

meadowland

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. NEW JERSEY WETLANDS - DAY

A landfill by a vast, marshy, lake.

Half-filled garbage bags scattered about. A child's broken big wheel, tipped over. A bare, withered tree. A single glittering Christmas ornament dangling from it.

Lost, useless things.

A 1994 Ford Probe, parked at the edge of the water, engine running.

The wind, a dull howl.

CLOSE ON CAR:

The silhouettes of TWO FIGURES, seated in front. The car is angled away from us. We can't see their faces.

Over this, a woman's voice:

SARAH (V.O.)
Jessie? Let go...

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. MINIVAN - DAY

A SMALL CHILD'S HAND

His fingertips entwined in his mother's hair. Enmeshed. Sound of laughter.

SARAH (O.S.)
...I'm not playing around, monkey

JESSIE, a boy, 6, dark hair, brown eyes, mischievous smile, lets go of his mother's hair and flops back, disappearing into the back seat.

SARAH, 30's, in the passenger seat. Focused, she holds a yellow high-lighter, poised over a text book. Notebooks and a laptop on the floor by her feet. The source materials for a PHD dissertation. The title, on a rough draft copy: *"Gender Theory and inter-semiotic translation" by Sarah Ackerman.*

Her husband DAVID, 35, is driving.

Outside, the rural landscape of Upstate New York slips by; Orange and yellow flecked leaves. Ice and melting snow capping the outlying hills and farmland.

Sarah looks up from her work.

SARAH (CONT'D)
You know who gave him that book?

JESSIE (O.S.)
Uncle Tim!

Jessie pops his head up again, with a handful of animal crackers. Crumbs spill over the seat.

SARAH
It wasn't even wrapped.

DAVID
It's the thought that counts.

SARAH
Honey, you're making a mess...

JESSIE
It's not me doing it, it's the cookies.

Jessie bites the head off a bear. Sarah glances at David.

SARAH
A second hand Dr. Seuss book?

DAVID
It was his only copy. From when we were little.

SARAH
(nods)
That *is* nice.
(then)
Still, he could have wrapped it.

David keeps his eyes on the road.

DAVID
Let me know when it's time to talk about your family.

Sarah smiles.

SARAH
It'll be a short conversation.

Sarah glances down at her work for a beat, then reaches out, idly strokes David's neck.

DAVID
That feels good.

Jessie pops up again from the back seat, interrupting the moment. Sarah takes her hand away.

JESSIE
Is Uncle Tim going to *be* there?

SARAH
Don't hold your breath.

Jessie immediately holds his breath, puffing out his cheeks. Sarah turns around and ritually pops one cheek with her finger.

Jessie makes a farting sound as the air releases.

Then he lifts the book (Uncle Tim's present), by Dr. Suess, and we see the title: "*Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are*"

He bonks his mother lightly on the head with it.

JESSIE
When will we be in Ithaca?

Sarah bats the book away.

SARAH
Three more hours. Settle in kid.

JESSIE
I *really* have to go to the
bathroom.

David grabs a New Yorker Magazine off the front seat, and tosses it over his shoulder.

DAVID
Here you go buddy. Malcolm
Gladwell. Dig in.

SARAH
(in mock disgust)
Do not throw things at my child.

Jessie bats the magazine to the floor.

JESSIE
Your *child* has to go the bathroom!

A highway REST STOP sign in view up ahead.

DAVID
(pointing)
Up here.

Sarah looks down at her thesis notes again, trying hard to refocus....

EXT. REST STOP - DAY

The Minivan pulls in off the highway.

Mostly families here, headed home for the Thanksgiving weekend.

A steady line of people, from the wooden, rustic bathrooms to the drinking fountain, and back to their cars.

INT. MINI-VAN - DAY

Jessie, exasperated, opens his door and bolts from the back seat. He makes a bee-line for the mens room.

Sarah and David sit there. A beat of silence as they stare out the windshield at the other children and their parents.

Finally:

DAVID
I should pee, too

He reaches for the door, exits the car. Sarah sits there.

INT./EXT MINI-VAN

Sarah watches David from behind the windshield as he stands in the parking lot.

He stretches his arms luxuriously, yawning, turning his body away from her.

David, clocking her mood, beckons her outside.

EXT. REST STOP - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Sarah and David stand by their mini-van. Travelers stream past them toward their cars.

DAVID
Can you call your advisor? Ask for
an extension?

SARAH
He's already given me three.

DAVID
Poor baby.

He wraps his arms around her for a beat. She holds him, staring over his shoulder.

SARAH
It's my shitty planning. I still have so much reading to do.

DAVID
I know.

SARAH
(quiet)
There's never enough fucking time.

DAVID
I'm sorry.

SARAH
You should be. It's all your fault.

David laughs, letting go of the embrace.

Silence.

They stand there. David glances toward the rest rooms.

DAVID
I should... go check on him.

SARAH
Yeah, okay.

David walks off toward the rest room.

Sarah stares past him into the woods, the snow-capped tress.

EXT. MEN'S ROOM - DAY

David walks toward the men's room door.

The crowd of travellers has thinned out. In the b.g., the cars in the parking lot ease out into the highway.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - DAY

David looks around the bathroom. It's completely empty.

No sign of Jessie. He walks over to the TOILET STALLS.

DAVID

Jessie?

Silence.

He opens the stall doors, one by one. They're all empty.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Buddy? This isn't funny.

No answer. The wind outside.

EXT. REST ROOMS - DAY

Sarah looks around. Everyone is gone. The parking lot is deserted.

David steps out of the rest room.

DAVID

I can't find him.

SARAH

What?

DAVID

He's not in there.

SARAH

He *has* to be in there.

He walks past her, toward the rear of the rest rooms.

DAVID

I just fucking told you he's not.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - DAY

Sarah standing there. She catches her reflection in a cracked, filthy mirror then looks away quickly.

SARAH

Jess? I'm really angry now.

Silence.

Sarah looks around, confused.

Her eyes fall on something.

Black graffiti someone has scrawled on a stall door:

"FUCK THE WORLD"

EXT. MINI-VAN - DAY

Sarah peers into the back window. No Jessie. In the back seat, *"Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are"* by Dr. Seuss lays amid a scattering of cookie crumbs.

EXT. HIGHWAY - LATER - DAY

WIDE SHOT

Slate sky. Rain clouds. The austere, white, landscape.

Sarah and David, crisscrossing the empty grounds of the rest stop, yelling Jessie's name. Panic on their faces.

Their breath visible, ghostly, in the cold air.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. REST STOP - DUSK

A crime scene, in the last light of day.

A forensic team moves in and out of the MEN'S ROOM. Police, State Troopers speak in low voices, jotting down notes on small pads.

An air of darkening confusion.

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Just off a highway exit. Police cars, some with lights flashing, parked in the motel lot. It's starting to snow.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

FBI special agent FRANK GARZA, 48, a bear of a man, speaks to Sarah and David. His movements are heavy, deliberate. There's a sadness about him.

GARZA

No chance he could have run away?

SARAH

Where? We looked everywhere.

David shakes his head.

DAVID

He'd never do that. He's a happy kid. Independent but... very attached to his mother.

(MORE)

(then)
What about the surveillance --

GARZA
There was a malfunction in the rest
area security camera.
Unfortunately we have no visual
record of what happened.

DAVID
Fuck me.

GARZA
It's a setback. But we have
options.

Sarah stares ahead, in utter disbelief. We linger on her
face as Garza tries to remain upbeat.

GARZA (CONT'D)
An Amber alert has already gone
into effect, nationwide. That's
proven to be extremely effective.
And we have every available
resource in our department out
there looking for your son.

SARAH
(a beat, quiet)
So that's what you think happened.
Someone just... took him.

Garza looks off, collecting his thoughts.

GARZA
We're operating under that
assumption.
(then)
But I'm going to do everything in
my power to get your boy back.

Sarah nods slightly, staring ahead. Watching the grey
snowflakes drift past the red lights of the police cars.

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD: ONE YEAR LATER

FADE IN:

INT. MANHATTAN - RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Empty plates of food. Wine glasses.

Sarah, David, and their friends ASHLEY and BRENT. Everyone's a little drunk.

We linger on Sarah. She looks different now. Gaunt. Raw.

ASHLEY

David says you got a teaching job.

Sarah looks at her, as if awakened from a dream.

SARAH

I'm long term subbing.

ASHLEY

That is *so*, so great, Sar.

SARAH

It's just one class.

DAVID

AP Lit, right?

ASHLEY

How fantastic.

DAVID

For a Catholic school. In the wilds of Newark.

Sarah, distant, nods.

BRENT

Out in da' 'hood, huh?

ASHLEY

And your thesis, you can always...

David puts a hand on Sarah's shoulder, then takes it off.

DAVID

When the time is right she'll go back to it.

Sarah looks at David, then drains her glass. We linger on her. Then.

BRENT

I did my time in Catholic school. Nearly fucking killed me.

An awkward silence. Sarah rises, unsteady.

DAVID

Babe?

SARAH
Be right back.

She exits. David stares at his plate.

DAVID
She started on Lithium last week.
Probably shouldn't be drinking.

ASHLEY
(rises)
Maybe I'll just...

DAVID
She doesn't like to be coddled.

ASHLEY
Oh, everyone needs to be coddled.

Ashley leaves, giving David's shoulder a squeeze on the way out. David and Brent are alone.

BRENT
Maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

DAVID
No, it's nice to get out. It's
been so long.

BRENT
Are they in touch with you?

DAVID
In touch?

BRENT
The police or whoever.

DAVID
It's an "on-going investigation."
We, uh, call, every Monday to check
in.

BRENT
Keep a fire burning under their
ass.

DAVID
Yeah.

BRENT
Smart move.

David sweeps some crumbs off the table with his hands.

DAVID
At this point it doesn't look good.

INT. RESTAURANT BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sarah is standing in the center of the room, looking into the mirror. Her back is to us.

Ashley enters, stopping in the doorway.

ASHLEY
Honey?

Sarah turns around. Her hair is a mess and her face is wet. She looks like a little girl.

Ashley gets a paper towel and gently pats Sarah's forehead dry.

SARAH
You know what?

ASHLEY
What, sweetheart?

SARAH
You'd make a really good mother.

Sarah stares at herself in the mirror.

A beat.

She bursts into laughter.

INT. TAXI CAB - NIGHT

Sarah and David in the back seat. David's eyes are closed. Sarah is staring out the window.

Outside, the traffic lights, the glow of office buildings, flash past.

From the turbaned cabdriver's stereo, a male Pakistani voice sings a Ghazal. The piercing melancholy of the singing, washing over everything.

INT. SARAH AND DAVID'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A cramped two bedroom in a high rise on the upper east side. Sarah and David sit in front of the TV. Curb Your Enthusiasm is on.

DAVID
Got an e-mail from my brother.

Sarah says nothing.

DAVID (CONT'D)
He's coming to the city.

SARAH
And he wants to stay here.

DAVID
Not if it makes you uncomfortable.

SARAH
It makes me uncomfortable.

DAVID
It's just for a few weeks.

Silence.

SARAH
We should do something else every
night besides watch TV.

DAVID
There's an idea.

SARAH
He's such a fucking mess.

DAVID
I know. But he's trying.

Sarah thinks about this.

David reaches out and takes hold of her hand. Sarah,
suddenly uncomfortable, edges her hand away. Then picks up
the remote, and changes the channel.

CLOSE ON TV SCREEN

It's the live, NATIONAL SPELLING BEE CHAMPIONSHIPS. A slim
INDIAN BOY stands at the podium, his features contorted in
thought. A panel of JUDGES sit in front of him.

BOY
The word was... "Inconceivable?"

JUDGE #1
That's correct.

BACK TO SCENE

SARAH
(rising)
I'm going out.

David doesn't take his eyes on the TV.

DAVID
Make sure you have your key.

Sarah looks at him a beat, then leaves the room.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Sarah walks past the closed, metal gates of stores and shops. Grey snow falling in the lamp light around her.

