

THE SPRINGS

Written by
Arlo Thompson

arlothompson@gmail.com

(859) 608-4584

EXT. A FRONT YARD - EARLY EVENING - FALL, 1984

A jet black ninja, G.I. Joe action figure, SNAKE EYES, slides down a piece of twine guided by a boy's hand. It crashes into a few COBRA action figures, the enemy.

The hand twirls the figure in a ninja attack, knocking over any remaining figures standing in this sad patch of lawn, one of several in the sea of dirt that makes up the yard.

Wide now: THOMAS, 12, plays by himself. On his knees, seeped in his imaginary world, his sandy hair flops to and fro in the last sunlight of the day.

The surrounding wooden fence is held up with hope more than anything else. And the small house behind, matches it all.

With every move his worn jeans get a little more so and his t-shirt, somehow grubbier. It's his go-to look.

MIKE (O.C.)

Hey buddy...

THOMAS

Hi.

Thomas looks up at MIKE. Early-30s, mustache, and a smile that makes you feel good about yourself.

MIKE

Time for dinner. You mind washing up?

THOMAS

Okay.

MIKE

Maybe a little soap this time?

He flashes that smile at Thomas, who lights up as he gathers his toys.

INT. LIVING ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Thomas moves through the wood-paneled living room between a worn sofa and their old Zenith TV set, his arms filled with action figures.

He arrives in the kitchen. His mother, JOELLE, is at the stove. Mid-30s, lithe, working toward a sleeve of tattoos on her left arm.

JOELLE

Will you drop those and come back? I need you to run over to the lot before we eat.

THOMAS

Yes, ma'am.

JOELLE

I mean it, just drop 'em. You can line them up later.

THOMAS

(frustrated about it)

All right.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

On each side of the room is a twin bed. Thomas heads to his side and gently unloads his toys onto his bed.

Above it are two shelves FILLED with G.I. Joe action figures. All very neatly organized into factions.

Thomas's hand gently places a figure into an empty space.

JOELLE (O.S.)

Thomas!

THOMAS

Coming.

INT. KITCHEN - A FEW SECONDS LATER

Thomas leans on the counter. Joelle turns her head to him from the stove.

JOELLE

By the toaster. See that check?

It's a rent check.

JOELLE

Run that over to Bart and hurry back. Chop chop. Dinner's almost ready.

Thomas snaps up the check and heads out of the kitchen, through the small dining room and out the back door.

Through a screened-in patio, emerging into his back yard.

Thomas does a random lap around the backyard, throwing in a few ninja kicks like one of his action figures.

He pops opens the wooden gate in the privacy fence and fights his way down the narrow alley. His enemies: trash cans, a stack of old tires, some wood pallets.

A grueling battle, a half block long, before he opens a gate into--

EXT. BART'S CAR LOT - CONTINUOUS

Thomas makes his way between the cars. Used and European. He rubs his hand over them as he passes. A long Jaguar sedan, a BMW coupe, a Porsche he stops and peers into. And lastly, a Ferrari 308--

He doesn't dare touch. His hand glides inches above its contours as he moves past, then pushes open the office door.

INT. BART'S OFFICE - EVENING

BART sits behind a desk in the small office. Mid-50s and barrel-chested with a thick beard and a buzzed head of hair.

BART

Tom, my boy. What can I do ya for?

Thomas is a different kid now. Not playful and free like in the yard or alley. He's self-conscious and nervous.

THOMAS

I've got, my mom... here.

And he hands over the rent check.

BART

Tell her thank you for me. And Mike too.

THOMAS

I will.

Thomas turns to leave.

BART

Whoa, whoa. Hold on there.

Bart pulls out a receipt ledger.

BART
Gotta keep track. Just good business.
Remember that.

THOMAS
Okay. Um, mom's got dinner ready. I
need to...

BART
Everything by the books.

He rips off the receipt slip and passes to Thomas.

BART
Alright, off you go.

Thomas turns to leave before Bart can get out--

BART
Thanks, Tom.

The door closes behind him. Bart folds the check before
sliding it into his shirt pocket.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

Joelle and Mike are setting the table. Plates, silverware,
glasses and such.

MIKE
Can we just really quickly--

JOELLE
Leave it alone.

MIKE
Joelle, come on--

JOELLE
Later--

As she sets a plate in front of WREN. A small, 8 year old
girl wearing glasses, her nose buried in a book.

Thomas comes through the back patio door.

THOMAS
Bart says thanks.

And he pulls out a chair for himself.

JOELLE

Nope. Hands first. Hit it. Milo!
Hurry up in there, kiddo.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

MILO comes out of the bathroom wiping his hands on his shirt as he heads toward the table.

Their brother. He's 10, wearing a Walkman and headphones.

JOELLE

(she sees his Walkman)
No, not at the table. And please use
a towel next time. You'll stretch out
your shirt.

Milo shrugs. It's ridiculous to him that he should take off his Walkman. But he does and slides it onto a nearby shelf.

JOELLE

Wren, honey, time to eat.

Wren looks up from her book.

WREN

Mm, hmm.

And dives right back into it. Joelle is resigned to this situation.

Thomas slides into his seat and dinner is passed around. Fish sticks, mac and cheese from a box, green beans, a simple iceberg lettuce salad.

Wren looks up long enough to put a little from each on her plate as they arrive near her.

THOMAS

Mom, can I ride with Marlon this weekend? I've got to ask tomorrow so he can ask his mom.

JOELLE

If your homework is all done. Any tonight?

THOMAS

An essay. But I'm almost done.

JOELLE

Good. Milo?

MILO
Done-a-rooni.

MIKE
You sure?

MILO
Oh, yeah.

MIKE
Wren?

Her head pops from behind her book. She takes a bite of food.

JOELLE
No sweetie, we meant, do you have any homework.

WREN
All done.

She tosses in another bite and heads back to the book.

INT. THOMAS & MILO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Thomas plays on his knees in front of his bed. A Cobra action figure makes a scaling assault up his bedpost. A sneak attack on Joes huddled near his pillow.

A Cobra Commander figure in the other hand on the ground, his voice is a squeaky, high-pitched, sort of evil.

THOMAS
(as Cobra Commander)
This will be their ruin.

Milo is on the other side of the room, his Walkman and headphones on. He works through some rudimentary break dancing moves.

A heated argument POURS through the walls. Joelle and Mike:
COMMITMENT. FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR US. COWARD.

Thomas gets louder, forcing himself to ignore the adults.
HOW DARE YOU. NOT THEIR FATHER. YOU WON'T LET ME BE.

THOMAS
(as Cobra Commander)
Annihilation. Pain that they have never known. Climb, climb, you dogs.

Close on the Walkman clipped to Milo's belt. His hand turns up the volume. *Rocket* by Herbie Hancock.

He starts moving a little harder, getting into it.

INT. WREN'S BEDROOM - SAME

Illumination seeps through a comforter covering a Wren sized lump.

She sits cross-legged under the blanket. A flashlight in one hand, aimed at her open book. The other hand gently turns a page.

The argument storms into Wren's little haven.
NEVER LOVED ME. NOT TRUE. THAT'S JUST NOT TRUE.

Wren begins to rock back and forth gently as she tries to narrow her focus.

EXT. THOMAS'S NEIGHBORHOOD, **COLORADO SPRINGS** - MORNING

Thomas's worn sneaker steps on a seam in the sidewalk. Two more steps and then the opposite shoe hits a new seam.

This inadvertent waltz moves him through the neighborhood filled with older, smaller houses.

His worn Jansport backpack hangs over his hoodie as he dawdles along.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - MORNING

Thomas pulls open the front door to the school. It's early and most students haven't yet arrived.

He makes a sharp cut across the hall into the--

INT. CAFETERIA - SECONDS LATER

It isn't busy but Thomas waits to join the buffet line until the few students ahead of him have paid and left.

His tray is being filled now: pancakes, wrinkled little sausages.

THOMAS
Could I, um, some eggs too?

LUNCH LADY
Sure honey. That good?

It's a hefty scoop. They look rough.

THOMAS
Yes. Thank you.

His tray meets him at the register. He carefully pulls it near him.

REGISTER LADY
Eighty-five cents.

Thomas shuts down.

THOMAS
I... my... My name is Thomas Frost.

The Lunch Lady jumps in--

LUNCH LADY
Here, Alice--

She reaches over the Register Lady and grabs an index card box. Thumbs through it, and pulls out a smallish, yellow card.

It reads: **Free Lunch Program** with some numbers around the edge to be punched. A handful punched already. And in the middle, in blue-inked cursive, is written **Thomas Frost**.

Alice takes the card and punches it.

ALICE
First day. It's nice to meet you
Thomas.

It takes a second for him to push the embarrassment aside.

THOMAS
You too. Thanks.

Thomas picks a table near the wall, away from other kids, and sits.

He sloughs off his pack and hoodie.

Thomas looks down on his feast. A subconscious sigh of relief follows and he digs in.

He shovels in his meal. Washing it down with a milk. With just a few bites left--

A shiny new pack drops on the bench opposite Thomas. And after it, MARLON, Black, also 12.

MARLON

Did you finish your history?

THOMAS

(through a mouthful)

Yeah. But I spaced the words a little so it stretched out long enough. What if we failed on purpose and get dropped out of honors back to regular stuff?

MARLON

Would your mom be okay with that?

THOMAS

No.

MARLON

Same. Are you ready?

THOMAS

You got it?

Marlon unzips and reaches into his pack, and pulls out a COBRA action figure, still in the packaging. The Baroness.

THOMAS

Dude. No way. The Baroness! Now we both have one.

MARLON

Yeah. Here.

He passes it to Thomas.

MARLON

Don't open it!

THOMAS

I won't, I won't.

Thomas looks deeply through the clear plastic holding the figure in place then flips it over to read the back.

MARLON

I'll open it at home. I wanted to show you first.

THOMAS

This is so cool. As soon mine showed up in the mail from my dad, I tore it open. You know her story is crazy, right? Supposedly, she's had all this plastic surgery because she got burned super bad in this assault with Cobra.

Thomas hands it back to Marlon, who slides it into his pack.

