



UNIVERSAL CABLE PRODUCTIONS



CHANNEL ZERO

An Anthology

"Candle Cove: Transmission One"

by

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based on the short story by Kris Straub

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FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY

"Channel Zero" is another name for the collective unconscious.

It's the frequency your nightmares play on. The channel we all tune in to when we close our eyes at night.

It's the source of eerily similar horror tales told and retold in different cities around the world.

It's the birthplace of modern urban legends you find on a cheap forgotten website somewhere on the internet. Stories of the world you recognize, thick with dread and unease.

Each season of CHANNEL ZERO will tell a single one of these stories, curated from the strangest, most unsettling tales discovered in the darkest corners of the internet.

The first season's story... Kris Straub's haunting "Candle Cove."

- Nick Antosca

Open on... A DIGITAL DISTORTION PATTERN

Our TV displays a distorted but oddly beautiful image. And we begin to hear... is that CALLIOPE MUSIC? Now CUT TO -

A KIDS' TV SHOW

Amateurish painted sky. Dangling yellow sun. The CALLIOPE MUSIC continues, ominously festive. This is the "CANDLE COVE THEME" ... and we'll hear it again.

CANDLE COVE

A dated, cheesy title card. Ultra-low budget, local public access sort of thing. PAN DOWN from the sky to reveal...

A TOY PIRATE SHIP ("THE LAUGHINGSTOCK"), and a PIRATE PUPPET ("PERCY") at the helm, holding the flimsy wheel. Percy has a PORCELAIN BABY DOLL HEAD and BULGING EYES.

PERCY THE PUPPET

I- I'm scared, Laughingstock. There's somethin' in there.

Up ahead waits THE ENTRANCE TO A WATERY CAVE.

Now reveal: The good ship Laughingstock has a FACE, like Thomas the Tank Engine. It looks like a deranged whale.

THE LAUGHINGSTOCK

There sure is, Percy. But dont'cha want the treeeeasure?

PUSH IN SLOWLY on the CAVE ENTRANCE. A DARK MOUTH. Crooning:

THE LAUGHINGSTOCK (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You... hafta... go... insiiiiide.

As WE ARE SWALLOWED UP INTO THE CAVE'S DARKNESS... CUT TO:

TODAY SHOW INTERVIEW FOOTAGE:

MATT LAUER, familiar and friendly, faces us from the studio set. Well-lit, bright, homey.

MATT LAUER

Mike Painter's here with me. He's been called "America's child psychologist," and his new book is *The Future is You*. I'm happy to have Mike Painter back on the show.

Reveal sitting on the couch: **MIKE PAINTER (40)**. Mike smiles.

MIKE

Thank you.

Mike has a reassuring presence. He's boyish, but he has a confident, protective quality. He radiates warm intelligence. A man you trust - because you can see he's at peace with himself.

MATT LAUER

So Mike. Has being a dad changed how you look at childhood?

MIKE

Yeah, I think so. Your perspective becomes less clinical and more... *How do we nurture and protect?*

MATT LAUER

Your wife Laura's a child psychologist too.

MIKE

So parenthood is field research, yes. Our daughter Grace is six. And it's...

MATT LAUER

Lions in the wild.

The two men falling into easy conversation, laughing.

MIKE

Kids can be pretty scary, yeah. But in a way... adulthood is just a mask, a sophisticated mask, and behind it, we're just the kids we used to be.

MATT LAUER

(more serious)

In the book you talk about your own childhood. Your twin brother was murdered when you were twelve.

Mike hesitates. And now there's subtle shift as suddenly -

INT. MATT LAUER'S STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

WE'RE NO LONGER WATCHING TV FOOTAGE. We're IN THE STUDIO, WITH MIKE. Close on him.

And now we're aware of the edges of the studio set. Beyond the cozy living room, off camera, PITCH DARKNESS. A VOID.

Mike's gaze flicks downward - to **A DYING FLY...** Caught in his water glass. STRUGGLING. He can hear its TWITCHING WINGS.

MIKE

In the summer of 1988... in Iron Hill, West Virginia, where I was born... five kids were murdered.

MATT LAUER

The Iron Hill Murders. Never solved.

A faint HUM starts up in Mike's ear. Or in his head.

MIKE

Yes. The last victim was my twin brother. Eddie. I was sent to live with my uncle after that. And I've never been back.

MATT LAUER

Why not?

Mike's eyes flick back to the DROWNING FLY.

MIKE

I don't believe in returning to pain.

MATT LAUER

Will you ever go back to Iron Hill?

MIKE

We don't have to relive pain. We can accept and acknowledge, then mindfully choose to let go. So no. I'll never go back.

MATT LAUER

I want to do something unusual.

Matt Lauer slides a LANDLINE PHONE between them.

MATT LAUER (CONT'D)

I have someone on the phone. His name is Andy. He's 6 years old. His mother recently died. I'd like you to talk to him. Show me what you do.

Mike is taken aback. *This is fucked up.* He glances around, unnerved. Now (eyes adjusting) he sees SHAPES in the darkness beyond the set. CAMERAS. Silhouettes of CREW & CAMERAMEN.

MIKE

I don't think that's approp-

MATT LAUER

(hitting the speaker button)
Andy? Are you there?

THICK STATIC. Then... a CHILD'S SCARED VOICE... far away...

ANDY (V.O.)
...H-hello?

Mike is loathe to engage, but feeling he has no choice...

MIKE
Andy? My name is Dr. Painter. I'm a doctor who kids talk to about all kinds of things that might be on their mind. Was there anything you wanted to talk to me about? ...
(a beat of silence)
Do you have a favorite animal?
(hearing WHIMPERING)
Andy, are you okay?

Andy is CRYING in fear. Matt Lauer just stares at Mike. Creepy. There's ODD RUSTLING on the line. Mike grows alarmed.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Is somebody there with you?
(to Matt Lauer)
What is this??

The CRYING rises, nearing hysteria - then STOPS. Silence. Until... CALLIOPE MUSIC can be heard over the line. The *CANDLE COVE THEME*. Mike recognizes it: he goes still with dread.

Then... Andy begins to LAUGH.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Andy... what is that? Is that your TV?

More laughter. Mike's heart is racing. Whatever *Candle Cove* is, it strikes a nerve with him. Trying to stay calm -

MIKE (CONT'D)
Andy, turn it off.

The laughter grows HIGH-PITCHED, UNNATURAL. Almost HELPLESS -

MIKE (CONT'D)
Turn it off!

The call ABRUPTLY CUTS OFF. Mike looks at the FLY: Dead, floating. Matt Lauer stares at Mike, blank as a mannequin. Mike looks at the Crew, but his eyes have adjusted more...

... and he can see that THEY ACTUALLY ARE MANNEQUINS. Eerily real, but clearly made of wood and cloth. *What the fuck??* The PHONE RINGS. Mike flinches. Matt Lauer answers it, listens.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Is it him?

Matt Lauer shakes his head... but holds out the receiver.

MATT LAUER

It's for you.

Mike stares at the phone. More than anything in the world, he does not want to take this call... **HARD CUT TO -**

INT. MIKE'S WESTCHESTER HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

- as Mike Painter wakes in bed. Mike sits up. Alone in a beautiful bed. Morning sun streams in the window.

Mike looks around, dazed. He rubs his eyes. Looks at a **FRAMED PHOTO: Mike, his wife, their daughter.** A beautiful family.

Seeing them, Mike smiles. Then his gaze slides to the clock beside the photo: It's 10:21am. He groans and stands up...

KITCHEN - DAY

Mike eats Kashi cereal in a *Better Homes & Gardens* kitchen, casually reading the newspaper.

He takes out his phone, goes to "Favorite Contacts" and thumbs "Laura." His wife. Types: "**Heading out now. Have a good day at work. Love ya.**" His thumb hovers as if he's about to type more. But he decides against it. Hits send.

Then he grabs some **PACKED BAGS** by the door and heads out...

EXT. MIKE'S WESTCHESTER HOUSE - DAY

We get a look at Mike's beautiful neighborhood as he walks to his Lexus. A neighbor waves. Mike waves back.

As he gets in the car and drives off, a beautiful **SCORE** (think Morricone's "Days of Heaven" theme) rises and plays over...

A MONTAGE: MIKE PAINTER ON THE ROAD

As Mike **EMBARKS ON A JOURNEY**. Beginning in the **WEALTHY GREEN SUBURBS** of Westchester...

... onto the endless generic stretches of **I-78 INTERSTATE**... others cars passing, a **LITTLE KID** looking at Mike from the back seat of an SUV; Mike smiles back...

... this is smooth, peaceful, gliding across the landscape as clouds slide over the sky... now the downbeat **RUST BELT** with its rest stop **Cracker Barrels** and **Roy Rogers**, until finally...

Mike leaves the interstate, moving onto RURAL ROADS... the countryside of West Virginia, WOODS and SMALL TOWNS...

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD / PICNIC AREA - DAY

Mike cruises down a lonely road shaded by green forest. Late afternoon, the shadows long and deep. Mike pulls off onto...

AN EMPTY PICNIC AREA. It's tiny, just a faded picnic table and patchy grass, surrounded by FOREST. A peaceful spot.

CLOSE ON MIKE as he leans back and shuts his eyes. Gonna take a short roadside nap. His left hand hangs limply from the car window. As he settles to sleep, his hand TWITCHING once...

FADE DOWN the lovely score to SILENCE. But as Mike sleeps... there's movement in the woods. And from that darkness...

A SMALL, WHITE FIGURE emerges. The size of a child... but ENTIRELY COVERED IN HUMAN TEETH. No eyes, no ears... only A TOOTHLESS, RED-GUMMED MOUTH. This is **THE TOOTH-CHILD**.

The Tooth-Child creeps toward Mike. And when it reaches him... it puts its mouth on Mike's fingers and begins sucking on them. Like an infant nursing. An awful, nightmare image...

CLOSE ON... Mike's eyes slowly opening. AND REVEAL: He's alone now. The Tooth-Child is gone.

Mike starts the car. The Lexus drives off. We FOLLOW IT down the road... then pan over to reveal the sign it just passed:

WELCOME TO IRON HILL, WEST VIRGINIA

Mike Painter is going back home.

MAIN TITLES
then FADE TO...

EXT. A RURAL HOUSE / FRONT YARD - DUSK

Mike gets out of the Lexus and looks up at the OLD TWO-STORY HOUSE surrounded by woods. He walks toward it...

