## Black Sunshine

Tad Williams

FADE IN:

EXT.—PIERSON HOUSE, 1976—NIGHT

From blackness to shadowy trees—a tangled orchard in moonlight. We move through them toward a three-story turn-of-the-century house with lights in the windows. As we track in, we hear Black Sabbath’s “Iron Man” playing distantly on a stereo.

CUT TO:

ERIC’S DREAM POV—Micro close-up on a carpet—it’s ALIVE, squirming with intricate patterns. “Iron Man” is ear-splitting now.

YOUNG JANICE

Eric! Eric, talk to me!

YOUNG ERIC’S POV swivels up from the carpet—things are dreamlike, compressed, distorted—it’s an acid trip. YOUNG JANICE is so close that her face is distorted. We dimly see she is fifteen, maybe sixteen, wearing ’70s clothes.

YOUNG JANICE

Eric, I want to get out of here...!

YOUNG BRENT lurches into view, looming above JANICE. He’s chunky, teenage, clutching his hands against his stomach, panicky but trying to stay calm.

YOUNG BRENT

Shit, it’s bad—Topher’s freaking out for real up there.

YOUNG JANICE

What’s going on, Brent? Where’s Kimmy?

YOUNG BRENT

I don’t know! I can’t find her. I think...I think something bad happened! I tried to help Topher, and I...

Just now realizing, BRENT lifts his hands away from his body and stares at them. They are smeared with blood. His eyes bug out.

YOUNG JANICE

Oh my God!

Something is THUMPING on the ceiling above—something heavy thrashing around upstairs. As the POV looks upward, the ceiling suddenly becomes TRANSPARENT, a spreading puddle of translucency as though the ceiling were turning to smeared glass. A dark human shape (YOUNG TOPHER) is lying on the floor of the room above, face pressed against the transparent ceiling as though it were a picture window, looking down on them. All we can make out of him is a huddled shape, distorted face, and a single staring eye.R

YOUNG TOPHER

Hey, Pierson—I seeeeee you...!

YOUNG JANICE

(screaming)

Eric!

FADE with JANICE’s cry still echoing, as we

CUT TO:

INT.—ERIC’S MOTEL—NIGHT

ADULT ERIC as he sits bolt upright in a motel bed, sweating.

YOUNG JANICE

(very faint now)

Eric!

ERIC PIERSON is sweaty, trembling. He’s in his early forties, nice-looking, slender, but at this moment he could be twenty years older. He fumbles for a cigarette and sits smoking in the dark, as we

ROLL CREDITS

EXT.—THE PIERSON HOUSE, NOW—MORNING

ADULT ERIC drives down a long, dirt driveway. From atop a rise we see the house—the same house, but now sitting in a wide, empty DIRT FIELD several acres across: the orchard has been cut down. The house looks grim—peeling paint, screen door hanging halfway off. Hesitantly, he moves up the front steps and through the front door.

INT.—HOUSE

There’s nothing Gothic or creepy about the place, it’s just stripped and empty—carpets removed, no furniture, wallpaper peeling. ERIC hesitates again, then moves toward the dark stairwell. He flicks the switch—no light. He looks up the stairs, but a noise outside distracts him. A car with “Red Letter Realty” has pulled up beside his and someone is getting out.

EXT.—HOUSE

ERIC has returned to the dry front lawn, and stands with his back to the drive, looking up at the house. As an attractive, dark-haired woman in her late thirties approaches, he talks over his shoulder to her.

ERIC

Things seem smaller when you see them after a long time. I remembered this place as being so huge...

JANICE

That’s funny, because I remembered you as being much shorter.

ERIC turns, startled.

ERIC

Janice? Janice? Oh, my God, what are you doing...

(looks at car)

Jesus. Are you the...

JANICE

The real-estate agent? Well, someone else in the office is actually handling it, but when I heard you were coming back to town to sign the sale papers, I said...

(shrugs)

Well, it seemed to make sense.

ERIC is still staring at her.

ERIC

You look...you look great.

JANICE

I look old. But thanks. You look okay yourself. I was sorry to hear about your grandmother.

ERIC

Well, ninety-two. We should all last so long. I thought she’d sold this years ago.

JANICE

She wasn’t stupid, Eric. She was making the developers bid up the price—you can see this was the last property here. She did you a good turn.

ERIC

(turns back to the house)

It’s hard to believe, huh? Those days seem like... like a dream.

JANICE

Not to me. I live around here, remember?

ERIC turns at the harshness in her voice.

ERIC

Is that bad?

JANICE

You didn’t want to stay much. No, I guess it’s all right. Not as exciting as Los Angeles, I’m sure.

(she frowns, then tries to smile)

But it’s nice to send the kids off to school without firearms training.

ERIC

You...have kids?

JANICE

Callie and Jack—eight and six. But no, not at the moment. They’re with their dad for the summer. We’re divorced.

ERIC is staring at the house again.

ERIC

I was just going to visit Topher, then drive back, but...hey, would you like to have dinner? It’d be nice to catch up.

JANICE

You’re...going to visit Topher?

ERIC

Thought I should. You want to come along?

JANICE

(shakes her head; then:)

You haven’t seen him lately. It’s bad.

ERIC

(shrugs)

Yeah, that’s what they told me. So, dinner. What do you say?

JANICE

I don’t think it’s a good idea, Eric.

ERIC

Just talk. Catch up. I...really feel like I need to.

JANICE

You don’t want to catch up, Eric. It’s better to leave things alone.

ERIC

C’mon...Jan-Jan

JANICE looks at him for a long moment, both touched and irritated by the use of the name. She rolls her eyes like a schoolgirl.

JANICE

Asshole.

FADE TO:

EXT.—LAS LOMAS CONVALESCENT HOSPITAL—DAY

It’s a quiet, decent place. ERIC pulls into the parking lot.

INT.—HOSPITAL

ERIC walks down the hallway, past various geriatrics in wheelchairs and one young man twisted with palsy. As ERIC’s gaze sweeps across the young man’s face, a voice speaks behind him.

OLD WOMAN

Stop! Stop!

He turns. A scowling OLD WOMAN in a wheelchair is following him.

OLD WOMAN

It’s all a mistake! Call my mother!

ERIC walks on a little faster than before.

CUT TO:

INT.—HOSPITAL LOUNGE

The room is filled with old people on benches, in chairs, mostly staring into space. ERIC is talking with a NURSE in the lounge doorway. She points toward the corner. As ERIC approaches, looking around, he doesn’t see TOPHER until the last moment—then a look of SHOCK runs across his face.

FLASH CUT TO:

TOPHER as a teenager in 1976, handsome, blond, surfer-ish, a shit-eating grin on his face as he lounges on a couch.

TOPHER

Eric, my man! Have I got something for you...

CUT TO:

TOPHER NOW, in his wheelchair. He is startlingly grotesque, hairless and hunched, but his SKIN is the worst part—a crusty brown SHELL over his whole body, as though he’s covered with dried mud. He sits as stiff as if paralyzed. Two pale blue eyes peer out of the masklike face.

ERIC

(trying to cover his shock)

Topher, man. Long time. Long time... I’m sorry I haven’t been to see you in a while. Life, man, it’s just...you know.

A horrible silence. TOPHER peers outward, not even looking at ERIC.

ERIC (cont.)

I never...I never stop being sorry, man. It was just so screwed up. You...we never thought...

NURSE

(appearing over his shoulder)

Is everything all right?

ERIC suddenly gets up and lurches toward the door.

CLOSE-UP: TOPHER’S FACE, staring at nothing.

In the doorway, the NURSE nods understandingly.

NURSE

It’s very disturbing if you haven’t seen it before.

ERIC

(still in shock)

It’s been years...

NURSE

It’s come on very badly lately. Nobody knows what it is. It’s flexible at the joints, though, when he moves. When we move him, that is—he doesn’t do anything himself, doesn’t talk... The skin tissue is unusual—hard and brittle, like... what is it insects make? A chrysalis?

(she looks at ERIC)

I’m sorry, am I upsetting you? Is he a relative?

ERIC

(shaking his head)

High school friend...

FADE TO:

EXT.—RURAL ROAD—DAY, MINUTES LATER

ERIC is driving, face troubled. He fumbles for a tape and pushes it into the player. Something contemporary begins to fill the car, as we

CUT TO:

INT.—HOSPITAL—SAME TIME

CLOSE-UP on TOPHER’s strange face. The eyes blink for the first time, slow-motion, as we

CUT TO:

INT.—REAL-ESTATE OFFICE—SAME TIME

JANICE, phone against her ear, is looking for something on top of her desk, holding a styrofoam cup of coffee in her hand.

JANICE

...I think they’re looking for something a bit less pricey...

She looks at the coffee, which is suddenly black as ink. There is black on her hand, too, and smeared up her arm. She drops the black liquid to the floor, but her desk is covered in black smears too, and it’s all over her legs and skirt and chair. She screams and leaps up, rubbing frantically at herself, as we

CUT TO:

TOPHER’S EYES: Another SLOW BLINK

INT.—ERIC’S CAR

The contemporary music abruptly twists sideways into the drum-and-screams intro of the Stones’ “Sympathy for the Devil.” Eric stares at the tape player, starts to pop the tape, then hears:

TOPHER

Hook a right, man—time we got back to your place.

The high-school TOPHER is sitting in the passenger seat, grinning, thumb pointing down a side road. ERIC gasps and hits the brakes. The car fishtails to a stop on the side of the road. ERIC stares. The passenger seat is EMPTY. The music is back to normal.

CUT TO:

INT.—REAL ESTATE OFFICE

JANICE is standing up, perfectly clean, her desk clean too, everything fine but for the coffee she spilled on the floor. All her co-workers are STARING at her, as we

CUT TO:

EXT.—GAS STATION—MINUTES LATER

ERIC has pulled his car into a small service station. The CASHIER, a fifty-something skinny guy with a beard and ponytail, wanders out. ERIC gets out and leans against the car, stunned.

CASHIER

It’s self-serve. Hey, you feel all right?

ERIC

Yeah, I guess so.

CASHIER

We got a bathroom if you need to puke or something.

ERIC

No, I...I think I just...had a flashback.

CASHIER

(chortles)

I know about that shit, man. Between acid and that Post Traumatic Stress shit, I’ve had so many of them things I prolly spend more time in the old days than I do in the right-now...

ERIC is looking back over the fields and through the trees, as we

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.—RESTAURANT—NIGHT

ERIC and JANICE eating dinner in an upscale Mexican restaurant. She has dolled up a bit, but has a sweater over her shoulders as though unwilling to relax too much. Neither is eating very heartily.

ERIC

...Had no idea. Oh my God, he looks like...like...

JANICE

Like a monster. I know.

ERIC

It really got to me. I kind of freaked out on the ride back.

JANICE looks troubled, but also angry.

JANICE

Yeah. Tension and guilt will do that to you.

ERIC

Are you saying I should feel guilty, Janice? I do. Of course I do. But it’s not all my fault.

JANICE

You sure left town like you thought it was.

She has been fidgeting with her silverware. She waves a waiter over.

JANICE (cont.)

Could you please give me a clean fork, if it’s not too much to ask? This fork is dirty. It’s disgusting.

The waiter leaves. ERIC looks at her. She stares defiantly back.

JANICE (cont.)

Well, you did, didn’t you?

ERIC

What did you want me to do? I had a scholarship that fall, remember? Did you want me not to go to UCLA?

JANICE

To become a journalist and save the world.

ERIC

To become a journalist, yeah, even if I didn’t know it then. Should I have just stayed?

JANICE

Of course not. Then you would have had to break up with me face-to-face.

ERIC

C’mon—it was as much your idea as mine, wasn’t it?

JANICE

Maybe. But I didn’t get to leave. I had to go to that high school for two years. How do you think that felt? To have people pointing at me, whispering about me...?

ERIC

If you want me to say I’m sorry, Janice, I will. I’m sorry.

(He toys with his food.)

Didn’t you have anyone else to talk to? What about Brent?

JANICE

Oh, sure, Brent. I hardly saw him. He got all weird—started reading like Tibetan Buddhism and stuff.

ERIC

Brent? Reading books?

JANICE

He’s a lot different, Eric. You’d hardly know him. He’s done really well, actually. He lost a lot of weight, married some ex-model, owned his own advertising agency in Los Angeles for a while, then sold out and moved back here...

ERIC

Advertising agency? Oh, shit, he wasn’t the Zenger in Zenger-Kimball, was he? That’s too weird.

JANICE

Like I said, you wouldn’t recognize him...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.—BRENT’S HOUSE—SAME TIME

The ADULT BRENT ZENGER looks fit and successful—nice haircut, buff body, expensive casual clothes. His wife TRACY and daughter JOANIE look up from the couch where they’re watching television. BRENT heads for the closet to hang up his coat.

BRENT

The man is home.

TRACY

Hi.

JOANIE

Hi, Daddy. The class hamster had babies.

BRENT

I’d love to hear about it after I get myself one little, much-deserved drink.

TRACY

You’re home late.

BRENT

Dinner with a client...

He reaches the closet and throws open the door, starts to hang up his coat, then sees there’s a light of some kind at the back of the closet. BRENT is surprised. He pushes through the coat hangers and discovers a door on the back of the closet, where clearly none has ever been before. He steps through it and into an EXACT DUPLICATE of the living room he’s just left.

BRENT

What the hell...?

TRACY

(looking up in alarm)

Who are you? What are you doing in here?

JOANIE

Mommy? Mommy!

BRENT

What are you talking about...?

TRACY

(pulling JOANIE backward toward the phone)

I don’t know what you think you’re doing, but I’m calling the police. Don’t move!

JOANIE

(crying)

Who is that man, Mommy?

Terrified, stunned, BRENT takes a stumbling step backward and falls into the closet. After a confused moment, he fights his way out of darkness again.

TRACY

Brent? What on earth are you doing? Do you need some help?

JOANIE

Daddy’s tangled up in the coats!

CLOSE UP—BRENT, pale and shaken, as we

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT.—RESTAURANT PARKING LOT—NIGHT

JANICE and ERIC are walking through the lot. She has her sweater pulled tight around her shoulders.

ERIC

...And she put all my stuff in boxes and put them out on the sidewalk with—you know those label guns? With a label on each one reading “property of shit head.” Which is how I became single again.

(a beat)

Hey, I thought you would have enjoyed hearing about my hopeless love life.

JANICE

Oh, Eric, I never wished you bad luck. Not really.

(a beat)

I’m sorry if...if I wasn’t very good company tonight. I told you this was a poor idea.

ERIC

I said I’m sorry about everything, Janice. I really am, I...I was just scared of the whole thing. You, life, what happened...

They have stopped beside his car.

JANICE

I accept the apology. I did stupid things too. Let’s just say goodnight and maybe we can be friends again. That would be something, wouldn’t it? After all this time?

ERIC

It sure would.

He reaches out and takes her hand, holding it awkwardly for a moment— he’s trying to find a way to pull her closer but she’s quietly resisting. Abruptly he drops her hand and walks to his car.