The boys gather up their belongings. Thomas grabs his empty tray and they head off together through the cafeteria.

MARLON

Do you think she had it done on her, you know?

Thomas giggles. They are such boys still. But things are really starting to spark in their brains.

THOMAS

Her boobies?

Marlon giggles too.

MARLON

Yeah. Do you think?

THOMAS

Oh, she totally did. (beat) Say it.

MARLON

No, I can't.

THOMAS

Say it.

Thomas sets his tray on top of a trash can.

MARLON

(quietly to Thomas)
Boobies.

THOMAS

Ahhhhh! You said it. You said boobies.

MARLON

Shhhh. Stop. Stop.

As they're laughing and heading out of the cafeteria--

THOMAS

Do you want to ride this weekend?

MARLON

I can't. We're going to my grandma's.
Next weekend?

THOMAS

Yeah.

INT. 7/11 - AFTERNOON

Thomas stands in the candy aisle scanning the choices. He grabs a chocolate bar, take a couple steps toward the counter and changes his mind.

The chocolate goes back and his hand pulls out a box of Nerds candy. The original half grape/half strawberry kind.

Thomas heads toward the checkout counter and sees a handful of middle school boys huddled around an arcade game near the door.

The Nerds are placed on the counter and as the CLERK taps in the price on the register, an OLDER MAN cues up in line behind Thomas. And then a MID-20S WOMAN behind him.

CLERK

Thirty-one.

Thomas's hand is already in his pants pocket pulling out his change. He sorts through the few coins. A few nickels, a dime and a penny.

THOMAS

Here's twenty-six...

He hands over the change to the Clerk.

THOMAS

And one sec...

He reaches back into his pocket and fishes around for more but comes out empty-handed. A small panic starts to rise.

THOMAS

Wait, sorry, there's more...

OLDER MAN

Here, I've got it. How much do you need?

THOMAS
Ah, uh, no, that's okay.

CLERK
You got a nickel? It's all
we need.

OLDER MAN
Sure. Let's see here...

He's digging in his other pocket now.

THOMAS
No, really, I've got--

MID-20S WOMAN
Come on, kid, take the nickel.

The arcade game boys now watch the scene at the counter.

THOMAS
(flustered)
I don't want his nickel.

The Older Man reaches over him and passes a nickel to the Clerk.

OLDER MAN
No worries, son. Just a nickel.

Thomas's hand come out of his other pocket. No luck.

He looks at the Clerk, then the Older Man, before bolting out of the store... Leaving his candy, change, and pride at the counter.

EXT. BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

A clod of dirt EXPLODES as it hits the wooden fence. Thomas picks up another. They make up most of the yard.

He chucks it at the fence and it thuds off, dropping to the ground.

Another one fires in and bursts into a cloud of dust. Thomas turns to see Mike behind him wiping dirt off his hands.

MIKE
Grab another one.

Thomas does. Mike eases on over to him.

MIKE
(demonstrating)
Now, as you pull back, watch this...

He pulls back like a baseball pitcher and follows through on his imaginary pitch.

MIKE

Really push through, use your legs too. Gets a lot more speed on it. Which is really the whole point when you're blowing up dirt clods, right? Here, I'll help you out.

He helps Thomas with his form as the boy pulls back to fire another clod. Thomas's release is comical looking but sure enough, the ball of dirt rockets into the fence.

MIKE

There you go. Let's do it again.

THOMAS

Yeah, yeah. Okay.

They both keep at it. Thomas working on his form and Mike occasionally giving him pointers.

A few clods later, while they're still throwing--

MIKE

So... you've been out here a while. Everything alright?

THOMAS

I'm fine.

MIKE

Sure?

THOMAS

Yeah, just... stupid stuff.

MIKE

Any of it have to do with me and your mom and last night?

SPOOOOOOF! A clod hits the fence.

THOMAS

I mean, some, yeah.

MIKE

Sorry. We had some things to talk about and it got a little loud.

THOMAS

No, it's alright.

MIKE
It's not. Adults, sometimes things
are hard for us too. But it's not
okay if it upsets you guys.

THOMAS
I'm okay.

MIKE
You sure?

THOMAS
Yeah.

MIKE
Sure?

THOMAS
Yes.

MIKE
Absolutely?

THOMAS
Yes. Yes. I'm good. (beat) Hey, do
you think I can watch a movie
tonight?

MIKE
Trying to sneak that in, huh?

Busted. Thomas smiles.

THOMAS
Maybe.

MIKE
Yes, you can. Is it a late one?

THOMAS
Kind of, one a.m.

MIKE
Keep it quiet and don't wake your
brother or sister.

INT. THOMAS & MILO'S ROOM - LATE NIGHT

A small collapsible travel alarm clock RINGS next to
Thomas's sleeping head.

In a flash his hand clamps it shut and slides it under his pillow to muffle the sound. His other arm reaches under to find the tiny alarm switch.

CLICK. It's off.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

The old Zenith television glows in the darkness, the volume audible only to Thomas.

He sits on the floor, wrapped in a blanket, right in front of the screen.

On the screen: a GIANT RAT climbs over the top of a cabin in the woods. A scene from FOOD OF THE GODS, a classic B horror movie.

Thomas is riveted. *This is unbelievable.*

INT. THE BOY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Thomas is dead asleep in his bed. A hand reaches in and lightly scruffs his hair. He stirs a little.

MIKE

Thomas.

He kneels next to the bed and musses the boy's hair again.

MIKE

Hey, Thomas.

The boy's eyes open. He's still sleepy.

MIKE

Sorry to wake you, buddy.

Thomas rubs his face a little and props up on an elbow.

THOMAS

What time is it?

MIKE

Almost eight.

THOMAS

Saturday, right? Can't I sleep some more?

MIKE

It is Saturday. I need to talk to you for a minute.

Thomas sits upright now.

MIKE

I've already talked to your brother and sister but I wanted to tell you that I'm leaving.

Thomas gives a quick shake of the head. No. As if that will stop Mike's next words.

MIKE

Yes. Please, please know that it has nothing to do with you kids.

Thomas shakes his head again.

MIKE

In the last couple years you guys have meant more to me than I ever imagined. You know I love you but there are some things your mom and I can't work out. So we decided that it's best for me to go.

Thomas fights to keep the rush of feelings packed inside. It's getting harder--

THOMAS

When?

MIKE

Now, buddy. I'm all packed.

And harder--

THOMAS

Now?? But yesterday.

MIKE

I know, I know. But this morning we talked it through and this, this is it.

He leans in and gives the boy a monster bear hug.

Thomas wraps his arms around the man. The boy's jaw is clenched, his eyes starting to well.

MIKE

I'm sorry Thomas. Love you.

THOMAS

I love you too.

Mike lets him go.

The instant Mike's feet pass the threshold on the way out, Thomas lets it out. A quiet sob, but it's deep and it hurts.

INT. BACK PATIO - MID-MORNING

Joelle sits on the floor. She's red-eyed and worn down.

Thomas slowly creaks open the door to the patio and peeks his head in.

JOELLE

Hey. Come on in.

She pats the floor next to her. Thomas comes in and slides down onto the spot.

THOMAS

I can make something to eat for us, if you want.

JOELLE

That might be nice. Thank you.

Thomas looks up at the shelves opposite him and locks eyes on a big, rolled-up sleeping bag and tent in its nylon sack.

THOMAS

Mike forgot his tent and sleeping bag.

JOELLE

Yeah, I think he probably left those for you kids. I'm sorry, Thomas. We just couldn't work things out.

THOMAS

Okay.

JOELLE

It's not fair, I know. I didn't think my boyfriend troubles would come around this time.

Beat.

THOMAS

What do we do now?

She puts an arm around him and pulls him in close.

JOELLE

Now we get on with it. And one day you and me, Milo and Wren, we won't feel like this.

THOMAS

I hope that's soon.

JOELLE

Me too.

INT. HISTORY CLASS - MORNING

Class hasn't started yet. Students filter in. Jabbering with each other. Some take their seats.

Thomas and Marlon sit in desks next to each other on the far side of the room. They talk quietly.

MARLON

I don't get it. You never miss an episode. And this one was so great. At one point Duke AND Snake Eyes got captured.

THOMAS

Yeah, I was, my mom needed some help that morning. I completely forgot about it.

MARLON

You know it'll be on again sometime. I'll watch it with you. Man, I love reruns.

THOMAS

Yeah, I'll see it then for sure.

MARLON

Hey, let's ride this afternoon. Before it gets dark. Meet you at the track?

THOMAS

Deal.

EXT. THE TRACK, THE EDGE OF TOWN - AFTERNOON

Eye level on a sea of sage brush. Jean-clad legs streak past on a BMX bike, pounding up and down on the pedals.

Looking down on "The Track." Dirt paths worn into a field. Countless years of pedaling youth impose their will on this small patch of earth.

Marlon, on his BMX, shreds through the course. Thomas keeps up through defiant pride. His bike is older, cowboy-themed, with a banana seat. Definitely not an off-roader.

They ride with freedom and abandon. Over dirt ramps. Catching air when they can. Around bends. Down a small washout and up the other side. It's relentless and joyful.

Exactly what Thomas needs right now.

Their bikes slip as they round a shale covered bend.

Another go around. Both making great jumps off a dirt ramp. Circling back around toward the shale again.

Moving with Thomas's front tire as he tears along. It hits the shale and sinks in.

Thomas is vaulted off his bike, his arms trying to break his headfirst dive into the dirt before he slams into a bush.

He lays still.

Marlon skids to a halt and flies off his bike, back to Thomas.

MARLON

You okay, you okay?

Thomas blinks at him, still reeling/assessing.

THOMAS

Yeah. Just...

He starts to push himself into a sitting position. Marlon helps him out.

THOMAS

Need a minute. Guuuggh. Stupid bike.

A rough scratch on his temple bleeds through the dirt.

MARLON

Oof. Does it hurt?

Thomas looks down at a nasty swath of road rash on a forearm. Shallow but painful.

THOMAS

Can you? I think I need help.

Marlon unties a flannel shirt from around his waist and helps Thomas tie it around his arm.

MARLON

Let's get you up.