INSERT - 1988, 2 BOYS RUNNING UP THE LAWN... MIKE (AGE 12) and his twin Eddie. A flicker of memory. Subjective POV.

PRESENT: Mike climbs the porch steps, nervous. Up close, the house looks cared for: Old but loved. He RINGS THE BELL.

No answer. He looks at an old SUV in the drive. *Someone's home*. He RINGS the bell again. And hears FAINT VOICES from around the side... CUT TO -

THE BACK YARD

A **BLACKBIRD** - perched on a woman's creased hand. Unafraid.

A **LITTLE GIRL (6)** - watching the bird. Fascinated. Silent.

A **WOMAN (60s)** - letting the bird eat seeds from her hand. The Woman has kind eyes and long grey hair.

MIKE (O.S.)

Hey.

His voice startles the bird - and it flies away. The Woman turns... but stops when she sees Mike. As if seeing a ghost.

This is Mike's mother: **MARLA PAINTER (60s)**. A strong, intelligent, good person. Wounded but resilient.

MARLA

Jesus.

LITTLE GIRL

(tugging her arm)

Who is that?

Mike walks toward them. Marla is quietly overwhelmed.

MARLA

Mike... Why didn't you tell me you were coming?

MIKE

I wanted to surprise you.

MARLA

(shaky laugh)

Well, you did.

LITTLE GIRL

Miss Marla - who is that??

Mike smiles warmly at the Little Girl.

MIKE

Hi. I'm Mike.

Little Girl just watches him with big eyes and tugs Marla's arm again, whispering -

LITTLE GIRL

Miss Marla.

MARLA

He's my son.

LITTLE GIRL
You have a son??

Mike holds Marla's gaze - a complicated history between them. Then he kneels in front of the Little Girl. Very gentle, non-threatening. Practiced at putting kids at ease.

MIKE
Are you taking good care of my mom?

Little Girl just looks at him shyly.

MIKE (CONT'D)
You like birds?

Little Girl hesitates, then nods. Marla is watching this interaction, touched.

MIKE (CONT'D)
What's your favorite bird?

LITTLE GIRL
Woodpecker... or no - blue jay.

MIKE
When I was a kid, I used to fill the feeder out here, and every day I'd see a blue jay chase the crows away so the other birds could eat. Just one brave blue jay, and all these big crows would fly away scared.

Little Girl finally smiles, amused.

MIKE (CONT'D)
So I like blue jays too. Why do you like them?

LITTLE GIRL
Um... their tails...

She laughs, now comfortable with Mike...

INT. MARLA'S KITCHEN - DUSK

A cozy kitchen. Mike sits as Marla gets leftovers from the fridge. She's still a bit shaken by Mike suddenly showing up.

Mike looks around, taking in the decor, the warmth. It's comforting. He sees PHOTOS - Marla with young kids, at the piano. No photos of Mike or his family.

MIKE
That didn't look like a piano lesson.

MARLA

She's easily distracted. Sweet girl.
You're so good with kids.

MIKE

Runs in the family. And it's what I do.

A beat as Marla arranges food on plates.

MARLA

Sorry I'm quiet, I'm just... it's
so strange to see you.

(then)

Good to see you.

MIKE

It's fine, Mom. It is good.

MARLA

I'm gonna have a beer, you want one?

She hands him one. Mike opens it and drains half the bottle
in one drink, thirsty. Marla puts their plates on the table.

MARLA (CONT'D)

Chicken amandine from yesterday. I
like it cold.

She sits and opens a beer. A long drink. Mike eats.

MIKE

Thanks, Mom. I'm starving.
(stops, just regarding her)
It really is, um...

He trails off.

MARLA

'...good to be home'?

Her tone is just slightly pointed. Gentle, but pointed.

MARLA (CONT'D)

You haven't been in this kitchen in
almost thirty years, Mike.

MIKE

You know you can come visit us any
time. I wish you would.

MARLA

When I came after Grace was born, I
felt... I don't know.

(then, genuine)

Sorry. I wasn't prepared for this.

MIKE

What I was gonna say was, 'it is good to see you, Mom.'

Marla nods. She has a lot of questions. Isn't sure how to ask them, or if she should at all. She watches him eat.

MARLA

So, are you... just passing through?

MIKE

(chuckles)

No, ma, this was my intended destination.

MARLA

How long do you want to stay?

MIKE

I could stay at the motel -

MARLA

Are you kidding?

MIKE

I don't want to inconvenience you. I mean I can't stay long obviously, I gotta get back to Laura and Grace.

MARLA

Stay as long as you want.

MIKE

I really want you to see Grace again. That kid reminded me of her. Jesus, she was a baby last time. This week she starts first grade.

Marla's just watching him, holding a lot in.

MARLA

Yeah?

MIKE

She's growing up on a daily basis. She brought home this painting she did at art camp of a big blue dog -

MARLA

(cutting him off)

Mike, why are you here?

Mike stops eating.

MARLA (CONT'D)
Just tell me.

MIKE
What's wrong?

MARLA
Nothing, right now. I'm really happy to see you. But...
(hesitates, torn)
I like my life. It's a good life, considering. I just hope you're not here to rip a wound open.

MIKE
I'm not.

MARLA
Every few years, some writer comes to Iron Hill to try and solve those murders. I've always been afraid one day it would be you.

A beat. His silence not denying it. Then -

MARLA (CONT'D)
After all these years. Why now?

MIKE
I'm... in a place in my life where it feels necessary.

Not enough of an answer for Marla. She looks at him, waiting.

MIKE (CONT'D)
(if you really want to know...)
Nightmares. Past year or so. I write books about "moving forward" but...
(he makes a gesture of futility: *Here we are.*)
So I guess today is that day. I am that writer.

MARLA
I hope it helps you sleep.

MIKE
He was my twin, Mom.

MARLA
Well, he was my baby boy. He was the one who needed my protection.
(then)
I love you. Do what you need to do.
(MORE)

MARLA (CONT'D)

All I ask is keep me out of it,
don't ask me for help, don't tell
me how it's going. I just want
to... live in the present.

MIKE

Okay.

Marla gets up, resigned. Starts to go, but -

MARLA

It's so strange to be called Mom.

She leaves. Off Mike, alone at the table...

INT. MARLA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A bit later that night. Marla's alone. Dressed for bed now. Staring into her dresser mirror, thinking.

Then... She goes to the closet. Moves things aside to reveal: A TRUNK. Inside: **FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHS**. Old, dusty. Photos of TWO BOYS. Identical twins. MIKE & EDDIE PAINTER. Her sons.

And NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS from 1988. "SEARCH INTENSIFIES FOR MISSING KIDS." "ANOTHER ONE." "THE IRON HILL MURDERS." And...

"FIFTH CHILD FOUND DEAD" over a PHOTO OF SMILING, GEEKY EDDIE PAINTER. Marla thoughtfully wipes dust off his face, gently taps the photo with her finger... TAP... TAP... TAP...

Off Marla, haunted and lost in thought, remembering...

EXT. MARLA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Establishing. After midnight. The MOON gleams over the house. MATCH CUT from the moon to -

WHITE SLEEPING PILLS... in a man's hand. We're in -

INT. MARLA'S GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT

As Mike swallows the SLEEPING PILLS and lies back on the guest bed. Wide awake. He looks around at mundane details: A lamp with no bulb. An OLD TV on the dresser. Some FOSSILS, an ANT FARM. *This used to be Mike's childhood bedroom.* Then -

A CRACKLE OF STATIC jolts him: The old TV on the dresser just turned on by itself. Mike sits up slowly, the TV's glow playing across his face. SNOWY ANALOG STATIC on the screen.

The CANDLE COVE THEME becomes faintly audible. Like delirious carnival music. Mike tenses. *He knows that music...*

Mike gets up and turns the TV off - plunging the room into DARKNESS. Relief. Then - WE NOTICE in that dark background:

A **HUGE FIGURE** CROUCHING BEHIND MIKE, HALF HIDDEN BY THE BED.

Mike does not see it yet. A *Puppet-thing* peeping out from behind the bed like a like a giant, gleefully evil child playing a prank. It has A WHITE PUPPET FACE and GLASS EYES, and seems to be WEARING A PALE CLOAK and a BLACK TOP HAT.

Now Mike turns and sees it. He freezes... but doesn't flee. *Whatever this thing is, he has seen it before.*

MIKE

You're not there.

The *Puppet-thing* doesn't move. Mike begins to walk toward it.

Closer... closer. More of it comes into view.

He extends a hand.... Walks up to it... outstretched fingers about to touch it... when -

IT IS SILENTLY GONE.

Mike sits on the bed, short of breath. Deeply shaken. He lays down, closing his eyes. CLOSE ON MIKE'S FACE - and MATCH CUT:

MIKE'S FACE - IN DAWN SUNLIGHT... Pull back to REVEAL we are -

EXT. MARLA'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAWN

- standing in the yard. Barefoot. Sunrise. *Mike sleepwalked.*

He looks around almost guiltily. As if ashamed to have done this. He holds up his LEFT HAND... it is curled in a claw. He flexes it, bringing sensation and movement back.

Then Mike looks over the treetops... in the exact direction he was walking... at: **A WOODED MOUNTAINTOP**, not far. His eyes fix on a DARK, ROCKY OUTCROPPING at its peak. He stares...

... and then JOLTS, startled, as Marla walks past him. She gives Mike a strange look: *What are you doing out here?*

MIKE

Where you going?

Marla goes over to her car, unlocks it.

MARLA

Just to clear my head.

(then)

How's yours?

CUT TO... A GRAVESTONE:

Edward Painter
Beloved Son and Brother
 1976-1988

EXT. NEW BAPTIST CHURCH CEMETERY - DAY

... and reveal Mike & Marla, at Eddie's grave. By a CHURCH.
 Leaves RUSTLING, birds SINGING... beautiful day.

MIKE

And you always swore you'd never
 make us go to church.

MARLA

(soft laugh)

Well, turns out when it comes to
 burying your kids, New Baptist is
 the only game in town.

Mike smiles. He looks around... and sees that they are not
 alone: Across the cemetery, a **MAN IN A RED-BROWN SWEATER**
 kneels by a grave. In the shadow of an oak. His face unseen.

Mike watches idly. Then the man looks over, and Mike politely
 averts his gaze.

MARLA (CONT'D)

You want to talk to him?

MIKE

(surprised)

What?