Sara looks up. A MAN is walking toward her, with a Doberman on a chain. His face is covered with ski mask. There's a LITTLE BOY beside him, bundled up in a snowsuit, holding his hand.

Sarah looks from the boy into the man's eyes, then away. The dog growls. The man jerks back the dog's leash. Sarah walks quickly past.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET - NIGHT

Sarah descends the stairs of a subway entrance.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - NIGHT

Sarah sits as the car hurtles through a dark tunnel.

Across from her a TRANSIT COP stands holding the metal pole for balance. He stares off, vaguely. A sadness about him.

Sarah watches him, retreating into herself.

EXT. LOWER MANHATTAN STREET - NIGHT

Sarah walks out of subway entrance and down a dark, empty street. Through a chasm of dark office buildings... until she stops at long metal railing. She looks down and we see what she sees: The GROUND ZERO MEMORIAL.

Sarah stares into the floodlit chasm, her shadow falling across the open void.

Over this, a young boy's VOICE, lightly accented in Spanish:

VOICE (O.S.)
I have been one acquainted with the
night...

INT. ST. MONICA'S SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

A student, ENRIQUE, 13, holds a book and reads from it in a halting, stumbling voice.

ENRIQUE

...I have walked out in rain -- and
back in rain. I have out walked the
furthest city light. I have looked
down the saddest city lane. I have
passed by the watchman on his beat,
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to
explain. I have stood still and
stopped the sound of feet, When far
away an interrupted cry Came over
houses from another street, But not
to call me back or say good-bye;
And further still at an unearthly
height, O luminary clock against
the sky, Proclaimed the time was
neither wrong nor right.

(beat)

I have been one acquainted with the
night.

Sarah, focused, looks at each student. The class is full.
They all wear uniforms.

SARAH

Thoughts? Impressions?

A GIRL, 13 raises her hand.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Nazarena?

NAZARENA

I thought, um, is this guy maybe a
cop? And as he's going down his
route we feel how, like, scared he
is about all the crimes that could
happen in the neighborhood? And
what's so great is he really makes
me feel that.

SARAH

A cop on his beat? That's fair.
Someone else? Samuel?

SAMUEL, 13, African-American, sits up.

SAMUEL

I don't know if the guy is 5-0 or what but the dude is for sure majorly depressed. This isn't the first time he's felt that way. He's been *acquainted* with the night, right?

The class laughs.

SARAH

So that's it? He's just depressed?
(then)
What's *making* him feel this way?

As Sarah scans the room her eyes fall on a student in the back. He's MEXICAN, 13, a little beefy, long hair, a black *Slayer* T-shirt under his school uniform. He's listening to an iPod.

This is JORGE.

Sarah walks over and holds out her hand. Jorge grudgingly hands her his iPod.

Then she puts the earbuds in her own ears. The class watches her.

What Sarah hears: grinding heavy metal; Pounding drums, relentless guitar and raw, inchoate screaming. Sarah seems momentarily hypnotized by the brutality of the sound.

She snaps out of it, suddenly, yanking the earbuds out and pocketing the iPod.

SARAH (CONT'D)

What did you think of the poem
Jorge?

JORGE

It was heavy.

The class laughs.

SARAH

In what *sense*?

A beat, as Jorge sits up and clears his throat.

JORGE

In the sense that the dude speaking, the "night watchman"? Is like, the poet who wrote it?

(MORE)

And he's telling us how he's been
like, chosen for this job, the job
of being like, the one who is
"acquainted with the night."

By God or whoever. He's all by
himself out there. "Out past the
furthest city light."

(then)

Seeing the dark shit only people
like him can see.

Silence, as the class waits for Sarah's reaction.

SARAH

Well, that's...

Sarah stares off, forgetting what she was going to say.

INT. ST. MONICA'S SCHOOL - HALLWAY - NEXT DAY

Sarah is walking toward her class room. As she nears a
corner, a child's voice, loud and insistent floods toward
her.

BOY (O.S.)

No -- No -- No --

Sarah turns the corner and sees...

A SECURITY GUARD, 40 and an African-American teacher, MRS.
WILLIAMS, 46.

They're standing beside a distraught, 10-year-old boy.

He wears glasses. He's a little overweight, and has a bad
haircut. Stains on his light blue school uniform shirt. His
body holds a restless, undefinable energy.

This is Adam.

He anxiously clutches an over-stuffed back pack with a small,
stuffed monkey hanging off the zipper.

Sarah, captivated, stops a few feet away to watch as...

The guard wrenches Adam's backpack away and hands it to Mrs.
Williams.

Mrs. Williams unzips the backpack and turns it upside down.

Onto the floor fall an assortment library books; Time Life
books about elephants, books about the African plains, Jungle
and tropical rainforest atlases.

Adam stares off, breathless.

ADAM
I wanted to read them.

MRS. WILLIAMS
What did we tell you about
stealing?

ADAM
I don't remember.

MRS. WILLIAMS
If everyone stole books from the
library there'd be none left for
anyone else.

Sarah notices a distinctly, distracted, unfocused look in Adam's eyes. As if he's deep inside himself... reading a continuous stream of thoughts.

Adam suddenly lunges for one of the books on the ground.

ADAM
Can I just show you something?

MRS. WILLIAMS
Adam.

Adam turns abruptly and faces Sarah. She stiffens. His eyes are pleading.

ADAM
In one of them? Lookit, lookit,
hey, because this, this pachyderm,
when one of them dies, their
memory, they... it's inconceivable
they... they, look at this--

Sarah looks back at him, unsure how to react.

Mrs. Williams tears the book out of Adam's hand.

Sarah tenses in empathy.

MRS. WILLIAMS
Get your butt down to the office.
Now.

Adam tries to grab the book back.

ADAM
But I have to show you something!

MRS. WILLIAMS

Now!

Adam suddenly throws himself on the floor, in a fit. Kicking his legs violently and screaming.

He lays still for a few seconds -- then quickly springs up, making an elephant trunk motion with his arm, ignoring her. He lets out an elephant roar. His face an aggressive mixture of confusion, anxiety and joy.

Sarah watches as Adam moves in tight, manic circles in front of her.

Mrs. Williams pulls out her cell phone.

MRS. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

I'm calling your mother. See what she thinks of your ridiculous behavior.

Adam stops, stiffens. His eyes get wet.

ADAM

No! No! Please!

MRS. WILLIAMS

You're forcing my hand here.

Adam spins a second time and stop, looking directly at Sarah.

ADAM

But you CAN'T!!

Sarah backs away a step, held in his gaze.

MRS. WILLIAMS

As if you're not in enough trouble today.

Adam covers his face with his hands, bowing his head.

ADAM

You CAN'T!

MRS. WILLIAMS

All *right* then.

(pointing)

To the office. Now.

Adam exhales, jerks himself around, and ambles away down the hall.

Mrs. Williams shakes her head, glancing at Sarah.

MRS. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
This one gonna be the death of me.

Sarah watches Adam's silhouette, as it fades down the hallway.

INT. SARAH AND DAVID'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sarah lies in bed next to David. His eyes are closed. He's deep asleep.

Suddenly, Sarah's eyes open. A memory comes to her.

SARAH
Oh.

She gets up and dresses quickly.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

She crosses the street, dressed in sweats, parka and sneakers and heads toward a PARKING GARAGE.

Her face is set, determined.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Sarah walks past an ATTENDANT who is watching an Indian soap opera on a tiny TV.

The attendant glances up at her, nods. Sarah walks quickly past him.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - UPPER LEVEL - NIGHT

Sarah walks toward the Mini-Van and clicks the doors open with the remote.

INT/EXT. MINI-VAN - BACKSEAT - NIGHT

Only the dome light on. Sarah is in the back seat, on her hands and knees, searching for something.

She's reaching deep inside the seat cushions. Her fingers prodding, frantically...

She pokes inside every cup holder, gets down between the seats, pulls out the floor mats and reaches underneath the seats.

Suddenly, her expression changes as she feels something and she pulls her hand out.

In her palm is one of the ANIMAL CRACKERS Jessie was eating on the day he disappeared.

It's a lion. Stale, hard, but still intact.

Sarah opens her mouth and places the lion carefully on her tongue.

She closes her eyes, tasting every atom.

EXT. ST. MONICA'S - PLAYGROUND - NEXT DAY

Sarah is eating her lunch on a bench.

Behind her a class of sixth graders is playing. Sarah looks up across the playground. A small boy crossing her field of vision, talking to himself excitedly. It's Adam.

Sarah sits up, watching him, intent. He heads for the

JUNGLE GYM

Where a girl, HAYLEY, 9, sits on low rung. She narrows her eyes at Adam.

HAYLEY
Are you a retard?

ADAM
(startled)
What?

HAYLEY
My mother says you should be in a
special school.

Sarah holds her breath. Watching as Adam's face clouds over.

Suddenly Adam reaches out and swats at Haley. His hand connects with her shoulder and she tumbles off the jungle gym.

Sarah gasps.

Haley, on the pavement now, screams, holding her knee. It's scraped and bleeding.

Sarah runs over to comfort her.

Adam stiffens, just standing there, an odd smile on his face.

MELANIE, 32, Latina, tough, a 5th grade teacher, comes running across the playground.

Sarah waves to her as she cleans the dirt from Hayley's knee.

SARAH
I think she's fine.

Melanie kneels beside her.

MELANIE
We'll get you to the nurse sweetie.

Hayley continues to cry. Adam just stands there.

HAYLEY
He pushed me.

MELANIE
(to Adam)
Is that true? Did you push her?
(off his silence)
Adam?

ADAM
I don't know what you're talking
about.

Melanie turns to Sarah.

MELANIE
Did he push her? Did you see?

Adam's eyes flick toward Sarah. A moment.

SARAH
No. She fell.

Hayley starts to cry.

MELANIE
Okay.
(then)
Hayley, you're going to be fine,
honey. Let's get you back inside.

Haley covers her face with her hands.

HAYLEY
But he *pushed* me.

MELANIE
That's not what Ms. Sarah says.

ADAM
But look at this!

Adam suddenly positions his arm in front of his nose like an elephant trunk and raises his arm into the air with a roaring sound.

MELANIE

Adam, go back to class.

ADAM

Can I go to the library to watch
Animal Planet?

MELANIE

(to Adam)

What do you *think*?

ADAM

I'm only just asking you because
it's on in ten minutes!

(to Sarah)

Can I go?

SARAH

It's not up to me.

ADAM

Why not?

Melanie takes Adam by the shoulder.

MELANIE

Adam...

He jerks away from her, throwing his hands over his head.

ADAM

In ten minutes! Animal planet!
AAAORRRGH!

Melanie blocks his way.

MELANIE

(an edge)

Adam? I'm talking to you. And I'm
telling you to go back inside and
sit down. Right. Now.

Adam, jolted, suddenly bolts off toward the school, his
movements, angular and awkward.

Haley, betrayed, stares at Sarah.

Sarah turns away from her to watch Adam run away.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Sarah drives back to New York City. The New Jersey landscape flying by. Ahead of her, an SUV, the shapes of three children in the back.

Sarah speeds up and pulls alongside. She can see the kids, laughing, watching a Disney cartoon on a backseat DVD player. The mother, driving, a silhouette.

Sarah looks away quickly and speeds past.

Behind her, in the distance, a large, bright, billboard. It says: "Meadowlands."

INT. UNION SQUARE PARK - DAY

Sarah and Ashley having coffee on a bench. Mothers pushing strollers pass by.

ASHLEY

Do you and David ever discuss it?

SARAH

That part of my life is over.

ASHLEY

It's an option, though, right?
You're young.

SARAH

(shrugs)

I've got kids around me all day
now, what do I need another one
for?

(then)

And I'm not totally sure I wanted
Jessie in the first place.

It hangs there.

ASHLEY

You don't mean that.

SARAH

Maybe I do.

ASHLEY

Sarah...

SARAH

Maybe I put that... negative
thought out into the universe and
... the universe responded by
taking Jessie.

Ashley puts an arm around her.

ASHLEY

That's not how things work.

