)

But I was wrong. I think about that every day. What I should have done. I should've walked away a hundred times before I did. I should have done my own research. You're probably asking yourselves, if it was so bad, how could I stay? I don't blame you, but the answer is simple.

(beat)

I loved those whales.

He looks at the assemblymen...

JOHN

By passing this bill, you will be taking the first major step away from the ignorance and follies of men. Men who have stood on platforms made with the blood of living beings. They don't care about the whales nor the trainers they have at their parks. They care about profiteering off animals who can't speak for themselves. By placing your mark on history, you prove that there is still hope for those without a voice. Because they still need you.

John looks back at the seated crowd, where we see Pete and Jackie, side by side. He turns back to the assemblymen...

JOHN

There are still whales who have been stolen from their families and imprisoned in captivity. There are whales who go entire lifetimes without seeing the ocean. Seeing what life is like outside of a tank. As long as there are whales in captivity we are committing a crime against nature. By passing this bill, you can have the peace of mind knowing that you helped real progress. I have only one thing left to say, and it's to SeaWorld.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He looks at the Attorney...

JOHN
Empty the tanks.

Applause erupts in the back of the courtroom. John sits as Dick grabs the microphone on his desk.

DICK
Thank you John.

John looks back for Pete and Jackie, but they're gone. He turns back forward, tears forming in his eyes. The crowd quiets.

DICK
We've wrapped up our allotted time for public testimony and will now take a vote. The bill requires eight votes to pass.

On John, as Dick begins reading off the names of Assemblymen, all SOUND fades to our score. We have only John's reaction to guide us. His eyebrows raise...

FLASH TO:

JOHN AND ELSKA FLOATING ON THEIR BACKS

BACK TO:

John's gaze WIDENS...

AND THEN:

ELSKA HELPING JOHN TO THE SURFACE OF THE POOL

BACK TO:

Tears fall from John's eyes...

FINALLY:

JOHN'S HAND AGAINST THE TANK GLASS ON HIS FIRST DAY AT WORK

RETURN TO:

Dick looks over the room, at every waiting face. Settling on John.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DICK

The committee votes twelve to one.
In support of the legislation.

Dick smiles at John, who, along with crying, smiles back.

FADE TO:

EXT. UPSTATE NEW YORK NEIGHBORHOOD - JOHN'S HOUSE - DAY

A SEDAN weaves around a corner, driving towards us, breaking a few feet in front of us. John hops out, as does the DRIVER, helping him get his luggage out of the trunk.

JOHN

Thanks.

The Driver gets back in the car and drives off, and John walks up to his steps, stopping at a small package waiting for him.

INT. UPSTATE NEW YORK - HOME - DAY

The front door opens, and John's dog BARRELS around a corner, JUMPING up onto him. Planting her giant paws on his chest, nearly knocking him over.

He juggles the package in his left hand while he fights her off with his right.

JOHN

Hey! Hey! Yes!
I missed you too!

He laughs. Kneeling down, succumbing to the cuteness as she LASHES his face with her tongue.

HOME OFFICE

John sits at his desk, the package waiting to be opened underneath lamp-light. He grabs a pocket knife and flips the knife portion up.

Slicing through the tape, he stops, and opens the box...

Inside, a jewelry box. John reaches in and lifts it out of the packaging. He opens it and a small card falls out.

The dog shuffles into the room, her head held low, ears pinned back. She sniffs at the note on the floor, John nudges her snout away, revealing the SeaWorld logo.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As lighthearted as he can be...

JOHN

Oh look, they sent us a gift.

He opens the box fully, and inside we see Clint's ring.

All air seems to be sucked out of the room. Any sense of levity is gone. John, frightened, stares down into the box. The dog sits beside him, watching as he pulls the ring out of its case.

CUT TO:

BACKYARD

A screened in backdoor. It opens, John looks through the mesh. He shuts it, slides the deadbolt locked inside.

CUT TO:

The dog's ears perk up, tilting her head as she watches John open a hallway door. He flips the light on inside. Then the kitchen pantry door, and finally his bedroom closet.

CUT TO:

HOME OFFICE

John's hand slides around the corner and flips the light on. He enters, slowly approaching the ring, still beneath the lamp on the desk. He sits down, holds the ring in his hand.

FADE TO:

INT. NEW YORK BAR - NIGHT

John, dressed in the same clothes he wore to court, sits in a booth across from Clint who hasn't lost his boyish charm.

JOHN

It sounds silly to apologize, but I am. I'm sorry.

Clint, reserved, smiles and nods.

JOHN

I was hard headed, and I shouldn't have acted the way I did. Not towards you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLINT
John, we were young.

A WAITER drops off two wine glasses at their table and pours Red into each.

JOHN
When do you leave?

CLINT
Tomorrow. You just caught me.

John pauses, realizing this will probably be the last time he sees Clint. He takes a deep breath, swallows and then...

JOHN
Do you ever think about me?

CLINT
It's hard not to. People are always asking me about my famous ex-boyfriend.