Then he realizes she means talk to Eddie - his grave.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Oh. Uh, well, I -

MARLA

I'm kidding, don't be weird. Do
 that shit in your head.

Mike smiles. He glances over at Red-Brown Sweater again...
 and sees that the guy's leaving. Walking off toward his
 car... Gone. Mike looks back at the grave. Marla sighs.

MARLA (CONT'D)

Let's go home, I'll make lunch.

Off Mike, with a last glance at the grave...

INT. MARLA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Marla and Mike, back at home. Finishing lunch. Marla glances at him, fighting curiosity.

MARLA

You planning on doing anything today?
Or just working from here?

MIKE

(getting up, glancing at
his watch)
I was gonna head over to the
sheriff's and see about something.

MARLA

"Something."

MIKE

You said you don't want to know.

But Mike has glanced up - and he stops. He's looking at the window behind Marla, which looks out into the back yard.

MARLA

What?

MIKE

There's a guy in the woods.
(as she turns to look)
Hang on, don't turn around.
(then, unnerved)
He's looking at us.

MARLA

Can you see what he looks like?

We still don't see what Mike is seeing.

MIKE

No... he's got a red sweater on. I
think this same guy was at the
cemetery just now.

MARLA

I'm gonna look.

Marla turns to look and now we see HER POV: A FIGURE IN A RED-BROWN SWEATER lurking in the shadowed trees - turns and disappears into the forest as soon as Marla looks at him.

MARLA (CONT'D)

There he goes.
(then, shrugging)
People walk through the woods.

MIKE
He was stopped.

MARLA
I never saw any guy at the church.

MIKE
Anything like that ever happen
before? Somebody looking at you?

MARLA
No. Mike, relax.

MIKE
Come with me to the sheriff's.

Marla gives him a look.

MARLA
Are you kidding?? Go. You're
aggravating me.
(then)
Jesus. People walk in the woods.

Mike shrugs reluctantly. Mike hesitates, but finally leaves. Marla waits til she hears his car. Then she goes back to the window and looks at the woods uneasily. FADE TO...

EXT. A STREET IN TOWN - DAY

A street in IRON HILL. Quiet and idyllic, yet modern. PAN OVER to a small RED-BRICK BUILDING shaded by oaks: **THE SHERIFF'S STATION**. Tiny. Looks more like a post office.

REVEAL - That was Mike's POV. Mike walks toward the station.

INT. SHERIFF'S STATION - FRONT DESK - DAY

Mike approaches Deputy **AMY WELCH** (~33). She's on the phone, taking a report. She's the only person visible.

AMY WELCH
Lemme guess, they didn't take
anything... Susan'll take your
statement, ok Mr. Crumm?
(puts phone down, yells)
SUSAN!? Line one... the only one
that's blinking.
(to Mike; who are you?)
Yeah?

MIKE
My name's Mike Painter. I, um-

AMY WELCH
Oh - hey! Mike Painter.

MIKE
That's right-

AMY WELCH
I know all about you. My mom saw you on Dr. Phil and got all excited. Amy Welch.

MIKE
Amy Welch. I remember your mom.

AMY WELCH
None of her other students ever got on TV. Hey, want some pastries?

She points to a paper box of pastries.

MIKE
All yours.

AMY WELCH
I can't eat gluten. So... what are you doing *here*?

Mike hesitates, not wanting to answer - when...

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Holyyyy shit.

Sheriff GARY YOUNG (40, African-American) is walking up. A former football star past his glory. Friendly, relaxed.

GARY
I've seen him on TV, too.
(looks at Mike a beat)
Mikey Painter. You here to report a crime?

MIKE
Ah, no. Actually I have a request.
For you, I think.

GARY
Why don't we go in my office?

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

A cluttered, almost cozy office. Family photos. Sports trophies. Gary Young leans against his desk, facing Mike.

GARY

You know, I got 26 varsity touchdowns playing for the Iron-heads. But not one felt as good as a certain grand slam I hit when I was ten years old. Billy Reese was on first, some other kid was on second - and you were on third. ...You don't remember, do you?

MIKE

I remember.

GARY

(laughing)

You don't have to be polite.

MIKE

Gary, I remember you. I read the Gazette online. When you were elected, I read about it.

GARY

Ha. Well. We keep up on you, too. Your mom's closer to my daughter than her real grandma is. So I kinda feel like I still know you.

MIKE

And I had a feeling I might need your help. I was actually hoping I could look at some files from back then. From '88. The murders.

Gary hesitates. Almost apologetic:

GARY

Mind telling me why? I mean, it's still a sensitive area.

MIKE

There's a lot of questions still.

GARY

A lot of those questions kinda faded during the 28 years since those five kids were carried out of the woods and buried.

MIKE

Minus their teeth.

Gary sighs.

GARY

Yeah, they never did find the teeth.

(then)

All I'm saying is, there's lots of people just like you and your mom who lost people. And *technically* it's still an open case. I'm not saying no. I'm just asking why.

MIKE

I'm writing a book.

GARY

Ok. ...Is it gonna be a good book?

MIKE

I believe so.

GARY

A respectful book?

MIKE

Above all else.

Gary nods, thinking. Looking around. Then suddenly -

GARY

Hey, did you know that I married Jessica Hale?

MIKE

... Yes, I did.

GARY

I think she'd be pretty annoyed if she knew I saw you and didn't invite you for dinner tonight.

(as Mike starts to protest)

C'mon, we're having people over. Plus I need your expert opinion on my kid. I think he's turning out *strange*.

MIKE

No, really, I'm not feeling-

GARY

You come over for dinner... and I'll give you a hand with those files.

Off Mike... PRE-LAP CONVERSATION and DINNER SOUNDS... CUT TO:

EXT. THE YOUNGS' HOUSE - BACK YARD DECK - NIGHT

... Mike sitting awkwardly at the "dinner party." SIX PEOPLE outside under a FULL MOON, drinking beers and eating tri-tip. In addition to Gary, there's Amy Welch, the deputy. The youngest here. Curious, loves stories. And...

JOE CUSTER (40) - Big, drunk. Former class clown. Likes Amy.

TIM HAZEL (late 40s) - Quiet, mild-mannered. Also likes Amy.

And notably, **JESSICA (40)**, Gary's wife. Pretty. Jessica has a warm, open-hearted vibe. She is intrigued by Mike's presence. Watching him. He glances at her curiously, too.

GARY

Coach Founder never liked me.

JESSICA

He never liked anybody. The man was a grouch, he was a grumpy, grouchy type of person-

JOE CUSTER

You know, I think he was the first teacher to swear in front of me.

MIKE

(doing an impression)
"Custer, you're pissin me off."

JOE CUSTER

Mike, you missed your calling.

AMY WELCH

I always felt bad for the guy.

TIM HAZEL

How so?

AMY WELCH

Well he'd had to quit by the time I was there.

MIKE

He quit? Why?

GARY

That's right, you were gone by then.

JOE CUSTER

(savoring this)
Founder was having an affair.

MIKE
What, really?

JESSICA
With Mr. Timmons.

MIKE
What?

TIM HAZEL
They live in Florida together now.
Good for them, I think-

MIKE
Wait like- Mr. Timmons- *Grizzly*
Timmons was having a secret affair
with Coach Frowner!?

JOE CUSTER
Worth coming back just for that, right?

MIKE
I mean- Jesus. Wow.

AMY WELCH
Well I think it's a happily ever after.

TIM HAZEL
It is.

DANE YOUNG (9) comes outside and nudges Gary's arm...

DANE
Dad, Katie's been watching TV
forever. I wanna watch *Labyrinth*.

GARY
Life is tough, bud.

JESSICA
Dane, tell your sister it's time
for bed. And you too.

Dane makes an expression of outrage, then trudges inside.

GARY
My nine-year-old's obsessed with
David Bowie. That's strange, right?

MIKE
(amused)
I wouldn't worry about it.

JESSICA

Thank you, Mike. *We* were strange.
Remember we had our own language?

AMY WELCH

You made up a language?

MIKE

We were like seven.

JESSICA

We had an imaginary kingdom, and I
was Queen and you were King.

AMY WELCH

My friends never did fun stuff like
that, they were all on their gameboys.

JESSICA

God you ARE young.

MIKE

And Eddie wanted to be King, but I
always made him be the Jester.

JESSICA

(to Amy)

I grew up right down the road from
him and his brother. When we got
older Mike had a little crush on me.

GARY

Should I be worried?

AMY WELCH

Mike, you have a kid, right?

MIKE

I have a beautiful six year old
named Grace who's already learning
how to use sarcasm.

JESSICA

A six year old teenager. That's fun.

MIKE

(getting up)

Always. Where's the bathroom?

INT. THE YOUNGS' HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - NIGHT

Mike SPLASHES WATER on his face. Looks in the mirror. He's
exhausted. A little drunk. Ready to leave.

UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

As Mike passes a bedroom doorway -

QUIET LITTLE GIRL (O.S.)

Mike?

Mike stops. Steps back. A LITTLE GIRL watches him from the bedroom... and Mike does a double take when he sees the same Little Girl he met in his mom's yard. This is **KATIE YOUNG (6)**. Jessica's daughter.

Mike kneels, getting on her level. He takes a reassuring, gentle tone with her. Instinctively good with kids.

MIKE

Hey. Katie. I didn't realize this was your house. Nice to see you again.

(off Katie's smile)

Guess what? You're friends with my mom... and I'm friends with your mom. Cool, huh? And *my* daughter is just your age.

Katie holds out her hand for a handshake. Mike reaches out - but she makes a fist. He FIST-BUMPS her. She GIGGLES.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Boom.

Then Katie raises a finger to her lips. "*SHHH.*"

MIKE (CONT'D)

Okay. Why are we *shhh*-ing?

Katie looks over her shoulder - into the dark room. She seems to be looking at THE TV. Which is off. She's disappointed.

KATIE

Aw. It went away.

MIKE

What did?

Katie looks back at the blank TV, frustrated.

MIKE (CONT'D)

What went away?

She stares at him, reluctant to speak. He gets insistent -

MIKE (CONT'D)

Katie? What were you watching?

Before we hear her answer, HARD CUT TO -

EXT. THE YOUNGS' HOUSE - BACK YARD DECK - NIGHT

Mike abruptly comes outside and returns to the table, amid boozey chatter. He grabs a beer and drinks. Disturbed -

GARY

...and she says, "I can't cuz it's stuck on the ice." And I go, "Well how'd *that* happen?..."