Sarah thinks about this. Watching two mothers push their
strollers down a walkway.

EXT. STREET - EVENING

David walking. He turns toward a CHURCH and heads down a
flight of stairs.

INT. CHURCH REC ROOM - LATER

A non-denominational vibe. A table with a coffee pot and
some literature: *Coping with Loss*, *Compassionate Grieving*,
etc.

A diverse group of NINE PEOPLE, David among them, sit in
folding chairs. Etched on their faces, a suffering that
gives them a kind nobility. TED, 40's, the group leader, in
a V-neck and jeans is speaking.

TED

There is a pace beyond our pain.
That is a place of peace and
acceptance. For ourselves and the
ones we've lost.

(then)

And if we can stay focused on the
positive, our journey will
eventually take us there.

PETE, 38, suit and tie, friendly smile, nods.

PETE

Eventually.

Murmurs of assent from the group. David struggles to take
this in.

INT. CHURCH REC ROOM - LATER

The group is milling around card table after the meeting.
David, awkward, pours himself a coffee.

PETE, 38, suit and tie, friendly smile, approaches.

PETE
You're new - I'm Pete.

DAVID
David.

They shake.

PETE
Some of us are going out for drink.
Would like to join us?

DAVID
Maybe next time.

Pete, sensing David's anxiety, gives him a calming smile.

PETE
There's no blueprint for this, bro.
You just feel what you feel.

DAVID
Thanks.

Pete looks directly into David's eyes.

PETE
The only way past is... through.

INT. COMPARATIVE LITERATURE DEPARTMENT - OFFICE - DAY

Sarah, restless, sits before her thesis advisor, a Pakistani-American professor, FATIMAH, 40. On her desk, a picture of her husband and teenage daughter. Rows of books behind her.

FATIMAH
You are sure this is what you want?

Sarah nods.

FATIMAH (CONT'D)
Your status will remain open, of course. And the committee will give you all the time you need.

SARAH
No. I'm done.

Silence. Fatimah's eyes widen slightly.

FATIMAH
In view of the circumstances of course I understand.

Sarah's fidgets with the arm of her chair.

SARAH

Then we're good to go?

An awkward beat. The sounds of birds and students laughing drift into the office from outside.

Fatimah looks at Sarah carefully.

FATIMAH

It is... a shame, Sarah... all the great work you've put in. And your insights are very original. If you change your mind, when you feel ready, perhaps...

Sarah ignoring her, rises and goes to the window.

Fatimah removes her glasses then puts them on again. As if a private memory threatens to overcome her.

FATIMAH (CONT'D)

In trying times it can be important to have a constant...

She makes a sweeping gesture toward the bookshelf.

FATIMAH (CONT'D)

... and the words of the American writers and poets you study. Eliot. Frost. Bishop. You obviously connect with them in a special way.

(hopeful)

They might be a comforting place to return.

Sarah turns to look at her. Backlit by the mid-day sun. Her face half in shadow.

SARAH

I've read enough books.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sarah stares at her reflection in the mirror. Sound of traffic outside.

She takes a prescription bottle of pills out of the cabinet above the sink. The bottle reads: "*Lithium.*"

She opens the bottle, and dumps the entire contents into her hand. A mound of blue capsules.

She dumps them all into the toilet.

INT. SARAH AND DAVID'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

It's late. Sarah and David are sitting up in bed. Sarah has her lap top open. Her face lit by the cool, blue glow of the screen. David is reading a pamphlet from his bereavement group.

DAVID
How'd it go with your advisor?

SARAH
Really good.

DAVID
(nods)
Baby steps...

SARAH
Right.

DAVID
Picking up my brother at the
airport tomorrow.

SARAH
Have fun.

We see what Sarah's focused on:

ON SCREEN

Sarah clicks on a file labeled "Critical Theory
Dissertation." She drags this file into the GARBAGE file,
then empties it.

One by one, the dissertation files disappear. The screen, now
blank. Waiting...

BACK TO SCENE

David looks at her hesitant.

DAVID
I was thinking about maybe doing
some kind of... memorial project.
Compile all that great footage of
him... from the different phases of
his life. If you were open to
that... we could make copies and
send them to all our friends.

Sarah's eyes flick up from the screen.

SARAH
For who?

DAVID
What?

SARAH
(an edge)
Memorial service for who?

David looks at her, then away.

Sarah turns back to her lap top.

At the dead center on the screen, she types:

"FUCK THE WORLD."

INT. ST MONICA'S - ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - DAY

Sarah, energized, speaks to the WOMAN behind the counter who's thumbing through a National Geographic magazine. On the cover: *Exploring the dark continent.*

SARAH
I need to check a student's records.

INT. ST. MONICA'S - ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Sarah, at the desk, looks through Adam Macardle's file. On the top of the file it reads: "*Special Needs. Diagnosis: Asperger's Syndrome*"

She opens the file to find a school photo of Adam. Bed head hair. Thick glasses. Blank stare. An awkward smile.

Under this, Adam's carefully written signature. And next to his name is a very good doodle of an elephant's head.

Below this: Guardians: *Joe and Christa Macardle, foster parents.*

INT. TEACHER'S LOUNGE - DAY

Sarah, Melanie and another full time teacher, MAX, gay, 32, eat their lunch. Sarah eats quickly, absorbed in the conversation.

MAX
... our next door neighbors growing up had a kid with AS.
(MORE)

If you gave her your birthday or some date in history, like when Lincoln was shot, she'd tell you exactly what day of the week it was.

MELANIE
Not Adam Macardle.

MAX
Oh, no. Just elephants.

MELANIE
All Animal planet. All the time.

MAX
How bad does that suck? All the downside of a disability and none of the perks.

Sarah thinks about this. The sound of children laughing rises up from below.

SARAH
He wears that same shirt every day.
(then)
He's got parents, right?

MELANIE
You can call them that.

MAX
The mother's a real piece of work.
She looks like a tweaker.

MELANIE
Yeah, I definitely get a meth vibe off her. And for sure the dad has a record.

SARAH
You've seen them?

MELANIE
(nods)
Adam forgets his lunch like, three times a week and his mother has to bring it to him. Which she seems none to pleased about.

MAX
As is reflected in her choice of cuisine for her child.

SARAH
What's that?

MAX
Popeye's chicken. Every day.

MELANIE
Actually his father seems kind of okay. He picks him up from school sometimes. He'd be kind of a babe if he cleaned up.

Sarah pushes her lunch away, stands, looks out the window over the playground.

SARAH
Somebody should really step up and help that kid, you know? Before something really bad happens.

Melanie and Max, silent, exchange a look.

INT. CHURCH REC ROOM - DAY

The group is seated. David is speaking.

DAVID
.... I'm standing in the backyard of the house where I grew up. There's a big field behind it. I can see Jessie out there. He's all alone, playing in the tall grass. Appearing... disappearing. Totally... in his own world. And I can see he's happy. I can hear his laughter.

Jenna nods, moved.

JENNA
That's such beautiful dream, David.
(then)
Maybe that's where he is now.

DAVID
(moved)
Maybe.
(then)
It's how I want to remember him.

TED
And that's a place you can always go to, David, when you feel a drift. A positive place.

PETE

Maybe there's a way to incorporate
it into your project.

TED

(nods)

That's a great idea.

JENNA

Perhaps Sarah can help you with
that...

David looks at her, but says nothing. Ted looks toward the
group.

TED

What do we think?

Nods all around. David looks encouraged.

INT. EMPTY CLASSROOM - NEXT DAY

Sarah sits at her desk, listening to Jorge's confiscated
iPod. Her eyes are closed. The muffled, aggressive sound
bleeds out of the earphones.

She opens her eyes. Jorge is standing in front of her.

SARAH

Who are we listening to?

JORGE

Burzum. "Darkness."

SARAH

They're not fooling around.

JORGE

No ma'am.

SARAH

You bought this for yourself?

JORGE

It's my older brother's.

SARAH

Does he know what you're listening
to?

JORGE

He's in Afghanistan.

Sarah sets down the iPod, looks at Jorge.

SARAH

I don't want to fail you. You're too smart. But you have to start handing in your homework. You've got to get motivated.

JORGE

I am motivated. About art. And music and... stuff.

SARAH

I understand. But give it your best shot okay?

Jorge nods, embarrassed by her interest.

JORGE

Yeah, thanks.

As Jorge reaches for the iPod, he exposes a scarred row of self-inflicted CUTS on the underside of his bare forearms.

SARAH

Jesus.

JORGE

What?

SARAH

How often do you do that?

JORGE

(shrugs)

Ah, you know. I apply only when necessary.

Sarah looks carefully at the scars. As if drawn to them. More curious than judgemental.

SARAH

Supposed to feel good, that the idea?

JORGE

Hell, no.

SARAH

No?

JORGE

It *hurts*.

(then)

That's the idea.

INT. EDITNG SUITE - DAY

David is at work, quietly editing a nature documentary. On the screen, footage from the Everglades. Thick cypress trees, brackish water, kudzu. An alligator glides lazily down the river.

David freezes the image, staring at the alligator staring back at him. He rubs his eyes and looks away.

His gaze falls on a stack of tapes on a nearby shelf. Handwritten on them: "*Home movies-- Jessie. Beach, Disneyland, Ithaca, etc.*"

He picks one off the pile. It reads: "*Jessie, Fifth Birthday.*"

David stares at it, considering something.

INT. EDITNG SUITE - NIGHT

David works in front of a monitor.

A disorganized parade of images of Jessie flash by; Jessie at the beach, at home, in front of a Christmas tree. Jessie with Sarah and David, with grandparents and friends. Holidays, birthdays, and vacations.

Brent enters.

BRENT
Almost ready?

DAVID
Yeah, one sec...

David taps a key and freezes an image on the monitor.

ON MONITOR

Jessie at a birthday party, seated in Sarah's lap. She has her arms around him. Mother and child smiling at each other.

BACK TO SCENE

Brent stares at the image.

BRENT
Whoa, man. That's beautiful.

DAVID (O.S.)
It's going to be... something. I'm just not sure what yet.

CLOSE ON: JESSIE. Looking out. Smiling.

DAVID (CONT'D)
I just don't want to forget what he
looks like.

INT. SARAH AND DAVID'S APARTMENT - JESSIE'S ROOM - DAY

David is inside, putting things in boxes. He's humming to himself with a forced cheerfulness.

Sarah appears in the doorway with her coat on. She looks tired.

SARAH
What are you doing?

DAVID
I thought we could make this room
into an office. We always wanted
to do that.

SARAH
We did?

DAVID
Sure. I'll paint it. Move in the
computer. I could edit here. You
could work on your thesis.
(then, soft)
It's been almost a year. We've got
to make some decisions, Sarah.

David reaches inside a box and pulls out a child's new red polo shirt. He holds it up. It looks comfortable and expensive.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Remember this?

Sarah nods, remembering.

SARAH
From your mother. And three sizes
too big.

DAVID
He was swimming in it, but he loved
it. He was going to wear it on the
first day of school.

SARAH
He even slept in it.

They stare at each other for a moment, then look away.

DAVID

We'll give it to the Good Will.

David throws the shirt back into the box.

Sarah walks out of the room, leaving him alone.

INT. ST. MONICA'S SCHOOL - HALLWAY - NEXT DAY

Sarah spots Adam walking down the hall, dragging his book bag. She follows him. He walks slowly, humming to himself, dragging his hand along the wall.

He heads toward a doorway marked, "Library."

INT. SCHOOL LIBRARY - DAY

Adam sits at a table before a pile of books. He's looking at an atlas, open to a map of Africa. His finger traces the contours of the country as he softly talks to himself.

Sarah, in the doorway, watching him. He's too absorbed to notice her.

Then Adam carefully tears a page out of the book. Sarah sees that it's a color photograph of AFRICAN ELEPHANTS on a grassy plain.

Adam folds the photo neatly and slips it in his pocket. He looks up and sees Sarah watching him. He freezes, his eyes magnified through his thick glasses. Sarah smiles at him, open and empathetic.