JANICE

Eric?

ERIC

Hang on a second.

He fumbles around, then pops a tape into the player and leaves the door open as he walks back. The quiet intro to Traffic’s “Low Spark of High Heeled Boys” begins to play.

JANICE

I know that.

ERIC

Of course you do. This is now officially middle-aged-people’s music.

He suddenly takes her hand again, then pulls her toward him.

ERIC (cont.)

Remember slow dancing?

JANICE

The only kind you could do. A casualty of the Disco Invasion is what you were. C’mon, Eric, stop.

ERIC

Just a dance. Better than arguing. Come on.

JANICE allows herself to be drawn slowly into a dance.

JANICE

You do know you’re going back to your motel alone, don’t you?

ERIC

All the more reason to be quiet and let me enjoy this...

They circle across the parking lot, under the lights. A foursome walks past them and makes joking comments, but sweetly—it’s a nice moment.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

EXT.—PIERSON HOUSE, 1976—NIGHT

Another quiet song rises up, supplanting Traffic’s—it’s Roxy Music’s “In Every Dream Home a Heartache.” Five people are sitting on the roof of the house. It’s a summer evening, last rays of sunset just vanishing, and the lights of other houses are far on the other side of the orchard.

Five teenagers are sitting along the edge of the roof, passing a joint. YOUNG ERIC and YOUNG JANICE are pressed close. Chunky YOUNG BRENT, wearing cutoffs and deck shoes, is dangling his feet over the edge and taking his turn with the joint. KIMMY, a small girl with glasses, a hooded sweatshirt, and overalls, sits a yard or so from him but close to YOUNG JANICE. YOUNG TOPHER sits against the chimney, swigging from a bottle of Bacardi.

YOUNG ERIC

Last night of summer.

YOUNG JANICE

Shut up. You’ll ruin it.

YOUNG BRENT

(inhaling deeply)

Nothing could ruin it but running out of dope. I love this song. Manzanera rocks so bad on this solo that it isn’t funny.

YOUNG ERIC

The last night of the last summer we’re all in high school together. The night summer vacation dies forever.

TOPHER

(reaching down to take the joint)

Oh, shit. Poetry alert!

Everybody laughs.

YOUNG ERIC

Okay, I’ll just shut up.

YOUNG JANICE

No, baby, you’re so sweet when you talk. But just be quiet for a little while, okay?

She presses in against his side. TOPHER passes the joint to KIMMY. After a hit, she starts to cough. JANICE leans over to slap her back.

YOUNG JANICE (cont.)

Kimmy, just take little hits! You always do that.

KIMMY

(raspy, almost unable to talk)

At least I didn’t throw up. This time.

TOPHER

Erky. Throw me a cigarette, man.

ERIC tosses up his pack. TOPHER takes one and lights it.

KIMMY

How long are your grandparents gone, Eric?

YOUNG ERIC

Weeks. Months. Years.

YOUNG BRENT

(laughing)

Erky is high.

YOUNG JANICE

They missed their plane. They were supposed to be back today.

The Roxy Music song has been playing under all this, and it’s building to a climax now. YOUNG TOPHER stands up and begins playing air-guitar, using the rum bottle as the guitar neck. He sings along with the song being played.

YOUNG ERIC

Yeah, and if you get too fucked up and put a foot through my grandparents’ roof, it’ll be my fucking heartache, all right. Topher, what are you doing?

YOUNG BRENT

Topher’s higher than Erky.

YOUNG JANICE

Topher, be careful...

The climax of the song comes. TOPHER strides down to the edge of the roof and braces himself, serenading the orchard and surrounding town. He begins to sing, quiet but getting louder, then bellowing the final line about blowing his mind..

As the guitar solo comes wailing in, TOPHER staggers for a moment on the edge of the roof, air-strumming the bottle. Abruptly, he pitches over the edge and vanishes. After a stunned second:

YOUNG ERIC

Shit!

KIMMY

(almost crying)

Is he hurt? Is he hurt?

YOUNG ERIC

Topher, man? You all right?

TOPHER

(weakly; offscreen)

It was all great, except the last little bit. But I think I spilled some of my Bacardi.

YOUNG BRENT

(relieved)

You are such an asshole, man!

YOUNG ERIC

Are you sure you’re okay?

As ERIC begins climbing down from the roof, TOPHER suddenly sits up.

TOPHER

Shit!

(fumbles in pockets)

If those fuckers get lost...

(finds what he’s looking for)

Ah. Far out.

YOUNG ERIC

Don’t do shit like that, man.

TOPHER

I fucking thought I smashed these or something.

YOUNG ERIC

Smashed what?

TOPHER

Let’s go in, man, put on some more tunes—I’ll show you. It’s a surprise...

As Roxy Music plays out, we

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT.—ERIC’S MOTEL—NIGHT

Just to establish the transition, we see the outside of a mid-grade side-of-the-road motel. We move in on ERIC’s room.

INT.—ERIC’S MOTEL—NIGHT

ADULT ERIC is sleeping. We move in on his face, lips moving a little, hear his voice in a dreaming whisper:

ERIC

Topher, don’t...

CUT TO:

Quick FLASH of TOPHER’s distorted current face coming out of shadow, as though it were in ERIC’s room.

ERIC wakes up, gasping, but there’s nothing in the room but a little light from the streetlights leaking through the curtain. ERIC lets his head fall back, then we hear a faint noise. ERIC sits up: he hears it. It’s someone CRYING.

Looking really disturbed, ERIC glances at the digital clock, which reads 3:17. We hear the crying a little louder—a woman’s voice, a hopeless, quiet weeping. ERIC stands up by the bed, turning his head slowly, locating the source of the sound. It’s more upsetting to him than us, because he RECOGNIZES it.

ERIC moves slowly across the dark room toward the bathroom door, which is closed. He slowly leans his head against the door and we hear the crying louder. He looks terrified. The crying gets louder.

ERIC

K-K-Ki...Kimmy?

The crying continues, a little more frightened and miserable now.

ERIC

Kimmy, is...is that you?

KIMMY

(tiny, whispery voice)

I’m so scared.

ERIC, hands shaking violently, tries the door. It’s locked.

ERIC

Kimmy, let me in.

KIMMY

I’m...scared. Eric, where is everyone? What’s happening?

Something THUMPS, as though someone has just climbed into the bathtub. The thumping gets louder—something very strange is happening in the bathroom.

ERIC

Kimmy? Kimmy!

Her weeping has changed to sounds of panicked grunts, like someone fighting for their life or being raped.

KIMMY

Why...why can’t...I...see? You told me...you told me I could see...everything!

On “everything,” the door finally pops open in ERIC’s hand. He throws on the light. The bathroom is EMPTY. He staggers back, looks wildly at the clock. It reads 3:18, as we

CUT TO:

INT.—HOSPITAL—NIGHT, SAME TIME

We see TOPHER’s strange head on a pillow, eyes open, staring straight up into the darkness. A light from outside is making tree-branch shadows flail on the walls and across his expressionless face, but he is utterly, utterly still.

CUT TO:

INT.—JANICE’S KITCHEN—NIGHT

ADULT JANICE is in her dressing gown, hugging herself against a chill, stumbling a little as though just awakened. There’s streetlight coming through the blinds and a bathroom light in the hall. She takes a glass and fills it from a dispenser bottle of water by the refrigerator, then drinks it, as we

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: RIM OF GLASS

There’s an ANT on the glass, feelers waving. JANICE makes an “urp” of shock and jerks the glass away from her mouth, then slams it down in the sink. A moment later she snatches it up again, plunges it under the faucet and washes the ANT down the drain. She looks, and there are a few ANTS on the dispenser bottle as well. A little less surprised now, but just as unhappy, she starts to lift the bottle into the sink, then snatches her hand back. There are more than a couple of ants—at least a dozen are running along the counter and in a line to the refrigerator door. She takes a napkin and flicks them off the handle, then pulls open the refrigerator, spilling out the light.

CUT TO:

INTERIOR OF REFRIGERATOR

There are MILLIONS of ANTS in the refrigerator—a boiling black mass that tumbles out the door and all over the linoleum. JANICE leaps back, shrieking and shrieking and shrieking as we go to BLACK and then, when the screams have faded,

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.—MOTEL COFFEE SHOP—MORNING

ADULT JANICE and ADULT ERIC are having coffee. They both look like hell—they clearly haven’t slept.

ERIC

I...I’ve been having bad dreams for a few weeks now. About...that night. That’s one of the reasons I decided to come back. I thought, y’know, seeing the place again...

JANICE

But not me. Just the place.

ERIC

I didn’t think you’d WANT to see me. Stop playing games. You’ve been having them too, haven’t you?

JANICE

Yeah. But it wasn’t bad at first. Just a couple of nightmares, and I used to have those all the time. But...things have started happening. In the daytime.

ERIC

Me too. Bad. Bad stuff.

JANICE

But why? It’s too weird, Eric. It doesn’t make sense. I’m scared I’m going crazy.

ERIC

I don’t think so—not both of us at the same time.

(he stands up)

Well, as long as I’m back in town, I guess it’s time to go see another old friend...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT.—BRENT’S HOUSE—HALF AN HOUR LATER

The house is big, nice, with two SUVs in the driveway. ERIC and JANICE are on the front porch.

JANICE

We could have called first...

ERIC

If he’s really Zenger-Kimball, I don’t trust ad guys on the phone.

JANICE

He’s still Brent!

ERIC

Yeah. Whatever that means after twenty-five years.

The door opens. BRENT ZENGER doesn’t look good. In fact, he looks worse than ERIC and JANICE: it’s early in the morning and he has a drink in his hand and a sour, sick expression on his face.

BRENT

Hey, Janice. Pierson. Long time.

ERIC

You don’t seem surprised to see us.

BRENT shrugs and turns, waving for them to follow him. He leads them across the entry into the large living room. The television is playing and there’s a Bacardi bottle on top of it, half-full.

BRENT

Drink?

ERIC

A bit early.

BRENT

Tracy and Joanie are out at the park.

(looks at Eric)

My wife and kid. Sit down.

ERIC

Like I said, Brent, you don’t look surprised to see us.

BRENT

Not feeling very surprised today, I guess. Watching Jenny Jones’ll do that to you—kind of burns the surprise glands right out.

ERIC

Me and Janice—we’ve been having some weird dreams. Ring any bells?

BRENT

Yeah, and it’s nice to see you, too, Pierson. It HAS been a long time. I’m doing well, thanks for asking.

JANICE

Neither of us has had much sleep, Brent. Eric doesn’t mean to be rude.

BRENT

That’s pretty good, Pierson. Back after twenty years and already she’s sticking up for you again.

(he looks around)

Do you think there’s too much white in this room? Tracy kind of bugged out on the all-white thing.

ERIC

Have you been to see Topher?

BRENT

I saw him. Once. That was enough.

JANICE

He’s gotten a lot worse.

BRENT

No shit.

ERIC

(angry)

Look—enough! Brent, man, I’m sorry I haven’t been around. You could have called me too, for that matter. But the fact is that we went different ways.

BRENT

Yeah. It happens.

ERIC

So let’s cut the bullshit, okay? I knew you in the fucking third grade, man. Being a grown-up sucks, cool, we’ll all agree. Now let’s get down to business. There’s something really strange going on. Janice and I have been having hallucinations, all about that night. THAT night. Nothing else. How about you?

BRENT

I don’t really want to spend a lot of time thinking about that shit.

ERIC

It doesn’t feel like we have much choice.

(a beat)

It’s happening to you, too, isn’t it? How long?

BRENT

I don’t know what you’re talking about.

ERIC

Don’t give me that, man, I know you. How long? Weeks?

BRENT

(after a pause)

Yeah. For a while. But it goes away sometimes.

ERIC

Maybe it did, but now it’s getting worse. We have to do something.

BRENT

(laughs)

Oh, yeah? What’s that? Write a little Sunday magazine section piece? “High School Nightmare Reunions”? Or maybe call the cops? The dream police? What the fuck do you think we can do about it, Erky?

ERIC

It’s something to do with Topher. I could feel it when I saw him. There’s something...alive in there. Angry.

JANICE

That doesn’t make any sense.

ERIC

None of this does—but it’s happening. We have to go see him. All of us. If this is something to do with...that stuff...that stuff he took...

BRENT

Talk to him? You really have turned into liberal dickhead, Pierson, just like I always thought you would. What are we going to say? “If that’s you fucking with our minds, Topher, could you please stop?” You must be joking.

ERIC

He was our friend...

BRENT

And look at him now! You think talking to that... thing is going to change anything? Is it going to change the past? Is it going to make up for what happened to him, to...to Kimmy?

Shockingly, BRENT suddenly bursts into tears—he’s had quite a lot to drink.

BRENT (cont.)

Kimmy. Oh, man, poor Kimmy... Shit!

JANICE

It’s okay, Brent. It wasn’t your fault, either...

BRENT

Okay? It fucking well is not. And if you want to go talk to that...that thing...go ahead. But don’t expect me to come with you. I wouldn’t go within a mile of that freak.

ERIC

That doesn’t make...

BRENT

Just get out. Get out of here before my wife comes home. I used to tell her about what great friends I had. Don’t fuck it up for me.

JANICE

Brent, come on...

BRENT

(shouting)

Get out of my damned house!

CUT TO:

INT.—ERIC’S CAR—MINUTES LATER

They are driving out of BRENT’s nice neighborhood.

ERIC

That went well, didn’t it?

JANICE

He’s terrified. What’s going on?

ERIC

Guess what. I’m terrified too...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.—HOSPITAL—AN HOUR LATER

JANICE and ERIC are talking to an ADMINISTRATOR at the main desk, a lady in her fifties or early sixties.

ADMINISTRATOR

I don’t quite understand what you’re asking, sir. Mr. Holland’s records are private, but I can assure you he’s been getting the best possible care.

ERIC

Who DOES have access to his records? His father’s dead—he must have a legal guardian.

ADMINISTRATOR

He has an aunt in Northern California. But I’m not sure I should be discussing any of this with you. He’s been a patient with us for almost thirteen years now. I recognize Mrs. Moorehead, but I don’t think I’ve even seen you before.

ERIC

(to JANICE)

Mrs. Moorehead?

JANICE

(to ADMINISTRATOR)

That’s fine, thanks. We were mainly wondering about whether there had been any...changes. To his condition.

ADMINISTRATOR

Only the skin problem, which seems to be getting worse.

ERIC

But what did they say when they sent him here...?

JANICE pulls him away.

ERIC (cont.)

He was in a government psychiatric hospital—under security. I still have the clippings. Would they really just let him go?

JANICE

(a little angry)

This isn’t some big investigative report, Eric. Topher hasn’t spoken or moved in years. His dad went to court and asked to have him sent here, so he’d be closer to home.

ERIC

(disgusted)

His old man must have been happy Topher couldn’t get into trouble any more.

The OLD WOMAN ERIC has seen earlier rolls out in front of them, then paces them until they stop in front of TOPHER’s door.