On Mike... stewing. Something eating at him. He takes another long, almost violent drink. Then sharply cuts Gary off -

MIKE

You guys remember *Candle Cove*?

They all abruptly look at him. The change in his demeanor is striking. Tension, an air of jittery aggression. Impatient -

MIKE (CONT'D)

Kids' show. When we were growing up. Puppets. It had puppets.

GARY

(remembering)

Yeah... it was only on for like a year.

MIKE

A *summer*. Summer of '88.

JESSICA

...and they looked like they were made in somebody's basement out of like hair and teeth and bubble gum...

JOE CUSTER

The Laughingstock! That was their ship.

AMY WELCH

The fuck are you guys talking about?
(to Tim)
Do you know?

TIM HAZEL

(curious)

I was too old. I missed it.

Jessica, Joe, and Gary are getting oddly excited, chiming in. Mike watches with fearful intensity, like a cornered animal.

JOE CUSTER
The summer I started smoking weed. And watching that shit! There was Pirate Percy... and Horace...

JESSICA
It was on a weird channel. Like 58 or something. And it started to get weirder and weirder as it went on...

MIKE
(drunk, cutting in)
Katie told me she was watching it tonight.

Everybody looks sharply at Mike again. Surprised.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Did you ever tell her about it?

GARY
No, I -

JESSICA
Hell no.

TIM HAZEL
Is it back on the air??

JESSICA
Who would rerun that?

JOE CUSTER
Millenials!

JESSICA
Well, Katie shouldn't be watching it. I remember having nightmares... I had a nightmare where I was watching it but it was just the puppet faces *screaming*, just...

JOE CUSTER
That was an actual episode.

JESSICA
No, no - not possible.

JOE CUSTER
(grinning)
Remember... Jawbone?

Mike subtly reacts. Only Gary notices.

AMY WELCH
What's Jawbone?

JESSICA
That was the bad guy's name.

JOE CUSTER
 (relishing this)
 He was this dirty skeleton thing...
 in a white robe and a black top
 hat, but his head was a skull, and
 he had these big ol' glass eyes -

ON MIKE white-knuckling ANXIETY... FLASHBACK TO -

THE PUPPET-THING... crouching behind the bed in its PALE COAT and a BLACK TOP HAT. Staring up at Mike - at us - with GLASS EYES: The Puppet-Thing Mike saw was Jawbone. Life-sized.

REVERSE to Mike in the guest bedroom... but instead of Mike, it's HIS 12-YEAR-OLD SELF, backed up against the wall in paralyzing terror - off this petrified child BACK TO -

MIKE - *violently* lurching to his feet at the table.

GARY
 Had too much to drink there, man -

MIKE
 You gonna sit around and talk about
 this shit all night?

The harshness in his voice surprises them - and us.

JOE CUSTER
 You brought it up.

GARY
 It's just a show, bud.

Jessica's watching him with empathy. Gary's fascinated. But Mike's staggering away from the table, muttering...

MIKE
 ...Just a show?... Fuck it. Fuck you.

Mike staggers around the side of the house. Leaving them all startled. Amy looks around at the others.

AMY WELCH
 ...What was *that*?

EXT. THE YOUNGS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Mike walks unsteadily across Gary & Jessica's front lawn. Then he stops, alone now. And we see that his anger gone... replaced by *fear*. He's scared. Profoundly, deeply scared.

JESSICA (O.S.)

Mike?

He turns. Jessica has followed him. She approaches with compassion. Not mad. Concerned for him. But respectful.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Hey. You ok?

MIKE

I shouldn't drink.

JESSICA

We all have our moments.

MIKE

I've had finer.

She looks at him, trying to understand: *What's eating at him?*

JESSICA

This place means a lot of different things to me. But I guess for you... it's just one thing.

MIKE

Yeah, well. I'm embarrassed.

JESSICA

I wish you would've told me you were coming back.

MIKE

I wasn't sure I was - until I did.
(then)
I get the sense Gary doesn't know we've kept in touch.

JESSICA

Does a few messages here and there count as keeping in touch?

MIKE

More than a few.

Jessica hesitates. Then, to end the conversation -

JESSICA

If you want to talk tomorrow - sober, in daylight - let me know.

MIKE

Sorry for ruining dinner.

On Jessica, watching him walk unsteadily away...

EXT. IRON HILL ROAD - NIGHT

Mike walks, weaving a bit, through town. The only sounds are NIGHTBIRDS and CRICKETS. As he notices familiar buildings...

INTERCUT MEMORIES - 1988 - With young Mike, moving through town... silent flickers of memory, fragments of childhood...

Up ahead, Mike sees a patch of trees... evergreens in neat rows... a **CHRISTMAS TREE FARM**. Mike stops. Staring at the trees. PUSH IN on those neat rows, into them... then -

TRANSITION TO DAYLIGHT

- Moving fast through Christmas trees, running... We are -

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE FARM - DAY *FLASHBACK TO 1988*

REVEAL now that we're in the POV of Mike age 12, running, breathless... hearing SOMEONE ELSE RUNNING in the next row of trees, racing - he VEERS to PLAYFULLY TACKLE the other runner -

- his twin, EDDIE (12).

EDDIE

Get off! Dickhead.

MIKE (12)

You started too soon.

EDDIE

I wasn't racing! You're a dick.

Eddie glares, panting. Eddie is a scrawny, kicked-puppy version of Mike. A natural born victim. That kid who always has his shoulders hunched, sensitive and suspicious - a bully magnet.

GIRL'S VOICE (O.S.)

(somewhere in the trees)

Guys??

MIKE (12)

Sorry, man. I was just playing. Hey.
Sorry. For real. You ok?

Eddie reluctantly nods. Mike extends a hand. Eddie hesitates, then clasps it. A brother moment. But then... Eddie just turns and starts jogging on through the trees.

MIKE (12) (CONT'D)

Hey! Wait for Jess. ...Hey!

As Eddie vanishes, **JESSICA (AGE 12)** emerges from the trees behind Mike. She likes him. But she's 12 and it's confusing.

JESSICA (12)
Hey. You got stuff in your hair.

MIKE (12)
(finally looks at her)
So? So do you.

JESSICA (12)
So take it out.

He picks some pine needles out of his hair.

JESSICA (12) (CONT'D)
No, out of mine.

Mike hesitates. Then he awkwardly reaches up and plucks the dead pine needles from Jessica's hair. She smiles.

JESSICA (12) (CONT'D)
Thanks.

An awkward beat. Mike blushes - and impulsively kisses her cheek. A sweet, innocent moment. Jessica smiles helplessly.

MIKE (12)
See ya.

He takes off running after Eddie.

EXT. REDNECK BACK YARD - DAY *FLASHBACK TO 1988*

Young Mike emerges from the trees to cut through a redneck back yard. Overgrown, wrecky. A PICKUP TRUCK on blocks. Mike's grinning goofily, high on the kiss, so he doesn't even see -

A HUGE PIT BULL RACING at him across the yard! *OH FUCK* -

And just as he glances over way too late and **SEES IT** - the Pit Bull gets **YANKED BACK**. It's chained to a nearby tree.

Jesus. Mike laughs with gleeful adrenaline, flips it off -

MIKE (12)
Fuck you, Axl.

- and runs on, the Pit Bull **BARKING FURIOUSLY** after him -

INT. MARLA'S KITCHEN - DAY *FLASHBACK TO 1988*

Young Mike bursts into the 1988 version of his mom's kitchen, still elated. Stops to take off his shoes... then hears -

A GIGGLE. From the living room. Mike listens. He hears THE TV. CARTOON VOICES. Then - SUSTAINED GIGGLING. Almost hiccup-y.

MIKE (12)

Eddie?

That *CANDLE COVE* THEME starts to play....

INT. MARLA'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS *FLASHBACK TO 1988*

Young Mike enters, puzzled. Eddie sits Indian-style on the floor, watching *something* on TV - GIGGLING UNCONTROLLABLY. He's so close to the TV he's blocking it, but we glimpse...

A surreally colorful KIDS' SHOW... SWIRLING MIST is visible, and the spindly, spastic limbs of some cheerful puppet...

MIKE (12)

Eddie... what is that?

Eddie slowly turns. A finger to his lips.

EDDIE

Shhhhhh...

MATCH CUT TO PRESENT DAY:

INT. MARLA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

- the living room floor, empty and dark. REVERSE TO REVEAL MIKE
- drunk - in the doorway, now an adult. Thinking.

He sits heavily on the couch and picks up the landline phone, dials. As it RINGS, he hunches forward. Then a sleepy voice -

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Hello?

MIKE

It's me.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Jesus... Are you ok?

MIKE

I'm sorry to call so late.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Mike... I love you. But if you're calling me, I know you're not where you're supposed to be.

MIKE

I am where I'm supposed to be.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
*They don't let you make calls at 3
 in the morning from rehab, Mike.*

Mike flinches. Hurting. But it would hurt more to hang up.

MIKE
 I need to talk to Grace.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
She's asleep. I'm hang-

MIKE
 No! Laura - let me talk to our
 daughter. Let me hear her voice.

Yes, the woman on the phone is **Mike's wife LAURA.**

LAURA (V.O.)
*Mike. We agreed she shouldn't see you
 until... we figure things out.*

MIKE
 Laura, if I could just...

LAURA (O.S.)
Mike...

Oddly... her voice didn't come over the phone that time. Mike looks up to see **LAURA IN SILHOUETTE** sitting across from him in the living room. As they talk, we never see her face.

LAURA (CONT'D)
 I can't, Mike. Not... Not after
 what happened.

Mike is silent. "What happened" hurting him. Quietly -

MIKE
 I miss my daughter.

LAURA
 She misses you too. But... I don't
 know you anymore. I don't know
 what's eating away at you because
 you don't tell me. But you have to
 deal with it, Mike, because you
 can't come home until you do.

On Mike's face as he takes this in, starting with exhausted despair... slowly tightening into numb determination.

MIKE
 I know.

INT. MARLA'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Marla sits in the darkness of her bedroom, awake. Listening. She can hear every word Mike is saying downstairs.

MIKE (O.S.)
I can't hold this door closed any longer. I have to go inside.

Marla's expression is complicated, haunted... as if she very much doesn't want him to open that door. FADE TO...

EXT. MARLA'S HOUSE - YARD - MORNING

Sunrise. CLOSE ON MIKE'S FACE as he startles awake...