Adam smiles and waves back.

TIM (V.O.)

The thing about our brains is, I
should say our conscious brains
is...

INT. SARAH AND DAVID'S APARTMENT - DAY

David's brother, TIM, 35, sits at the table before his dirty plate. He wears a T-shirt, black jeans, sneakers. He's a highly intelligent, attractive, charming, scruffy mess.

Sarah and David busy themselves setting the table and prepare dinner.

TIM

...all we can do is scan things,
right to left...

(MORE)

brrrrrrrp, zzzzzzt... absorbing information in long continuous sequences. That's why it takes so fucking long to get edu-ma-cated. Years and years of school because we're just basically reading miles and miles of text. But the unconscious is another story. That's where we're on a whole other level than language. See, words have no inherent meaning, right? I mean, they're just pointers. See this, see that. This is a table? Really? Who says? But, I've now named it and made it separate from everything else. But that's not how we started. That's not how babies and animals see it. So the thing is how to get past that... split, is the *thing*. Getting quiet enough to cut out the noise and static and see what's really there. And the question, the thing I'm grappling with is how much are we missing by just focusing on the most obvious linear input stream for our learning.

Beat.

SARAH
Coffee, Tim?

TIM
(nods)
Anyway, that's pretty much the cornerstone of what's been happening with me lately.

DAVID
Sounds complicated.

TIM
(shrugs)
If you say so.

David and Sarah finish clearing the table. Tim watches them, with awkward empathy.

TIM (CONT'D)
And how about you guys? Hanging in there?

Sarah and David are silent. No one looks at each other.

INT. SARAH AND DAVID'S APARTMENT - SPARE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tim sits on the bed, his shirt off, reading a book and holding a toothbrush.

Sarah enters carrying extra sheets and blankets.

TIM
I want you to know I really
appreciate this.

SARAH
No worries.

Sarah fluffs a pillow, drops it on the bed.

TIM
He was pretty much the greatest kid
I ever met.
(beat)
I wish I could have told him that.

SARAH
Maybe you will someday.

A beat.

TIM
What?

SARAH
Nothing.
(then)
He adored you.

Tim's eyes widen.

TIM
No way. Really?

SARAH
Imagine that.

TIM
Wow. Fuck.

SARAH
And you never remembered his
birthday.

TIM
That I'm super-flawed isn't even an
issue.

SARAH
How hard was it to do that?

TIM
For a self-absorbed, self-
medicating asshole like me?

SARAH
Jiggle the handle in the bathroom
if you go, it gets stuck.

TIM
I'm sorry, Sarah. I really am.

A beat. Sarah nods, a long exhale.

SARAH
Okay.

TIM
We good?

SARAH
'Night, Tim.

Sarah turns out the light. The room darkens, save for the
light spilling in from the hallway.

TIM
Sarah?

SARAH
Yeah?

TIM
I did get him that book though.

Sarah, in silhouette, stares at him from the doorway.

INT. ST. MONICA'S SCHOOL - HALLWAY - NEXT DAY

Sarah is walking past the office. As she passes a doorway,
she notices Adam standing there, his back to her.

He's talking to a school administrator who is just out of
frame.

Sarah stops to listen in. They can't see her.

SCHOOL OFFICIAL (O.S.)
When's she coming?

Adam glances up at a clock.

ADAM
Soon. I don't know.

SCHOOL OFFICIAL (O.S.)
We can't keep doing this Adam.

Adam just stands there. Sarah lingers, thinking.

INT. TEACHER'S LOUNGE - DAY

Sarah quickly grabs her sack lunch out of the tiny refrigerator and heads out the door.

Melanie and Max are already eating at the table.

MAX
Something I said?

MELANIE
Come eat with us, girl.

SARAH
I have an appointment.

Sarah's out the door. Melanie and Max exchange a look.

INT. SARAH'S MINI-VAN - PARKED - DAY

Sarah eats a sandwich in her car in the school parking lot. She's scanning the lot, alert and intense.

After a moment, a 1994 FORD PROBE, with a loud exhaust, pulls up a few spaces away from her.

Sarah glances over at it, hunching down slightly in her seat.

A WOMAN, 30, thin, with dirty blonde, unwashed hair, gets out and leans against her car. She's smoking a cigarette and checking her cell phone. She looks restless and agitated.

This is Adam's foster mother, CHRISTA.

Sarah watches as Christa spots something, and suddenly tosses her cigarette to the ground and stamps it out.

Sarah sees Adam, head down, ambling toward Christa.

Adam and Christa stand face to face, but with Adam's eyes looking away, his hands fidgeting.

Sarah rolls down her window, and listens.

CHRISTA
What the hell is the matter with
you?

ADAM
I'm... sorry.

CHRISTA
Until the next time.

Christa pulls a grease-stained bag of Popeye's chicken out of the car and hands it to Adam.

ADAM
I said I was sorry.

Christa gives him a quick smoothing down of his hair, then a swat on his butt. Something close to affection.

CHRISTA
Just words, kid. Don't mean
nuthin.'

Adam turns, heads back to the school cradling his lunch.

Christa gets back in the Ford Probe and drives off.

A beat, then Sarah starts up her car and follows her.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Sarah follows Christa, a few car lengths behind. She can see Christa is on her cell phone.

EXT. MOBIL STATION - PARKING LOT - DAY

Christa's car pulls into a gas station parking lot. Christa gets out and heads quickly for the bathrooms.

Sarah parks a discrete distance away and watches.

INT. SARAH'S MINI-VAN - DAY

Sarah notices a MAN, 34, wool cap pulled low over his eyes and a goatee, waiting by the bathroom door. Christa, anxious, approaches, then walks slowly past him toward the women's bathroom. He puts his hand on her ass, follows her inside and shuts the door.

Sarah gets out of her car.

EXT. GAS STATION - REST ROOMS - DAY

Sarah walks carefully to the bathroom door, stands outside and listens. She hears the sounds of sex inside.

The door is open, just a crack. Sarah looks in.

The drug dealer is leaning back against the sink, eyes closed. Christa is on her knees, giving him head.

Sarah watches for a moment, then turns and heads into the Mini-mart attached to the gas station.

INT. MINI-MART STORE - DAY

Sarah, restless, wanders the aisles, pretending to shop. She glances out the store window toward the gas station.

After a moment, Christa emerges. She walks into the mini-mart and up to the counter.

CHRISTA
Pall Mall regulars.

The KOREAN CASHIER puts the cigarette pack on the counter. Christa takes out a credit card.

CASHIER
No debit card purchase under ten dollars.

CHRISTA
For real?

He points to a handwritten sign. Christa fumbles through her purse. Sarah watches her.

CHRISTA (CONT'D)
Fuckin' Christ.
(then)
Can you just... come on, dude...

The cashier shakes his head and taps the sign again.

CHRISTA (CONT'D)
(under her breath)
Mother fuck me.

Sarah steps in, hands her a ten dollar bill.

SARAH
Here you go.

CHRISTA
No, hey, c'mon.

SARAH
It's no problem.

CHRISTA
You don't got to do that.

SARAH
It's nothing.

Christa takes the money.

CHRISTA
You're real sweet lady.

EXT. MINIMART - PARKING LOT - DAY

Sarah and Christa walks toward their cars.

CHRISTA
You gimme your address I'll pay
you back.

SARAH
Not necessary.

CHRISTA
I don't like owing anybody
anything.

SARAH
Just pay it forward.

Christa raises a hand to high five her.

CHRISTA
I like your style sister.

Sarah, awkwardly, high fives her back.

They've reached Christa's car. Beyond, at the edge of the parking lot, the man in the wool cap is lingers, smoking a cigarette.

Christa sees Sarah glance at him, then:

SARAH
Got any kids?

CHRISTA
(quickly)
Me? No. Why?

SARAH
(shrugs)
I don't know, I just...

CHRISTA
No time for it. Focusing on my
career and whatnot.

Off Sarah's look, Christa lights a cigarette and continues.

Christa points half-heartedly, to two cardboard boxes in the
back seat. They look old and water stained.

CHRISTA (CONT'D)
I sell supplements. If you're
interested I can hook you up.
We're running a promotion now on --

SARAH
-- That's okay.

An awkward beat. Christa looks around, anxious.

CHRISTA
What about you?

SARAH
What?

CHRISTA
Got kids?

SARAH
Oh. Yeah. I have a little boy.

Christa looks off, her face unreadable.

CHRISTA
They say... mothers and sons...
have a special bond, right?

Sarah just nods.

Christa gives her a faint smile, gets in her car and drives
off.

Sarah watches her go.

INT. ST. MONICA'S SCHOOL - HALLWAY

Sarah hurries back toward her classroom.

The school principal, JOHN GRIFFIN, 55, appears around a corner, and stops to observe Sarah. Then he checks his watch as she ducks into her classroom.

INT. JESSIE'S ROOM - DAY

Sarah is cleaning up Jessie's little desk, arranging pencils and crayons. She positions the chair neatly in place.

Then she begins rifling through a box marked "*Jessie's Clothes*", looking for something specific. She finds it: the red polo shirt.

Sarah holds the shirt up to her nose, shuts her eyes, and inhales.

She opens her eyes. Tim is standing in the doorway. He's holding a box full of Sarah's text books.

TIM
Everything okay?

SARAH
Yeah, great. Just cleaning up.

TIM
(off books)
You, uh, getting rid of these?

SARAH
Unless you want them.

TIM
Yeah, totally.

Tim sets the box down. Sarah is still holding Jessie's shirt, self-consciously in her hand.

TIM (CONT'D)
If you need any help...

SARAH
Thanks, no.
(then)
How's the job hunt?

TIM
I had a, uh, a house-sitting thing lined up and that sort of fell through. But I've got other options. Some teaching work, possibly. Or maybe I'll head back to Portland. Reapply to grad school or...

(MORE)

(then)
The basic thrust obviously is to
get my life back on track.

SARAH
Sounds like a plan.

TIM
And look, I know it feels like I'm
just sort of hovering around here
and taking up space. But I'll be
gone before you know it.

(then)
In the meantime... don't be a
stranger. I'm here if you want to
talk, or just hang even. Or
whatever.

SARAH
You got it.

Tim remains standing, awkwardly, in the doorway.

Sarah walks over to him, reaches out and hugs him very tight.
She lets the hug linger. Jessie's shirt is clutched in her
hand.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Do your thing, okay, Tim? Life is
short. Don't let anybody fuck with
you or tell you who to be.

Tim's nods, unsure how to process this.

INT. SARAH AND DAVID'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

David is assembling footage on his laptop. Tim is writing in
a notebook on the couch. The TV is on, low.

Tim looks up -- sees something on screen.

TIM
(points)
Dave....

David reaches for the remote and raises the volume.

ON TV

The crawl says: "Breaking News - Live"

A REPORTER stands beside a highway in upstate New York.

In an INSERT on the side of the screen, a helicopter shot of white van surrounded by police cars.

REPORTER

...Authorities have stopped a man they say is allegedly involved in the abduction of a child from Scranton, Pennsylvania. Details are sketchy at the moment but what we do know at this time is the man is an unemployed resident of Tompkins County and was stopped for routine traffic infraction on route 89. The trooper apparently spotted the child in the back seat and when questioned the driver attempted to flee. The chief of police has scheduled a press conference at six o'clock this evening. We have no other details at this time but will bring them to you as they come in.

David hits "pause" on the remote.

On the screen, the reporter is frozen, with his eyes half-lidded, mouth open. He looks demonic.

Tim looks at his brother, as he call out.

DAVID (O.S.)

Honey... ?

INT. SARAH AND DAVID'S APARTMENT - DAY

Garza sits awkwardly in a chair across from Sarah and David.

Tim, leaning against a wall, listens.

GARZA

There's still not a whole lot we know at this time.

DAVID

Who is he?

GARZA

His name is Paul Henry Hulka. A trooper stopped his van in a highway outside Harrisburg.

Garza places a print out of a PHOTO on the coffee table in front of them.