OLD WOMAN

(eyes wide)

You going in there?

JANICE

We’re going to see a friend.

OLD WOMAN

(grabbing ERIC’s arm)

You tell my mother I been good. Tell her I never went in there.

As they open the door, she rolls herself backward down the hall.

OLD WOMAN (cont.)

That’s where the devil lives...

The door swings open. It’s a small room, but with TOPHER at the far end it seems very large. He is sitting in his wheelchair by the bed, staring at nothing. ERIC and JANICE hesitate, then JANICE at last moves forward and sits on the bed. ERIC picks up a chair and puts himself on the other side of TOPHER.

JANICE

Eric and I are here to see you, Topher. We’ve been thinking about you a lot.

ERIC

Yeah. A lot.

JANICE

We’ve been having...bad dreams. About that night. We thought...you might be having bad dreams too.

ERIC looks at her, a little surprised; this is an unexpected approach. He struggles to find the wavelength.

ERIC

We...want to help you. God, man, we’re so sorry that this happened to you. To all of us.

TOPHER is rigid as a statue, staring past them.

ERIC (cont.)

But it isn’t anybody’s fault. It just...happened.

JANICE hesitates, then reaches out and takes TOPHER’s hand. It’s a brave act—we can sense how weird it must feel.

JANICE

I haven’t slept well in months, Topher. You know I’ve tried to help you, come visit you. How can I do that if I’m scared all the time? If I can’t get any sleep?

ERIC

We were all friends, remember? Before that... that bad night. We’re still your friends. We...we miss you.

(after a long moment, he touches TOPHER’s other hand.)

Please, man. Please.

The strange tableau falls silent, two people holding hands with a rigid monstrosity, as we

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT.—BRENT’S HOUSE—SAME TIME

ADULT BRENT is loading things into his SUV. It looks like he’s getting the family ready for a camping vacation, but not a happy one: he’s very blank and silent, even though his wife TRACY is standing at the front door, talking to him.

TRACY

Brent? What are you doing? Are we going somewhere?

He continues to load the SUV, not answering.

TRACY (cont.)

Whatever it is you’re doing, we’re not going anywhere until you talk to me. What’s going on? It’s like I don’t even know who you are anymore...!

BRENT slows and then stops in the middle of the driveway like a toy winding down. He puts his hands over his face, shoulders shaking.

TRACY

Brent? Brent, you’re scaring me...

INT.—ERIC’S CAR—LATE AFTERNOON

They are driving along a tree-lined road. Both look troubled.

ERIC

...I mean, what was that all about? Are we saying that it’s Topher who’s making us see these things? There are a lot of better explanations, Janice. Janice?

JANICE shakes her head, too tired to talk about it. We close on JANICE’s face, her eyes closed, thinking, hand on head like she’s got a migraine coming on. The sound of The Doors’ “Riders on the Storm” comes up slowly, filling the car.

JANICE

I don’t want to hear any music, Eric. Could you turn the tape off?

ERIC

(sounding strange)

It’s not the tape player.

JANICE

(opens eyes)

Then turn off the fucking radio! My head hurts.

ERIC

I didn’t turn it on. It’s not on.

As they both stare at the dark radio dial and the music grows louder, something suddenly appears for an instant in front of the car—a dark shape. JANICE and ERIC both shout in terror and ERIC jams on the brakes, sending the car squealing and sliding. Something THUMPS against the car as they screech to a halt, halfway across the road.

JANICE

We hit somebody! We hit somebody!

ERIC is sitting stunned in his seat, trying to get his breath, when something large and dark lands on the windshield. For a moment there’s a dim glimpse of YOUNG TOPHER’s face, distorted against the glass, then he bursts into roaring FLAMES which surround the car.

TOPHER

(screaming with laughter in the flames)

I see you! I see you!

An instant later the FLAMES vanish. Everything is NORMAL, the car still skewed across the empty road, but no sign of anything else. ERIC turns to JANICE, bloodless, shocked. She’s just as devastated.

JANICE

Oh, my God, Eric, what’s happening to us...?

We pull back slowly from the pair of them, back until we see the car in the middle of the country road, back and back, as we

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT.—HOSPITAL—NIGHT

The wind is blowing the trees, hard. Except for a light in the front lobby, the hospital windows are all dark. The wind gets stronger, the tree-shadows flailing along the walls.

INT.—BRENT’S HOUSE—SAME TIME

BRENT is sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of the television. The sound is off. As we pan around we see that he has a bottle and glass on the rug in front of him. The glass is upside-down. BRENT has arranged five BULLETS in a little circle on the bottom of the glass, and is holding the sixth in his hand, looking at it. A gun is lying on the carpet next to his leg.

INT.—JANICE’S HOUSE—SAME TIME

JANICE and ERIC have finished a meal of take-out food. JANICE is washing the few dishes while ERIC wanders around in the kitchen/dining room. We can hear the wind getting LOUD outside. He picks up a picture of JANICE’S CHILDREN and looks at it.

JANICE

I’m glad you’re here. I don’t think I could have faced spending the night here by myself.

ERIC

I felt the same about the motel. So...tell me about your marriage. Was he a good guy?

JANICE

Terry? I don’t know. He’s an engineer. Not the most talkative guy in the world. I thought I could make it work. It seemed like a good idea at the time...

ERIC

What went wrong?

JANICE

Nothing, really. But nothing went right after a while, either. Another guy I cared more about than he cared about me.

(turns, drying her hands)

But it’s different when a marriage goes off the tracks and you have kids. It’s...there’s still something that worked. I love my children. I miss them so much.

ERIC

I can’t seem to get a handle on it. You married. Children.

JANICE

It’s been a quarter of a century, Pierson. You haven't exactly stayed in touch.

ERIC

All I’ve been doing since I came back here is saying I'm sorry, and it doesn't seem to be working on anyone. But I am sorry, Janice, especially about the way I treated you. Shit, I didn't know what was going on—I was numb, crazy. I was a kid! We were all kids. I just wanted it all to go away.

JANICE sits down on the couch. ERIC joins her.

JANICE

I used to call you. You never called back. It was horrible, having to keep leaving messages with those guys in your dorm—I could just hear them thinking, “Oh, no, it’s that pathetic hometown chick that Pierson dropped...”

ERIC

It wasn’t like that...

JANICE

But you know what the worst thing was? Do you remember that stupid song about the telephone? It was playing every time I turned the radio on that fall.

(she sings, a little hoarse)

“Okay, so no one’s answering...so I’ll just wait a little longer, longer...” I couldn’t get away from that fucking song.

JANICE blinks angrily, fighting tears.

ERIC

I never liked Electric Light Orchestra, anyway. Brent really hated ’em. Said they’d gone downhill after Roy Wood left the group.

JANICE

Boys. You can talk about guitar solos, but anything else just paralyzes you, doesn’t it?

ERIC

Look, for years there wasn’t a fucking day that went by when I didn’t think about how things went so wrong—with you and me, that night... everything. Over and over. Thinking about how if I’d only done this thing different or that thing different...

JANICE

(after a pause)

What are we going to do, Eric? I’m frightened.

ERIC shakes his head, then moves closer to her and puts his arm around her. She relaxes into his chest.

ERIC

I have no idea at all. I’m scared shitless myself. But this feels good. It’s the first thing that’s felt that way for a while.

(a beat)

I haven’t really been able to make it work with anyone. Scared I never will. Sometimes it feels like I’m getting paid back for being a shit to you, back then.

JANICE lifts her face to look at him. She has a tear on her cheek. ERIC gently wipes it away with his finger. After a moment, he touches her cheek again, letting his hand stay. She leans forward and they kiss. What starts out careful and tentative begins to turn passionate—JANICE is crying as they kiss, almost climbing onto his lap. Then she pulls away.

JANICE

No. No, it’s not right.

ERIC

If you want...

JANICE

After all these years, I don’t know what I want. But you don’t know me any more, Eric. I’m not the same person, and neither are you. We can’t just fall into bed. We’d be...I don’t know, fucking our past, not each other.

ERIC

Seems like it’s our past that’s fucking us. In more ways than one.

JANICE slowly moves back against his chest.

JANICE

You’re still pretty funny, you know? Too bad it’s true.

(after a moment)

I was so scared.

ERIC

It’s been a weird day all around.

JANICE

No! Back then. That night. I was acting cool because I hated you guys treating me like a wimpy girl, but I didn’t really want to take that stuff...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.—PIERSON HOUSE, 1976—NIGHT CLOSE ON: BRENT’S PALM

YOUNG BRENT is shaking a little bit of something out of a pill bottle onto the cotton wadding in his hand. As we pull back, we see that everyone is sitting in a circle on the living room floor, except TOPHER who is lying on the couch with his feet up.

YOUNG BRENT

Four-way windowpane. Decks are cleared. Ready to beam up, Mr. Spock.

KIMMY

(nervously)

I thought acid came in, like, a sugar cube.

YOUNG BRENT

That was in the old days. This is the latest and greatest. Come on, you don’t know who your friends really are until you trip with them— right, Erky?

YOUNG ERIC (singing)

“Oh I wish I was an Oscar Mayer wiener/ that is what I’d truly like to be-ee-ee/ ’cause if I was an Oscar Mayer wiener...”

YOUNG BRENT

Five hits. Kimmy, put a record on so we don’t have to listen to fucking Pierson.

YOUNG ERIC

(finishing)

“Everyone would be in love with me!”

YOUNG JANICE

You wish.

KIMMY

What should I put on?

YOUNG BRENT

I don’t know. You got anything decent, Pierson? You got Yes? Fragile would be pretty bitchin’.

KIMMY

Here’s a Yes album, I think. It’s hard to read the writing.

As she’s putting it on, TOPHER swings his legs down from the couch back and sits looking over the others as the acoustic intro of “And You and I” begins. JANICE and KIMMY are both clearly nervous.

YOUNG JANICE

They’re so tiny! How long is this going to last?

YOUNG BRENT

A while. I wish I could have got Stringer to get me this stuff earlier—it’s amazing to go, like, to the park. The grass looks alive.

YOUNG ERIC

The grass is alive.

YOUNG BRENT

You know what I mean.

(to Kimmy)

But wait ’til you see the stars. They look just... far out.

YOUNG ERIC

They are far out.

Everyone laughs, even BRENT.

YOUNG BRENT

(in a bad Brooklyn accent)

Quit bustin’ my balls, Pierson.

(holds out the acid; normal voice:)

Okay, boys and girls. Come and get it!

TOPHER

Slow down, Zenger. I wanna show you guys something.

YOUNG BRENT

Fuck, Holland, this shit doesn’t even come on for an hour. Let’s just take it and then you can show us.

TOPHER

(enjoying his mystery)

No, you’re definitely gonna wanta see this first.

There’s a pause: TOPHER’s clearly waiting to be asked.

YOUNG ERIC

Okay, what is it?

TOPHER extends his hand, in a fist, palmside down, then turns it over and uncurls his fingers to reveal five shiny BLACK PILLS.

YOUNG BRENT

What the fuck are those?

TOPHER

The. Fucking. Best. High. Ever.

YOUNG BRENT

Looks like speed, man. Black beauties.

TOPHER

Oh, no, my little Bent Zengerdenger. This is shit you’ve never seen. Ain’t nobody ever seen this. This...is Black Sunshine.

YOUNG ERIC

Topher, what exactly the hell are you talking about?

TOPHER slides from the couch onto the floor, takes a theatrical swig from the rum bottle, enjoying everyone’s attention. Just to piss them off, he takes an elaborate time lighting a cigarette, too.

YOUNG BRENT

Come on. Jesus!

YOUNG JANICE

Ooh, the mystery man.

TOPHER

Okay, you know the lab? The place my old man works?

YOUNG BRENT

Where you have a job pushing a broom on Saturday mornings?

TOPHER

(unfazed)

Yeah. That lab. Well, Castillo the fuckin’ head janitor had to go home because he got sick—he was, like, green—and he left me the keys to lock up. Man, normally he’d rather leave me alone with his fuckin’ daughter than even let me touch ’em, but he was in bad shape, pukin’ his lungs out all over the restroom...

YOUNG ERIC

You have a gift for storytelling, amigo.

TOPHER

I do, don’t I? So anyway, I thought it might be a good time to check out the drug refrigerator, the one that’s always locked with this big old fuckin’ lock? Just in case they had some like pharmaceutical quality coke lying around, or some shit like that.

KIMMY

Topher! You could go to jail.

TOPHER

Not unless I was stupid enough to get caught. So I’m checking it out, and they’ve got a little glass jar of these babies in the back, in some kind of a plastic envelope, with all these yellow warning stickers. The name was fucked up—Dee-oh-noxy-somefucking or other—but right there on the label it says, “hallucinogen.” You know what that means, right, Pierson? ’Cause you’re so smart and shit in English?

YOUNG ERIC

You stole some drugs you don’t know anything about, except they said “hallucinogen”? You’re crazy, Topher.

TOPHER

(suddenly angry)

Don’t fucking talk to me like you’re my dad or something, Pierson. I’m not stupid. I had the keys, remember, like to the files and stuff? I went and looked in the folders, checked it out. It’s an experimental drug they’re working on for some government project, and it’s basically just like acid, except cleaner, ’cause there’s a couple of different electrons or some chemistry shit like that.

YOUNG BRENT

Fuckin A. Experimental acid? For the government? What kind of shit is that?

YOUNG ERIC

And you just walked off with ’em? Like they’re not going to notice.

TOPHER

Cool out, man. I found some other pills that looked just like ’em—some kinda water-retention shit. So if they give ’em out to somebody for an experiment they won’t get high, they’ll just get...whatever. Bloated.

(cackles)

And the scientist guys’ll just say it’s like “a nonstandard reaction to the medication.” I hear my dad talk about this stuff.

(brightly)

So, whaddaya say? Let’s get high!

YOUNG JANICE

(incredulous)

Huh? You don’t think we’re going to take those, do you?

KIMMY

I think maybe I should go home.

YOUNG BRENT

No! No, don’t, Kimmy. It’s cool. We’re just going to take acid—Topher’s only playing around.

TOPHER

I ain’t fuckin’ playin’ around, Zenger. This is fuckin’ straight up. What, are you all pussies? No offense, ladies.

YOUNG ERIC

Just cool out, Topher. It was pretty amazing you did that, but we’re not going to take something no one’s ever heard about. What is this “Black Sunshine” shit, anyway? They give their drugs names like that?

TOPHER

I made it up. Pretty bitchin’, huh? I made a copy of Castillo’s key too. If this shit is half as good as I think it is, I’m gonna creep half the next batch and sell it for ten bucks a hit. Send some to Ozzy and the boys and get a backstage pass forever. Come on, Pierson—it’ll be far fucking out!

ERIC shakes his head grimly. BRENT has already begun giving out his WINDOWPANE ACID to the girls.

YOUNG BRENT

Just forget it, Holland. Come on, you’ll blow the mood. We’re just getting to the good part of this song.