Because Marla is SHAKING HIM. Mike stands in the yard, feet filthy. *He sleepwalked again.*

Marla's staring at him, worried. Not knowing what to say. Seeing he's awake, she just goes in the house without a word.

Mike's closer to the woods than he was last time... as if going further each time he sleepwalks. Again he looks above the trees - in exactly the direction he was going - to see:

That **MOUNTAINTOP** in the distance. The **ROCKY OUTCROPPING** at its peak... *What's it mean to him?*

INT. THE YOUNGS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Jessica, *slightly* hungover, walking into the kitchen. Gary's already up making eggs for Dane, who's gaming on his phone.

JESSICA
I see my boys are up early.

GARY
I rise with the sun, baby.

JESSICA
S-U-N or S-O-N?

GARY
Whichever's first.

JESSICA
Dane, go wake up your sister.

Dane rolls his eyes and dutifully heads upstairs.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
Did you call the sink guy yet?

GARY
Of course I did.

JESSICA
Really? If you're just saying that,
hold off. I think I can fix it with-

DANE (O.S.)
(from upstairs)
MOM?

INT. KATIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Jessica enters Katie's room... to find Dane alone. Puzzled.

DANE
She's not in the bathroom either.

Jessica looks into the hall, calls -

JESSICA
KATIE?

As Jessica calls for her daughter, PUSH IN on Katie's pillow.
Off the white pillow... MATCH CUT TO:

INT. RABBIT'S FOOT DINER - DAY

HOT SAUCE SPATTERING LIKE BLOOD ON SCRAMBLED EGG WHITES... as
Mike douses his breakfast. He's sitting at the counter at the
Rabbit's Foot, Iron Hill's diner. Locals sit in the booths.

DAPHNE BONNER (late 40s), matter-of-fact and bossy, brings
him a coffee refill. She is also TEXTING distractedly.

DAPHNE BONNER
How's those eggs, Mikey? My girls
just got em fresh from the farm.
(calling)
Tess! Willa!

Two WAITRESSES tending the booths look over. **TESS (19)** is
fresh-faced, curious. **WILLA (27)**, is dark-eyed, sexy/surly.

DAPHNE BONNER (CONT'D)
This is Mike Painter. I used to
babysit him.

Tess waves. Willa gives a grudging nod. Some locals look over
at Mike. Daphne glances at her phone. REVEAL - she's texting
someone called "S": "**He's really back. He's here now.**"

Then the DOOR CHIMES JANGLE VIOLENTLY and she looks up as -
Jessica strides in. Messy, agitated. Drawing attention.

DAPHNE BONNER (CONT'D)
Grits or hash browns, hon?

But Jessica's heading right for Mike.

JESSICA
Mike, can I talk to you?

Mike, surprised, gets up with everyone in the diner watching...

INT. JESSICA'S BEAT-UP SUV (MOVING) - DAY

Mike rides shotgun as Jessica drives through town. She's driving a bit recklessly. Anxious. Her mind on Katie -

JESSICA
She wanders off. But in the store. Not like this. Why would she get out of bed in the middle of the night?

MIKE
I've seen kids do stranger things.

But CLOSE ON MIKE and he's tense too, freaked by Katie going missing. Jessica pulls up at a red. Thoughts spiralling.

JESSICA
I mean, there's no reason to think it's anything else... Right?

MIKE
I don't think so. No.

JESSICA
I went to tuck her in, she was asleep. Then this morning...

Mike goes into reassuring mode, puts a hand on her arm.

MIKE
She's probably somewhere close by, and we're going to find her. Let's just focus on that. Ok?

Jessica looks at him gratefully. Calming a bit.

JESSICA
Right. Ok. Thank you.

MIKE
That's what I'm here for. Hey... after you went to bed last night, did you by any chance hear her TV on?

JESSICA

No... why?

MIKE

(noticing)

Light's green.

Jessica hits the gas and they speed off through town.

EXT. PATCH OF WOODS BY SOME HOUSES - DAY

Jessica's SUV pulls up as Gary is emerging from the woods. People are with him: some CIVILIANS and two deputies - Amy Welch & Tim Hazel. (Hazel in uniform is a reveal to us that he is a deputy.) They've been searching the patchy woods.

Mike and Jessica get out of the SUV to meet them.

JESSICA

No?

GARY

We walked the whole stretch.

(to Mike re: a nearby house)

Her best friend lives there. We thought she might've come this way.

JESSICA

Ok so, so- what about the Amber Alert? Can we have them-

GARY

Honey- hon, that's for if they *know* there's an abduction. This- I'm telling you, she's playing with somebody's cat somewhere.

As they talk, Mike looks around uneasily. At the woods. At the town. Blank, unremarkable spaces tinged with mystery. *Where is she?* He's thinking hard but keeping quiet.

JESSICA

Where else are we supposed to look??
Mike, where would a kid go?

MIKE

Where has she made good memories?
Where do she and her friends play?

GARY

We'll check the park again... Check the school again... The candy machines at the store. Uh -

Mike is looking off toward the town again. Thinking -

MIKE

Wait. It's probably nothing, but...
two days ago, at my mother's
house... I told Katie I grew up in
Iron Hill.

(to Jessica)

I told her how we used to play hide
& seek sometimes after school.

Gary looks from Jessica to Mike.

GARY

Where??

CUT TO:

GOD'S EYE VIEW: THE CHRISTMAS TREES FARM

Rows and rows of trees, seen from above. The tree farm is
vast. Someone could really get lost here.

JESSICA (O.S.)

Katie???

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE FARM - DAY

Mike, Jessica, Gary, and the deputies are spread out among
the Christmas trees, searching. All some distance apart. For
Mike there's a sense of ominous spaces, things behind trees.

AMY WELCH (O.S.)

Mike.

Amy's approaching with Tim Hazel. They walk with Mike -

AMY WELCH (CONT'D)

Hey... so, Gary's the sheriff and
all, but if something like,
actually happened to Katie? He
can't supervise a case involving
his own family. So I'd actually be
handling the investigation.

MIKE

(*why's she telling me this?*)
That makes sense.

AMY WELCH

And I'd want to talk to everybody who
was over there last night, right?

This triggers slight alarm bells for Mike. Playing calm:

MIKE

Yeah, of course. Did you talk to Joe Custer already, or...

AMY WELCH

We'll get him next. I mean it's just a formality. So... you were actually the last person to talk to Katie... I mean... you notice anything off?

MIKE

No... no signs of distress.

AMY WELCH

What about later? See anybody outside?

Mike is uneasy. Silent trees, unseen CROWS crying. He's aware of Amy close by, Hazel on the other side.

MIKE

No. I was trashed. Just went home.

AMY WELCH

Yeah?

MIKE

Hit the sack, slept it off.

AMY WELCH

You seemed pretty upset.

(off his shrug)

Seemed like talking to Katie put you on edge.

Now Mike is sure: **He's a suspect**. He keeps it casual.

MIKE

No...

AMY WELCH

But she told you about that TV show, right? I found some stuff about it online. Mostly people from around here, posting on old message boards. But nothing about who made it...

MIKE

(losing patience)

Yeah, it was a local show.

AMY WELCH

When they kept talking about it last night, you got real agitated.

MIKE

It touched a nerve, ok? It was that summer, my brother, all of it.

AMY WELCH

Right, sorry. Just asking.
(playing apologetic)
You get it, though, right? You were the last person to talk to her... then suddenly you get all hostile and storm out. You see how that would make you a person of interest, right? If there were a case?

Mike stops. He forces a smile, tilts his head. Semi-joking:

MIKE

Do I need a lawyer?

AMY WELCH

Do you need a lawyer?
(beat)
No, of course not. But... stick around in case we need your help. After all, you're the expert, right?

Mike smiles, nods. Alarmed. Amy & Hazel keep walking as Mike hangs back... but Amy looks back, and he has to follow.

ON MIKE'S FACE, uneasy... now PAN AROUND to REVEAL not Amy & Hazel ahead of him but **some 12 YEAR OLDS**. PAN BACK AROUND, REVEALING **MIKE AT AGE 12**. *We've entered a FLASHBACK...*

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE FARM - DAY *FLASHBACK TO 1988*

- as Mike walks home with Eddie and some kids. Mike lags, carrying a STACK OF BOOKS. The others are horsing around - except Eddie.

The other kids start to peel off in another direction. One - **YOUNG JOE CUSTER** - SHOVES Eddie.

JOE CUSTER (12)

Don't get kidnapped, losers!

MIKE (12)

(yells after him)
Embrace a dick, Custer!

- but Eddie doesn't react. He just walks faster.

MIKE (12) (CONT'D)

Hold up! Stop speed-walking. We're gonna get home before it's on.

Young Mike begins to mockingly HUM the CANDLE COVE THEME, as if mentally challenged.

MIKE (12) (CONT'D)
Durr, I'm Eddie and I like puppets...

Eddie just keeps walking, then disappears behind a tree. Mike hurries after him... and Eddie's gone.

MIKE (12) (CONT'D)
Eddie!!!! ...YOU'RE AN ASSHOLE!

Still lugging the heavy books, Mike hears a NOISE not far away. Down a few rows of trees. Mike goes toward the sounds. It's just rustling. Not even movement, really.

MIKE (12) (CONT'D)
Uh, we're too old for hide and seek...

Then Mike stops. Because about a hundred feet away, he sees: **THE PIT BULL** that nearly took off his head earlier. Loose.

It doesn't see him yet. Mike starts backing away, scared shitless. Just going to back right out of its sight... but the Pit Bull looks up - *sees him*. **FUCK**.

Mike drops his books and RUNS. The Pit Bull CHARGES after.

STAY WITH YOUNG MIKE - ragged and frantic - running through the trees, zigzagging, trying to lose the dog when -

He takes a fall. Looks back down a CORRIDOR OF TREES to see: The Pit Bull coming into view. A straight shot.

It fucking BOLTS right for him. Mike scrambles to his feet and starts to run but the psycho dog is barreling down on him, *OH FUCK IT'S ABOUT TO GET HIM - Mike flinches -*

- but The Pit Bull stutter-steps and NOSEDIVES into the grass, falling over itself in a tangle of legs.

What the fuck? Mike opens his eyes. The dog struggles up... and SHAKES ITS HEAD. Then... it goes rigid. And starts to ROTATE ITS HEAD. Further. Further... *What is it doing??*

RACK FOCUS TO REVEAL: **EDDIE IN THE B.G....** Concentrating on the dog with a blank, dead look. Slowly rotating his hand at the wrist... as if guiding the dog's movement.