ON PHOTO

A driver's license photo of a nondescript 55 year old MAN, with short cropped, receding salt and pepper hair, and wire rim glasses.

GARZA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Does he looks familiar?

BACK TO SCENE

David leaning over, stares at the image intently. Sarah doesn't look at it.

DAVID
No.

Tim takes a few steps into the room and glances at the photo.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Is he from around here?

GARZA
Upstate. He's got a farm outside of Dryden. The bureau forensic team is up there now.

DAVID
"Forensic."

TIM
(looking away)
My least favorite word ever.

Garza glances over, not knowing what to make of him.

SARAH
(rising)
This has nothing to do with us.

GARZA
It very well may not.

SARAH
Then why are you here?

GARZA
We found a computer hard drive in the back of his van. There are... images on it. Digital photographs. Of young children. Boys.

DAVID
Oh God.

The air goes out of the room.

GARZA

I just... I wanted to give you a heads up before the press gets a hold of this. We need to finish going through the material on the hard drive. But you'll be notified the second we know anything.

David leans forward, his head in his hands.

Sarah, turns away, her eyes finding Tim, who is looking back at her, feeling her pain.

INT. SCHOOL LIBRARY - NEXT DAY

Adam reads a book a large picture book on Elephants. He's oblivious to the other kids around him.

Sarah watches him from the doorway.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

Sarah eats lunch with Adam on a filthy picnic bench by the playground.

SARAH

What'd you get?

ADAM

Drumsticks.

SARAH

That all?

ADAM

Yep.

SARAH

How do you know what "inconceivable" means?

ADAM

I just know.

Adam reaches into his backpack and takes out a bottle of pills. He takes one out and washes it down with his Pepsi

SARAH

What's that?

ADAM

Zarontin.

(then)

It's for my seizures.

(MORE)

"Anti" means against. And it works so much better than the Depakote. And of course: "To be taken with meals."

(anxious)
I'm doing bad in school. I can't concentrate. It's a problem.

SARAH
What subjects are you having trouble with?

ADAM
I don't know. Everything.

Sarah reaches her hand out to touch him. He pulls away slightly, never making eye contact.

SARAH
You're a very smart boy, Adam. Do you know that?

ADAM
No.

SARAH
And everything is going to be fine.

Adam jerks his head up at this. Motionless, he stares ahead.

ADAM
You promise?

Sarah nods.

ADAM (CONT'D)
I always wanted someone to tell me that.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Sarah is holding Jessie's red polo shirt out to Adam. Adam is looking away from her and shaking his head violently and waving his arms.

ADAM
No, no, no, No...

SARAH
Are you sure?

ADAM
It's... the color.

SARAH
You don't like red?

ADAM
It's the worst color there is. It's
the color of fire ants.

SARAH
Maybe you'll want it later...

ADAM
How far away is Africa?

Sarah backs off, letting the shirt rest in a heap in her lap.
She looks vaguely hurt.

SARAH
I... really don't know, Adam.

WIDEN TO REVEAL

Melanie and another teacher across the playground, watching
Sarah.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Sarah sits across from Principal Griffin.

GRIFFIN
Mrs. Culler never should have shown
you his file.

SARAH
I wanted to know something about
his background.

GRIFFIN
We find that inappropriate.

Sarah's breath quickens, something is building inside her.

SARAH
Since when is caring about a child
inappropriate? His mother is a *drug*
addict. Do you see how he comes
dressed to school? In those filthy
clothes? Am I the only one who
knows what's going on here? If
someone, an *adult*, doesn't start
taking a real interest in him,
we're going to lose him. The
damage is going to be *permanent*.

He looks away for a beat, weighing his thoughts. Then:

GRIFFIN

You're one of our most committed teachers on staff, Sarah, no question. And my heart goes out to you for the pain you've suffered. But I'm telling you to stay away from Adam Macardle.

(then)

And that's not a request.

Sarah rises suddenly and walks quickly out of the room.

EXT. SARAH AND DAVID'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Sarah walks toward her building, absorbed in her thoughts. She hears laughter, looks up to see...

TIM

Sitting on the stoop, rolling a cigarette, a paperback book perched on his lap. He's talking with two JAPANESE GIRLS, obviously tourists.

Tim is low-key and flirty. The girls, laughing, are charmed by him. They ask him to take their picture with their iPhone.

Sarah, amused, stops a short distance away, watching.

Tim takes his time photographing the girls, composing the shot perfectly.

The girls walk away, looking back to smile at Tim, as Sarah approaches...

SARAH

Hey stranger.

TIM

(looking up)

Yo.

(of girls)

I'm big in Tokyo. You have no idea.

SARAH

No overnight guests, okay?

TIM

Not with your thin walls.

Sarah laughs.

Tim rises, stretches his arms out lazily, then lights his hand-rolled cigarette, the book tucked under his arm.

It's sexy. The wayward, more handsome brother.

TIM (CONT'D)
Walk with me?

SARAH
Where?

Tim nods vaguely down the sidewalk.

TIM
Does it matter?

Sarah, a faint smile, shakes her head.

MOMENTS LATER

Sarah and Tim, walking slowly down the street. Past a small playground. Kids and mothers playing.

SARAH
More light reading?

He shows her the book: *"Wittgenstein -- The Collected works"*

Sarah looks suddenly fragile.

SARAH (CONT'D)
(of book)
Give me something good, Tim. I
need it.

They stop walking, as Tim regards her. Really considering his task.

He flips slowly through the book, until he finds a carefully underlined passage.

The street seems to get very quiet.

TIM
"I don't know why we are here, but
I'm pretty sure it's not in order
to enjoy ourselves."

Their eyes meet, as Sarah considers this.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

Grey skies. Beyond the fence, kids running, throwing balls. Their laughter and yelling evaporating into the air.

Adam is standing by the side of the school building, throwing a half-deflated football against a concrete wall. Over and over again. As he does this, he talks to himself, rapidly. An elaborate, one-sided conversation.

WIDEN TO REVEAL:

Sarah, watching him from the other side of the fence. Her face is a mask.

She turns, abruptly and walks away.

ON ADAM

As he looks up sensing something. He stops what he's doing, and confused, watches Sarah leave.

INT. EDITING SUITE - NIGHT

David stares at a monitor, editing footage of a documentary. The DIRECTOR beside him.

On the screen, images of dense South American rain forest.

David rubs his eyes, leans forward.

DIRECTOR
You okay?

DAVID
I'm fine.

The director puts a hand on his shoulder.

DIRECTOR
Let's call it a night. Get some rest.

DAVID
Okay.

The director leaves.

David stares at the frozen image of the colorful birds in the rain forest on the screen.

He taps some keys, and the memorial-in-progress for Jessie appears.

ON MONITOR - FULL SCREEN

The montage David's cut together so far: Jessie alone, with Sarah, with David, in various locations. Tim is in some of the footage. More holidays, birthdays, vacations.

There's no sense of order and the effect is random.
Confused. Hallucinatory.

The sequence ends on a single image of Sarah. She's looking at the camera, something deep and restless in her eyes.

BACK TO SCENE

David freezes the image and stares at it.

INT. CHURCH REC ROOM - NIGHT

Post meeting fellowship. The mood is upbeat. David is getting coffee. Pete approaches.

PETE
How's it going?

David shrugs, vague.

DAVID
You know. It's a process.

PETE
(a smile)
Everything in its own time.

Pete looks at his watch.

PETE (CONT'D)
Shit - I missed the train.
(then)
You up for a beer? I got an hour to kill.

DAVID
I should probably be getting home.

PETE
C'mon, one drink.

David looks away, thinking.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Dim. A few patrons. Pete and David at a table in the corner.

PETE
You can't control the world.
Things *happen* to you. Maybe the
worst things. And in the end, you
just go, "okay... now this has
become part of my story."

David considers this.

DAVID
I never found out what happened to
you.

PETE
Oh, right.

DAVID
You mind my asking?

A beat, as Pete stares off at a neon beer sign.

PETE (CONT'D)
My daughter was riding her bike
home from a friend's house. Some
investment banker is coming home
drunk from a bachelor party in the
morning, and he hits her. Then he
drove off. Left her by the side of
the road to die like an animal.
My wife and I... our marriage
didn't survive.
(beat)
That was over two years ago. And
in that time, I've searched my
heart, you know... asked God what
to do, how to live with all this.
And then he answered me: he told to
look within my heart. And let that
direct me.

David looks at him, impressed.

DAVID
I'm nowhere near that yet.

PETE
It takes time. But yeah, it's nice
to finally get clarity.

They drink. Pete looks off, hesitant.

PETE (CONT'D)
Can I tell you something?

DAVID
Sure.

PETE
I know where this guy lives.

The room becomes very still. David's eyes widen slightly.

PETE (CONT'D)

And I know where his kids go to school. Every Tuesday he picks his them up and they head uptown at the 34th street station.

(then)

But one of these Tuesdays... he's going to show up there and I'm going to be standing on the platform. And when the train comes into the station, I'm gonna push him right onto the tracks. And we're all gonna watch his fucking body come apart.

Pete lifts his beer, drinks.

Silence.

David stares ahead into nothing.

EXT. MINI VAN - MOVING - NIGHT

David drives. The radio is on, low. He is far away from the city.

He turns off the highway suddenly onto an exit.

EXT. REST STOP - NIGHT

David pulls into the lot and parks the minivan.

INT. MINIVAN - MOVING - NIGHT

David stares out the windshield. He's drinking a beer from a six pack on the seat beside him.

David looks around, toward the road, the bathrooms, the woods.

This is the REST STOP where Jessie disappeared.

David rolls down the window and looks out into the darkness.

DAVID

Hello..?

Silence. Wind in the trees. He drinks.

INT. MINIVAN - MOVING - NIGHT

David drives, very fast, back to the city. There are no other cars around him.

His face is expressionless. The woods lining the highway rush past him.

David sees something out the window. He immediately slows the minivan... and gradually comes to a stop by the side of the road.

Then he backs up... twenty, thirty yards. He comes to rest at the side of the highway. He gets out of the minivan.

EXT. HIGHWAY -- NIGHT

David stands before a WHITE CROSS by the side of the road. There's a pile of flowers before it, most of them dried with age. A ring of colored glass candles, and pile of sympathy cards and handwritten notes are heaped before it. Rising above these, on a small easel, is a PLACARD with the photo of a MAN, about David's age, looking out and smiling.

Under this:

In loving Memory of MICHAEL - 5/5/14

A long beat, as David stares at the roadside memorial

The wind moves the trees slightly. There is no moon.

Then... he steps forward, savagely kicking the candles, shattering them and sending them across the highway.

He knocks over the easel, and scatters the flowers. The photographs and cards are flattened into the dirt.

He grinds them all under his boot.

When he's finished, David just stands there, his body slack. A silhouette by the side of the road.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Sarah and David sit with Agent Garza at his desk. He has a folder open, photographs visible inside. The air is tense.

GARZA
Take your time.

DAVID
(anxious)
Okay.

GARZA
There's one or two in particular
we'd like you to look at.

DAVID

Why?

GARZA

We think one of the boys could be --

David holds his stomach.

DAVID

I can't breath.

Sarah sits there, without emotion.

GARZA

You want some water?

David nods. Garza pours some water, hands it to him. David drinks it, then takes a deep breath and exhales.

DAVID

Let's do this.

Garza opens the folder and places a digital photograph in front of them. The image is not visible to us.

Sarah's eyes flick toward the picture, then away.

SARAH

What is that even a picture of?

David studies it intently.

DAVID

It's... two children. I see them.

(beat)

Two... boys. They're... facing away from the camera. On their backs. It's mostly their skin but -- This one's hair. Oh, Jesus. Yeah, maybe I don't know... Sarah?

SARAH

It's not him.

DAVID

Look at it.

Sarah shoves the photo away.

SARAH

This is utter bullshit. It's not him.

Silence.

DAVID

Okay... so, these pictures and what else? Is this all you have?

GARZA

No.

(beat)

Hulka had a farmhouse, upstate, near Ithaca. He built a kind of... dungeon in the basement on the property. That's where he kept his victims.