BRENT puts his own portion on his tongue, then hands the rest to ERIC; as ERIC takes his, the girls look at each other.

YOUNG JANICE

We’re just going to take half.

They break one hit of acid in half and each take part, KIMMY having trouble swallowing. ERIC turns and offers the last squares of WINDOWPANE on his fingertip to TOPHER.

TOPHER

I can’t fuckin’ believe you guys. The last night of summer. Fuckin’ lightweights! What have you got to lose, Erky? You ain’t even staying around this asshole town.

He holds the five black pills in his hands and stares at them, then stares at ERIC’s proffered acid. BRENT has his eyes closed, swaying to the music— one hand is against KIMMY’s leg, which she’s trying to ignore. TOPHER looks them all over, then abruptly THROWS the five pills up in the air.

CLOSE ON: BLACK PILLS, TUMBLING

As they come down, TOPHER lets them fall into his mouth like candy. It’s hard to tell whether they all make it in—at least one bounces away—but from the way TOPHER holds his mouth closed, he’s clearly got some.

YOUNG ERIC

(genuinely startled)

Fuck, man, what are you doing...?

YOUNG JANICE

Topher? You’re joking, right? Spit them out!

TOPHER swallows elaborately, then grins.

TOPHER

Party time...!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.—JANICE’S HOUSE—MIDNIGHT

ADULT ERIC and ADULT JANICE have fallen asleep on the couch, curled together. Shadows are moving across their faces—it’s windy outside. JANICE is twitching. ERIC is murmuring in his sleep, small, unintelligible sounds of fear.

INT.—BRENT’S HOUSE—SAME TIME

ADULT BRENT is lying face down on the rug with the bottle of rum tipped over beside him, wind moaning in the chimney. At first we think he might be dead, but as we move closer we see the sixth BULLET is still gripped in his fingertips.

INT.—CONVALESCENT HOSPITAL—SAME TIME TOPHER’S POV:

We are looking down a long hospital corridor, from TOPHER’S POV—it’s his odd SHADOW we see on the wall beside us. The wind is loud now, wailing. As the shadow passes across the open doors of the patients’ rooms, we hear some of them cry out loudly in nightmares. We see others flail in their beds. The shadow passes the nursing station where the DUTY NURSE is sleeping as though she’s been poleaxed; as the shadow crosses her she flinches and whimpers. A few more steps and our POV reaches the hospital’s front doors, which FLY OPEN so hard the glass shatters. The sound of the wind is a ROAR now. POV pauses for a moment, looking out on the dark and the trees.

We are now behind the dark humanoid SHAPE, which moves out the doors, out of our view. The doors swing back, as if the force that held them open has released them. A few more shards of glass tinkle. The winds are still fierce.

Our viewpoint turns, moving back down the hall much faster than we came the other way, past the sleeping nurse, past a few patients wandering in the hall, lost and weeping, to TOPHER’s room.

On the bed is the hardened shell of TOPHER’S DISCARDED SKIN, a horrible relic, clearly empty now, lying cracked open, broken into several pieces on the white sheets.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

INT.—JANICE’S HOUSE—MORNING CLOSE ON ADULT ERIC’S FACE:

He’s sleeping, still fully dressed on the couch. JANICE comes into the room in a bathrobe, toweling her hair. She stands over him, a look of troubled fondness on her face, then lays her hand on his cheek for a long moment before sliding it down to his shoulder and gently shaking him.

JANICE

Wake up, Rip Van Winkle. The power’s off. I used most of the not-very-hot water on a quick shower, so you have a choice—a cup of lukewarm water to wash with, or a cup of lukewarm water to make instant coffee with.

ERIC

(groaning)

An embarrassment of riches. Jesus, give me the coffee, please.

(a beat)

It was nice. Holding you last night.

JANICE

Oh, shit! It’s Saturday, isn’t it? I have to call the kids about when they’re coming in so I can pick them up. Where’s my watch?

(she examines it)

After ten. Damn.

ERIC

When are they due back?

JANICE

Tomorrow. School starts on Monday.

(she picks up the phone)

Oh, damn, damn, damn, the phone’s out too. I knew I should have gotten a cell phone.

ERIC

Use mine. Shit, dead battery. Okay, we’ll drive into town. Maybe stop somewhere and get some actually hot coffee, hmmm?

JANICE

(a sudden thought)

Eric, how can I let them come back to...to this stuff? To their mother having some kind of breakdown, complete with screaming daytime nightmares?

ERIC

I think the parenting magazines always say, “Tell them the truth.”

(a beat)

But speaking as a journalist, I doubt the writers have ever had this particular problem to deal with.

JANICE

Speaking as non-journalist and parent...thanks a lot.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT.—DRIVING THROUGH TOWN—MORNING

The storm damage is pretty extensive—trees down in the road, some power poles and phone poles tipped over. Many stores have plywood or plastic sheeting in place of windows and people are sweeping up the sidewalks. There’s no power anywhere, including the traffic lights. ERIC stops at an intersection where a COP is directing traffic.

ERIC

Hey, officer, do you know if any of the pay phones are working?

COP

Not right around here. Besides the wind, we must have had a little electrical storm or something— there’s a lot of stuff on the fritz besides just phone lines. Screwing up our radios, too. And some of the power poles actually caught fire.

JANICE and ERIC for the first time look at each other, a dawning idea that something is not completely ordinary here. ERIC pulls out of the line of cars so he can continue talking to the officer.

ERIC

So...so where would the nearest working phones be?

COP

You’d practically have to get to the county line, I think, other side of the hills. PacBell’s got crews out though. They should have the service on in a couple of hours. Power might take a little longer...

CUT TO:

INT./EXT.—DRIVING—MINUTES LATER

There are repair crews out along the road. ERIC and JANICE are behind an ambulance and firetruck, which turn down a side road.

ERIC

(slowing car)

That’s...

JANICE

They’re going to the convalescent hospital. Have to be. It’s the only thing down there.

ERIC pulls the car around and follows the ambulance, as we

CUT TO:

EXT.—HOSPITAL—MINUTES LATER

The front grounds of Las Lomas Convalescent Hospital are a surreal sight. Many of the windows are broken out, and a tree has crashed down on the front of the building, smashing the roof and damaging one of the walls. Several of the patients are wandering around the grounds, many still in nightgowns. Police and fire people are trying to clear some of them out of the driveway so the firetruck and ambulance can get in.

ERIC and JANICE park the car and walk across the front lawn. Some of the patients are just wandering. Others seem frightened or dreamy, but all turn to STARE fixedly at ERIC and JANICE as they walk past.

The ADMINISTRATOR is standing next to the fallen tree, talking to one of the police officers while the ambulance paramedics roll a stretcher in through the ruined doors. The ADMINISTRATOR looks up in surprise as ERIC and JANICE approach.

ADMINISTRATOR

Mrs. Moorehead? Did someone...? I mean, how could anyone have called you when the phones are out...?

JANICE

Called me? Why would anyone call me?

ADMINISTRATOR

(flustered)

Oh. I just thought...because of your friend, Mr. Holland.

(her look grows sharper)

If no one called you, how did you know?

CUT TO:

INT.—HOSPITAL—MINUTES LATER

ERIC and JANICE are walking fast down the hallway, across leaves and other debris which have blown in through the broken doors and windows. The NURSE is walking with them, talking fast and nervously.

NURSE

He’s the only one...it’s a miracle more didn’t wander away—it was terrible! Some of them were so frightened they hid under the beds and we missed them when we did the count this morning.

JANICE

But you said he couldn’t move—that he couldn’t even get into a wheelchair by himself!

NURSE

It’s so strange—I’ve never heard of anything like it. In a way, it’s a kind of miracle...oh, but I hope he’s all right! Poor Mr. Holland. Poor, poor Mr. Holland...

The OLD WOMAN that ERIC had met previously is standing in the hall, wearing a jacket over her nightgown. As they push through the door of TOPHER’S ROOM she calls after them:

OLD WOMAN

He’s gone home! I heard him when I was sleeping! Tell Mama I’m all right, ’cause he’s gone home!

TOPHER’s empty “shell” is still lying on the bed. JANICE muffles a noise of fear and disgust behind her hand. After a moment, ERIC steps forward and hesitantly touches it. He lifts the masklike skin of the face, staring at the hollow eyeholes. It breaks apart in his hand, as we

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT.—BRENT’S HOUSE—LATER IN THE MORNING

ERIC and JANICE are walking up BRENT’s walkway. There’s only one SUV in the driveway now.

JANICE

He can’t be more than a few hundred yards from there, Eric. He’s crippled! He’s been mostly bedridden for years!

ERIC

A chrysalis—that’s what the nurse said the first time I saw him. Like a cocoon. And now he’s hatched.

ERIC knocks at BRENT’s door.

ERIC (cont.)

You don’t think all that’s a coincidence, do you? The power failures, all that shit, and Topher just sheds his skin and walks away? After all these years?

JANICE

What are you saying? That he did it, somehow? I thought you were supposed to be the rationalist.

ERIC

When the facts themselves are irrational, you still have to work with them. Just think about it for a second. Think! What night is it tonight?

JANICE stares at him in incomprehension as the door opens. BRENT is standing there clutching his hand, with blood on his arms and shirt. He looks numb and half-dead. JANICE and ERIC gasp.

BRENT

I was wondering when you’d show up.

(their expression finally penetrates; he looks down at the blood)

Oh. I broke a glass. Guess you might as well come in.

He turns as if he couldn’t care less and walks inside. After a moment, ERIC and JANICE follow him.

INT.—BRENT’S HOUSE—HALF AN HOUR LATER

BRENT is pretty drunk. He’s sitting on the couch with his head in his hands while ERIC and JANICE make coffee on a camping stove they’ve set up on the counter.

BRENT

I sent Tracy and Joanie away. Tracy didn’t want to go, but I think she thought I was going to get violent or something... Joanie wanted to take all her dolls.

(fighting tears)

Oh, God, I sent them away...!

ERIC pours a cup of coffee for himself, sips it and burns his tongue. He blows and sips it again gratefully while JANICE takes a cup to BRENT.

BRENT (cont.)

I should have gone with them. I don’t want to be here. It’s all going to hell.

ERIC

Shut up and get some coffee into you. Jesus, Brent, do you always drink like this?

BRENT

(indignantly)

What? Are you going to tell me everything’s normal? That it’s fucking inappropriate to be drinking in the morning? You think I should just sit here sober waiting for that...thing to come kill me?

JANICE

(sharply)

You knew he got out of the hospital?

BRENT looks up with such SHOCK in his eyes that he clearly did not. His hands begin trembling so badly that coffee spatters the rug.

BRENT

(looking down at the mess)

Jesus. Jesus, look at that.

ERIC

Give it to me.

He sets the cup on the table in front of BRENT. As ERIC stares at haggard, shivering BRENT, his face softens.

ERIC (cont.)

You didn’t know he’d gotten out of the hospital?

BRENT

Christ, no. But I had dreams...

JANICE

We all had dreams. But he’s a sick man, catatonic—a cripple!

BRENT

He’s coming for us. He wants...he’s angry. Because of...of what we did.

JANICE

But that doesn’t make any sense! We were his friends! And why now, after all these years?

ERIC

Maybe because he had to get ready. Like a caterpillar who had to wait until he could become a butterfly. He was just waiting all that time, changing inside, growing into...something else.

(turns to JANICE)

You know what tonight is, don’t you? Don’t you? Why are your kids coming back tomorrow?

JANICE

Oh, shit, I never called them. What do you mean, why are they coming back? Because they have to be back for school...

(it finally hits her)

Oh. Oh, God, tonight is...

ERIC

Yeah. The last Saturday night of the summer.

They look at each other across the sunlit living room of a nice, ordinary house, as we

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.—BRENT’S HOUSE—HOURS LATER

The living room is beginning to look a bit like a cage. A house of cards has fallen over on the coffee table. BRENT and ERIC are smoking. BRENT has sobered a bit—he just looks hellishly depressed. JANICE is clearing up in a sort of obsessive way, straightening things on shelves, etc.

ERIC

Leave it alone. It’s okay.

JANICE

It’s driving me crazy. All this mess... It’s something to do, for God’s sake. What are we waiting for?

ERIC

The power to come back on. The phone to start working. A monster who used to be our friend to knock on the front door. Who knows?

JANICE

If you really think this is going to happen, why don’t we just leave? Let’s just get in the car and go!

BRENT

Won’t do any good...

ERIC

For once I agree with Zenger. What if the engine just happens to die while we're driving down some back road somewhere? There we'll be, out in the woods somewhere, stuck, no walls, no locked doors...

JANICE

It just seems...it just seems so stupid. All of it. This is stuff that happened years ago! What's it doing screwing things up now? I just want it all to go away so I can have my kids and my life back.

ERIC

There has to be some kind of sense to this. He was in that psychiatric hospital for years. What did they find? What the hell was in those pills?

BRENT

(shaking his head)

Doesn’t matter now.

ERIC

But it does! Was it some kind of psychic warfare experiment? Some kind of biological modification thing? The CIA, a bunch of other government groups were working on all kinds of crazy shit in the Seventies. What did Topher get his hands on?

JANICE has finished nervously clearing the living room. She wanders into the hall and through the open bathroom door. We can still hear ERIC's voice.

ERIC (cont.)

For a while, about ten years ago, I thought I might write an article about it—I even started researching. Nobody wanted to say a fucking word—total blackout. It was definitely something big. But I just couldn’t go through with it, you know, dragging all that stuff back out again...?

JANICE is staring at herself in the mirror, hands on the sink. ERIC’s voice has become a faint murmur. As she stares, the radio beside the bath begins to play Cat Stevens’ “Moonshadow.” She stares at it in shock. When she looks back at the mirror, it’s her own YOUNGER FACE looking back. At first she is terrified, but the impulse to look at this lost version is irresistible. As she lifts her hand to touch her own adult face, the YOUNG JANICE image mirrors her.

CUT TO:

EXT.—PIERSON HOUSE, 1976—NIGHT

It’s dark now, and YOUNG ERIC and YOUNG JANICE are sitting on the front porch overlooking the orchard. “Moonshadow” is wafting out the front door. There are stars in the sky and crickets chirping. JANICE is looking into the mirror of her compact, her hand in the same position we last saw it.

YOUNG ERIC

(amused)

What are you doing?

YOUNG JANICE

You know Carly Heener? She said that when she did acid, she knew when she was tripping because she looked in the mirror and her face was melting.

YOUNG ERIC

Carly Heener’s brain was already melted. Cool out, it won’t even hit for half an hour or so. You’re just high from all that weed.

(a beat)

Man, Zenger must have a serious crush on Kimmy. He’s actually in there listening to Cat Stevens with her. Like the Pope sitting down to have breakfast with Satan.

YOUNG JANICE

(laughing, high)

You’re so funny, Eric. But if you guys all think Cat Stevens is so bad, how come you have one of his records? Busted!

YOUNG ERIC

I think my cousin must have left it or something.