The dog's head KEEPS GOING... until - **CRUNCH**. It snaps its own neck... and collapses, limp.

Mike stares at Eddie in shock. *What just happened?* But Eddie simply walks away into the trees. Off Mike's bewilderment... PRE-LAP someone shouting "KATIE!" as we go BACK TO:

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE FARM - DAY

... where Mike walks uneasily with Tim Hazel sticking close to him. We can hear distant shouts of "Katie" from the others. Hazel keeps giving Mike curious glances.

But Mike is looking off through the Christmas trees. **HIS POV:** Amy Welch (half hidden by trees) talking to someone intently on a cell phone... and glancing over at *him*.

TIM HAZEL

So that show... was last night the first time she saw it?

MIKE'S POV: Amy ends her call, glancing back to Mike - alarmed. Then she hurries away... *Where's she going?*

MIKE

I think so.

TIM HAZEL

What channel was it on?

MIKE

(looking at him now)
Why?

Hazel gestures dismissively: *Just wondering.*

TIM HAZEL

Weird they'd just air it again.
(off Mike's tense silence)
Seems like everybody who saw it that summer was 12, 11, younger... I was too old. I missed it.

Something about Hazel's chatter is a little too casual. Mike has a rising sense of paranoia. **HIS POV:** He sees Amy reappear. With Jessica. Walking toward him purposefully. Something's up.

TIM HAZEL (CONT'D)

(more insistent)
What channel was it on?

Mike looks at him, alarmed by his intensity. But now Amy and Jessica are striding up. Jessica motions Amy to stay back. Jessica approaches Mike, agitated.

JESSICA

I need to talk to you.

PRIVATE SPACE IN THE TREES

Mike and Jessica step away, a little distance off. Whatever she heard from Amy, it's changed the way she looks at Mike.

JESSICA
Anything you're not telling me?

MIKE
What do you mean?

JESSICA
Marla told us she heard you come in at 3 am. *Five hours* after you left our house.

MIKE
I walked around.

JESSICA
What aren't you telling me?

MIKE
I'm trying to help here -

JESSICA
Mike. I'm scared for my daughter. Just like you would be. I'm asking you, parent to parent: Is there anything you're not telling me?

Mike hesitates. *Knows* better than to say it. But he can't lie to her in the face of that emotional appeal.

MIKE
...This is gonna sound insane.

JESSICA
Jesus Christ - say it.

MIKE
The show... It may have something to do with this.

JESSICA
(confused at first; then)
Candle Cove?

MIKE
(insistent)
That's why I got so rattled last night - it was connected to what happened in '88, too. The only time anybody ever saw that show was during the murders. And now Katie sees it...

She's staring at him. He sounds absolutely crazy.

JESSICA

Where did you go last night after
you left?

(off his frustration)

Mike, did you do something?

MIKE

I'm trying to help you find her.

(admitting -)

I never told her we used to play
here. This is where it took some of
the kids in '88 -

JESSICA

What?

MIKE

It's not just a TV show, Jess.
Please listen, I'm not crazy-

JESSICA

You're not crazy?

MIKE

I know it sounds-

JESSICA

I know about Stovington.

MIKE

(stops, at a loss; then -)

I'm not crazy. I had a-

JESSICA

*You were released from a psych ward
three days ago.*

Mike looks suddenly exhausted. Doesn't deny it.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

You must've come straight here from
the hospital!

MIKE

(quiet)

I went home the first night. My wife
let me come by to get some clothes.

JESSICA

It doesn't matter!

MIKE

I had a nervous breakdown -

JESSICA

What I heard was 'psychotic episode.' *Psychotic*. What does that mean, Mike? You're a doctor.

On Mike, losing the fight. Exhaustion in his eyes -

JARRING SILENT FLASH TO... Mike dull-eyed - SLEEPWALKING - in his Westchester home. Shirtless, HOLDING A KNIFE and CUTTING SOMETHING INTO HIS SIDE as his wife LAURA screams at him M.O.S. and dials 911 - and BACK TO -

- Mike tries to speak quietly, calmly - *See? I'm sane -*

MIKE

I... I don't remember it, but I committed myself voluntarily -

JESSICA

You don't remember?? Tell me again about last night. After you left-

MIKE

It's not me, it's the show, *someone is doing this -*

On Jessica: *Holy shit he's crazy*. She turns and yells -

JESSICA

GARY!! AMY!!
(to Mike)
Don't move. Do not move.
(screaming)
GARY!!!!

Amy and Gary and Tim Hazel emerge from the trees - but when Jessica looks around - **Mike is gone.**

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Oh shit. MIKE!! Gary, it's him - he's out of his mind -

GARY

Come on -

They head in the direction Mike must've gone, but the tree farm is vast... and we **CRANE UP OVERHEAD FOR A BIRD'S EYE VIEW** as they spread out, hunting for Mike..

And maybe we notice further down the rows of trees, Mike's figure running, putting distance behind him... FADE TO:

A TV SCREEN - AN ANIME CARTOON

A psychedelic action scene - an androgynous CLOAKED WARRIOR fighting demons that stretch and shape-shift. We are -

INT. THE YOUNGS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

- where Dane (Katie's 9-year-old brother) watches cartoons. The IMAGE DISTORTS DIGITALLY for a moment - then resolves.

Tess Bonner appears in the doorway holding a phone. She's the younger waitress we saw at the diner. She's babysitting Dane.

TESS

Dane. What kind of pizza?

DANE

Bacon and pineapple. So Katie can have leftovers when she's back.

Tess nods, smiles. Disappears to order.

A beat: Dane alone watching TV. In the b.g. behind him, we can see a MUD ROOM with a screen door to the back yard. Then...

A SILHOUETTE passes across the screen door. It opens... and SOMEONE SLIPS inside. We can't see who... but a FIGURE is now inside the mud room, getting closer and closer to Dane...

THE FIGURE'S POV - Creeping toward Dane. Dane's back is to us - he's unaware. We're getting closer... when -

Tess steps back into the doorway. We duck out of sight.

TESS (O.S.)

What do you want with it?

DANE (O.S.)

Garlic bread and dipping sauce.

Beat. We peer out of hiding. Tess is gone. We move closer...

DANE - watches TV - when a bright scene goes dark and he sees REFLECTED MOTION on the TV screen. HE turns sharply to see -

MIKE. Lurking in the mud room doorway. He looks scary - disheveled, wild. Mike holds a finger to his lips. Dane stares. Is he gonna scream? But then, calm:

DANE

She said you'd come to talk to me.

MIKE

Do you know where she is?

Dane just looks at him, reluctant to speak.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Did she tell you not to talk to me?

Still nothing.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Do you love your sister? Do you want to see her again?

DANE

Yeah.

MIKE

Have you ever heard stories about some kids who died out in the woods a long time ago?

Dane hesitates, then nods.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I need to go get your sister before something really bad happens to her. Do you understand?

Dane nods. Freaked out now.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Did she tell you where she was going?

Dane screws up his face in puzzlement.

DANE

What's "the Crow's Nest"?

Mike's face tells us: He knows exactly what 'the Crow's Nest' is... and he's scared as hell.

INT. THE YOUNGS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Tess peers into the kitchen doorway, checking on Dane... And sees him watching TV. Alone. Mike is gone.

TESS

Hey Dane. You ok in there?

DANE

Uh-huh.

Tess turns away and continues with her call.

INT. MARLA'S BEDROOM - DAY

REVEAL MIKE now in his mother's bedroom, digging through her closet. Looking for something. He pushes some clothes aside, finds the TRUNK that we saw earlier. Opens it to see...

the FRAMED PHOTOS OF HIMSELF & EDDIE AS KIDS. The NEWS CLIPS from '88. He stops, looking over all this history, when -

FLOORBOARDS CREAK behind him. Reveal: Marla in the doorway. A beat. They look at each other. Then -

MARLA

Gary called. You want to tell me what's going on?

MIKE

Where's the gun?

MARLA

Katie's like my own grandchild. If something happened to her...

(then)

What do you want a gun for?

MIKE

To get her back.

MARLA

He said you're sick, Mike.

Mike stops and looks over his shoulder. Darkly joking:

MIKE

Well, that's just ridiculous.

MARLA

They're coming here now. Look me in the eyes. Do you know anything about where Katie is?

Mike stands. Approaches his mother. Close. From the heart:

MIKE

Mom. They have no idea what's really going on here. They didn't know back when Eddie died, either... and now it might be starting all over again.

Marla reacts to that. Memories of '88 rushing back. Memories of Eddie going missing.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Please. Give me a chance to try and get her back before it's too late.

A tense beat. Mike and Marla looking in each other's eyes. She wants to believe him - but can she? Before she can answer - The DOORBELL RINGS downstairs. Then RINGS again.

MARLA

I got rid of that gun years ago.

With that, Marla heads downstairs to get the door... On Mike, wondering where her head is at -

STAIRCASE

Mike edges down the stairs, listening as Marla's FOOTSTEPS go to the front door. He hears her open it -

AMY WELCH (O.S.)

Marla - have you seen him?

Mike holds his breath. Will she give him up? Then...

MARLA (O.S.)

No. But come in. You want coffee?

As we hear them enter the house O.S., Mike slips down the stairs and into -

THE KITCHEN

In the b.g. we see Marla lead Amy Welch and Tim Hazel past a doorway toward the living room. Mike stays out of sight...

AMY WELCH (O.S.)

He hasn't tried to contact you?

MARLA (O.S.)

Not yet. But his car's here, so...

Mike moves toward the back door to escape - but stops... and grabs a HUGE KITCHEN KNIFE from the sink. Then slips out...

EXT. MARLA'S HOUSE - DAY

Mike crosses the back yard, disappearing into the WOODS. But WE STAY BEHIND, and PAN UP over the trees to reveal:

THE WOODED MOUNTAINTOP not far off. The **ROCKY OUTCROPPING** at its peak. Directly above where Mike slipped into the woods. That's where he's headed.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE FOREST - DUSK

MIKE'S POV - As he moves up the mountain, through thick trees, over rocky ground. The sun is going down... this is **MAGIC HOUR**, dreamlike light coming through the trees. **LABORED BREATHING** and **CRUNCHING LEAVES** are the only sounds.