DAVID

A "dungeon"?

GARZA

(nods)

They're recovering bodies from there now.

DAVID

I think I'm going to be sick.

Sarah exhales, loud. They look at her.

SARAH

Our son is *fine*. He's out there, somewhere. I can *feel* it. There are signs. You don't see it, but a mother does.

David looks at her, helpless.

DAVID

What... signs Sarah?

SARAH

That another family picked him up. And he went to live with them.

GARZA

Another family?

DAVID

Sarah. Please... just... stop it.

SARAH

Did you ever think of *that*?

EXT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - PARKING LOT - DAY

Sarah and David are walking to their minivan. David trailing her by a few feet. Sarah, in her own world. Then.

DAVID
(stopping)
Sarah?

Sarah turns around to face him. David clutches the keys in his hands. He's looking at her, despair in his eyes. They are standing just beside the Minivan.

A beat of silence, then.

DAVID (CONT'D (CONT'D))
I... I... I just...

A long, excruciating beat, as David trembles, groping for the words. A torrent of emotion welling inside him.

Then, overcome, he sobs openly. Weeping like a child.

Sarah, motionless, just stares at him.

INT. ST. MONICA'S SCHOOL - DAY

Sarah in front of the class. She looks restless, distracted. On the blackboard behind her she's written "*Emily Dickinson, 1830-1886.*"

Nazarena reads from a book.

NAZARENA
"..Because I could not stop for
Death, he kindly stopped for me,
the carriage held but just
ourselves... and immortality."

SARAH
Okay. Thank you. Now how does the
carriage in this poem....

Sarah looks off, noticing a lone empty desk in the back.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Anyone seen Jorge today?

SAMUEL
I saw him in the bathroom right
after last period.

Sarah thinks about this.

SARAH
How about since then?

No one has an answer. A long beat, as Sarah looks at Jorge's empty desk. As if sensing something.

SARAH (CONT'D)
(suddenly)
I'll be right back.

Sarah abruptly walks out the door.

The students, bewildered, watch her go.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Sarah, under fluorescent lights, walking down the long hallway.

She turns a corner, and heads toward the boy's bathroom.

Sarah stops before the door and takes a breath.

She opens it and peers inside.

SARAH
Jorge?

Her voice echoes into silence.

She steps into

THE BATHROOM

It's empty. A row of stalls along the wall. No sign of Jorge.

Sarah looks around, noticing only the last stall door is closed.

She walks slowly over to it, pushing it open to find...

JORGE

Slumped between the wall and the toilet. His right wrist slashed, a pool of blood leaking out onto the floor.

Sarah drops to her knees, grabbing Jorge's arm to staunch the flow of blood.

Jorge's eyes open slightly.

They look at each other.

A moment.

Jorge closes his eyes, slipping back into unconsciousness.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - LATER

Jorge, on a gurney, oxygen mask covering his face. TWO PARAMEDICS tending to him.

Sarah stands watching, beside MELANIE and two other TEACHERS. Jorge's blood is on Sarah's shirt and hands.

MELANIE

Thank God you found him.

Sarah says nothing. She looks at Melanie, her face unreadable.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

(careful)

How did... you know he was in there?

Sarah looks away. Her gaze falls on Jorge's blue school uniform shirt, which is torn open to reveal a black T-shirt underneath.

The shirt reads: "Black Realm Records - Brooklyn."

INT. BLACK REALM RECORDS - DAY

Second CD's and records. Garish posters on the wall. Sarah enters, walking past a skinny tattooed SALESGUY, 19, behind the register. He watches her with quiet amusement.

Sarah peruses the CD'S. Her fingers grazing the titles..."Rotting Christ" "Cradle of Filth." Cartoon images of degradation and pain on every cover.

She finds a BURZUM CD. It's titled "Depths of Darkness."

She heads back to the --

COUNTER

The sales guy rings her up.

SALESGUY

Your kid likes the hard stuff, huh?

SARAH

Like you wouldn't believe.

INT. SARAH AND DAVID'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sarah sits before her laptop. Her face lit by the ice blue light of the screen.

She's holding her shirt in her hands. It's flecked with Jorge's blood. She considers it moment, then tosses it in the hamper.

David enters, takes off his shirt and sits on the bed.

Sarah looks at him a long beat. Then rises and sits beside him.

Silence.

She reaches out, taking hold of David's hand, and gently lifts it to her face. She closes her eyes and kisses it.

David looks at her, expressionless.

EXT. SARAH AND DAVID'S APARTMENT - STREET - NEXT MORNING

Sarah, walking to her CAR, listening to the black metal she's transferred to her iPod. Her eyes, intent, focused. She's deep inside herself.

As she approaches her car, a hand reaches out, touching her on the shoulder...

Sarah stops, turns --

It's Ashley. She's looking at Sarah, concerned.

ASHLEY

Sarah?

Sarah takes the earbuds out and looks at her, as if she doesn't recognize her.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Have you gotten my calls?

SARAH

I've been busy.

ASHLEY

Are you okay?

SARAH

What does it look like?

ASHLEY

(an edge)

I don't know, Sarah, why don't you tell me?

(off her silence)

David told Brent that they... they found this guy with...

(MORE)

pictures and... oh God Sarah, I
hope it's not --

Sarah slips her earbuds back in. She gives Ashley an enigmatic, half smile.

SARAH
Relax. Everything is going to be
fine.

Sarah gets in her car and shuts the door.

Ashley looks at her through the window, helpless.

INT. ST. MONICA'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Sarah, intent, focused, at her desk. She's wearing earbuds, and holds an ipod. Eyes closed, listening intently.

The students look anxious. Nazarena, Samuel exchange a worried glance.

Principal Griffin steps into the room. There is a school SECURITY GUARD beside him.

The class falls silent as he addresses them.

GRIFFIN
I need a word with Mrs. Ackerman.

Griffin takes a step toward Sarah.

GRIFFIN (CONT'D)
Sarah?

No response. She's too in her own world to notice him.

GRIFFIN (CONT'D)
May I speak with you a moment?

Sarah lifts her head slightly, eyes still closed.

Griffin raps on her desk hard with his fist.

Sarah looks up. She's out of breath. Her face is shining.

SARAH
(quiet)
Time to go?

Griffin points toward the hallway.

Sarah, rises and walks quickly past him out of the room.

Reveal, scrawled on the white-board behind her:

*When night falls
She cloaks the world
In impenetrable darkness
A chill rises
From the soil
And contaminates the air
Suddenly...
Life has new meaning*

- BURZUM

EXT. STREET - DAY

CLOSE ON: Sarah's face. She's staring intently at something out of frame.

Reveal: she's across the street from the MOBIL GAS STATION and MINI-MART where she first saw Christa and drug dealer.

Sarah walks toward it.

EXT. MOBIL STATION - REST ROOMS - DAY

Sarah stands outside the Woman's bathroom. She's holding a small plastic bag. She looks around. No one here.

She pushes the door open. It's empty. Dingy, graffiti covered walls. A cracked mirror.

INT. WOMAN'S BATHROOM - DAY

Sarah stands before the elaborate graffiti on the stalls and walls. She runs her fingertips over the scrawled words and symbols, as if divining a code.

She turns and places the plastic bag on the sink. She opens it and pulls out a pack of men's razors.

She takes one out, holds the blade in her hand.

She stares at herself, in deep concentration, in the cracked mirror.

Then her eyes drift down to her bare arms...

INT. MINIVAN - MOBIL STATION PARKING LOT - DUSK

Sarah sits in the driver's seat, restless. She pulls out her cell and texts TIM --

Sarah: *Where are you?*

After a moment...

Tim: *The roof.*

INT. SARAH AND DAVID'S APARTMENT BUILDING - ROOF TOP - DUSK

Sarah steps out onto the roof from an access door. There are little Christmas lights strung up around the roof's edge.

Tim sits on one of a few lawn chairs scattered on the tar surface. A six pack of beer. A little table beside him with books and drug paraphernalia.

There's a strange, new confidence about Sarah as she walks toward him.

TIM

Does, uh, Dave know where you are?

SARAH

Your brother and I are taking a little time off.

They don't take their eyes off each other.

TIM

Ah.

SARAH

You okay with that?

TIM

Hey, it's your crossword puzzle.

Sarah spots a GLASS PIPE on the night table. She picks it up, curious.

TIM (CONT'D)

Everything in moderation, right?

SARAH

Including moderation.

Tim nods, unsure.

Sarah picks up the glass pipe and examines it.

SARAH (CONT'D)

There's some, what do you call it, some "rock" in here.

TIM

Put it down.

SARAH
Why?

TIM
That's DMT.

SARAH
You think I'm an old lady.

TIM
It's not for amateurs.

SARAH
Just help me light the fucker.

She sits beside him on the lawn chair and holds the pipe.

As she does so, it exposes the fresh cuts on her arm, from the razor.

Tim stares at the wounds. He knows what they are.

Sarah puts the glass pipe in her mouth and their eyes meet again.

Tim picks up a lighter and lights the pipe...

...and Sarah takes a hit.

And holds it.

And holds it.

Closing her eyes. Exhaling the smoke. The lights of the city behind her.

The moment feels languid, sexual.

Tim reaches out... his fingertips lightly brushing a hair from her face.

Sarah opens her eyes.

SARAH (CONT'D)
My son is alive.

Silence.

TIM
What?

Sarah's eyes are glassy and far away.

SARAH
I can see his energy. He's close.

TIM
Sarah...

SARAH
Don't look at me like that.

A beat, as Tim reaches for the pipe, lights it, and sucks down a hit.

TIM
No, yes. Energy. His... that's true. He *is* out there and...

They look into each other's eyes.

SARAH
That's what I'm saying.

TIM
And I feel it too. His presence. In all things, as much as... in whatever form, and --

SARAH
He's living with another family.

Silence.

TIM
What... family?

Sarah looks away. She rises. She walks unsteadily toward the edge of the roof.

SARAH
Another family from the school.

Tim rises, his eyes never leaving her body.

SARAH (CONT'D)
And you know what else?

TIM
(quiet)
What?

Sarah is at the edge now. Surrounded by falling darkness.

SARAH
I'm going to get him back.

INT. SARAH AND DAVID'S APARTMENT - NEXT MORNING

David wakes, in an empty bed. He looks around. Sarah is not there.

INT. SARAH AND DAVID'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN

Tim is eating a bowl of cereal. David enters. He seems distracted. A heavy silence.

DAVID
You seen Sarah?

TIM
I think she left early.
(then)
School maybe?

David glances into the living room. Tim's disheveled bedding is strewn over the couch.

DAVID
She doesn't work there anymore.

TIM
(beat)
Then I don't know.

David leans over the sink, closing his eyes.

DAVID
She needs help, Tim.

Tim stands, awkward, facing his brother's back.

TIM
But you know what I think?

DAVID
What?

TIM
That she's going to figure it out herself.

DAVID
(an edge)
Oh, really.

TIM
One way or the other.

David turns around suddenly.

DAVID

"One way or the other?" What does
that mean? What does that even
fucking *mean*?

A beat, as Tim looks at him.

TIM

It means you have no choice.

INT. SARAH'S MINI-VAN - PARKED - DAY

Sarah sits in her car, the engine idling. She's wearing her
clothes from the night before. Staring intently out the
window at something.

WIDEN TO REVEAL

A dingy row house at the end of the block.

Adam's father, JOE, 35, is leaving the house. He's handsome
in a battered way. He wears jeans and a brown Carhartt
Jacket over a flannel shirt. A few days of scruff on his
face. He looks burdened, preoccupied.

Joe walks to his Ford Probe parked at the curb, gets in and
drives off.

Sarah waits a beat, then slowly follows him in her car.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Sarah follows Joe's car as he pulls into a side street, parks
and walks up to a LOADING DOCK.

Sarah remains out side the alley, watching as...

A MAN, 55, salt and pepper hair, wearing a nylon jacket and
dark slacks comes out onto the DOCK to meet Joe. The man
hands Joe an envelope.