YOUNG JANICE

Yeah, sure.

(looks at him fondly, then frowns)

You know, you’re kind of sweating a lot.

YOUNG ERIC

I think it might be coming on a little.

YOUNG JANICE

Do you think Topher will be all right? Where is he, anyway?

YOUNG ERIC

Out running through the trees, probably. Yeah, he’ll be fine. I saw him drink gasoline out of a jug once. He thought it was white wine. Crazy fucker’s invincible. Besides, I bet he’s bullshitting anyway. His dad would beat the shit out of him if he got caught ripping that place off. I bet it’s just speed, or some psilocybin he bought off Ricky Caffaro or something...

JANICE nestles against ERIC, looking out at the orchard. “Moonshadow” ends and is replaced by Peter Frampton’s “Baby I Love Your Way.” ERIC laughs.

YOUNG ERIC

Man, Zenger’s really got it bad.

(shouts toward the door)

Put on some decent music, will you?

YOUNG JANICE

I never noticed how close the trees are to the house. They look...I don’t know. Like they’re surrounding the place.

YOUNG ERIC

They are surrounding the place.

YOUNG JANICE

You already did that joke. But don’t you think they’re weird? Like they’re reaching...

YOUNG ERIC

Ssshhh. You’re just starting to come on. It’s fine. It’s all fine.

He puts his arm around her. After a moment, he starts to kiss her neck, then her mouth. She tries to respond, but when his hand moves up to her breast she pulls away.

YOUNG JANICE

Don’t...

YOUNG ERIC

It’s okay.

YOUNG JANICE

It’s not okay. I feel weird. Like...like I’ve got a battery on my tongue. I don’t think I like this.

YOUNG ERIC

Shit. You only took half a hit.

(he sits up)

I’m leaving in like a week, you know.

YOUNG JANICE

(quietly)

I know.

YOUNG ERIC

And, I don’t know, since I’m going to be in LA, and we’ll only be able to see each other on weekends...I don’t know, maybe we should start thinking about...about...

There is a loud CLATTER from just overhead, then something large and dark DROPS down from the roof above them and lands with a SLAM on the porch, making ERIC and JANICE shout and jump in shock. It’s TOPHER, very wired and grinning. He’s got his shirt off and tied around his waist. He looks like a wild man.

TOPHER

Take me to your leader!

(cocks an ear to music)

What is that queer shit?

(shouts)

Zengerdenger! Put on some Zep or some Sabbath or I’ll kick your ass into next year!

(he leans over ERIC and JANICE)

Man, I’m so fucking thirsty—let’s make a run for brews. C’mon, Erky, you drive.

YOUNG ERIC

I’m not driving, man. The acid’s just starting to come on.

TOPHER

Then we’ll walk. C’mon. Janice, make your fuckin’ boyfriend get off his ass. Come on, come on!

YOUNG JANICE

Why do we need beer?

TOPHER

Why do we need beer? Why do we need anything? Why do we need fucking music? Why do we need dope? Because life is shit and I’m so fucking high I can’t believe it!

(he laughs and shadow-punches the air, circling ERIC and JANICE like a dog excited about going for a walk)

Party time!

TOPHER throws back his head and howls like a wolf, a rising, hoarse note that turns into ERIC yelling:

ADULT ERIC

Janice! Janice!

As we

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.—BRENT’S HOUSE—EVENING

ADULT JANICE is staring at the mirror, at her own grown-up face. She looks at her hand on the counter. There’s an ANT crawling on it. JANICE gasps and flails until she brushes it off. ADULT ERIC appears in the bathroom doorway, obviously upset. The house is dark, but there’s light behind him from (as we’ll find out) a camping lantern in the living room.

ERIC

Where have you been?

JANICE

(near tears)

You were going to break up with me, you bastard! Before any of that other stuff even happened!

ERIC

What are you talking about?

JANICE

We were sitting on the porch, and you were just about to tell me we should break up...

ERIC

I have no idea what you’re talking about, Janice. Where the hell have you been? I’ve been looking for you for half an hour all over the house. I’ve been screaming your name! I was worried to death!

JANICE

I’ve been right here...

(a beat)

Half an hour?

ERIC

Brent’s not doing too well. Where were you?

JANICE suddenly grabs him.

JANICE

Oh my God. I am going crazy.

(looks around)

It’s dark!

ERIC

Yes, it damn well is. That’s why I’ve been looking all over for you—I didn’t know what happened. Where were you?

JANICE

Back there. Back there, Eric.

BRENT stumbles into the hallway, haggard, haunted.

BRENT

(even more overwhelmed than ERIC and JANICE)

Can’t get away. He’s in our heads! We’re fucked.

ERIC

Come on, pull yourself together.

BRENT

You think I’m useless, don’t you? But I know how to end this.

(he produces his GUN)

It’s easy. One bullet in Topher Holland’s brain and everything’s over...

ERIC

Jesus, Brent, put that thing away! That’s all we need, you pulling some cowboy shit like that.

JANICE

Why is this happening to us? He was our friend!

BRENT

You have no idea how hard I worked to make a life for myself. Worked damn hard. It was a nice life, too. I just wanted to forget...

BRENT pauses; then, as if he has really noticed ERIC and JANICE for the first time, he looks at them sorrowfully.

BRENT (cont.)

I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. It’s all my fault. I...

He turns and staggers out of the hallway. A moment later a CRASH startles ERIC and JANICE. They run to the living room. BRENT has knocked over the coffee table.

ERIC

Jesus, you almost busted the lantern...!

(realizes BRENT is staring in horror at the front door)

Brent, what’s...

As JANICE comes up beside him, the three of them standing close together in the middle of the living room, the DOORKNOB of the front door turns a little, clicks, turns again. They stare at it, frozen. After a moment, the door clicks and slowly swings open... BRENT makes little panting noises of terror. JANICE and ERIC grab for each other’s hands.

The door is all the way open. The street outside is dark. The doorway is EMPTY.

ERIC

(hoarsely)

Who...?

He picks up a broken table-leg and the lantern and slowly moves toward the open door. JANICE grabs a heavy vase and moves up beside him. BRENT is on his knees on the floor behind them. They reach the doorway and peer out. Empty, dark street. ERIC cautiously extends the lantern, taking a step outside, looking, looking...

ERIC

There’s no one here...

ERIC glances down. A symbol written in FLAMES on the porch—a crude drawing of an EYE, surrounded by rays like the sun—is flickering out. As it disappears, the PHONE rings, making them all JUMP in shock. It takes a second for the import to reach them.

JANICE

(excited, relieved)

The phones! The phones are working!

The cordless phone is in the table-wreckage near BRENT, but he doesn’t move. JANICE picks it up and listens for a second. Her eyes widen, her jaw drops. She turns like an accident victim in shock and hands the phone to ERIC.

JANICE

It’s for you. It’s...it’s Kimmy.

KIMMY

(on phone; as if from a great distance)

Help me...! I’m lost, and it’s so dark! Come home, Eric! Come home...!

ERIC is pale and half-dead-looking as the phone drops from his hand. He looks at JANICE, then at weeping BRENT. He and JANICE turn to stare at the open door.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT.—STREETS—MINUTES LATER

The ADULT versions of ERIC, JANICE, and BRENT walk down the dark, deserted suburban streets like they’re going to their own execution. All the houses are lightless and look deserted.

ERIC

I told you the car wasn’t going to start. It’s not going to work that way—none of it.

JANICE

We could wait until tomorrow and call the police! He’s an escaped patient! This isn’t just us having some hallucination—he’s real!

ERIC

You think that’s going to happen?

JANICE

It makes more sense than walking into your grandmother’s deserted house, looking for him. The lights have to come back on some time...the phones...

ERIC

Let’s find out.

ERIC suddenly steps out of the road and walks across a lawn toward one of the houses. He stops in front of the door and pounds on it.

ERIC

Hello? Can you help us, please? It’s an emergency.

(no answer; he knocks louder)

You don’t have to open the door, just talk to us.

JANICE

Eric, you’re acting crazy...

ERIC

Am I?

He vaults over the hedge to the next yard and begins pounding on that door, too. No answer.

ERIC

Help! Nuclear war! Invasion of wild pigs! Call the police! Call the National Guard!

He picks up a porch chair, heaves it over his head, then SMASHES it through the picture window.

JANICE

Stop it! Why are you doing this!

ERIC

Because there’s nobody there, Janice! No-fucking-body! Look at the windows—no candles, nothing. People in the real world have batteries, Janice. They have radios and flashlights. They still go out and walk their dogs, even when there’s a blackout.

ERIC reaches for a chunk of the windowsill and pulls it away. It comes off like it’s rotten and CRUMBLES into dust in his hands. He pushes his hand through the wall and another section breaks away and dissolves into powder.

ERIC (cont.)

He’s playing with us. Don’t you remember that night, when we were walking on this same road?

JANICE

Stop it. You’re making it worse.

ERIC

Do you remember what I said? He remembers. He’s pulled us back into it—it’s all happening again, but twisted up...

As ERIC speaks,

SLOW DISSOLVE:

EXT: STREET – 1976

The street is still dark, but only because it’s a quiet neighborhood, late at night. There are a few lights in the windows, streetlights, the glow of a television through curtains. YOUNG JANICE and TOPHER are walking with YOUNG ERIC, who has stopped in the middle of the street, clearly beginning to feel the acid. JANICE turns and starts back toward him.

YOUNG JANICE

Eric? What’re you doing?

(quietly, now she’s close)

Would you come on? Topher’s making me nervous.

ERIC lets himself be led. As they catch up to TOPHER, ERIC is clearly disoriented.

YOUNG ERIC

Is it...this year? In all the houses?

YOUNG JANICE

What are you talking about?

YOUNG ERIC

I thought...for a minute I thought... I mean, how do we know it’s still now?

TOPHER

Oh, he’s coming on real good.

YOUNG ERIC

No, really. I mean, we don’t know. Time could have just...stopped. For us, I mean. And like everyone else just went on. So in all those houses, it could be twenty years later, but we’re still stuck in this one night, forever. Like we were ghosts.

YOUNG JANICE

Don’t say things like that. You’re giving me the creeps.

TOPHER is swigging from a beer, even more full of manic energy. He’s carrying the rest of the two six-packs in a bag.

TOPHER

Twenty years there ain’t gonna be no town here—’cause one of these days I’m gonna burn the fucking place down. Maybe I’ll do it tonight.

(turns to ERIC)

You want another beer? It’ll cut the harsh on that buzz.

YOUNG ERIC

No. I don’t think so. Not now.

YOUNG JANICE

I feel really strange, Eric. I wish you hadn’t said that. I feel...empty.

TOPHER

(oblivious)

I told you we could pimp some brews up at the One Stop, no problem, man. It’s ’cause we had a chick along, just like I told you. Those older guys, they always want to look cool when there’s a chick around.

YOUNG JANICE

I can see my hand moving—look. It’s all blurry.

TOPHER

You got tracers, baby! It’s coming on!

YOUNG ERIC

(forcing himself back to reality)

How ’bout you, Topher—you okay, man?

TOPHER

(a flash of suspicion)

Why? You think I’m acting weird? You’re just paranoid—you always get paranoid, Pierson. I’m fucking great. Black Sunshine, bay-bee! I’m so big I’m gonna blow up like a balloon!

YOUNG JANICE

I hope Kimmy’s all right. We should have made her come with us. She’s really nervous about all this...

TOPHER

Zenger’s snifn’ after her. Boy is workin’ hard, workin’ hard.

YOUNG JANICE

(suddenly)

I probably will still be here in twenty years. This fucking dead town.

(she is suddenly very emotional)

You’ll go off to college and you’ll be some famous guy, and I’ll see you on television, and I’ll still be working in that coffee shop, refilling the catchup bottles.

ERIC is lost in thought, silent, plodding along.

TOPHER

Yeah, you’ll be sixty years old, wearin’ that fucking little skirt. “Hi, my name is Janice, happy to serve you!”

YOUNG JANICE

Like you’ll be doing anything different, Topher. At least I’ll have a job, which is more than you’ll have when they find out you were ripping off the lab.

TOPHER

Man, I’ll be so far out of here. Once I bag fuckin’ high school, I’m gone, and my dad can fuck himself. I’ll join the fuckin’ Air Force, be a pilot. I’ll be all over the world, checkin’ out the señoritas, all that shit.

TOPHER’s voice is getting strangely loud and off-key. He’s even twitching a bit. ERIC is staring at him.

TOPHER (cont.)

I’ll be so fuckin’ high you won’t even be able to see me. You and Pierson and all the others, you'll be pretending you're my friends, but you'll be on the ground, living in this dick town, on the ground, round and round on the ground...

YOUNG JANICE

(angry)

Shut up, Topher. You aren’t going to do shit. Your old man’s going to throw you out and you’ll wind up hangin’ around on the benches at Tyner Park like all the other losers...

TOPHER

(suddenly screams)

Fuck you, bitch!

TOPHER is suddenly shaking with rage, eyes rolling. ERIC, startled out of his reverie, takes a step forward.

YOUNG ERIC

Hey, man, cool out...

TOPHER

Keep your woman in line, man! She can’t talk to me like that...!

YOUNG JANICE

You can’t talk to me like that...

TOPHER

(screaming again)

I ain’t stupid! I ain’t fucking stupid! I’ll fucking show you!

TOPHER turns and runs away down the street. ERIC looks at JANICE in worried irritation, as if to say it’s her fault, then starts after him. They have reached the end of the wooded street that leads to the orchard and the Pierson House. TOPHER stops under the last streetlight before the orchard, huddled. ERIC approaches him slowly.

YOUNG ERIC

Topher? Topher, man, just take it easy...

As ERIC is reaching to put a hand on his shoulder, TOPHER looks up, grimacing in MISERY. His features appear for a moment to RIPPLE, like something powerful is shifting below the skin. As he shrieks at ERIC, the streetlight above them EXPLODES in a shower of glass.

TOPHER

Leave me alone!

ERIC reels back, shielding himself from falling glass, as TOPHER flees into the orchard and we

CUT TO:

EXT.—STREET—SAME TIME, BUT THE PRESENT

ADULT ERIC is clutching the same streetlight, unbroken now but also unlit. ADULT JANICE is beside him, crying, staring out across the empty lot where the orchard was, while ADULT BRENT simply stares.

JANICE

I don’t want to go there. I don’t care if this is all real or not. I don’t want to go there.

LONG SHOT: PIERSON HOUSE, NOW

Over her shoulder, we see the dark house in the empty field.

BRENT

(almost like talking in his sleep)

He wants it back. He wants it back...

ERIC

I don’t think we can run away from this, Jan-Jan.

JANICE

My kids. I’ll never get back to them—never see my kids again. Callie...Jack...

ERIC

I don’t want to go either. But I think the only way out is...there.

He takes an awkward step toward the field. He reaches back for JANICE’s hand. She looks at him, miserable but sobered. She reaches out as if to touch his hand, but lets her hand drop again, as we

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT.—ORCHARD—1974

YOUNG ERIC and YOUNG JANICE are holding hands, deep in the trees of the orchard. The branches are so close that they block everything except thin moonlight.