PULL BACK and we're **BEHIND MIKE**... over his shoulder but still in a kind of **POV** as he climbs the mountain, knife in hand.

(Note: This scene should have a similar subjective-POV style to what we've seen in the flashbacks. Going up the mountain, Mike is psychologically returning to childhood.)

Now Mike notices that the trees ahead seem to have bent ever so slightly inward... arcing to make a TUNNEL. It looks eerie. The shadows are deepening, the light fading.

Faintly, Mike hears what sounds like a WHISPER among the trees. But when he looks around, there's nothing.

Mike hesitates - and goes on. Into the "tunnel." Then - A CRUNCH in the darkening woods - and another WHISPER.

Mike stops, eyes wide. Looks around. Nothing. Then - a BRANCH CRACKS to his left. Mike looks over and glimpses -

SOMETHING PUPPET-like... that QUICKLY SCUTTLES BACKWARD into the darkness, as if being pulled offstage in a puppet show.

Mike starts to run, sprinting for the top of the mountain... not looking to the side...

... even as he hears CRUNCHING LEAVES and CRACKING BRANCHES and WHISPERING VOICES all around him crowding in...

EXT. MOUNTAIN TOP - NIGHT

Mike emerges from the woods as night falls. Disheveled, breathless. The moon hangs low over the strange, lonely ridge.

Just ahead is the ROCKY OUTCROPPING he saw from a distance. A CROWN OF HUGE, JAGGED BOULDERS distributed over the mountaintop. Room between them to move around. And to hide.

Mike is scared. But he wills himself toward the boulders. They jut ominously into the night sky... dark, gothic black shapes. Almost monolithic, like Easter Island stones...

As he gets closer, Mike starts to freak out. Trembling, shortness of breath... shivering as if he's cold...

But he goes on. And now he's close enough to see -

A decades-old WOODEN SIGN nailed to a tree trunk, with a simple picture painted on it: **A CROW.**

This is it. The "Crow's Nest." Mike hesitates.

MIKE

Katie!?

His voice is lost, no echo.

He takes a deep breath... and walks into -

THE "CROW'S NEST"

Mike moves among the boulders. He can't see far ahead.

He walks deeper and deeper. A carpet of dead leaves muffles footsteps. The boulders are like a labyrinth... and he's moving in a rough spiral toward the center.

His BREATHING is shaky, amplified. Sounds ECHO AND DISTORT. A TWIG SNAPS up ahead. Mike can't tell where it came from.

Mike grips his knife. Edges toward the nearest boulder. ANOTHER TWIG - just beyond the boulder? FURTIVE sounds... Mike edges around the boulder, knife poised -

- but there's nothing on the other side.

He relaxes. Just a little. Exhales. As, about 20 feet away -

A **TALL, PALE FIGURE** steps into his peripheral vision. We see this figure in the b.g., OUT OF FOCUS. Mike freezes. Sensing it there. Slowly he turns... and it comes INTO FOCUS:

JAWBONE. In a RAGGED WHITE CLOAK, with A BATTERED BLACK TOP HAT tilted jauntily over its grinning SKULL MASK.

This figure is more threadbare and ragged than the Jawbone vision Mike saw in his bedroom. And it doesn't have glass eyes. Only EMPTY BLACK EYE HOLES. It looks cheaper, part of the real world. And perhaps more terrifying for it.

It just stares at Mike. He summons courage. Just like last time he saw it.

MIKE

You're not there.

Jawbone doesn't move. Mike slowly walks toward it, just as he did last time. It still doesn't move.

Closer yet. Knife poised.

He is feet away. Close enough to touch it. He can hear Jawbone BREATHING. It seems real. But it did before, too. And when he reached out to touch it, it disappeared.

Now he reaches out and...

JAWBONE GRABS HIS WRIST. **This is no hallucination.**

Instinctively Mike SLASHES at Jawbone - DRAWING BLOOD from its spindly arm... *He hurt it! It bleeds!*

Jawbone yanks its hand away with a BITTER HISS -

And *takes off* among the boulders -

MIKE (CONT'D)

HEY -

- but Mike CHASES - plunging into the darkness -

FOLLOW MIKE - just over his shoulder, in frantic pursuit -

He can hear Jawbone's QUICK SOFT FOOTSTEPS up ahead -

Nearly-abstract shapes of BOULDERS and SPINDLY WHITE TREES
rush up out of the darkness -

A dizzy nightmarish blind run -

GLIMPSES of Jawbone - the white cloak vanishing around the
edge of a boulder - just up ahead -

Leading Mike deeper and deeper into the Crow's Nest, toward
the center - but he is catching up -

Closer and closer - reckless exhilaration - *Mike is going to
catch this fucking thing* -

Jawbone ducks between TWO BOULDERS - and Mike follows him,
knife ready, onto -

THE EDGE OF A CLIFF

Mike skids TO A HALT JUST IN TIME - on the edge of a steep
drop that cuts away down the mountainside - and affords a
TREMENDOUS VIEW OF THE GLITTERING TOWN BELOW.

This is why it's called The Crow's Nest. The moon is shining
on Mike's face - as pebbles tumble from his feet.

Mike looks around. Where the hell could Jawbone have gone?

He hears SCRAPING to the side. Further along the cliff's
edge. Peering cautiously out, he sees -

THE OPENING TO A CREVICE. The sound is coming from within.
Jawbone is hiding in there.

Mike edges toward it. The SCRAPING stops. Mike holds his
breath. Grips his knife and...

Mike LUNGES INTO THE MOUTH OF THE CREVICE, knife raised - but
STOPS HIMSELF JUST BEFORE HE STABS -

KATIE.

Huddled there, dirty and disheveled. Behind her, the DARKNESS
of the crevice is deep and absolute.

But... Katie doesn't look scared. Mike lowers the knife.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Katie?

She gives a little smile.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Are you ok?

She nods. Mike relaxes slightly. Relieved. Then... Katie ever so slightly cocks her head. *As if she heard a whisper in the darkness behind her.*

Mike's eye dart to the darkness. He can't see a thing. **But he senses something there. A PRESENCE.**

MIKE (CONT'D)

Katie.

Katie looks back at him... and grins big, showing **A GAP WHERE HER TWO FRONT TEETH ARE FRESHLY MISSING.**

MIKE (CONT'D)

(rush of dread)

C'mon now. Let's go home.

Mike holds out his hand to her. But his eyes remain fixed on that darkness. He's terrified.

Katie crawls toward him without protest and takes his hand.

Mike helps her out of the crevice and picks her up, holding her protectively as he backs away... Edging back along the cliff... taking Katie to safety.

But we don't follow them. We PAN BACK to the crevice where Mike found Katie. Empty now.

PUSH IN SLOWLY... and now we can see something on the dirt where Katie was sitting. Two small white things...

Her FRONT TEETH.

PUSH IN until we're close on those two little teeth, and...

A CHILD-SIZED ARM ENTIRELY COVERED IN TEETH reaches into frame and snatches up Katie's missing teeth.

The TOOTH-CHILD'S hand.

PAN UP just in time to *glimpse* its pale shape disappearing back into the dark. Off that feverish darkness...

FADE TO...

GOD'S EYE VIEW OF IRON HILL VALLEY - MORNING

Establishing. Sunrise over a peaceful small town.

KATIE (PRE-LAP)

I woke up and I got scared because
there was blood in my mouf.

INT. SHERIFF'S STATION - BULLPEN - SAME TIME

Katie - wearing some band-aids, but perky and eating a
popsicle - talks to Gary, Jessica, and Amy Welch.

KATIE

And then my teef fell out and the
pirates came on TV told me to bring
my teef up the mountain.

Gary looks around at Jessica and Amy. Baffled. This is not
what they expected to hear. Off Jessica, remembering Mike's
insane claim. *The pirates?...*

INT. HOLDING CELL AREA - DAY

Mike is locked in the holding cell. Exhausted. He's been
awake all night, and he's drained and shaken by his
experience up at the Crow's Nest.

CLANG... Gary enters the hall, faces Mike through the bars.

GARY

She says you didn't take her. So
how'd you know where to find her?

MIKE

I needed a place to hide out, and my
brother and I used to play there.
Called it the Crow's Nest cuz you
can see the whole town.

GARY

And you just ran into Katie there?

MIKE

Thank god.

Gary UNLOCKS THE CELL. Mike gets up, walks out wearily.

GARY

You know I don't believe a word, right?

MIKE

I brought your daughter back. Why don't
you just accept that and move on?

GARY
I wish I could.

MIKE
I didn't take her.

GARY
Let's just say I got a lot of
questions.

MIKE
(from experience)
You can learn to live with those.

INT. SHERIFF'S STATION - BULLPEN - DAY

Small room. 4 cheap desks. All empty as Mike emerges from the holding cell area, Gary behind him. When Mike notices -

A GYM BAG on the floor by a desk. It's half-open, and inside, Mike can see... a **RED-BROWN SWEATER**. On Mike, realizing: The man who was watching them in the cemetery earlier is here.

Then - **Tim Hazel** emerges from the Men's Room. Changed into civilian clothes, end of shift. Nods at Mike and Gary. And -

Casually picks up the gym bag and walks out. Off Mike - knowing that Hazel was the Man who was watching them from the woods - curious...

EXT. SHERIFF'S STATION - DAY

Mike walks outside. Jessica's waiting for him. Hostile.

JESSICA
"America's child psychologist" saves
kidnapped girl. That the idea? Put
it in your book?

MIKE
There is no book. There never was.
And I'm leaving. I think it'll make
people a lot safer here.

JESSICA
... from you?

Mike is torn. Keep walking or say what he believes? Finally -

MIKE
Me and Eddie were the first ones who
ever saw it. Now after *all this time*,
it shows up again? It's connected to
me. Like I provoked it by coming home.

JESSICA
 (skeptical)
 You provoked it.

MIKE
 It makes people do things. If I stay,
 it'll get worse. A lot worse.

He turns to walk away. Jessica wants to dismiss him as a lunatic, but there's now a hint of doubt...

JESSICA
 If there was never a book, why *did*
 you come back?

Mike stops, hesitates. Then... He starts unbuttoning his shirt. Jessica watches: *The fuck?*

MIKE
 It's been calling me.

He has unbuttoned his shirt partially and pulls it askew to show Jessica SOMETHING on his torso. We don't see what it is yet. But we see Jessica's reaction: She's disturbed.