Joe glances inside it, his face falling. The two men have a
brief discussion. The older man says a few words, shakes
hands with Joe, then disappears back through the door.

There's an air of sorrow about the whole thing.

Joe remains on the dock a moment, staring out into the alley.
His thoughts unreadable.

Then he jumps off the dock and heads quickly down the
opposite end of the alley, leaving his car.

EXT. RUN DOWN AVENUE - DAY

Bail bonds. A liquor store. A check cashing emporium.

Sarah follows Joe as he walks, at a discreet distance, in her car.

He ducks into a DIVE BAR. Sarah parks her car across the street.

INT. DIVE BAR - DAY

Dim, filtered light. Joe sits at stool at the end, a beer in front of him.

Sarah enters, letting her eyes adjust.

She orders a scotch from the BARTENDER, and sits a few stools away from Joe. She does not look at him.

They drink. A beat of silence. Then.

JOE
I know who you are.

SARAH
Oh yeah?

JOE
You're a teacher. At St. Monica's.
(then)
I know 'cause I seen you.
My son goes there.

She looks at him, finally and shrugs.

SARAH
It's a big school.

JOE
Maybe you seen him.

SARAH
I don't know. Lot of kids there.

They drink.

JOE
Not teaching today, huh.

SARAH
No.

JOE
Or maybe it's recess and you're
here for milk and cookies.

SARAH
Just tell me when nap time is.

JOE
Now you're talking.
(beat)
His name's Adam.

SARAH
Doesn't sound familiar.

JOE
He's special needs. You'd
recognize him if you saw him.

A beat.

Sarah gets off her stool, goes to the jukebox and punches in
a selection. *Bob Seger's "Fire Lake"* bleeds out of the
speakers.

They listen to it for while.

Sarah closes her eyes, sways to the music. Joe watches her.

The chorus comes around. It's kind of haunting.

JOE (CONT'D)
You know what this song 'supposed
to be about?

SARAH
I gather it's about a "Fire Lake."

JOE
Wow, you are a teacher.

She walks over to him, casual.

SARAH
You send your son to a regular
school.

JOE
Until they kick him out.

SARAH
Not a special education program?

JOE
With what money?

SARAH
You're asking me?

JOE
Yeah, right.

Joe stares at his beer. Sarah watches him carefully.

JOE (CONT'D)
He's a foster kid, right? And the agency claimed they didn't know about his condition. We thought we were getting a...

SARAH
Normal kid?

JOE
(nods)
I feel like an asshole but, it's a burden, and... you can't just give him back.

SARAH
Really? They don't let you dump him?

JOE
Glad you weren't my teacher.

Sarah moves one stool closer.

SARAH
You better believe it.

Joe laughs, unsure, then stares into his drink.

JOE
He's a sweet kid but if you're expecting... Rain Man, or like a math genius or a, you know, classical fucking pianist you're out of luck.

SARAH
I hear a lot of these kids are gifted in some way. You just have to recognize what it is.

JOE
He's gifted with staring at the
fucking TV all day.
(then)
So am I.

Sarah takes a step toward him, her body alive. "Fire Lake" continues play.

They don't take their eyes off each other.

A long, sexually charged beat.

INT. DIVE MOTEL - DAY

Dim light through the ratty curtains. A bottle of Vodka on the night table.

Joe and Sarah, on the bed, fucking. Joe is lying down. Sarah, straddling him.

SARAH

As her hips rise and fall. Her body straining. Her eyes closed, moving behind her lids.

JOE

Looking intently up at her body. His thumbs tracing her upper arms where...

Her cut marks are visible on her forearm. Faint scar tissue beginning to form.

SARAH
Yeah. Do that.

JOE

Squeezes her arm. One of the cuts starts to bleed.

SARAH

Her rhythm faster now... opens her eyes and knocks Joe's hands away, seizing control... and then grabbing his arms... pinning him back on the bed.

Her hips moving faster. Her back arching. Fucking him.

The sound of an ambulance in distance.

INT. DIVE MOTEL - LATER

Joe is on the bed, eyes closed.

Sarah is sitting up, with a new energy about her. She's looking toward the sliver of sunlight through the ratty curtains, her mind racing --

She looks at Joe, checking that he is asleep. She nudges him, he doesn't move.

JOE
(groggy)
Is it... three yet?

SARAH
No.

JOE
I'm supposed to pick up Adam.

Sarah looks at the clock. It reads "2:45."

SARAH
You've got another hour.

Joe turns over and goes to sleep.

Sarah rises -- moving quickly, silently -- and finds Joe's pants in a heap on the floor.

She rifles through them, finds his wallet, flips through it; Twenty bucks. A union card. A driver's license.

Then she pulls out a SCHOOL PHOTO of Adam.

ON PHOTO

Adam stares out, unkempt, a hopeful smile on his face.

Sarah keeps the photo and slips the wallet back in Joe's pants.

Then she reaches into the front pocket and quietly slips out Joe's CAR KEYS.

EXT. DIVE MOTEL - PARKING LOT - DAY

Sarah walks out of the motel. Bruised sky. The day is dying.

She walks up to Joe's Ford, unlocks the door and gets in.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

The students are just letting out. Adam makes his way through a crowd of children stepping into busses and getting picked up by cars.

Adam looks around, waiting, expectant. He's wearing his heavy back pack.

Melanie appears beside him. She points to the curb.

MELANIE
Your dad's here.

Adam looks. Joe's Ford is there, but Sarah is in the driver's seat. She has sunglasses on. She gives Adam a gentle wave.

Melanie, turned away, doesn't see that it's Sarah in the car.

ADAM
That's not...

Melanie, distracted, puts her hand on his shoulder.

MELANIE
Adam?

ADAM
But --

MELANIE
Adam look at me.

She takes his head and turning toward her. His eyes struggle to look away.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
I'm not a baby-sitter. You want to stay in school all night or do you want to go home?

Adam looks at her, unhappy with the choices.

Melanie's attention is pulled away by another student.

Adam turns and walks, unsure, toward the car.

EXT. FORD PROBE - DAY

Sarah opens the passenger door from the inside. Adam looks into the car, but does not make eye contact with her.

Sarah looks desperate.

SARAH
Get in, Adam.

Adam, confused, grips his book bag tightly, twisting the strap in his hand.

ADAM
Where's my Dad?

SARAH
It's okay. He told me to come pick
you up.

ADAM
My Dad Joe? You know Joe?

SARAH
(nods)
I do. I know Joe.

ADAM
Old Joe Crow. My Dad crow. Likes
to crow. Which is something a grey
elephant could stomp on.
(then)
Except that birds clean elephants
which is known as sym-bi-osis.

SARAH
I'm going... I'm going to take you
home now.

Adam lingers outside the car door, awkwardly chewing on the
strap of his backpack, trying to calm himself.

ADAM
Home...

Adam looks away, agitated. A long beat.

SARAH
Unless there's somewhere else you
want to go?

ADAM
Yes.

SARAH
Where?

ADAM
Uganda.

Silence.

SARAH
That's in Africa.

ADAM
(nodding)
It's where the most amazing
elephant sanctuary is. Can we go
there?

A beat.

SARAH
We can try.

ADAM
Are you serious?

SARAH
Get in.

Adam's face explodes with joy.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY

Garza speaks with David. David's face is ashen.

GARZA
We're ready for the identification.

David catches his breath.

DAVID
I... I need to reach Sarah.

GARZA
You want to call her?

David just stares ahead.

DAVID
She's not answering. And I don't
know where she is.

INT. FORD PROBE - MOVING - DAY

The school, receding in the background. Sarah, at the
wheel, takes a breath and steadies herself.

Adam beside her, clutching his backpack.

ADAM
It's a really long flight.

SARAH
Hours and hours.

ADAM
Wowie zowie. Are there movies on
the plane?

SARAH
And TV shows.

ADAM
Animal Planet? Whale wars? River
monsters?

SARAH
We'll have to see.

Adam, anxious, taps the window with his fingers.

ADAM
I've never been on an airplane.

Sarah slows to a stop for a red light.

She glances in the REAR VIEW MIRROR and sees...

A POLICE CRUISER, a few cars back.

Sarah tenses. Then, across the intersection, she notices a
WHITE CASTLE.

SARAH
You want to get a hamburger first?

ADAM
(lighting up)
White Castle?

SARAH
You got it.

ADAM
Not Popeye's.

SARAH
Never.

ADAM
Can I get a slider?

SARAH
Yes.

ADAM
Can I get two sliders?

SARAH

Yes.

Sarah keeps her eyes on the Police Cruiser, which is still behind them.

ADAM

Can I get three sliders?

SARAH

Okay.

The light turns green. Sarah accelerates through the intersection toward the WHITE CASTLE.

ADAM

Can I get four?

SARAH

Only four?

Adam closes his eyes and throws his hands in the air.

ADAM

This is amazing, I'll tell you that much.

INT. DAVID'S CAR - PARKED - DAY

David, a thousand yard stare out the window.

Reveal he's across from THE COUNTY MORGUE.

David turns and looks out toward the highway.

There's a large, bright sign by the trees. The sign says: "Meadowlands." There's an arrow on the sign, pointing in the opposite direction.

David looks back toward the morgue.

Det. Garza has appeared on the front steps, hands at his sides, waiting. A ghost.

David waves to him, then hands shaking, pulls out his cell phone.

He punches Sarah's number -- one last time.

We hear Sarah's voice mail pick up. David closes his eyes.

INT. COUNTY MORGUE - HALLWAY - DAY

Industrial. Fluorescent lights.

Garza and David walk slowly, silently down the hallway.

Garza nods toward a set of doors at the end of the hallway.

GARZA

We're here.

Partial view -- through a window in the door as we approach:
the silhouette of a CORONER, in a lab coat, beside a gurney.

David slows, holding his stomach. His breath, fast and shallow.

DAVID

I don't think I'm going to make it.

Garza places his hand on David's shoulder.

INT. MORGUE ROOM - DAY

A small body lies under a white sheet on the tray. David and Garza position themselves next to it.

David is breathing fast and shallow. He's here and not here.

Hank pulls back the sheet.

David looks down.

ON GARZA, listening to David scream. The scream is loud and long. An animal in pain.

GARZA

Motionless, unblinking.

The scream, echoing into silence.

INT. COUNTY MORGUE - HALLWAY - DAY

David and Garza. David's face is wet, his eyes hollow. But there's an eerie sense of relief in his body.

DAVID

And he did this to other kids?

GARZA

Five. That we know of.

DAVID

How did he do it?

Garza looks away.

GARZA
It's not important.

DAVID
(a flash of anger)
Just tell me how he killed them.

A beat.

GARZA
He cut some of their throats with,
it appeared to be some kind of
serrated knife. Like a steak
knife. Others he strangled with a
rope.
(then)
I'm not going to tell you they
didn't suffer.

DAVID
But you got him.

GARZA
Not exactly.

DAVID
I thought...

GARZA
He hanged himself. He was dead
when we found him.

A beat of silence.

DAVID
Who was he?

GARZA
Nobody.

DAVID
Must have been somebody.

GARZA
Must have been.

INT. WHITE CASTLE - DAY

Sarah, energized, watches Adam eat a slider. There are four
other sliders in front of him. She can't take her eyes off
of him.

SARAH
You enjoying that?

ADAM
Are you nuts? It's the best!

SARAH
I'm glad, Adam.

ANGLE ON DOOR

As a POLICE OFFICER enters the restaurant, and stands in line at the counter.

Sarah sees him. She tenses.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Finish that up sweetie.

ADAM
We just got here.

SARAH
I know, but --

ADAM
Where's your food?

SARAH
I'm not hungry.

ADAM
If I get four and you get four then we'll have eight.

SARAH
That's right.

ADAM
We will have ate eight!

SARAH
(distracted)
Hey, how about that.

Suddenly, Sarah's cell VIBRATES. She looks down, checking it.

The screen says: DAVID: 2 MISSED MESSAGES."

Sarah rises suddenly.