Clint laughs, John smiles, but the grin quickly leaves his face.

JOHN
I mean. Do you ever think about us?

Clint leans forward, elbows pressing into the table. With all the honesty in his being...

CLINT
I'm proud of the man you've become. What you've done is extraordinary, and I...I'm sorry that I wasn't strong enough to stay, to help you get through it, but you were so blinded by your own goals that I felt the best thing I could do was let you figure it out on your own.

JOHN
You shouldn't be apologizing.

CLINT
I have to get this off my chest.

JOHN
You did what anyone would've done. What I would have done.

Clint takes a deep breath, looks down at his hands folded on the table. Back up at John...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLINT

Everyday, I wake up with a cold
feeling in my heart. The same chill
I felt when I lost my father.

(beat)

I've gone to therapy, I've read
books, and everything points in the
same direction.

(beat)

I've missed you John. Sitting here
with you, it's like the ice is
thawing. I know we'll never be able
to have what we did. But the
thought of maybe calling you
sometimes. I hope that's not out of
the question.

John smiles, he begins to slide his hand across the table to
hold Clint's but is interrupted by Clint's phone, which
begins vibrating. Both of them stare at each other for a
beat and then he answers it.

CLINT

Hello?

He looks away from John, stands.

CLINT

(to John)

Sorry, I have to take this.
Five minutes?

John nods. Clint begins trailing off...

CLINT

(into phone)

I told you I'd call after dinner.

John sinks down into the booth, reaches into his pocket and
pulls out the RING. Fumbling with it, he looks through a
window at the Manhattan skyline. Millions of shimmering
lights. The concrete jungle.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE OCEAN - MORNING

MIST rolls over WAVES, folding into each other. The same
concrete jungle reflects across the water. A WHALE WATCHING
BOAT ferries forward, blowing a low HORN as it rides by.

INT. WHALE WATCHING BOAT - CONT'D

John and his Father lean on the railing looking out at the fleeting Manhattan skyline.

JOHN'S FATHER
You know how far out we're going?

JOHN
About an hour and a half.

John's Father looks back at other WHALE WATCHERS, whispering to each other after recognizing John.

YOUNG GIRL (O.S.)
Excuse me, John?

John turns to a YOUNG GIRL (20s), LET THEM BE FREE printed around an Orca on her sweatshirt. We stay with John's Father, watching, as John pushes himself off the railing and gives her a hug.

They exchange a few words and she snaps a selfie with him. As the Young Girl walks off, John returns to the handrail, lifts his jacket collar up and lowers the brim of his hat.

John's Father waits a beat, listening to the water rush against the side of the vessel. Then...

JOHN'S FATHER
I can't tell you how proud I am.
Last time I felt like this, I'd
just seen you perform. Ironical.

He smiles, looks at John expecting at least a smirk, but gets nothing but John's shoulder, his eyes pinned to the water.

JOHN
She was an outcast. We were a lot
alike in that way, I could feel it
when she looked at me. Like she had
so much to say -- but no voice.
(beat)
So I spoke up. I fought.

John looks at his Father, misty-eyed...

JOHN
But she's still in a tank.

John's Father soaks this in for a beat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN'S FATHER

And you're still fighting.

(beat)

You made a difference John. You showed the world that we can all speak up. That people can change things.

JOHN

She doesn't know I made a difference.

(beat)

She knows that she wasn't always this alone. That for a fragment of her life, she had someone who loved her.

(beat)

She had a family.

JOHN'S FATHER

Doesn't she still?

JOHN

Of course, but it's just --

(sigh)

We can be heroes, you know?

We can make this right.

(beat)

We can set them free.

JOHN'S FATHER

Who says we won't? Look...

I know you don't see it. But you've taken one major step towards getting Elska outside of her cell. You're right that she remembers you, but you're looking at it the wrong way. She doesn't resent you because you left. She knows that no matter where you are...

John looks out at the ocean, stone faced, exhausted.

JOHN'S FATHER (CONT'D)

She has a voice.

Six dorsal fins SHOOT upwards through the surface of the water. Forty WILD ORCAS swim together thirty feet from the boat.

We pull back from John's gaze, past his Father, all the way off the boat into the OCEAN. The whales swim around us in the most amazing display we've ever seen. SPLASHING into the surface.

CONTINUED:

FADE TO:

A picture of JOHN HARGROVE, arms wide, standing on the rostrum of TAKARA the killer whale.

SUPER:

Because of the bravery of John and other ex-killer whale trainers, SeaWorld has agreed to end all killer whale breeding programs and claims that the current generation of orcas in their parks will be their last.

According to SeaWorld's annual reports, for every one million dollars in revenue the park receives, roughly \$600 goes to conservation. That's less than one dollar per park admission ticket.

Over 140 Orcas have been placed into captivity.

On average, Orcas in captivity survive for less than 10 years.

The oldest living Orca known to man is over 100 years old.

Over **BLACK:**

She lives in the wild.