YOUNG JANICE

He...he was acting like he was crazy. Really crazy. I’m scared and I want to go home, Eric. Can you just take me home? I want this all to stop.

YOUNG ERIC

We can’t leave Topher like that. We have to find him—he’s freaking.

YOUNG JANICE

What about me, Eric?

ERIC shakes his head—a choice he does not want to be forced to make. Suddenly, something RATTLES the trees nearby. ERIC and JANICE freeze, startled. Whatever it is, it’s making a strange MOANING sound and it’s coming closer. JANICE presses into ERIC as they wait, helplessly. The sound gets louder, then an instant later YOUNG BRENT blunders through the trees and almost runs into them.

YOUNG ERIC

Brent! Damn, man, you scared me to death. Have you seen...?

He suddenly realizes BRENT has tears on his cheeks.

YOUNG ERIC (cont.)

Oh, shit, what’s up? Are you all right...?

BRENT pushes him aside.

YOUNG BRENT

Fuck off, Pierson. Leave me alone.

YOUNG JANICE

Where’s Kimmy? Brent, where’s Kimmy?

YOUNG BRENT

(stopping for a moment)

Your friend is a bitch, Janice. A total bitch.

His face screws up with anger and hurt and he blunders away.

YOUNG ERIC

Jesus, what’s going on around here...?

He stops as JANICE pulls away from him and heads toward the house.

YOUNG ERIC (cont.)

Janice! Where are you going...?

YOUNG JANICE

I have to find Kimmy!

He tries to follow her, but stumbles on something and falls. He gets up, calling JANICE’s name.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT.—THE DIRT FIELD, NOW—NIGHT

ADULT ERIC is in the middle of the empty field. There is nothing in front of him but the dark, empty house several hundred yards away. He is ALONE.

ERIC

Janice? Brent?

CUT TO:

EXT.—THE DIRT FIELD, NOW—NIGHT ADULT JANICE, SAME SITUATION

She’s alone, nothing but her and the house.

JANICE

Eric? Where are you?

CUT TO:

EXT.—THE DIRT FIELD, NOW—NIGHT ADULT BRENT, SAME SITUATION

BRENT is standing in the same field, also alone. As he stares at the house, light begins to GLOW in the windows—not sudden, like a light switch, but like something smoldering into life. The first spooky piano notes of David Bowie’s “Time” begin to waft across the field of dirt. BRENT slumps to his knees facing the house like a man awaiting execution, as we

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

EXT.—ORCHARD, THEN—NIGHT

The David Bowie song is playing, but a little more muffled, as YOUNG ERIC makes his way through the trees, which seem very tangled and dense. He stumbles into an open clearing and sees TOPHER sitting cross-legged, eyes closed, at the base of a tree.

YOUNG ERIC

Topher! Man, you okay?

TOPHER’s eyes open very slowly. He looks at ERIC with an expression almost of amusement.

TOPHER

Erky. Give me a smoke, man.

ERIC fumbles out a cigarette and hands it to him.

YOUNG ERIC

This is all crazy, man. I think I’m starting to peak...

As he’s talking, TOPHER lights it simply by touching the tip of his finger to the end of the cigarette. ERIC stares, open-mouthed.

TOPHER

Zenger tried to get himself some. He touched little Kimmy’s tit and she smacked him.

YOUNG ERIC

Did he tell you that?

TOPHER

I saw it.

YOUNG ERIC

You were with us.

TOPHER

(imperturbable)

I saw it. I can see your old lady right now. She and Kimmy’re having an argument because she wants to go home and Kimmy doesn’t. Kimmy’s kind of digging the high.

YOUNG ERIC

What are you talking about? You can’t see them from here.

TOPHER

I can see everything, man. I can see my fucking dad watching television in the living room at our house, drinking a fucking beer and squeezing his dick. Everything. I can see the, like, radio waves between the stars—they look like black rainbows.

(he stands and lets his head fall back)

You don’t know what I can do. I can see the worms in the ground under your feet, these little silver strings crisscrossing...

(lets his head loll forward until he’s looking at ERIC; grins)

I can even see inside your head, Pierson. You’ve been thinking all night about some little blonde chick you met at Bader’s party who said she was going to UCLA in the fall—thinking about how she slipped you some tongue when you went out with her to get smokes...

TOPHER’s laugh is a cackle. ERIC takes a stumbling step backward. TOPHER opens his eyes wider—the pupils are so dilated that there are no irises, only BLACK HOLES in the middle of the white.

TOPHER

Don’t run away, Erky. It’s all starting to happen now—I can feel it. I’m getting so big that I’m not going to need my body soon. I’ll be flying, man, flying...

TOPHER actually begins to FLOAT up from the ground until he is hovering at least a foot in the air, head thrown back, laughing. ERIC turns and runs, as we

CUT TO:

EXT.—PIERSON HOUSE, 1976—MINUTES LATER

YOUNG ERIC stands on the front porch, gasping for breath: he’s run all the way. He braces his hands on his knees. David Bowie is still playing inside.

YOUNG ERIC

(to himself; a terrified mantra)

Too high. Just peaking, that’s all. Cool out, man. Cool out.

Shakily, he stands and opens the door—the music comes rolling out.

YOUNG BRENT is crouched beside the stereo system, records all over the floor, feverishly looking for something.

YOUNG ERIC

Where’s Janice?

BRENT shakes his head; he’s too busy.

YOUNG BRENT

Gotta change the music—too many edges. You got some Floyd, don’t you? Reverse the flow, you know what I mean? Dark Side of the Moon? No, no, too much electricity. The new one, the new one, the new one. Wish You Were Here, yeah, that’d close up the holes.

(he looks up at ERIC, eyes wild, face flushed)

Where’s your Floyd, Pierson? You have Wish You Were Here, don’t you? Don’t you?

YOUNG ERIC

Take it easy, dude.

YOUNG BRENT

There’s fucking electricity, man! It’s leaking all over the place! I gotta put something on...!

YOUNG ERIC

Uh...I think I’ve got some Crosby, Stills, and Nash...

YOUNG BRENT

Perfect!

(he returns to pawing frantically through the records, not really looking at any of them)

Crosby, Nash, Stills, still crazy, Crazy Horse, Young, young gifted and black, Black Mariah, Blackmore, Richie Blackmore, Black Oak, blackout, Black Sabbath...

(he pauses for a moment, startled)

No. No!

(returns to his pawing and gibberish)

Nash, Stills, steel, steal your face, Steely Dan, Steeleye Span, Stealer’s Wheel, wheels, wild, child, chill, still, Stills, Nash, Crosby, Nash...

ERIC is looking for JANICE. The living room is a mess. So is the kitchen, even worse. Someone has started to make a pot of Spaghetti-Os on the stove, but stopped partway through, leaving tomato sauce splashed on the counter. Someone has finger-painted a crude EYE on the counter with the tomato sauce—the eye with sun’s rays we’ve seen on BRENT’s doorstep—and a few ants are crawling around it.

As ERIC reaches the stairs leading upstairs, BRENT has put on a “mellower” record—King Crimson’s Court of the Crimson King. ERIC hesitates, then moves up into the shadowed staircase. As he reaches the landing, he pauses.

YOUNG ERIC

Janice?

He looks up and down the hall, then moves toward the only closed door— for a moment the hallway STRETCHES, so that it seems a VERY LONG WAY. He takes another step and his hand closes on the doorknob and the door swings open.

It’s his grandparent’s BEDROOM—fussy, tidy. The only light is from a small bedside lamp with a heavy shade, so the room is shadowy. A FIGURE is seated on the bed, back to him, very still. ERIC, clearly nervous, begins to walk around. It’s KIMMY, head down as though she’s asleep sitting up, her hair covering her face. As ERIC nervously reaches his hand toward her, she lifts her face, eyes wide.

KIMMY

Eric! I thought you were Janice.

(she smiles)

Not Janice-Janice, of course, but this Janice.

YOUNG ERIC

Where is she?

KIMMY

I don’t know. She’s mad at me because I want to stay. Maybe she went home. If she has a home here, I mean—do you think everyone has one here, just like in real life?

ERIC shakes his head in confusion and sits beside her.

YOUNG ERIC

This is such a weird night...

KIMMY

I think it’s nice you’re in my dream.

YOUNG ERIC

Huh?

KIMMY

Because I thought about it happening like this, and then it happened, so that’s how I know I’m dreaming.

YOUNG ERIC

You’re not dreaming, Kimmy. You’re just tripping.

KIMMY

Maybe you dreamed it, too. Maybe you just went to sleep, and now you’re dreaming the same dream as me. That’s okay. It means no one can get in except us.

YOUNG ERIC

Like ghosts...

KIMMY

Yes. Like we’re ghosts, maybe. I never knew that there were so many places outside the world, Eric. I never thought there was any place I could really talk to you.

She turns to him, very intent.

KIMMY (cont.)

I could never say this to you in real life, but since this is a dream it doesn’t matter—I’m just talking to myself. I’ve been in love with you since ninth grade, Eric. Since we were in that Social Studies class together and did that project. When Janice started to go out with you, it hurt so much...

(smiling but teary-eyed)

And I just thought, I can never say it, she’s my best friend. But now you and I are dreaming the same dream.

ERIC, overwhelmed, just stares.

KIMMY (cont.)

You’ll never know how much I wished this could happen for real. I used to imagine that we met at a party, and that you didn’t know Janice, and that we...

(she turns her head away; when she turns back, her expression is almost feverish)

Sometimes I think about that at night, when I’m in bed, and I...I touch myself.

YOUNG ERIC

Jesus, Kimmy, I...

She leans over and puts her finger against his lips.

KIMMY

Ssshhh. I know—it doesn’t matter. I never understood that before, but I do now. Because there are places like this where we can be together— where we were always together.

(she giggles)

I wonder if I’m asleep now? Lying on the floor, and you guys are trying to wake me up...

KIMMY takes off her glasses.

KIMMY (cont.)

I want to learn everything, do everything. I probably won’t even remember this when I stop dreaming, but...

She suddenly leans forward and kisses him. ERIC, still stunned, almost pulls back, but the intensity of her kiss is compelling and he is drawn into it. After a moment they roll over onto the bed. A couple of times ERIC starts to draw away, more from overload than moral resistance, but KIMMY is uninhibitedly PASSIONATE—kissing and even licking his face and neck, climbing onto him, slithering her body over his with abandon. The kissing grows more intense; both of them have their hands in each other’s shirts and pants—ERIC has begun pulling KIMMY’s pants down over her hips when he suddenly hears JANICE’s voice loud in the hall just outside the door.

YOUNG JANICE

No, I don’t know where the Led Zeppelin is, Brent. You’ve got the records all over the place, how am I supposed to know?

Startled, ERIC slides away from KIMMY and onto the floor with a painful thump, almost tipping over the lamp table. He begins zipping himself up. KIMMY shows no such guilt, still deep in her “dream.”

KIMMY

Eric...? What are you doing?

ERIC hurriedly finishes, then gets his hand on the door just as JANICE starts to open it. For a moment they stand face-to-face.

YOUNG JANICE

What...?

YOUNG ERIC

(blustering)

Where have you been?

YOUNG JANICE

What do you mean, where have I been? You’re really sweating again.

YOUNG ERIC

I’m high, Janice. I’m tripping. But I was...I was worried about you.

(he begins to move toward the stairs, leading her away from the bedroom.)

Topher’s acting crazy. Completely crazy. It’s fucking with my mind. Do you think he really took all those pills?

YOUNG JANICE

I don’t want to think about him. Maybe I should just go home—I don’t feel very good. Besides, my mom didn’t answer the phone, so I couldn’t tell her I was staying at Kimmy’s. She’ll be pissed if she comes back and I’m not there.

YOUNG ERIC

What are you talking about? You already called her. Jesus, Janice, you call her again and she’ll know you’re high.

YOUNG JANICE

I called her already? Really?

(looks distraught)

Is that ’cause I’m tripping? I don’t like this stuff, Eric. I want to come down.

ERIC puts an arm around her, leads her back downstairs.

YOUNG ERIC

I think there’s some of that sinsemilla left. We should have a couple of hits, mellow us out...

As they reach the bottom of the stairs, BRENT suddenly lurches into view, holding a monstrous pile of records; some are slipping out of their jackets onto the floor, but he doesn’t even notice.

YOUNG BRENT

figured it out. It’s okay. It’s all handled.

YOUNG JANICE

What are you talking about?

YOUNG BRENT

See, I was thinking, “Stairway to Heaven,” but that's so obvious, but Jimmy Page used to play in the Yardbirds, just like Clapton and Clapton was in Blind Faith. And "Yardbird" means "prisoner," see?

YOUNG ERIC

You need to calm down, man.

YOUNG BRENT

No, no, you’re not thinking. You remember tthat Blind Faith song, “Sea of Joy”? Get how it connects? Because “Sea” is not only “Sea” like “ocean,” but it’s “C” like “Clapton” and also “Crimson,” right? Court of the Crimson King, and that’s the devil, right, the devil’s court—and that’s hell. So how do you get out of hell, that’s the Stairway to Heaven. Blind Faith. So it’s also “C” like “see”—seeing. With your eyes. You have to just...close your eyes, and you’ll get out. We’ll all get out, someday, even...even if it takes a thousand years.

(a long pause; BRENT looks haunted)

Don’t you get it?

Before ERIC or JANICE can answer, the FRONT DOOR swings open. TOPHER stands framed in it, feet wide apart, head down, face obscured by dangling hair. When he looks up, we see that his face is streaked with dirt and scratches and his eyes are wild and lost.

TOPHER

It’s...getting too big...

He staggers forward, raising his hand to his friends. He looks so deranged that ERIC, JANICE, and BRENT all step back from him.

TOPHER (cont.)

(a moment of focus; a cracked smile)

Hey, Erky, check it out.

He sings the old Oscar Meyer hot dog jingle, ending with the bit about everyone being in love with him. He suddenly stumbles and falls to his knees in front of them, head back, this time the eyes rolled up until only the whites show.

TOPHER (cont.)

(almost whispering)

Help me...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT.—PIERSON HOUSE, NOW—NIGHT

ADULT ERIC stands by himself on the front porch of the house. He looks around. There’s no one in sight, no lights but the strong glow of a full moon. The house itself is dark, too, and everything is dead silent. ERIC takes a breath, opens the front door, and steps through. He is tensed, but moonlight streaming through the windows shows the house is stripped, EMPTY.

Coming up from silence, slowly, is T. Rex’s “Bang a Gong.” As ERIC hears it, he shudders and turns to locate the sound of the noise, and as he turns the MUSIC and LIGHT and MOVEMENT all EXPLODE simultaneously. “Bang a Gong” is playing earsplittingly loud, and the room is suddenly the LIVING ROOM, CIRCA 1976. But this time, the ADULT ERIC is right in the middle, a witness to everything, including the younger version of himself.