ADAM
Where are you going?

SARAH
The bathroom.

ADAM
(slight panic)
Are you coming back?

SARAH
Yes.

Adam satisfied, goes back to eating.

Sarah heads quickly for the bathroom. She passes the police officer on the way. He glances up at her. She keeps walking.

INT. SARAH AND DAVID'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

David is comforted by a Ashley, Brent and Tim.

Head bowed, David clutches a cell phone in his hand. Tim rests his hand on his brother's shoulder.

INT. WHITE CASTLE - BATHROOM - DAY

Sarah locks the door, stares at herself in the mirror, holding her cell phone. A fluorescent light flickers above.

She taps her cell, to play back the message: David's voice, frantic, tinny bleeds out from the phone.

DAVID (V.O.)
Sarah, where are you? I've been
trying for hours. Please call me
back. They found --

Sarah taps the screen, her breath quickening, killing David's voice.

She closes her eyes. Striking the information from her mind.

Sarah opens her eyes. As a thought comes to her.

Her hands shaking, she taps her cell again -- finding an older EMAIL from David.

The subject line is "At the zoo." There's a video file attached. She taps on it.

We hear Jessie's voice:

JESSIE (O.S.)
Where do the animals live when
they're not here?

SARAH's eyes flicker and she seems to calm as she watches...

ON VIDEO - FULL SCREEN

EXT. CENTRAL PARK ZOO - DAY

Sarah is walking through the animal exhibits with Jessie. She's holding his hand. She carries her laptop and backpack full of dissertation materials.

Sarah is smiling, the sun on her face. Jessie is laughing. A perfect day.

SARAH
In their natural habitat.

JESSIE
The jungle?

SARAH
Or the plains. Or the veldt. Read
the signs, they tell you.

Jessie looks around the zoo.

JESSIE
This is their home environment now.

SARAH
(nods)
Ours too.
(pointing)
Look: monkeys.

JESSIE
Awesome!

They walk to the OUTDOOR MONKEY EXHIBIT. David zooms in on them: the monkey's are quiet. Hunkered down in the close groups. Alert, watchful.

SARAH (O.S.)
That's the mama. And the baby.

JESSIE (O.S.)
Their cage isn't big enough.

David pans back to Sarah as she strokes Jessie's hair.

SARAH
At least they're safe.

JESSIE
From what?

SARAH
Their natural enemies.

JESSIE
Nothing can hurt them?

SARAH
As far as I know.

JESSIE
Look what she's doing.

SARAH
Picking bugs out of his hair.

JESSIE
That's nasty.

SARAH
The bugs have to eat too.

JESSIE
Do the animals believe in God?

SARAH
You'd have to ask them.

JESSIE
Is animal heaven the same as people
heaven?

SARAH
I don't think so.

JESSIE
Why not?

SARAH
Maybe this place is their heaven.

JESSIE
The zoo? Yikes.
(then)
Is she *eating* the bugs off him?

We hear David's soft laughter from behind the camera.

SARAH
Looks like it.

JESSIE
Why does the mother *do* that?

Sarah turns slightly, to the camera.

SARAH
That's just what she does.

In the distance, the dull roar-screech of an elephant.

BACK TO SCENE

Sarah, gripping the cell phone, her breath, fast and shallow.

INT. WHITE CASTLE - DAY

Sarah exits the bathroom, desperation in her eyes.

She approaches Adam, who's eating his last slider.

And sees --

THE POLICE OFFICER

Seated at a table directly across from them.

The Police Officer is hunched over his tray of fries and sliders. His eyes are closed.

Sarah watches as he makes the sign of the cross and prays silently over his food.

He opens his eyes, glances up and sees Sarah looking at him. He nods, smiles.

Sarah, anxious, touches Adam on the shoulder.

SARAH
(hushed)
Let's go.

ADAM
Uganda?

SARAH
You bet.

EXT. NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE - DAY

The Ford Probe weaves through traffic under grey skies.

INT. FORD PROBE - DAY

Sarah, anxious, looks up at an approaching sign:

NEWARK AIRPORT

Adam looks at her, smiles. Sarah veers off onto the exit.

EXT. NEWARK AIRPORT - DAY

The car heads into a large parking lot.

INT./EXT. FORD PROBE - DAY

Sarah gets out of the car, opens the door for Adam and takes his hand.

They walk quickly across the lot, then across the roadway, in a continuous shot through a line of taxis and shuttle vans toward...

THE TERMINAL

Where they pass through the glass doors.

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - DAY

Sarah stops suddenly, under the hard fluorescent lights, and looks around, struggling to get her bearings.

The faces of travellers, harried, careening in all directions, loom into frame.

Adam looks around, taking it all in with wonder.

Sarah, frantic, trying to process, scans the arrival and departure monitors, her eyes falling on the word "INTERNATIONAL" above

A DELTA AIRLINES COUNTER

Sarah leads Adam quickly through the throng of travelers up to the counter, where a uniformed Delta employee, A WOMAN, 34, stands before a computer.

DELTA EMPLOYEE

May I help you?

Sarah, breathless, looks around. She's sweating. Her eyes fall on a SECURITY GUARD by an escalator.

DELTA EMPLOYEE (CONT'D)

Ma'am?

SARAH

I... I...

The woman is looking directly at her. Sarah under pressure, tries to think.

SARAH (CONT'D)

... I forgot our passports.

Sarah turns away from the counter suddenly, grabbing Adam's hand and walking back through the crowd, jostling a FAMILY with a cart full of luggage.

She weaves through the throng of travelers, many of whom seem to be staring at her.

She's moving faster now, and Adam is struggling to keep up, distracted by the sights and sounds.

Sarah, almost running now, leads Adam back toward the glass exit doors and flood of grey daylight.

INT. FORD PROBE - MOVING - DAY

Sarah, expressionless, drives down the highway. Lost in her own world.

ADAM
Is there another airport?

SARAH
No.
(then)
Change of plan.

Adam slaps both sides of his face with his hands.

ADAM
What!

SARAH
The trip doesn't really look
...feasible.

ADAM
Then where are we going?

A beat.

SARAH
It's a surprise.

ADAM
I don't know if I like surprises.

SARAH
I don't blame you.

ADAM
In fact I *know* that I *know* that I
don't like surprises.
(beat)
We're not going home... are we?

Sarah looks at him, her breath shallow, an indescribable pain etched on her face.

SARAH

Yes. We have to go home.

Adam closes his eyes and rubs his head against the window glass for comfort.

INT. FORD PROBE - MOVING - DAY

Sarah drives, looking around trying to get her bearings.

It's a wasteland here. Bail bonds. Fast food. Auto body shops. Nothing looks familiar.

SARAH

We're fine. Okay? Everything's going to be fine. I know exactly where we are... I just have to check --

Sarah doesn't know where she is. It starts to rain.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Sarah abruptly turns the car around in the middle of the street and heads in the opposite direction.

INT. FORD PROBE - MOVING

It's raining harder now. Sarah's looking out the windshield, agitated, for something, anything familiar.

She looks up. There's a large sign, up ahead:

"WELCOME TO THE MEADOWLANDS"

And an ACCESS ROAD, just past the sign, leading off the highway into a vast muddy landscape.

Sarah abruptly turns onto it.

EXT. ACCESS ROAD - DAY

The car, heading away from the highway, receding down the access road.

INT. FORD PROBE - DAY

Sarah drives down the muddy access road. Out the window, an industrial purgatory passes by.

Nothing lives here. Nothing looks familiar.

EXT. NEW JERSEY WETLANDS - DAY

A dumping ground. Sound of wind. A steady rain.

Half-filled garbage bags scattered about. A child's broken big wheel, tipped over. A bare, withered tree. A single glittering Christmas ornament dangling from it.

Lost, useless things.

The car is parked at the edge of the vast, marshy lake.

INT. FORD PROBE - DAY

ADAM
Who lives here?
(off her silence)
Who's habitat? What animals?

Sarah stares out the windshield. Lost inside herself.

SARAH
Nobody. Nothing lives here.

Beat.

ADAM
Do we know the way out?

Beat.

SARAH
No.

Beat. Adam looks around, anxious.

ADAM
Are we lost?

Sarah says nothing.

Reveal her cell phone in her hand, resting in her lap.

On the screen, David's messages, marked "urgent."

ADAM (CONT'D)
What are we doing? What's going on?

Sarah lifts her cell, trembling, and holds it to her ear.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Hey what are you doing? Talking on
the phone? Listening to a message?
Someone from the airport?
(MORE)

Did they find us a flight? Did they
get us our tickets?

Sarah ignores him. Steeling herself to listen to David's
message.

Her face betrays only a flicker of expression. Her mouth
drops open slightly.

She lets the phone clatter to the floor.

And then stares out into nothing.

Beyond the windshield, only a few feet from the front bumper
of the car, is the inky void of the lake.

Sarah looks into it's unfathomable blackness.

Adam, restless, begins rocking back and forth, clinging tight
to his bookbag.

Sensing danger.

Then.

Sarah reaches up and grips the steering wheel tight.

She puts her foot on the gas pedal, and slowly... slowly...
revs the engine.

The car inches forward... to the very edge of the
embankment... the lake.

EXT. FORD PROBE - DAY

The car inching forward... the front tires closer to the
water's edge.

INT. FORD PROBE - DAY

Adam looks confused, agitated. Sarah, rigid, her eyes void
of hope.

SARAH
(quiet)
I'm sorry.

The sound of Sarah revving the car, louder.

As She closes her eyes.

And Adam looks at her.

And the realization comes to him.

As his body goes rigid.

ADAM
You're going to leave me.

She doesn't look at him.

The car inches closer to the edge.

Adam sits up.

ADAM (CONT'D)
You're going to leave me.

Sarah grips the steering wheel tighter.

ADAM (CONT'D)
YOU'RE GOING TO LEAVE ME.

Sarah takes her foot off the gas.

The car stops moving forward.

SARAH
I...

ADAM
DON'T LEAVE ME!

And then, with all his force, Adam begins to HIT Sarah.

His face, contorted in fear and rage. His body rocking violently. A closed loop of despair.

ADAM (CONT'D)
No.. don't... no don't... no
don't... no don't.. no don't...

Over and over, Adam's small fists land blows on her head, and face and shoulders.

SARAH

Just sitting there, taking it. Her body absorbing his blows. All his rage. Over and over he hits her.

And then... a quick intake of breath. As something awakens inside her. And she sobs. Tears streaming down her face.

Sarah reaches out and takes hold of Adam's small fists in her hands.

As Adam's body jerks, his momentum continuing.

SARAH
It's okay. It's okay.

She looks into his eyes. Seeing him, maybe, for the first time.

Then she gathers Adam in her arms. He twists violently in her grasp but after a moment... he begins to settle.

She holds him tight, containing him.

SARAH (CONT'D)
(soft)
It's okay, baby.

Slowly.

Slowly.

Slowly.

Adam calms.

SARAH (CONT'D)
I'm not going to leave you, Adam.

Until there is stillness.

And they're both out of breath.

SARAH (CONT'D)
I promise... I'm never going to
leave you.

Adam, his breath slowing, stares ahead without emotion.

Silence.

Rain on the roof.

They both stare out.

A long beat.

Adam looks at her. His mood shifting. Then.

ADAM
You want me to read to you?

SARAH
What?

Adam reaches down and unzips his back pack.

We see it's crammed with stolen library books.

Adam reaches in and pulls one out.

Sarah sees the book.

Her hands fly to her face.

The book is "*Horton Hatches an Egg*."

Adam opens it to a random page. He begins reading aloud, in a halting, awkward voice:

ADAM

Did he run?

He did not!

Horton stayed on that nest.

He held his head high

And he threw out his chest...

"Shoot if you must

I won't run away!"

And he looked at the hunters

As much as to say..."

(beat)

"I said what I said

and I meant what I meant:

An elephant is faithful

one hundred per cent."

A long, quiet beat.

Sarah reaches out and takes hold of Adam's hand.

Their fingers entwine.

They stare out.

The rain coming down.

THE END