He helps Thomas to his feet. Thomas walks back to his bike.

MARLON

How bad is it?

THOMAS

(pulling it upright)

It's fine.

Thomas lightly touches the scratch on his face.

THOMAS

Ow. I, I need to go home.

MARLON

I'll ride with you. Man, that almost got me too.

EXT. THE FRONT YARD - LATER

Thomas and Marlon pull into Thomas's driveway. Thomas slowly dismounts. They lean the bikes against the fence and head in.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Thomas pushes through the door with Marlon following behind. The boys are met by a cloud of dense weed smoke.

THOMAS

Mom. Hey...

Joelle sits on the sofa with NINA, late-30s, Mexican American, strong hippy vibe. A tray on the coffee table is filled with bits of weed and seeds, a pipe nearby still smoking.

Joelle looks right past Thomas to Marlon, trying to hide her panic. She lets out a cough, unleashing her smoke-filled lungs.

THOMAS
I wrecked on my bike.

He holds up his wrapped arm. Joelle jumps up from the couch.

JOELLE
Come on. Let's take a look.

She hurries them through the house, away from the cloud of smoke.

INT. THE BATHROOM - A FEW SECONDS LATER

Thomas sits on the toilet as Joelle unwraps the flannel from his arm. Marlon sits on the side of the tub.

JOELLE
Let's see what we've got here. Were you guys being safe?

THOMAS
I think so.

JOELLE
Marlon?

MARLON
We were. His tire hit some shale and slipped. That's all.

Joelle's got it unwrapped now, inspecting the damage.

THOMAS
I just need different tires, that's all. Mine totally don't work on dirt.

JOELLE
So you guys went to the track then?

THOMAS/MARLON
Yeah./Yes.

JOELLE
You know I worry about you riding there but there's no good time for an I-told-you-so. It's not bad. Peroxide is under the sink.
(MORE)

JOELLE (cont'd)
 And when you're done would you mind
 walking Marlon out through the back?

THOMAS
 Okay.

JOELLE
 I am glad you're alright.

She kisses him on the head. *So embarrassing.* Then leaves the boys.

Thomas washes his arm off in the sink. He winces.

THOMAS
 Can you grab the peroxide for me.

Marlon opens the sink cabinet and pokes around.

THOMAS
 (quietly)
 Were they...

Marlon pops up with a bottle of hydrogen peroxide. Unscrews the cap.

MARLON
 I think so? I've never seen it but my
 sister told me about this high school
 party she was at and that looked
 exactly like what she was saying.

He pours it on Thomas's scraped up arm. It bubbles and burns--

THOMAS
 Ow ow ow ow ow ow. Stop, stop.
 That's good. Thanks.

EXT. THE BACK YARD - AFTERNOON

Thomas and Marlon step into the backyard. Thomas's arm is shoddily wrapped in gauze.

THOMAS
 This is so... are we high now?

MARLON
 Do you feel weird?

THOMAS
 No.

MARLON

Me neither.

They walk along the side of the house to the gate near the front.

THOMAS

Maybe you don't know if you are and that's how it works.

MARLON

That doesn't make sense.

THOMAS

Exactly!

Thomas pushes open the gate but stops in his tracks.

THOMAS

Would you mind not saying anything about this at school?

MARLON

I won't.

THOMAS

Thanks.

INT. THOMAS & MILO'S ROOM - EVENING

Thomas is freshly showered, sitting on his bed, clean jeans and a fresh t-shirt. Arm freshly bandaged, better this time around. He looks down at his lap.

JOELLE (O.C.)

You can't be that careless. It almost never happens but things have been so stressful lately and Marlon just walked right into our house.

Thomas doesn't look up.

THOMAS

So Marlon can't come into our house any more?

JOELLE

No. Yes, but I need you to be more careful.

THOMAS

Me?

A few women under hair dryers. Two in the barber chairs. One waiting, one having her hair cut by Joelle. And toward the back is Nina, the hippy, weed-smoking woman from earlier, washing a client's hair in the sink.

The phone RINGS. Joelle looks over from her station and spies Thomas just coming in.

JOELLE

Get that, please.

This is routine for Thomas. He slides behind the reception counter and picks up the receiver.

THOMAS

Hello, Salon on Vine. May I help you?

As he listens he searches for a pen and appointment book.

THOMAS

Mmmm hmmm. Okay--

He scans a finger across the calendar page--

THOMAS

Yes. One on Friday looks open. Yes... with Joelle. Great. Thank you Mrs. Christopher.

He hangs up and jots down the appointment.

JOELLE

Thank you. Hey, straight home, you hear?

THOMAS

Okay.

JOELLE

Spaghetti and sauce in the kitchen cabinet. I'll be home after I close up.

Thomas nods and turns to Milo & Wren who are packing up their school bags and putting on jackets.

EXT. THE STRIP MALL - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Thomas, Milo, & Wren dawdle along.

MILO

Can we stop for snacks?

THOMAS
Mom didn't give me any cash.

MILO
Oh. Wren?

WREN
Just my lucky nickel. I found it in
the living room last week.

Thomas's lost nickel. He looks to the sky and shakes his
head a little.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

The three kids are lined up on the couch. Wren, freshly
bathed in her PJs.

Joelle sits cross-legged on the floor in front of them.

JOELLE
Things are different now that Mike is
gone. Not as easy, right?

The kids all nod in some fashion.

JOELLE
So I need a favor from you.

WREN
I'll get a job.

MILO
Me too.

THOMAS
You're too young.

JOELLE
You're all too young. School is your
job. But to make things a little
easier, we are going to let a family
who also needs some help live with us
for a while.

WREN
Where are they going to sleep?

JOELLE
That's the favor. I'll need you three
to share a room.

WREN
No, please.

MILO
What?

THOMAS
Mom!

WREN
My room is too small for
boys, Mommy.

JOELLE
I know it is, sweetie.

INT. JOELLE'S ROOM - DAY

Joelle passes a full dresser drawer to Thomas. Milo is lined up behind him, waiting. Wren behind Milo.

JOELLE
For you. Set it in the living room
for now.

Thomas leaves and Milo steps up. A drawer handed to him.
It's a little heavy.

JOELLE
Oh! You got it?

MILO
I got it.

He bumps into the door jam on his way out. Wren's turn.

JOELLE
And for you let's do--

She looks around then hurries to unplug a table lamp.

JOELLE
Here you go.

Wren takes it out as Thomas returns.

JOELLE
Good, good. We've got a system.

She passes another dresser drawer to Thomas.

JOELLE
We'll have this done in no time. And
maybe pizza tonight?

Milo and Wren coming back in--

MILO/WREN
Pizza!/Pizza!

LATER. Joelle and Thomas carry/drag the queen size mattress out of the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Joelle's bedroom contents are stacked any and every where. She and Thomas lean her metal bed frame against the mattress and box springs already there.

JOELLE
Nice job, kiddo.

She high fives him. He's proud to help out.

THOMAS
Thanks. You too.

JOELLE
Milo. Wren. Ready to get your stuff moved in?

INT. WREN'S BEDROOM - A MOMENT LATER

Wren reads a book in her top bunk as Milo loosens the bolts on her bed frame.

Joelle quickly takes in the scene as she peaks in.

JOELLE
Whoa, whoa, whoa. I'll take that.
Wren, get down here.

Joelle gently snatches the wrench from Milo's hand.

JOELLE
Let's get your clothes and books moved into the new room. Remember, pizza.

MILO/WREN
Pizza!/Pizza!

JOELLE
(smiling)
You guys have to earn it!

INT. JOELLE'S ROOM - EVENING

Now the kids' room. The bunk beds are set up. Wren's little dresser and bookshelf to one side.

Thomas, Milo, and Wren sit on the bottom bunk.

JOELLE

This is going to work. Milo, you're on the bottom bunk and Thomas, we'll get you set up with a cozy spot here on the floor. Not ideal but we've got to do it. Thank you guys. I really appreciate the effort.

WREN

Pizza, Mommy?

JOELLE

It's on the way. Get washed up. Thomas, can you help me with one more thing?

INT. LIVING ROOM - A MOMENT LATER

All of Joelle's stuff has been moved out. She pats the top of the TV.

JOELLE

So, I think the dining room is our best bet.

THOMAS

The TV? Why?

JOELLE

Because we'll need the room in here.

THOMAS

But my movies. How am I going to--

JOELLE

Easy, easy. Listen, that's not going to change. Just where it happens. Okay?

THOMAS

Okay.

JOELLE

Lift from the bottom.

Thomas moves to his end of the TV and the two squat down and lift it up.

INT. THE BOYS' BEDROOM - DAY

The action figures are lifted off Thomas's shelf and neatly placed in a vinyl G.I. Joe Collector's Case. One of two.

Thomas meticulously packs each figure and its accessories.

As he finishes, through the window he sees a station wagon pull into the driveway. Milo creeps up behind him to look out too.

MILO

They're going to use our beds.

THOMAS

Think mom told them you wet yours?

Milo slugs him in the arm.

MILO

Shut up. Mom told you not to make fun of me. I know she did.

THOMAS

Sorry.

MILO

I'm really trying. It's just-- Look.

Joelle is in the drive greeting Nina, her salon coworker, as she gets out of her beat up station wagon.

The passenger door opens and out climbs KATIE. 13, long brown hair pulled into a pony tail, a look of reluctant acceptance on her face about this move.

The rest of the world falls away. She is all Thomas can see.

JOELLE

(in the driveway)

Kids? Come on out. Thomas? Milo?

MILO

Come on.

THOMAS

What?

He moves to the car and leans in the back to grab a bag and sees--

CHARLENE, 17, the same brown hair as Katie but in a short, pixie cut, and... advanced Cerebral Palsy. She's still buckled in and turns her head to greet Thomas.

Speech is difficult for her.

CHARLENE
Hi. I'm Charlene.

Thomas is startled, scared. He tries to hide it.

THOMAS
(hesitant)
Uh, hi. I'm Thomas.

CHARLENE
Hello Thomas. You can call me Char
for short.

Charlene's door opens and Nina has a wheel chair waiting.

NINA
Alrighty. You ready?

CHARLENE
Yes. Let's do it.