ADULT ERIC stands in the middle of the floor, blinking, astonished, as YOUNG TOPHER collapses to the floor and YOUNG ERIC, YOUNG BRENT, and YOUNG JANICE stand staring.

YOUNG ERIC

Oh, man, why did you take that shit?

As he bends over TOPHER, who is shaking violently, JANICE grabs at YOUNG ERIC’s arm.

YOUNG JANICE

We have to call an ambulance.

YOUNG BRENT

No fucking way. The cops will be all over this place!

YOUNG JANICE

He might be dying!

YOUNG ERIC

Topher? Can you hear me, man? You’re just tripping.

YOUNG JANICE

We have to get him to a doctor!

YOUNG ERIC

Topher?

TOPHER looks up, ragged and pale, but suddenly smiling.

TOPHER

Tripping? You wish, man. I’m...I’m becoming.

YOUNG ERIC

Let me help you...

He reaches down to pull TOPHER to his feet, but TOPHER simply shrugs and is three feet to one side. He has MOVED INSTANTANOUSLY, like a jump-cut. YOUNG ERIC is holding empty air. He is stunned, and looks up at the others. YOUNG JANICE is blankly terrified. YOUNG BRENT suddenly turns away, scuttling toward the stereo.

YOUNG BRENT

I definitely gotta put something else on...

He takes off T. Rex with a jagged scratch and begins scrambling among the albums scattered all over the floor.

ADULT ERIC has been watching this. Now he takes a step forward toward his younger self, reaching out as if to take himself in his own arms, but ADULT ERIC’s hand passes right through YOUNG ERIC, who is still staring after TOPHER.

YOUNG ERIC

What...what’s going on?

YOUNG TOPHER

Don’t touch me, Erky. You can’t stop it.

YOUNG JANICE

Topher, you’re scaring me...

She cautiously reaches toward him, as though he might be hot to the touch, but TOPHER is suddenly GONE again, having moved instantaneously to the base of the stairway leading upstairs.

ADULT ERIC

(shouts)

Just get out of the house!

(no one can hear him; his face crumples in misery)

Get Kimmy...

YOUNG BRENT

Topher, man, I couldn’t find the Sabbath, but check this out! You love this! You love this, man!

The choppy opening licks of Jimi Hendrix’s “Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)” come out of the speakers.

YOUNG BRENT (cont.)

Just sit down and listen to Jimi, man.

YOUNG TOPHER

(a big grin)

Listen to him? I’m talking to him, bro! I’m talking to all the dead people...

TOPHER turns and makes his way up the stairs into the darkness.

YOUNG ERIC

It’s the acid. I didn’t see it. It’s the acid. It’s the acid...

YOUNG JANICE

What are we going to do? We have to call an ambulance, the police, something...

(sudden realization)

Where’s Kimmy?

ADULT ERIC turns to YOUNG JANICE, who cannot see or hear him. Tears are in his eyes.

ADULT ERIC

I’m sorry, Jan-Jan. Oh, God, I’m so sorry. It was all my fault.

YOUNG ERIC looks up at the mention of KIMMY. A look of guilt flashes across his face.

YOUNG ERIC

Kimmy’s fine. She’s fine. I think...she went out walking. Yeah, she’s out in front.

YOUNG JANICE

I can’t stand this! I feel like things are crawling all over me. Eric, what are we going to do about Topher?

ADULT ERIC

I’m so, so sorry...

YOUNG ERIC

It’s okay. We’re all tripping—we’re just high, having a bit of a freak-out. Stay with me. Stay with me. It’ll be okay.

YOUNG JANICE

(wanting to believe)

You think so? Will you put your arms around me? I’m really scared.

YOUNG ERIC wraps his arms around her and they stand swaying in the middle of the living room. ADULT ERIC slowly reaches his hand out to the two of them, then lets it drop, as we

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

INT.—PIERSON HOUSE, NOW—NIGHT, SAME TIME

ADULT JANICE stands in a darkened, deserted hallway of the present-day house, moonlight coming in through the windows. A few objects remain after the house was emptied and some windblown leaves lie on the floors. After a moment, she hears a sniffling sound—someone CRYING. Frightened, she makes her way slowly down the hallway, listening, until she stops in front of one of the doors. She opens that door, but instead of a room, there’s ANOTHER HALLWAY—incredibly long, equally dark, with a huddled shape sitting at the far end. The crying is louder.

JANICE

K-Kimmy?

KIMMY

You never came back for me.

JANICE is suddenly near tears. Music rises quietly—ELO’s “Telephone.”

JANICE

I...I didn’t know...

KIMMY

You followed Eric like you were his dog. He was so much more important to you than me—your best friend...!

JANICE moves toward her but the hallway does not seem to get any shorter. KIMMY is still far away, her back to JANICE, face hidden.

JANICE

I didn’t know any better. He was my boyfriend... Oh, Kimmy, that was twenty-five years ago!

KIMMY

(a cracked laugh)

Not for me. For me it’s still happening. For me, it’s always happening...

JANICE

I’m so sorry!

The distance suddenly telescopes—JANICE is right on top of KIMMY. She reaches out to touch her.

JANICE

Kimmy? Can I do anything...anything to make it better?

KIMMY turns, except it isn’t KIMMY, it’s YOUNG JANICE, but still with KIMMY’s voice. YOUNG JANICE lifts BLOODY HANDS.

YOUNG JANICE/KIMMY

You betrayed me...!

ADULT JANICE screams; it echoes down the long corridor, twisting, growing fainter as we follow it around many twists and turns, until it fades back into the music of Hendrix, still playing somewhere. ADULT BRENT is standing in a corridor of his own, an Escher-like impossibility of stairs and weird angles. He turns, bewildered. A little SMOKE drifts along the passageway.

BRENT is frightened and clearly lost. He takes a step, then another. A shadow falls on the wall across from him, and he turns with eyes wide. A dark figure steps from an open door—it’s the ADULT ERIC.

ERIC

Brent? That you?

BRENT

Oh my God. Oh my God. I’ve been in here for hours—where did you go? Where’s Janice?

ERIC

I don’t know. Everything’s...strange.

BRENT

We have to get out of here. We should never have come. He’s going to...

ERIC

There must be some kind of sense to it, like Janice said. A reason. We were his friends...!

BRENT

No! He’s crazy. It wasn’t anybody’s fault—things just went wrong.

ERIC

Really? I thought you said it was all your fault.

BRENT

Let’s just get out of here.

ERIC

No, you distinctly said it was your fault. In fact, you were going to say that you betrayed him, weren’t you?

BRENT

What...what are you talking about?

ERIC

Come on...Brent. You know what betrayal is, don’t you?

ERIC steps closer, resting his hands on BRENT’s shoulders. BRENT is struggling, but he can’t get away.

ERIC

“You don’t know who your friends really are until you trip with them...” Remember that? Remember?

BRENT

(struggling)

Let go of me!

ERIC’s face is beginning to change—to harden and grow brittle. BRENT struggles harder, but it’s like being held by a statue. ERIC’s face grows completely rigid, like TOPHER’S SHELL. Then it cracks, and falls away, to reveal the young TOPHER beneath.

TOPHER

(big grin)

It’s all about the Court of the Crimson King, Brent. And hell has a special place saved for traitors...

BRENT’s clothes start to smolder where TOPHER is holding them. BRENT shrieks and flails and at last breaks away, falling backward.

TOPHER

Wait! There’s still the big finale...

TOPHER reaches up and PEELS AWAY his face, revealing YOUNG BRENT’S FACE underneath. ADULT BRENT doesn’t stay to watch—he drags himself to his feet, running down the distorted corridor, shrieking and crying, as we

CUT TO:

INT.—LIVING ROOM—THEN AND NOW

ADULT ERIC is miserably watching his YOUNG ERIC self combing through the carpet of the living room floor while YOUNG JANICE watches him, worried. No music is playing.

YOUNG JANICE

Eric? Eric, what are you doing?

YOUNG ERIC

He’s faking. He has to be faking. He couldn’t have taken all of those pills...

YOUNG BRENT looks up from his records.

YOUNG BRENT

Hey, where’s Kimmy?

ADULT ERIC

(a hopeless whisper)

Just tell them...

YOUNG ERIC

(hurriedly)

Outside! She went for a walk!

BRENT rises and heads for the front door. He pauses in the open doorway.

YOUNG BRENT

The moon! It’s fucking huge—like a big eye!

As he goes out, YOUNG ERIC is still on his hands and knees, running his fingers through the carpet, searching.

YOUNG ERIC

It’s all bullshit. It has to be! We’re just too high.

YOUNG JANICE

What are you talking about?

YOUNG ERIC

(looks up, desperate-eyed)

It’s not real. We’re all just tripping. Topher’s trying to freak us out. He just pretended to catch those pills, but they’re here somewhere. I’ll find them. That’ll prove it.

He goes back to his relentless combing of the carpet, crawling with his face practically down against the fibers. YOUNG BRENT comes back in and walks past them, then heads up the stairs. ADULT ERIC looks after him, then closes his eyes.

YOUNG JANICE doesn’t know what to do. She looks up at the stairway, then toward the front door. She watches YOUNG ERIC for a moment, then sits back, hugging herself and looking very frightened. ADULT ERIC moves toward her, and although she can’t see him, he kneels in front of her.

ERIC

You were right. Oh, God, I was a fucking idiot, a terrified kid, trying to talk myself into thinking everything made sense.

(a beat)

And now I’m just a ghost and you can’t hear me...

For a moment YOUNG JANICE almost does seems to hear him: she tilts her head, as though searching for a tiny sound. Abruptly, the stereo comes on full-blast—“Iron Man,” by Black Sabbath—and she jerks her head back around to stare at it. There’s no one nearby: it has turned on by itself.

We begin to experience the first scene over again, but this time from ADULT ERIC’s viewpoint.

YOUNG JANICE

Eric! Eric, talk to me!

YOUNG ERIC looks up blearily from the carpet.

YOUNG JANICE

Eric, I want to get out of here right now...!

YOUNG BRENT, staggers down the stairs, clutching his hands against his stomach, panicky but trying to stay calm.

YOUNG BRENT

Shit, it’s bad—Topher’s freaking out for real up there.

YOUNG JANICE

Where’s Kimmy, Brent? What’s going on?

YOUNG BRENT

I don’t know! I can’t find her. I think...I think something bad happened! I...

As if finally realizing something, BRENT lifts his hands away from his body and stares at them. They are covered in blood, smeared to the elbows. His eyes bug out.

YOUNG JANICE

Oh my God!

ADULT ERIC stares at BRENT, then looks up at the ceiling. He SEES something no one else can see, and cowers back in horror, gasping in panic, covering his face.

YOUNG JANICE

Eric! Eric, what’s going on? Stop that!

YOUNG BRENT has just noticed the music playing.

YOUNG BRENT

Why is this on? Who put on Sabbath? I hid the Sabbath!

YOUNG JANICE

(panicked, overwhelmed)

It just...came on. Why do you have blood on you?

YOUNG BRENT

No, no, no! It’s all wrong! It’ll fuck everything up!

YOUNG BRENT runs to the stereo and starts trying to turn it off, but can’t make the buttons work. Blood is smearing on the stereo knobs. He takes out the record and throws it on the floor, but “Iron Man” keeps on playing. He picks the record up and breaks it. He’s crying. The music keeps on playing. Something begins thumping on the ceiling—weird sounds, like there’s a large animal thrashing around up there.

YOUNG JANICE

(suddenly certain)

Oh, no. Kimmy’s up there. With him.

(to YOUNG ERIC)

She’s up there.

YOUNG ERIC shakes his head, but it’s not a denial.

YOUNG ERIC

(gesturing frantically at carpet)

He didn’t take all the pills. They’re around here somewhere. It’s okay! Everything’s going to be okay...!

An even stranger NOISE comes through the roof, a long muffled shriek. The three teenagers look up. For a moment none of them move or speak, although the music continues loud.

YOUNG JANICE

I’m going to get her.

She reaches the stairs, then turns to the two boys. She’s clearly terrified, but trying to be brave.

YOUNG JANICE

Well? Are you coming with me?

YOUNG ERIC

Everything will be all right.

YOUNG BRENT

(dropping the bits of shattered record)

No. It won’t.

YOUNG JANICE waits until YOUNG ERIC drags himself off the carpet and stands. ADULT ERIC leaps to the stairs and tries to block the way with his body.

ADULT ERIC

Don’t go up there! Don’t...!

But he’s insubstantial—they walk THROUGH HIM, as we

DISSOLVE TO:

INT.—STAIRS, THEN—MOMENTS LATER

We’ve dropped back into the shaky, distorted perspective from the beginning of the film, more or less YOUNG ERIC’S POV. YOUNG JANICE leads, YOUNG ERIC and YOUNG BRENT right behind. We can still hear the music, but it seems odd, underwater.

Everything upstairs is very trippy—angles seem strange. The hall lights are FLICKERING between bright and dim. It makes for an eerie, almost “strobelight” effect.

YOUNG JANICE

Kimmy! Kimmy, where are you?

YOUNG ERIC

Where’s...where’s Topher?

YOUNG BRENT

I don’t know. He was here a minute ago—man, he was acting so strange... I think he cut himself or something...

The corridor is distorted, the walls so narrow that it seems they might crush the viewer. YOUNG ERIC looks down to the far end, sees the door to his GRANDMOTHER’S ROOM—the place he left KIMMY. He turns like a sleepwalker and moves toward it. We follow right up to the door, feel him hesitate, then push it open.

Inside, there’s only the one light of the bedside lamp, flickering, making a little humming noise as though you can HEAR the ELECTRICTY. The bed is empty now, the sheets disarranged, smeared. On the wall over the head of the bed is the EYE WITH SUN RAYS, drawn crudely in smeared dark liquid, still wet.

There’s a brighter light coming from under the bedroom door. ERIC moves toward it slowly. He stands in front of it and we hear a strange muffled THUMPING noise, and also heavy breathing and moans, like someone quietly reaching orgasm. ERIC pushes the door and it swings open. There’s something in the tub, moving clumsily, hidden from us by the shower curtain.

YOUNG ERIC

Kimmy...?

YOUNG JANICE is stuck behind YOUNG BRENT, and cannot see properly. She makes a face as something CRAWLS over her foot. She looks down blankly and sees that she’s standing in a couple of dozen ANTS. She shudders and takes a step back, trying to brush them off.

YOUNG ERIC (cont.)

Is that you, Kimmy?

He pulls the shower curtain aside and we see that KIMMY is huddled on her hands and knees, face pressed against the wall, partially hidden by the curtain. She’s breathing in a very jerky way, and her voice is very thin.

KIMMY

Eric? I’m...scared. It’s dark, Eric. But Topher’s... going to help me to see...like he does. Could you turn off the water? I’m getting all...wet.

YOUNG JANICE

(still behind BRENT, trying to get over the ants and past him)

Kimmy? Are you okay?