INSERT - We see again the JARRING SILENT FLASH of memory we saw earlier when Jessica asked Mike about his "psychotic episode": Mike dull-eyed - sleepwalking - in Westchester. Shirtless, CUTTING SOMETHING INTO HIS SIDE WITH A KNIFE (we don't see what) - as Laura screams M.O.S. and dials 911 -

And now in present day, REVEAL what Mike is showing Jessica: Down his ribs, FRESH RED SCAR TISSUE FORMS THE WORDS...

M I K E C O M E H O M E

MIKE (CONT'D)
 And now I know what happens when I
 listen. So no matter how bad it
 gets, I have to stay away.

Jessica looks at him with horror as he buttons up his shirt.

MIKE (CONT'D)
 Take care, Jess.

She watches him walk away. Unsure what to believe...

INT. MARLA'S GUEST BEDROOM - DAY

Mike packs a few things into his bag, getting ready to leave - when Marla appears in the doorway, watching. Sad.

MARLA
You don't have to leave.

MIKE
Yeah, I do.
(look at her)
You understand that, right?

Marla is silent, emotional. Doesn't really have an answer. Mike stops packing for a moment. Hesitates. Reluctant to ask her, but almost *has* to -

MIKE (CONT'D)
Hey. You remember *Candle Cove*?

MARLA
Your TV show?

MIKE
In all the time I was gone, did you ever see it again?

MARLA
I don't understand.

MIKE
(beat)
Forget it.

He returns to packing. But now her mind is on *Candle Cove*.

MARLA
Who made it up? You or Eddie?

MIKE
Made what up?

MARLA
Candle Cove.

On Mike, puzzled...

INSERT - 1988 FLASHBACK - Young Mike & Eddie in the living room, bathed in the TV glow. Eddie closer than Mike, both of them rapt on the TV. The CANDLE COVE THEME FAINTLY AUDIBLE...

MIKE (V.O.)
We watched it. On TV.

Slowly begin to PAN AROUND toward the TV...

MARLA (V.O.)
(now *she's* confused)
No...

(MORE)

MARLA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 You used to stare at the TV and
 crack yourselves up like it was the
 funniest thing in the world... just
 watching the static.

... to reveal that **THE TV SCREEN IS NOTHING BUT STATIC.**

The music is gone, drowned in STATIC...

Mike stares at Marla in bafflement.

MIKE
 Twenty other kids saw the show. We
 were all watching it.

MARLA
 Mike, it was a dead channel.

Marla stares back in equal bafflement... Off them looking at
 each other, unsettled. Mike freaked out: Was it in his head?
 In their heads? Couldn't be... right?

A SERIES OF SHOTS:

- MIKE'S CAR DOOR SLAMMING
- HIS KEY STARTING THE ENGINE
- MIKE'S LEXUS LEAVING MARLA'S DRIVEWAY

Mike Painter's getting the fuck out of town. And we enter...

A MONTAGE: MIKE ON THE ROAD AGAIN

An echo montage of Mike's journey to Iron Hill... the reverse
 trip of the one he made in the teaser.

This one set to MUSIC that's equally beautiful, but sadder,
 more wistful (example: "Angoisse Temporelle" by Acanthus from
Le Frisson Des Vampires)...

Lyrical images glide by as we travel up I-78 out of the Rust
 Belt... past endless REST STOPS and GAS STATIONS...

... back to New York. DUSK FALLING as MIKE ARRIVES BACK IN
 WESTCHESTER... PULLING UP A LITTLE DISTANCE FROM -

HIS OWN FAMILY'S HOUSE. But he doesn't get out of the car. He
sits there looking at his home in the gathering night.

There's a LIGHT GLOWING in the kitchen window, and he can see
 his wife LAURA moving through the kitchen, making dinner for
 GRACE, his daughter. This is the first time we've seen her in
 person. She resembles Katie a bit. She's adorable and happy.

And off Mike watching them - and the emotion in his eyes,
 feeling he can't go inside - END THE MONTAGE and go BACK TO...

INT. KATIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Back in Iron Hill, Katie sleeps in her bed... peaceful and safe. Miraculously Katie came out of her ordeal unharmed.

Then... her eyes open. As if she heard something. She lifts her head, listening. Until finally... Katie smiles. Showing the cute gap in her teeth. And gets out of bed...

INT. GARY & JESSICA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jessica sleeps in bed with Gary. Arms around him, clinging to each other in sleep after a long, frightening day. Then...

RAGGED SCREAMING comes from down the hall. They jolt awake -

JESSICA

That's Dane!

- and as they fly out of bed and rush to their children ...

EXT. MIKE'S WESTCHESTER STREET - NIGHT

Night has fallen in Westchester. Full dark now. Only the streetlights illuminate the peaceful neighborhood. Mike's Lexus is still parked out of the way...

INT. MIKE'S LEXUS (PARKED) - NIGHT

Mike sleeps in the driver's seat, huddled up a little bit, looking vulnerable. He is dreaming. TWITCHING slightly. His head twitches as if he's trying to get away from something -

HIS PHONE VIBRATES. He wakes, disoriented. Gropes for it.

MIKE

Hello?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

A distraught Jessica stands outside an OPERATING ROOM. In the b.g., Marla waits, worried. Both of them badly shaken.

JESSICA

(holding back panic)

Dane's in surgery, Mike, he -
they're trying to save him, they-
She stabbed him, Mike. In his sleep-

Mike struggles to understand -

MIKE

Who did, who stabbed-

JESSICA

She had a *hook*! Katie, she had a-
she gave him wounds like- Where the
fuck did she get a hook??

MARLA - puts a hand to her mouth. Sickened.

MIKE - goes pale. Even more horrified. Thinking -

MIKE

Where is she?

JESSICA

She's- she's at the station. But-
Something's wrong with her. She
won't talk. She's like a zombie...
(then, quiet)
You said... it can make people do
things, right?

Mike closes his eyes. This question hits him like a punch.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Mike. It didn't stop... Will you
come back?

On Marla, hearing this - her expression hard to read... as A
SURGEON steps out of the operating room in the b.g., looks at
Jessica. She makes one final plea -

JESSICA (CONT'D)

(desperate, pressing)
Please - if you're connected to
it... Help us...
(off the Surgeon's impatience)
Please, Mike.

She hangs up and turns to the Surgeon...

WE STAY WITH MIKE - In his car, stunned and haunted. Mike
stares out into the darkness... HIS POV - The DARK TREES by
the road... PUSH IN SLOWLY ON THE DARKLY RUSTLING LEAVES...

FADE/MATCH TRANSITION TO...

SOFT LEAVES UNDER A KID'S SNEAKERS

Almost night. The SHAKY, TERRIFIED BREATHING of the kid whose
sneakers we're looking at is the only sound. We are -

EXT. THE "CROW'S NEST" - DUSK *FLASHBACK TO 1988*

In the darkness among the towering boulders. Only a few
shafts of fading light creeping in. Now SLOWLY PULL UP TO
REVEAL the terrified kid...

MIKE, age 12. *We have just plunged into a violent and vivid memory, something intensely traumatic, with no bearings...*

He's hiding. Eyes wide with adrenaline, leaves in his hair, beads of sweat on his forehead. *What's going on? What is he hiding from??*

Now Mike hears FOOTSTEPS. Slow, quiet FOOTSTEPS approaching across the leaves. Coming around the boulder... toward him. Mike becomes very still. Holds his breath. A focused intensity coming over him as the FOOTSTEPS draw closer...

And now we see that Mike's clutching something: A **HOOK**. A long, curved, steel hook... a pirate's hook.

And as the FOOTSTEPS draw nearer, Mike readies the hook as if to swing it -- but we go BACK TO -

INT. MIKE'S LEXUS (PARKED) - NIGHT

Mike in his car, tense. He looks at his hand - curled into a fist, as if still gripping the hook. Leaving us wondering: *What happened to Mike as a kid up at the Crow's Nest?*

He rolls down his window. Listens to the RUSTLING leaves. A dog BARKING somewhere. He looks at his own house. LIGHTS GLOW in two bedrooms, but the curtains are drawn.

And then he starts the car...

EXT. MIKE'S WESTCHESTER STREET - NIGHT

Mike's Lexus pulls away... And glides off down the street. Into the night. **FADE TO...**

EXT. MARLA'S HOUSE - DAWN

Mike climbs the porch steps in the dawn magic hour. As if he knew he'd have to come back. Marla emerges from the house to meet him. Weary. She has been up all night.

MIKE

All this time I thought I was running away. But I think my whole life has been leading back here.

MARLA

Jess told me she saw it too. The show.

MIKE

This thing is real. Somebody created it. I need to find out who... and make sure what happened here 28 years ago never happens again.

MARLA
I'll help you.

Mike looks at her with surprise. Simply:

MARLA (CONT'D)
I'd like to know who killed my son.

On Mike, feeling the weight of that. He nods in respectful acknowledgment. Of course they'll do this together.

MARLA (CONT'D)
Come in. I'll make coffee.

As he follows his mother inside and shuts the door, we PULL BACK WIDE on the house where Mike grew up... and CUT TO...

A SATURDAY MORNING CARTOON

Sprightly TALKING ANIMALS on a TV screen, innocuous. PULL BACK to reveal we are in -

INT. A LIVING ROOM - MORNING

A family home somewhere in Iron Hill. **TWO LITTLE KIDS**, 7 or 8, watch cartoons while their mom is in the b.g. Then -

The CARTOON DISTORTS. Goes dark. The kids sit up, startled - BLOCKING OUR VIEW... as *something else comes on TV*....

As that familiar *CANDLE COVE* THEME starts up, we can just see the edge of a **surreally colorful KIDS' SHOW... SWIRLING MIST... the spindly, spastic limbs of a cheerful puppet...**

EXT. FAMILY HOME - MORNING

PULL AWAY from their house as we hear the two little kids START TO GIGGLE O.S. ...

VARIOUS SHOTS: FAMILY HOMES IN IRON HILL

Quiet houses with porch swings and Big Wheels on the lawn. Backyards with INFLATABLE POOLS. SUVs and station wagons outside. And as we PULL AWAY from each house we hear...

The GIGGLING of the children within.

GOD'S EYE VIEW OF IRON HILL VALLEY - MORNING

Sunrise over the peaceful little valley... As the GIGGLING BECOMES A LOW, **CHILDLIKE CHORUS**: The strange music of kids all over town getting their first taste of *Candle Cove*...

END OF PILOT