Nina unbuckles Charlene and slides her out, into the chair. It's tough for Nina and Charlene is only a willing participant.

Thomas watches as Nina wheels her away. He snaps back into himself and grabs an over-stuffed duffel bag from the seat.

Thomas heads to the house and Katie grabs a bag and follows.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joelle is putting sheets on the bed where the TV was the night before. Nina parks Charlene in her chair by the couch.

NINA
Hang tight and we'll have you set up
in a jiff.

Thomas comes in with the duffel bag, Katie right behind.

JOELLE
Thomas, show Katie to her room?

THOMAS

Yes, ma'am.

He heads toward his "old" room.

INT. THE BOYS' BEDROOM - A MOMENT LATER

Thomas and Katie stand in the middle of the room. He sets down the duffel bag.

THOMAS

I guess, whichever bed you want.

He moves around the room a bit.

THOMAS

Here is a dresser for you guys. Night stand. Lamp.

His eyes catch the action figure cases on his bed. *She'll see that you play with toys.*

He casually moves over and scoops up the cases.

THOMAS

I'll let you get settled.

A case in each hand, he makes a hasty exit.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Around the table sit Joelle, Milo, Wren, Katie and Thomas.

At the end of the table, Charlene eats, with Nina hovering nearby.

The girl's hand struggles to the plate, forks a piece, and heads toward her mouth. Nina reaches in to help guide it.

CHARLENE

I've got it.

NINA

I know you do.

CHARLENE

Then let me--

NINA

Okay, okay.

It takes Charlene a couple slow tries to get the bite aimed and into her mouth.

NINA

There you go--

CHARLENE

(mouth full)

I told you.

Katie keeps to herself as she works through her meal.

Milo is fascinated with Charlene's routine. Thomas gives him a hard nudge to break his stare. Everyone notices.

MILO

Hey! (beat) Sorry.

NINA

It's okay. This is how we roll at meal time. Right, Char?

CHARLENE

Yes, it is. Thank you for dinner, Joelle.

JOELLE

Of course, you're very welcome. Now, things are going to be a little tight quarters around here so I need you kids to be patient. Okay? We'll have to take turns on some things and everyone's got to help out with chores to make this work.

NINA

That's you too, Katie.

KATIE

I know.

JOELLE

There's one more big thing and that is, I need you all to keep this quiet from Bart. It's really important. If he comes over just tell him I'm not here or come get me first and I'll meet him outside. Or meet him over at the car lot later. Can we all do that?

THOMAS

Yes ma'am.

MILO/WREN

Yes ma'am./Yes, Mommy.

JOELLE

Good. Now, who's on dish duty tonight?

MILO/WREN

Thomas./Thomas.

NINA

Katie, you help Thomas out.

KATIE

I will.

Looking down at his plate, Thomas's eyes widen with surprise/fear at this.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Katie scrapes plates into the trash. Thomas stands there, hesitant to make any basic decision.

KATIE

So...

THOMAS

So?

KATIE

Wash or dry?

THOMAS

Wash, I guess.

KATIE

Great.

The washing begins. A plate, more than thoroughly scrubbed and rinsed, is passed to Katie.

Eye contact successfully avoided, Thomas keeps at it.

This goes on and on, in silence.

Unlike Thomas, Katie is relaxed. She casually dries and shelves the clean ones.

The last dish now placed--

KATIE

Well, have a good night.

She hangs her towel and strolls out. When the coast is clear--

WHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO. Thomas lets out a breath like he's been holding it for an hour.

INT. THE KIDS' NEW ROOM - NIGHT

It's dark, save for the street light creeping in through the shades.

Wren is tucked into the top bunk. Milo the lower. And Thomas is stuffed into Mike's old sleeping bag on top of pallet of blankets on the floor... **right next to Milo.**

MILO

(quietly)

This is totally not fair.

THOMAS

(also whispering)

At least you have a bed.

MILO

Whatever. You have Mike's awesome sleeping bag. I meant, I don't want them in our room.

THOMAS

I know. Just try and sleep.

CLICK. A flashlight shines out from under Wren's comforter.

Thomas gets up and stands on the edge of Milo's bunk so he can reach Wren. He slides his head under her comforter.

She's reading, and whips her head to look at him. *Get out.*

THOMAS

We can see your light, you know.

WREN

(genuine)

Really?

THOMAS

Yes.

WREN

Oh.

THOMAS

I won't tell. Don't stay up too late?

WREN

Just one chapter. Promise.

She pulls the cover off his head and shuts him out of her little world.

INT. THE KIDS' NEW ROOM - LATE AT NIGHT

Thomas's head rests on his pillow. He's sound asleep.

A DRIP lands on his cheek. Then another. His hand sleepily wipes it.

Another drip. He wakes and looks at the sheet hanging off the bed above his head. Another drop about to fall.

He sits up and sees the sopping source leading to Milo's wet crotch.

Ugh. Thomas gets up and quietly leaves the room.

INT. THE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tired and frustrated, Thomas washes his face with soap and water.

INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING

Corn flakes pour into a bowl and the box is passed to Thomas's waiting hand.

He looks at Katie as she milks up her cereal.

THOMAS

(nervous)

Thanks.

KATIE

Sure.

Milo and Wren are already eating across from them. From the living room they hear--

CHARLENE (O.C.)

Now. We've got to go now.

NINA (O.C.)

I know, just one more minute.

A moment later Nina rounds the corner into the kitchen then dining room, pushing Charlene in a her wheel chair.

CHARLENE

I need to go now. It's not fair I have to wait.

NINA

I get it. You gotta go, you gotta go. I'm sorry. We're almost there.

The three Frost kids stop mid-bite as Nina wheels Charlene into the bathroom.

It's a minor struggle to get her chair into the bathroom.

NINA

Hold on. Almost.

She finally gets the door closed.

Katie eats on, unfazed.

JOELLE

Hey, Thomas?

She's just come out of her bedroom. It breaks the hold Nina and Charlene threw at the Frost children.

THOMAS

Yeah, mom?

JOELLE

Katie is starting school today. Would you mind showing her the way?

THOMAS

Um, no. Sure.

JOELLE

Thank you, honey.

KATIE

(softly)

Thank you, honey.

Thomas blushes.

EXT. FRONT OF THE HOUSE - MORNING

Thomas waits on the front porch, ready for school. Katie comes out of the front door--

KATIE
I'm following you.

THOMAS
Um, right.

And he steps off the porch.

EXT. THOMAS'S NEIGHBORHOOD - MORNING

They move along in silence. The only sound made by their shoes on the sidewalk.

Thomas, musters up some courage--

THOMAS
So, I'm sorry, which grade are you in?

KATIE
Eighth.

THOMAS
Oh. I'm in seventh.

They continue on a while more until--

THOMAS
Did you like your last school?

KATIE
I did.

THOMAS
Well, this one is pretty great. Maybe you'll like it too?

He's really trying.

KATIE
Maybe.

They stop and wait for the crosswalk to change across from the middle school.

THOMAS

It's kind of hike to get here but our house is as close as we could get and still be in the district so my mom thinks it's worth it. Did you have to walk to--

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - MORNING

The signal changes and they step off together.

KATIE

I did. Okay, see ya.

THOMAS

I can show you to the office if you--

KATIE

I'll figure it out. Thanks.

THOMAS

Oh, okay. Meet here after school?

KATIE

I'll see you at the house.

Her foot hits the campus curb and she's off, as if Thomas were never at her side.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Marlon stuffs his jacket into his locker. Thomas slumps against the metal doors.

THOMAS

I got peed on. Peed. On.

Marlon gives him a side-eyed look-- *What?*

THOMAS

I'm not kidding. Milo, and I'm sure he didn't mean it but, I was sleeping on the floor right next to his bed--

MARLON

Why weren't you in your bed?

THOMAS

Sorry, let me back up. So this new family moved into my house.

MARLON

Your house isn't that big.

THOMAS

No kidding. But that means Milo and I have to sleep in Wren's room. Which totally sucks, and yes, I did get peed on, but listen to this...

Marlon has turned back to his locker, fidgeting with something in there.

THOMAS

Listen.

MARLON

(without looking)
I'm listening.

THOMAS

Okay, so... one of them is a girl.

Marlon keeps digging in his locker.

THOMAS

Did you hear me? A girl.

MARLON

I've got to get to class.

THOMAS

Uh, yeah, let's go to the track later and I'll tell you all about it.

MARLON

(sighs)
No, I've got to, I need to tell you something.

THOMAS

What?

MARLON

I got home from your house the other day and my mom smelled weed on me. I told her it wasn't us and that led to me spilling the truth. So I'm not allowed to hang out with you for a while.

THOMAS

What... Why, why would you tell her?

MARLON

I'm not getting in trouble for something your mom did. That's messed up. I'm sorry. I feel really bad. I've gotta, I've got to go.

Marlon shuts his locker. He walks past Thomas. We stay on Thomas, sorting out this rejection, as Marlon moves away down the hall.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Thomas is fuming. He pushes through the front door, having completely forgotten that Charlene now resides on one side of the living room.

Her bed is propped up so she's sitting. She gives him a little wave.

CHARLENE

Hi, Thomas.

He stops for a second.

THOMAS

Hi, Char.

NINA

Hello, Thomas.

She's on the couch, reading.

THOMAS

Hey.

And he pushes on through the house to--

INT. THE KIDS' NEW ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Wren's feet hang off the top bunk, swinging lightly. She's buried in another book up there.

Milo sits on the bottom bunk, headphones on, working through some Pop & Lock moves with his arms.

Thomas stands in the doorway. He looks down at his sleeping pallet. *This sucks.* He turns and peels out the room.

INT. BACK PATIO - AFTERNOON

Thomas slides down the wall to sit on the floor.

He spies Mike's old tent on the shelf across from him.

INT. BACKYARD - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Laid out in the splotchy yard are the pieces to the tent. Unpacked and ready to be assembled. A two person dome tent.

Thomas sits nearby in the dirt reading an old sheet of instructions.

He lays down the ground cover. Easy enough. But it gets tough. He struggles. Getting the poles slid through nylon bands. Bending them to catch in the end pockets.