YOUNG ERIC reaches out to KIMMY and she turns. Her eyes are GONE—only RAGGED BLACK SOCKETS—and her face and shirt are soaked in blood. The wall where she’s been leaning is smeared with blood and the bathtub is full of it—she’s kneeling in it.

YOUNG ERIC and YOUNG BRENT both scream and reel back, knocking YOUNG JANICE over, tumbling in a panic on top of her, which prevents her from seeing.

YOUNG JANICE

Kimmy! Kimmy? Eric, what’s wrong?

YOUNG ERIC

Don’t look! Don’t look!

Scrambling away from the bathroom, he tries to pull YOUNG JANICE with him, but she’s fighting him, crying, trying to get to KIMMY. She manages to grab the doorframe of the bathroom and pull herself crawling onto the tiles. As she turns away from fighting with ERIC, she sees (with her face at floor-level) a black knot of ANTS, boiling, swarming over some small object lying on the tiles just a few inches from her nose. It’s a bloody EYE—one of KIMMY’s eyes.

The POV SWINGS CRAZILY as she flails backward, retching and shrieking, tangling with YOUNG ERIC and YOUNG BRENT as they try to rise. They tumble back into the bedroom, sprawling on the floor. The lights are still flickering slowly on and off, and in a moment of shadow we see that there’s a LARGE DARK SHADOW on the ceiling—like a stain, but more complicated.

As the lights flicker up again, the shadow opens its EYES—it’s TOPHER, stretched on the ceiling as though it were the floor. A trail of BLOODY HANDPRINTS leads up the wall and across the ceiling to where he is.

TOPHER

Seen enough?

The three terror-stricken teenagers crush themselves into the corner of the bedroom, staring as TOPHER crawls back across the ceiling and down the wall like a spider, until he reaches the floor and stands at the center of the room, blood-smeared arms held wide.

TOPHER (cont.)

It’s almost done now. I can fucking feel it happening—I don’t need this body anymore, don’t need any of this...

YOUNG JANICE

(a ragged screech)

What did you do to Kimmy...?

TOPHER

I helped her. Helped her to see...all the way...to the end...

TOPHER suddenly convulses—not just a twitch, but something that physically distorts his ENTIRE BODY. He SCREAMS—a whistling shriek of agony.

TOPHER (cont.)

Oh God! Oh God! Oh God!

He is thrashing now, his body BULGING and TWISTING. STEAM begins to rise from his skin, leaking from his mouth and nostrils, and his gasps and screams become even more tortured. The three teenagers are all weeping in terror, fighting to force themselves even farther back into the corner. TOPHER is between them and the door.

TOPHER (cont.)

Oh, fuck, it hurts! Help me! It hurts it hurts it hurts! I don’t want to be...inside this...any more... Ah! Ah!

TOPHER suddenly staggers forward, his face seeming to MELT from within, little ripples of flame lifting from the skin. He grabs YOUNG BRENT, who shrieks and struggles. YOUNG ERIC and YOUNG JANICE do not try to help him, but only fight to get further away, clawing at each other. TOPHER pulls YOUNG BRENT close so that their faces are only inches apart, wreathed in steam, and shrieks at him.

TOPHER (cont.)

Get me out of here! Fuuuuuck! Make it stop!

The biggest convulsion of all, a moment in which TOPHER seems almost to turn INSIDE-OUT, and YOUNG BRENT is flung away, slamming against the bedroom wall. TOPHER falls onto the floor, writhing like a smashed snake, making awful gargling noises. YOUNG BRENT slowly climbs to his feet, stumbling and gasping, then staggers out the bedroom door.

TOPHER (cont.)

(his voice is different now, weak and ragged)

Stop! Come back! It’s...this is all wrong...

YOUNG ERIC and YOUNG JANICE struggle onto their feet and sprint for the bedroom door. TOPHER’s twitching has slowed—he raises a quivering hand after them.

TOPHER (cont.)

Come...back! Eric! J-Janice! Don’t...leave me... Don’t leave me...

We are on YOUNG ERIC and YOUNG JANICE as they hurtle down the stairs in a distortion of sound and vision. YOUNG BRENT is already gone, the front door swinging, and they CRASH through it after him, still screaming into the darkness, screaming, SCREAMING...

As the door swings back and clicks shut (we see it from the inside) the screaming abruptly STOPS.

We are in the empty, current LIVING ROOM with ADULT ERIC, ADULT JANICE, and ADULT BRENT. They turn in unison from the front door and look at the entrance to the stairway. There is a long, grim silence.

JANICE

(a ragged whisper)

We should have taken Kimmy...

ERIC

We were afraid...

JANICE

We left her there to bleed to death.

BRENT

(staring at them)

Who are you?

ERIC

What?

BRENT

Who are you? Is it you again, another trick? Do we have to do this all over again?

(he begins to cry)

I’ve been here for years. There’s nothing left you can do to me...

JANICE

Brent, it’s us. We’re here. It’s really us.

ERIC

(to nobody in particular)

You know what we need to do, don’t you?

BRENT

But how do I know that?

ERIC

We need to go upstairs.

JANICE closes her eyes, not arguing, knowing it’s true.

BRENT

Upstairs? We can’t!

(whispers)

He’s up there.

ERIC

(to JANICE)

I tried to make it all go away. I was wrong. I lied to you about Kimmy, because...she and I were making out, getting it on, and...and I was feeling like everything would fall apart if you found out.

JANICE

(startled)

Oh, God, Eric, really?

ERIC

But I lied and it killed her.

JANICE hesitates, trying to decide what she feels. At last:

JANICE

You can’t change the past. You can’t let it haunt you. We all wish we'd done things...differently.

Without quite realizing it, they both look at BRENT, but he will not meet their eyes.

ERIC

We should have called someone—the police, an ambulance. Instead of just leaving Topher there all night, turning into...whatever it was.

(a sudden, nasty thought)

Whatever it is.

BRENT

He hates us. We betrayed him.

JANICE

We didn’t know any better.

She looks at ERIC, then holds out her hand, which he takes. As if they’ve had a silent conversation, they both move toward the STAIRS, then, with only the smallest hesitation, they mount up into the shadows. BRENT stares after them for a moment.

BRENT

(quietly)

Don’t leave me here.

He stands for a moment, then—with an expression of great hopelessness— he pulls the GUN out of his pocket and starts up the steps after them.

BACK WITH ERIC AND JANICE:

The stairway is impossibly long, as distorted as some of the earlier hallucinations. They climb silently, clutching each other’s hands. A little MIST or STEAM drifts down from the doorway at the top and eddies past them down the stairs.

They finally reach the door at the top and look into the upper hallway. It’s DISTORTED like 1976, with mist along the wood floor, but empty like “now.” A few leaves rustle beneath their feet, blown in through the broken window at the end of the hall. Silently, ERIC and JANICE step up and begin to walk down the hall. A small cracked voice begins to sing the Oscar Meyer hot dog jingle again, close by.

As ERIC and JANICE reach the bedroom door, it swings open. The empty bedroom has EXPANDED—it seems dozens of yards across. At the far end, a pale shape—TOPHER REBORN—sits in front of the wall in low mist, head sunken on his chest. The EYE WITH SUN RAYS is scrawled on the wall above his head in dried blood. TOPHER finishes the jingle with the line about there soon being nothing left of him.

He lifts his head. He is VERY PALE all over, without any hair, his skin raw and clammy, like some sea creature that has been pulled from a shell. His eyes are all BLACK.

TOPHER (cont.)

Hi, Erky. Hi, Jan-Jan.

JANICE tries to say something, but TOPHER lifts his hand and her mouth works without sound. ERIC takes a step toward him, but TOPHER lifts his other hand and ERIC and JANICE are both frozen in place.

TOPHER

Ssshhhhh. It’s time for you to be quiet.

A strange SHIFT in perspective and TOPHER is suddenly right in front of them, still sitting cross-legged.

TOPHER (cont.)

I spent a long time being quiet, while I changed. It was like being buried alive. Helpless in the dark—screaming but no one could hear me. Twenty-five years. Twenty-five years, screaming! Think about that.

(he reaches out and touches JANICE’s face, then ERIC’s)

I thought of lots of ways to make you suffer for leaving me. Oh, I lay there a long time in the dark, trapped in that body, thinking about it. What I would do to you. When I had finished... changing.

TOPHER stands. He has no genitals, no nipples, no fingernails or toenails. Music begins to play—Roxy Music again, “In Every Dream Home a Heartache,” slow and building.

TOPHER (cont.)

I thought I might...melt you. Or turn you inside out. Or maybe just let you experience what happened to me—a quarter of a century locked inside yourselves—but that all seemed so...obvious. And after a while, I began to really think...

BRENT suddenly appears in the doorway—staggering, panting for breath.

BRENT

Leave them alone!

TOPHER

Hey, I was wondering when you’d show up!

BRENT

Fuck you! You know it’s not them you want. You know it!

TOPHER

Do I? It’s funny how you think you know things about your friends, isn’t it?

BRENT suddenly levels the gun and shoots, five times in rapid succession, screaming as he does so.

BRENT

Fuck you! Fuck you!

When the smoke clears, the REBORN TOPHER is still standing there, unharmed but for five little puckered holes across his pale body. He smiles and looks down at the bloodless wounds. They close up.

TOPHER

Did you really think you were in a place where that would work? This all belongs to me—don’t you know that? This is all my dream, and this time I’m taking you along.

BRENT sobs and lifts the gun.

BRENT

There’s one bullet left...

TOPHER

Go ahead. What was it you said? “One bullet in Topher Holland’s brain and everything’s over”?

BRENT slams the gun against his own head and pulls the trigger. Nothing. A moment later the gun crumbles into dust in his hand.

TOPHER

You didn’t think it would be that easy, did you?

He turns to ERIC and JANICE; they tumble to the floor, moving again.

TOPHER (cont.)

I never finished my story. See, I spent a long time—years—thinking about what to do to you. But then, slowly—oh, I had a lot of time—I came to understand that there are levels of betrayal. Many levels. And you were scared and young, just like I was.

(a beat)

But there are some betrayals that can’t be forgiven.

(he turns to BRENT)

Right, Topher? Come here.

BRENT (as we’ve been thinking of him) sways and crumples to the floor. TOPHER (as we’ve been thinking of him) points, and BRENT begins to crawl toward him, despite himself. TOPHER’s skin is giving off faint curls of smoke now. The music is growing more insistent as it builds toward its slow climax.

TOPHER

You ran, and ran, and ran, didn’t you? But you never really got away.

BRENT

(weeping, fighting, crawling)

No, please! I didn’t mean to...!

TOPHER

But you did it, and that’s all that matters. Abandoned this body like rats off a burning ship. Pushed me out of my own, so I had nowhere to go.

(a beat)

Black Sunshine. We’ll never know quite what that shit was, will we? The answer is probably buried in some government file forever. But it was sure something strange, something...bad.

(He leans down toward crawling BRENT/TOPHER)

You wanted to get out of this body bad, didn’t you? What you did to Kimmy, all the other crazy shit—none of that bothered you. But when the pain came, then you wanted out. And you got out. Jumped right into my body, didn’t you, Topher? And I had nowhere to go but this ruined, mutating shell. You took my body, didn’t you? You took my whole life!

BRENT/TOPHER has now arrived weeping at TOPHER/BRENT’s feet.

BRENT/TOPHER

I’m sorry! I’m so sorry!

TOPHER/BRENT

Sometimes it’s too late for “sorry.” Twenty-five years...Yeah, I'd say it was too late.

ERIC struggles to his feet.

ERIC

(to TOPHER)

Brent...? It’s you?

TOPHER/BRENT

He took my body just like a thief. Tried to make it his own, like repainting a stolen car. But it's over now, Holland, isn't it...?

TOPHER/BRENT pulls BRENT/TOPHER up off the ground and into his arms. The smoke is rising in earnest now, the first flames beginning to flicker from TOPHER/BRENT’s skin. BRENT/TOPHER is screeching and fighting, in pain, but can’t escape.

JANICE

Don’t! Oh, God, don’t...!

ERIC

Brent, we’ll help you...!

TOPHER/BRENT shakes his pale head. As the Roxy Music song comes up louder, he leans close to BRENT/TOPHER, close as a lover, and stares into his eyes. BRENT/TOPHER struggles even harder, like an animal in a trap, but it’s no use.

TOPHER/BRENT

(to ERIC)

No, there’s no help now—only loose ends. Only circles being closed. Sometimes the future can’t begin...until you kill your past...

Fire and smoke are leaking out of TOPHER/BRENT’s mouth as he turns back to BRENT/TOPHER.

TOPHER/BRENT

And now I want back all the things you took. The things that would have been mine...

The smoke and light is leaking from BRENT/TOPHER’s mouth, nose, and eyes now, being INHALED by TOPHER/BRENT.

TOPHER/BRENT (cont.)

A life...you got to live a life...but it should have been mine...

BRENT/TOPHER

(shrieking in terror)

No...no...!

TOPHER/BRENT

We got married, didn’t we...and we even had a child! Ah, she’s beautiful...

BRENT/TOPHER

No! Not them! Tracy, Joanie! Give it back!

TOPHER/BRENT

(gently)

No, it’s you who have to give it back now, Topher. Everything you stole. But don’t worry—it’s only for a moment...

BRENT/TOPHER is fighting, struggling, but his life and memories are leaking out of him, being devoured by TOPHER/BRENT—the real BRENT. The music comes up—Roxy Music, swelling...

TOPHER/BRENT

So many things that should have been mine. My memories, my future. Stolen. All you left me was the past. All you left me was that night.

(a beat)

Remember this song, Topher? It used to be one of your favorites...

(sings, almost a whisper)

“Inflatable dolly—dee-luxe and dee-lightful. I blew up your body...but you blew my mind!”

As the guitar solo wails in, the flames suddenly become an INFERNO—a wall of fire. We see the two figures writhing within it, hear BRENT/ TOPHER’s shrieks grow more and more SHRILL, then descend into bubbling GASPS as the figures in the flames slowly MELT TOGETHER...

A moment later, there is NOTHING: TOPHER and BRENT and the painted EYE on the wall are gone. The music is gone. ERIC and JANICE are huddled together in the deserted empty bedroom, with dawn light filtering through the cracked windowpane.

Silently, and as carefully as if they’ve both been badly bruised, they walk down the stairs, which look quite normal now. They make their way across the bare living room and out onto the front porch, where they stand for a moment, looking out across the empty dirt lot in the early morning light, to the trees and town beyond.

JANICE

What happens now?

ERIC

The future.

JANICE

Brent...Topher...whoever he was. He has a wife, a daughter. What are we going to tell them?

ERIC

(shrugs)

The truth? Or some part of it?

(a beat)

Maybe not.

Without looking, they reach out and find each other’s hands, then walk down the porch steps and out into the field that once was an orchard. We pull back, watching two small figures walk slowly, holding hands, across the empty field. Pink Floyd’s “Wish You Were Here” comes up, sweet and sad.

ROLL CREDITS. THE END.