Frustration. He's dirty. Sweating. Hammering the stakes into the earth. Tying down the storm cover.

He looks down at the instructions, a sketch of the finished product and looks up to compare his work.

He's done it.

INT. THE KIDS' NEW ROOM - A MINUTE LATER

The sleeping bag is snatched off the floor.

INT. THOMAS'S TENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Thomas spreads out the sleeping bag and lays down on it.

It's big and cozy and soft. He looks around at his spacious new room. He's proud, relaxed.

JOELLE (O.C.)

Thomas?

INT. TENT - MINUTES LATER

Her head pokes in.

JOELLE

What are you doing here?

THOMAS

I set up Mike's tent.

JOELLE

Because?

THOMAS

I need to.

JOELLE

You need to. Go on.

THOMAS

We have more room this way. Milo and Wren and me. Plus he didn't have a dry night last night. Wanna know how I know?

JOELLE

Nooooooooo.

THOMAS

It dripped on my head while I was sleeping.

Joelle slides all the way in and sits next to him.

JOELLE

Oh honey, I'm sorry. He really is trying.

THOMAS

How is this not the perfect solution? Plus, out here is better because I don't think Katie likes me.

JOELLE

This has to be hard for her too. Just, give it some time. (beat) Thomas, you can't live out here like some animal.

THOMAS

It's not like that.

JOELLE

It is like that. You've got to sleep inside.

THOMAS

No, Mom, trust me. Please? Can we just try it? For a little. I promise I'll still get all my homework done and my chores.

JOELLE

I'm not worried about that. There'll be snow soon.

THOMAS

If it gets too cold, I'll come in. Problem solved. Please, Mom, please?

She sighs in defeat.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

A thick MagLite flashlight lays on its side, spraying light across the tent.

Textbooks open, scattered about. The trenches in between filled with G.I. Joes waiting to assault the Cobra figures hiding a couple books away.

Thomas sits in his pajamas on the sleeping bag, orchestrating the attack.

The battle is swift and decisive. Cobra never had a chance against this group of Joes.

Thomas yawns and moves his toys to one side of the tent. A handful of them are lined up there already.

JOELLE (O.S.)

Knock, knock.

ZIP. Joelle peeks through door.

JOELLE

Brought you another blanket, just in case.

She passes it in to him.

THOMAS

Thanks.

JOELLE

You sure you'll be alright out here?

THOMAS

Yeah, I think so.

JOELLE

Alright then. Come here.

Thomas slides toward the tent door. Joelle pulls him in for a sneak attack kiss goodnight on his forehead. Thomas wriggles out of her grasp.

JOELLE

Gotcha.

She backs out and zips up his door.

Thomas slips into his sleeping bag and pulls the new blanket over him. He settles and shifts until he's comfy then clicks off his flashlight.

SILENT DARKNESS...

MAYBE TOO SILENT...

His silhouette pops upright. The light clicks on.

He unzips the door and slips on his shoes that were left on his "doorstep."

EXT. THE BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS

Thomas speed walks to the back patio door but stops. He takes a deep breath, exhales hard, then marches back to his tent.

INT. TENT - A FEW SECONDS LATER

Sitting with his feet outside the tent, he takes off his shoes. ZIP. Up goes his door. And he slides back into his bed.

A couple deep, somewhat calming breathes later, and he clicks off the light.

Darkness. Again. One more huge breath in and a long relaxing exhale.

EXT. THE SPRINGS - MORNING

Thomas walks through his neighborhood. Backpack on, hands in his pockets.

He walks for a loooooong moment before we see that Katie is walking next to him.

The two are accompanied by their usual weighty silence. The school comes into view ahead. And finally--

KATIE

You know, you don't have to sleep in the backyard.

THOMAS

I know.

KATIE

It's not like we wanted things this way--

THOMAS

No. I mean, I know. But I like it.

KATIE

We feel really bad about it.

THOMAS

Don't. No one should. Not you, your mom, my mom.

KATIE

Okay.

THOMAS

It's good, I promise. You know what's
it like having your own room, right?

Stepping onto campus--

KATIE

I don't actually.

Thomas stops.

THOMAS

Oh.

KATIE

See ya.

And she's leaves him there.

Thomas moves onto the campus by himself.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

The late day sun spreads shadows across the campus. The bell
sounds and kids begin to stream out of the building.

Thomas is in the mix, heading toward the same intersection
Katie left him at that morning.

EXT. BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

Thomas nears his tent, his jacket and school pack still on.
The flap of his tent hangs wide open. *What the?*

He looks inside--

THOMAS

No. Get out. Get out, right now.

INT. TENT - CONTINUOUS

Milo sits on the sleeping bag playing with a couple of
Thomas's action figures. Wren reads a book to one side.

MILO

Why do you get the tent?

WREN
It's not fair, Thomas.

THOMAS
Put those down. They're not toys.

MILO
They are totally toys.

THOMAS
They're mine so put them down.

Milo sets aside the toys.

MILO
Why do we have to share a room and
you don't?

THOMAS
Because I thought of it and you
didn't. Out or I'll find mom.

EXT. BACKYARD - SAME

Thomas holds open the flap for Milo and Wren as they come
out and stomp off.

MILO
Bullcrap.

WREN
Total bullcrap.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Thomas clicks on his flashlight. It now hangs from a metal
carabiner hooked to the dome. His very own chandelier.

It lights up his space. He's made a shelf on one side, a
couple of bricks holding an old wooden plank.

It's filled with his Action Figures. The good guys on the
left, in running poses, facing the bad guys charging back.

He grabs a textbook and cracks it opens.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Katie and Milo sit at the table finishing homework.

Thomas strolls through and reaches for the bathroom door handle, pushes it open and--

INT. THE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nina is giving Charlene a bath. Thomas doesn't see anything he shouldn't but--

THOMAS
Sorry, sorry, sorry.

As he backs out and closes the door.

NINA (O.C.)
(through the door)
Sorry, Thomas. Thought we locked that.

He looks at Katie--

THOMAS
You could have told me.

KATIE
Well, I didn't think you were some kind of perv.

MILO
What's a perv?

KATIE
Thomas.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

A hallway, between classes. Thomas weaves through the horde of students, his pack stuffed and slung over one shoulder.

He sees Marlon coming his direction.

MARLON
(a little coldly)
Hey.

THOMAS
Hey.

Thomas continues on, trying to keep his pack from slamming into anyone around him. He's mostly successful.

THOMAS

Oof. Sorry!

He pulls over at a water fountain and leans down for a quick sip. His head comes up and water dribbles down his chin--

As Katie approaches.

Thomas hurriedly wipes his chin and gives her a small wave.

No acknowledgment as she passes by.

Alone in the sea of students, Thomas resets his pack and heads off too.

INT. BACK PATIO - LATE NIGHT

Thomas quietly creeps through the back patio door. He slides off his shoes and coat leaving him in an old t-shirt and sweatpants.

With all the stealth he can muster, he continues into the--

INT. DINING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

His hand turns the volume knob on the TV all the way down then moves over and pops out the on/off button. A soft gray light from the screen blinks on and warms the room.

Thomas turns the channel knob a few slow clicks to his desired station then eases up the volume a smidge. A car salesman's voice eeks in as Thomas tiptoes to the edge of--

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He peeks around the corner at Charlene, asleep in her bed. Thomas moves quietly to the sofa and pulls off a blanket.

INT. DINING ROOM - A MOMENT LATER

Thomas sits, wrapped in his blanket, in front of the TV. The screen goes black as the movie begins.

Over the black, a BLOOD CURDLING SCREAM erupts. The 1959 HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL with Vincent Price. Thomas lunges for the volume knob, cutting the noise.

He waits a moment then turns it up a little. More screaming but now with a maniacal laughter behind it.

Thomas turns it down again then hurries in to check on Charlene again. *Whew*. Still asleep.

He settles back under his blanket and turns up the sound as the narrator's head comes onto the screen.

LATER. Thomas, wrapped tightly in his blanket now, is completely lost in the film.

Katie, bleary-eyed, walks up behind him, squinting at the screen--

A skeleton rises from a vat and pushes a woman into it. It's acid!

KATIE

What, is this?

It scares the bejeezus out of Thomas. He flails in silent panic.

KATIE

(softly)

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. Are you okay?

Thomas recovers and calms--

THOMAS

Yeah. I'm alright. I'm--

KATIE

Sorry, I have got to pee.

And she steps into the nearby bathroom, closing the door behind her.

A minute later Katie emerges. It's a commercial break now.

KATIE

I am really sorry. What is this?

THOMAS

The House on Haunted Hill. Vincent Price is in it.

KATIE

It's cool you sneak in here and watch movies. Every night?

THOMAS

No, just the weekends. Most of them,
anyway.

KATIE

Huh.

And she wanders back towards her bedroom.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Lunchtime. It's packed. Thomas waits in line, plenty of
students in front of and behind him. He keeps to himself,
his head looking down a lot.

Laughter erupts from behind him. He turns to see a gaggle of
eighth graders, Katie stands behind them. They lock eyes but
Thomas turns away quickly.

He orders.

THOMAS

Pepperoni pizza, please. And tater
tots.

LUNCH LADY

Fruit cup or an apple, hon?

THOMAS

An apple, please.

His tray meets him at the end. He pulls a chocolate milk out
of the drink bin and slides his lunch toward the register.
And Alice.

THOMAS

Hi.

ALICE

Well, hello Thomas.

She pulls out the index card box and rifles through for his
free lunch card.

As usual at this moment, Thomas is mortified. Alice punches
his card.

ALICE

Alright, good to go.

THOMAS

Thank you.

Thomas tries to exit without the world seeing him.

Katie finally reaches Alice.

KATIE

Katie Santos.

ALICE

Yes, hi Katie.

And Alice searches through and pulls out Katie's FREE LUNCH CARD as well.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Charlene is propped up in her bed. With Nina's help, she is reading out loud from *A Wrinkle in Time*.

CHARLENE

... But not so loud, please, Charles. That is, unless you want the twins downstairs, too. Let's be excul, ex, ... ugh--

NINA

You can do that one. Sound it out.

CHARLENE

Let's be ex clu sive, Charles Wallace said. That's my new word for the day.

NINA

Oh, is it?

CHARLENE

(catching her joke)
No, that's what Charles Wallace said.

Milo, jamming to his walkman, mindlessly dances into the room. Charlene loves it.

CHARLENE

Milo. Milo!

Milo spins to face them. He sees Charlene's excitement and dances over.

MILO

You like that? Oh! Be right back.

He dashes out of the room. In a flash, he's back, walkman in hand. A headphone splitter gets jammed in. A second set of headphones gets pulled from under his arm and plugged in.

He settles the foam earpieces onto Charlene's head and flips his own headphones back on.

His thumb hits the play-- Michael Jackson's vocals floating on *Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough*.

Her face lights up. Milo begins to dance a little, and Charlene, from her bed starts moving along.

Milo takes her hand and, with his help, spins himself around. They dance with each other until the song ends.

Charlene claps. She's ecstatic. Milo pulls off their headphones. He gives her a high five.

MILO

Oh, we're good.

CHARLENE

Yeah, we are.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Thomas thumbs through a TV Guide until he reaches the right page. He tilts into the light so it's easier to read.

His finger scans down the page, looking for his desired program. Found it. He picks up his clock and twists the dial to set the alarm.

He sets the clock by his pillow then crawls into his sleeping bag.

He cinches it tight around him then slips an arm up and out to flick off his flashlight.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Thomas, wrapped in his blanket, watches a bleach blonde bigfoot rage between snow covered cabins on the screen. The sound barely audible.

From behind: Katie comes in and sits down next to Thomas.

THOMAS

Sorry. Did I wake you?

KATIE

No, I was just up. Which one is this?

THOMAS

The Capture of Bigfoot.

Without asking, she pulls some of his blanket around herself. And now they're both under it.

No snuggling, she's just chilly. Thomas is paralyzed and stares straight ahead.

They watch on...

LATER as the credits rolls.

KATIE

That was... did you like it?

THOMAS

No, but the monster was cool.

KATIE

It was. Can I tell you something?

THOMAS

Yeah.

KATIE

I'm sorry I don't talk to you at school.

THOMAS

It's okay.

KATIE

It's not. This has all been a little weird. And I don't want to explain the whole thing to these people I barely know.

Thomas gives a few nods of acknowledgment.

KATIE

Thanks for letting me watch.

She unwraps herself from his blanket, gets up, and walks back to her room.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

English. Shaggy haired, bearded, MR. BROWN leads the class.

MR. BROWN

So Ms. Hinton starts and ends *The Outsiders* with the same sentence. Ponyboy steps out of the movie theater and has two things on his mind, right?

Thomas sits near the back scribbling notes. Marlon is on the far side.

MR. BROWN

Paul Newman and a ride home. So what does that tell us about the story?

An OFFICE CLERK comes through the door, interrupting.

OFFICE CLERK

Very sorry, Mr. Brown. I need to speak with Thomas Frost for a moment.

The students OOOOOOH as if Thomas has been busted.

MR. BROWN

That's enough. Yes, please.

Thomas raises his hand. The Clerk crosses and kneels down next to him.

OFFICE CLERK

(softly)

Thomas, your mother called and would like you need to meet her out front.

THOMAS

After school?

OFFICE CLERK

No, now. Just grab your things. You're excused for the day.

THOMAS

Oh. Okay, thanks.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

In the distance, Thomas treks across the empty front lawn of the campus toward Joelle's waiting car.

INT./EXT. JOELLE'S CAR - DAY

Thomas climbs into the passenger seat.

JOELLE

(gently)

Hi there. Sorry to pull you out of class.

THOMAS

It was English and boring so, thanks.

Milo and Wren are in the backseat. Buckled in, doing their own things. Wren in a book. Milo manually winds the tape back into a cassette with a pencil.

Joelle pulls away and takes the first right.

THOMAS

We aren't going home?

JOELLE

Not yet.

THOMAS

Where?

JOELLE

You'll see.

INT./EXT. JOELLE'S CAR - A BIT LATER

The car pulls into the parking lot of the Botanic Gardens. Joelle turns the car off and unbuckles--

JOELLE

You guys mind leaving your book and music here?

WREN

Why, Mommy?

JOELLE

It's a pretty place. Let's look at pretty things for a while.

EXT. BOTANIC GARDENS - EARLY AFTERNOON

It's almost warm out. The bright fall sun rains down through the colorful foliage on this tree-lined path.

Joelle and Wren hold hands and swing arms as they move along the path. Thomas and Milo tag along behind, both shuffling through leaves.

LATER.

JOELLE

What about stopping here for a bit?

It's a bench, in patch of glorious sunlight. Aspens on either side of the path with leaves of unimaginable reds, yellows, oranges, and a few stragglers in green.

JOELLE

Have a seat.

Wren hops up the bench, Milo slides onto it next to her as Thomas sits on the end.

Joelle turns away from them and looks around. Something is tearing her apart inside. She turns and kneels down to the kids.

JOELLE

I got a call today and it was very sad. I have to tell you, I'm sorry, your dad passed away.

Wren's face is scrunching up with tears.

JOELLE (O.C.)

It was yesterday. The police found his truck.

Milo shifts in his seat, not looking at his mom.

JOELLE (O.C.)

They think from the tracks he was trying to avoid something in the road. Maybe a deer or who knows.

Thomas folds his arms tightly and grits his teeth.

JOELLE (O.C.)

You know those turns up there. And it looks like it went down the side of mountain and that, that was it.

Joelle is crushed by the pain she's handed her children. She reaches out and pulls all three into a hug.

And the sun and trees and leaves, in all their beauty, can't help this moment.

INT./EXT. JOELLE'S CAR - AFTERNOON

It's numb in the car as Joelle drives. Wren doesn't read. Milo doesn't listen to music. And Thomas, like the other two, stares silently out a window.

JOELLE

Seems like this would be a good time for a little drive thru. Any requests?

THOMAS

No.

Wren doesn't respond. Milo looks to the front--

MILO

Mickey D's?

JOELLE

Everyone okay with that?

THOMAS

Yeah.

In the rear view mirror, Wren nod yes.

JOELLE

Mickey D's it is.

Sure enough, one is up ahead. She pulls in.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Thomas lays on his side. His dome flashlight shines down. He fidgets aimlessly with his SNAKE EYES action figure.

His door unzips and Joelle slides in and sits by him.

JOELLE

I called the school and you've got the next week off.

THOMAS

Okay.

JOELLE

Do you want to talk?

THOMAS

I don't know.

JOELLE

It's Friday. Maybe there's a monster movie on you'd like to watch or maybe just stay inside tonight? It might be nice.

THOMAS

I might come in for a movie.

She notices the toy in his hands.

JOELLE

Is that the most recent one he sent?

Thomas nods.

JOELLE

Oh buddy, I'm so sorry.

She lays down next to him and kisses the top of his head.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Thomas sneaks in to grab a blanket off the sofa.

CHARLENE

(softly)

Hey, Thomas.

He freezes mid-reach for the blanket and looks at her.

THOMAS

Sorry.

CHARLENE

Could you come here?

He crosses to her bed. This is the closest he's been to her since the day he met her in the car. He's nervous.

CHARLENE

I need a some water. Could you...

There is a sippy cup on the table near her bed but she can't reach it.

THOMAS

Here.

Charlene takes the cup but she is still laying down. She tries to lift her head enough but just can't.

THOMAS
Sorry. What should I do?

CHARLENE
Can you lift my head up a little.

THOMAS
Okay.

Thomas slides his hands under her head and gently lifts. Charlene tries to bring the cup to her mouth but can't manage the aim. She's frustrated.

CHARLENE
Hold on. Put me down.

Thomas rests her head on the pillow.

CHARLENE
When you get my head up, use your other hand to help me with the cup.

He lifts her head again and helps guide the sippy cup to her mouth. She takes a couple swallows.

THOMAS
More?

CHARLENE
Please.

He helps her with a little bit more.

CHARLENE
That's good. Thank you.

He eases her head back down and sets the cup aside.

THOMAS
Sure. Need anything else?

CHARLENE
Do you want to sit?

Thomas pulls up Nina's nearby stool and takes a seat.

CHARLENE
I'm sorry about your dad.

THOMAS
Thanks.

CHARLENE

Did he like movies too? Sometimes I hear you a little when you're watching.

THOMAS

Oh, I'm sorry. I try to keep it quiet.

CHARLENE

It's alright. I like knowing someone is nearby.

THOMAS

Maybe I'll turn it up just a little then. Um, my dad did like movies...

This is hard for Thomas but as he begins--

THOMAS

He worked in a mine and sometimes got back to the house really late--

It opens something. He relaxes and his story pours out--

THOMAS

And he wasn't always tired yet so he'd turn on the TV. But I would hear it. And then I'd sneak into the living room and he let me watch with him. It was so fun. This one time we were watching...

And from above we watch Thomas going on and on and Charlene smiling, then both of them laughing quietly.

INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING

Breakfast time. The whole house is eating. Nina wheels Charlene out of the bathroom and up to the table for breakfast.

Charlene lets out a big yawn.

NINA

Aren't you the sleepyhead today?

CHARLENE

Thomas kept me up late.

Thomas looks up from his breakfast.

NINA

Oh, did he?

CHARLENE

We had a late night chat.

THOMAS

Yup.

EXT. THE SPRINGS - MORNING

Fall leaves cover the walk as Thomas and Katie head to school.

KATIE

Do you know that jock Steve Erickson,
in my grade?

THOMAS

Yeah.

KATIE

At the assembly on Friday, he stood
up to speak and a fart slipped out.
The whole gym was crying laughing.
But otherwise, you didn't miss much
last week.

THOMAS

That is perfect. Absolutely perfect.

A beat... then--

KATIE

So, there's not a service or
anything?

THOMAS

Mom said no. And he didn't really
have any other family.

KATIE

Is he going to be in a cemetery?
Maybe you can visit sometime.

THOMAS

No. He's gonna be cremated. Is your
dad still...

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Wren reads at the table, occasionally fitting in bites of cereal. Nina helps Charlene with a bowl of her own cereal.

Joelle pours herself some coffee at the counter as Katie wanders in. Joelle opens a cabinet, grabs a bowl, and hands it to Katie as she passes by.

KATIE

Thanks.

She sits at the table and pours herself a bowl. Drowsily--

KATIE

(to Wren)

What are you reading?

WREN

Ramona and Beezus. It's fine. I liked Henry Huggins better.

KATIE

Me too. Ribsy is such a fun dog.

WREN

Yeah he is.

Thomas comes in rubbing his arms for warmth.

JOELLE

Morning. Warm enough last night?

THOMAS

Yeah. Pretty cozy in there actually.

She hands him a bowl too. He pours cereal and milk, grabs a spoon from the drawer and heads to the back door.

JOELLE

Nope, nope, nope. Meals at the table. You know the rule.

Thomas wheels around, eyes rolling, and sits by Katie.

KATIE

(softly)

Careful, I am chock full of cooties today.

Thomas smiles and digs in.

JOELLE

Oh Milo! Wren, go wake up your brother. I'll drive you two on the way to work. Thomas, Katie, you okay walking?

KATIE

Yeah. We'll bundle.

THOMAS

Yeah.

EXT. BACKYARD - MORNING, A SHORT BIT LATER

Thomas kneels down, unzipping the front door on his tent. The back gate creaks and he looks over to see Bart coming in to the yard.

BART

Knock knock.

Uh oh. Thomas stands up.

BART

You camping out back here?

THOMAS

No... it's, it's like a fort. No tree house so I, uh, improvised.

BART

Sounds good. Hey, is your mom up? Mind if head for a minute?

Fight the panic.

THOMAS

Um, no, I think she's, she's in the shower at the moment.

BART

Oh, sure. Sorry. Well, you can tell me. Is the heat working so far? I wanted to make sure that furnace was still kicking.

THOMAS

It's good. Pretty cozy in there actually.

BART

Good to hear. Okay, well, you tell her to call me if it gives you any trouble.

THOMAS

I will.

BART

Thanks, Tom. Don't get snowed in out here.

And he walks out the gate, latching it behind him.

Thomas waits a moment to make sure Bart is gone then hurries into the house.

INT. JOELLE'S ROOM - A MOMENT LATER

She sits on her bed lacing up some boots. A knock on her door--

JOELLE

Come in.

Thomas opens it and leans in.

THOMAS

Mom.

JOELLE

Yeah.

He's flustered. She doesn't notice.

JOELLE

Make it quick. I've got to go.

THOMAS

Bart just came over.

Now she looks at him.

THOMAS

It's okay. I stopped him in the yard and told him you were in the shower.

JOELLE

Oh, good.

THOMAS

I didn't want to...

JOELLE

Come here. Sit.

He joins her on the bed.

JOELLE

We're in a tough spot, Thomas. At some point, we're going to get through this and things will be different. Until then, sorry, bud.

EXT. THOMAS'S NEIGHBORHOOD - AFTERNOON

Snow falls lightly as Thomas walks home from school. His big second hand winter coat flaps open in the cold. *You'll grow into it*, Joelle had told him.

Thomas stops and pulls it closed. He starts the zipper but it catches at the bottom. He's frustrated as he struggles with it--

Katie rounds the corner. She's bundled up too.

KATIE

Can you believe they canceled school already?

THOMAS

Mr. Brown said we're supposed to get more than a foot.

Still working on his zipper issue--

THOMAS

(looking at his hands)
We're still kinda close to school but is it okay if we...

KATIE

Yeah.

She sets off. Thomas doesn't see her move. Katie notices and comes back.

KATIE

What's going on there?

THOMAS

It's stuck at the bottom and I'm freezing. This sucks.

KATIE

Let me see.

Thomas looks around to make sure they're alone.

THOMAS

Okay, but hurry. This is super embarrassing.

She moves close and begins her work.

Ziiiiiiiiiiiiip. She's got his coat all closed up for him. Feeling dumb and shaking his head a little--

THOMAS

Thanks.

KATIE

Sure.

They move off together.

KATIE

Any movies on tonight?

THOMAS

I'll have to check. Would you want to watch one?

KATIE

If it's a good one. Or, a really bad one. I can't change my mom's alarm since she has to be up early to help Char. Maybe come wake me?

THOMAS

(a little hesitant)

Um, sure. I can do that.

KATIE

I'll see about making popcorn before I go to bed.

THOMAS

Whoa. I never thought of that.

Katie taps her temple.

KATIE

I'm kind of a genius.

INT. TENT - LATE NIGHT

The rattling bell of the little travel alarm starts up.

Thomas's hand grabs the clock. He pulls it in tight and shuts off the alarm.

INT. BACK PATIO - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Thomas peels off his coat and snow-covered boots. In his socks, sweatpants and a long sleeve thermal, he moves--

THROUGH THE DINING ROOM. Passing a big zip lock bag of popcorn on the table.

PEAKS INTO THE LIVING ROOM. Charlene is sound asleep.

He stops outside NINA & KATIE'S ROOM. He slowly grasps the handle. Like a master thief, he turns the knob until the softest of clicks occurs. Then eases the door open.

INT. NINA AND KATIE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Only the faintest light creeps through the open door. Thomas looks from one bed to the other. He can't tell who is who.

He tiptoes over to Milo's old bed. His hand reaches out and hovers above the the covered shoulder. *This isn't right.* He pulls back and tiptoes across to his old bed.

He lightly rubs the shoulder of this occupant. Nina rolls over. Thomas sees her face, panics, then scurries out, hastily closing door behind him.

Nina doesn't wake but rolls onto her other side.

INT. TENT - EARLY MORNING.

Early dawn light seeps into the tent. Thomas sleeps hard.

A piece of popcorn bounces off his cheek. Then another. This finally stirs him.

One of his eyes opens as another piece bounces off his face. He flinches at it.

THOMAS

What are you doing?

Katie sits in the corner of his tent and tosses a piece into her mouth.

KATIE

You didn't wake me up. I even made popcorn.

She pelts him with another piece.

THOMAS
Hey, stop it. I did.

KATIE
Well, there's still popcorn and I
didn't get to see Attack of the
Killer Tomatoes.

Thomas looks around his tent. He's strung twine across the supports. G.I. Joes hang all around in assault poses. Ah jeez. He looks back to Katie.

THOMAS
I went into your room. And I didn't
know which bed your were in.

KATIE
The one on the right.

Katie takes another bite.

THOMAS
I know that now. I went to the wrong
bed.

KATIE
(laughing a little)
You woke up my mom for the movie?

THOMAS
I don't know. She moved and I got
scared and ran out. Then I was too
chicken so I just came back here.
Sorry.

KATIE
Oh, that's great. Well, let's try
again sometime.

She unzips the tent door to leave and turns back to him--

KATIE
Pretty cool setup you have here--

And she climbs out.

INT. DINING ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Thomas comes in from his tent. It's a bad scene--

LIVING ROOM-- Charlene is choking. She can't breathe. Her arms flailing as Nina frantically tries to help her.

NINA

Come on, Char. Come on.

Katie is frozen, watching helplessly.

KITCHEN-- Joelle is on the phone

JOELLE

Twenty-four, thirty-seven Gunnison Street. Yes, sorry-- Thomas, you and Katie take Milo and Wren to the tent. Now.

Thomas moves through to the LIVING ROOM.

THOMAS

Katie, let's go.

KATIE

I'm staying.

Nina is too busy to respond.

JOELLE

Go Katie, go. I'll be here.

MILO & WREN'S ROOM-- They are awake and can hear something serious is happening. Thomas is calm he as urges them out.

THOMAS

Wren grab your book. Let's go. Mom wants us to wait in the tent.

DINING ROOM-- Thomas brings up the rear as Katie holds Wren's hand. Milo leads the way.

Struggle and panic sound from the living room as Thomas ushers them out the back door.

INT. TENT - A MOMENT LATER

The scream of sirens grows closer and closer as the kids take seats inside of the tent.

Milo picks up an action figure.

MILO

Can I play with this?

Don't be selfish right now.

THOMAS

Yes. Just be careful.

WREN

It doesn't smell great in here.

THOMAS

Uh, okay. Sorry about that.

Katie has her arms wrapped around her knees. The sirens peak and die out.

THOMAS

It's going to be okay.

Katie nods in agreement, a lump in her throat. She's far from convinced.

THOMAS

They'll help her. They're trained for all sorts of stuff.

WREN

Yeah, it's their whole job to save people.

KATIE

You're right. Thank you, Wren.

She reaches over and gives Wren's hand a little squeeze.

The tent unzips from the outside and Joelle peeks in. Her eyes are red but she's gentle and maternal here.

JOELLE

Hey, guys. So, Char and Nina are on the way to the hospital. Katie, I'm going to drive you over now so we can wait.

KATIE

Okay.

JOELLE

Thomas, can you watch them? I'm not sure how long we'll be.

THOMAS

Yes, ma'am.

Katie climbs out. Joelle leans back in.

THOMAS

No, I'll sleep in my tent.

He pushes himself up off the couch.

JOELLE

Sleep tight then and thanks again for everything today.

EXT. SMALL PARK - AFTERNOON

Wrapped warmly in their winter gear, Thomas and Katie wander along the paths.

KATIE

When I was little I remember she had crutches but could get around.

THOMAS

How did it get like this?

KATIE

Mom said it's not that her disease gets worse but all the problems it causes can add up and make things worse over time.

THOMAS

It's terrible.

KATIE

It is but mom always says don't feel sorry for her.

THOMAS

How can you not?

KATIE

I guess I look at it as, she's my sister first and her own person. And just like any of us, she has her own feelings and stuff.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Nina and Joelle lift Charlene onto her bed from her wheelchair.

NINA

And, ready, here we go.

Milo and Wren watch from near the couch. Joelle pulls the blankets up over Charlene, who nods thanks.

And now we see that Charlene has had a tracheotomy. Bandages hold in place the blue plastic tube jutting from her neck.

A small appliance used for suction sits near the bed. Its little hose hanging neatly from the side. Nina leans down to plug it in.

Nina turns to Milo and Wren--

NINA

So she can't really speak at the moment but she can still hear you. I'm sure she'd like to say hi.

The two kids move to Charlene's side.

WREN

I'm glad you're home.

Charlene nods in agreement.

MILO

Do you want to listen to some music?

NINA

Maybe not right now. Unless...

Charlene gives a tired no with her head.

NINA

Yeah, let's let her rest.

Katie and Thomas hurry in through the front door, trying to keep the cold out.

KATIE

Hi Char!

They both cross right over to her, pulling off mittens and hats as they go.

THOMAS

Hi, Char. Good to see you.

It's fatigued, but she gives them a smile.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

Joelle and her children sit with Katie at the table. They quietly pass around food and hear--

Nina trying to spoon feed Charlene in the next room.

NINA (O.C.)
I know it's hard. Just swallow a
little. It's really soft.

A few solemn bites eaten around the table. The sound of Charlene choking a little.

NINA (O.C.)
Hold on, hold on. Let me get the
suction...

They hear the little machine whir to life followed by its gurgle as it sucks the gunk out of her neck.

NINA (O.C.)
There we go, there we go. Let's try a
little water.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Joelle and Nina wash and dry the dinner dishes.

JOELLE
The salon was filled with blue hairs
today and you know I don't mind
cutting their hair but--

NINA
(softly)
Sorry. Listen.

Joelle turns off the water. Nina stops drying the plate in her hand.

WREN (O.C.)
*And Charles Wallace. She wanted her
brother. Mrs. O'Keefe had called on
Charles to stop Branzillo--*

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Under the light of a lamp, Wren sits on the stool, reading to Charlene from *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*.

WREN

*He'd need all the powers Heaven could
give him--*

Nina and Joelle stand at the edge of the room.

JOELLE

Is this okay?

Nina nods yes. It's more than okay.

WREN

*He had said goodnight to Meg in a
brus, bru, I don't know that one.*

Wren looks to Nina and Joelle.

NINA

Let's see.

She crosses to Wren, who's pointing at the word in the book.

NINA

Brusque. Kind of short and cold.

WREN

*Brusque. He had said goodnight to Meg
in a brusque and preoccupied way, and
then given her one quick blue glance
which had made her keep the light on
and the book open.*

Nina rubs Wren's back as a thank you and crosses back to Joelle. The two women head back to the kitchen as Wren reads on--

WREN

*Sleep, in any event, was far away,
lost somewhere in that time which had
been shattered...*

EXT. THE SPRINGS - MORNING

The city is covered in the gray of winter. Thomas and Katie make their way through the bitter cold to school.

THOMAS

(chattering with cold)
This is bad but not as bad as when we
lived in the mountains.

KATIE

No. This is the coldest moment ever.

THOMAS

Seriously, there were times it was hard to remember ever being warm. Nothing colder. I promise.

A bit of sunshine has crept into their lives. It's less cold now as they move along.

They both pull off their winter hats. The garments disappear as if they'd never been wearing them.

KATIE

Texas was nice. We were living with my grandma. My dad's mom.

THOMAS

Did you like it there?

KATIE

I did but mom and Nana did not get along so we went to New Mexico and stayed with my mom's sister for a while.

THOMAS

I don't think I'd like it there.

KATIE

How do you know? You've never been.

THOMAS

Huh. I guess I don't.

Ice and snow drip off the trees onto a damp sidewalk. The return of life is on the horizon.

The scarves and gloves come off.

KATIE

I'm still the new kid, you know? And I didn't know how long we'd stay so I haven't really let myself like any one.

THOMAS

Not even Joel Lundak?

KATIE

Have you smelled him?

THOMAS

Should I?

KATIE

Not if you can help it.

Foliage beginning to bloom. Green peeking out here and there.

Lastly, they pull off their coats.

The school is ahead in the distance.

THOMAS

My favorite is definitely The Blob.

KATIE

No, it isn't. We made fun of that movie the whole way through.

THOMAS

You're right. It's The Wolfman. He's my favorite. I even wrote a paper on werewolves in sixth grade. I got an A but my teacher said she didn't think it was an *acceptable research topic*.

KATIE

Well you showed her, didn't you, mister seventh grader.

Spring is in full force.

Thomas and Katie step on to the campus in hoodies and backpacks.

THOMAS

Did she ever go to school?

KATIE

For a while.

THOMAS

But she stopped.

KATIE

Yeah, when it got too hard for her and the aides at school. And mom.

They move across the front lawn of the school **together**.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

And down a hallway with other kids flowing around them.

KATIE

I mean you're solidly in middle school now so there must be someone.

THOMAS

(nervous at the idea)

I don't know. It's just, I mean, asking someone out?

They come to an intersection in the hallway.

THOMAS

Anyway, see you later.

KATIE

See ya.

They peel off in separate directions.

EXT. BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

A Cobra Infantry Trooper makes his way up a small ridge of stacked rocks guided by Thomas's hand.

THOMAS

(as the Trooper)

Must complete the mission.

The Trooper reaches the peak of the ridge, he's ambushed--

THOMAS

(machine gun fire)

Badadada. Badadadada.

By a crew of Joes poking out of neatly stacked bits of foliage.

NINA (O.C.)

(stern)

Katie.

Followed by the sound of the front screen door slapping shut. Thomas looks up from his campaign.

He can just see between some boarding on the fence to the front yard, where Katie stands, arms folded.

NINA (O.C.)

Katie.

Thomas hears the screen door creak open again and Nina joins Katie in the front yard.

NINA

I asked you, did you do it?

KATIE

(defiant)

And I said no the first time.

NINA

You are suspended from school. That doesn't happen unless you've done something wrong. Come on, Katie.

EXT. FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Closer on these two now, as if we're in the front with them. It's heated--

KATIE

I didn't do anything.

NINA

What were you doing with him? I am not going to ask again.

KATIE

I can't tell you something different this time. Nothing. Happened.

Katie wheels and storms off out of the yard down the street.

NINA

Katie, come back here. Now, Katie.

She moves to the front walk to see Katie jogging away from her down the street.

NINA

Dammit--

As Nina heads back into the house.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Thomas stops looking through the fence, opens the gate and tears off after Katie.

Forgotten on the ground, covered in bits of dirt, are his G.I. Joes.

EXT. THOMAS'S NEIGHBORHOOD - A MOMENT LATER

Thomas sprints down the walk. Katie is a block or so ahead of him. She makes a turn and he steps on the gas.

EXT. SMALL PARK - LATE AFTERNOON

Katie sits on a swing, kicking the sand at her feet. She's alone on the playground.

Thomas jogs into the sand and plops into the next swing.

KATIE

Leave me alone, Thomas.

THOMAS

I am.

KATIE

I'm not kidding.

THOMAS

I know.

Beat.

THOMAS

But--

KATIE

Did my mom send you?

THOMAS

No, I saw you run away and wanted to make sure you were alright.

KATIE

People don't run away for more company.

THOMAS

Pretend I'm you're shadow, just over here, keeping to myself.

Thomas begins to swing.

KATIE

My shadow never talks.

THOMAS

You got it.

He keeps on swinging.

The two glide back and forth next to each other. The only sound, the squeak of the chains.

Katie begins to relax.

KATIE

Do you have a hard time making friends?

Thomas thinks about it for a pass forward and back.

THOMAS

I guess so.

KATIE

I thought I had made some. It's been hard this year.

THOMAS

I know.

KATIE

You know. Anyway, Kelly Donahue and I finally started talking. She's in my civics class.

THOMAS

Kelly Donahue?

KATIE

Don't judge. I just said it's been a hard year.

THOMAS

Sorry.

KATIE

And really, she's sweet. But we met Andy Marken and Stephen Jao behind the gym to hang out, you know?

Thomas cringes a little. He knows they aren't nice kids.

THOMAS

Hang out, hang out?

KATIE

I don't know. Maybe? But I don't think I'm ready for that. Anyway, they had weed and I didn't want any but Coach Manzano found us and...

THOMAS

Now you're suspended. Your mom doesn't believe you?

KATIE

I swear I didn't do anything bad. She just, she has a lot to worry about so I don't ever get the benefit of doubt. It's always right to, "What did you do? Fine. You're grounded."

He glides to a halt in the swing as Katie does the same.

THOMAS

It'll blow over but in case you don't come back, were you thinking about living here at the park?

KATIE

Maybe.

THOMAS

You can borrow my tent. Or you can rough it under the slide over there.

KATIE

I could dig a little burrow. Or maybe Oscar the Grouch it in that can over there.

THOMAS

Sure, sure. But it is spaghetti night. I've heard there will be meatballs and garlic bread.

EXT. ALMOST BACK TO THOMAS'S HOUSE - EVENING

The two are almost to the front yard.

THOMAS

It'll be okay. Get it over with. I'll see you inside.

KATIE

Thanks, Thomas.

And he jogs into the back yard.

EXT. FRONT OF THE HOUSE - A FEW SECONDS LATER

Through the screen door, Nina starts scolding Katie--

NINA
Can we finally talk about this?

KATIE
I'm sorry. I didn't know they had it
with them.

EXT. BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Thomas carefully wipes the dirt from his action figures and
collects them into his arms.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - MORNING

History class. Students mingle about. Thomas sits near the
front pulling a notebook, pen, and textbook out of his pack.

Nearby-- Marlon talks to ETHAN and JAMES. Fellow students.
James is taller than the others.

ETHAN
They are way awesome.

MARLON
You want to talk awesome, ask Thomas
about his collection.

JAMES
Really?

MARLON
Yeah, really. Hey, Thomas.

Thomas, a bit surprised, turns around to face the boys.

THOMAS
Yeah?

JAMES
You're into G.I. Joes?

Thomas nods yes. The boys move over to where Thomas sits.

ETHAN

Can we see them?

THOMAS

Yeah, I guess so.

JAMES

Why don't we come over this
afternoon?

They can't see my house...

THOMAS

I can't today. But maybe I can bring
some tomorrow?

INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING

Thomas has his G.I. Joe carrying cases on the table, packing his figures into them. The last in, his favorite, SNAKE EYES.

He snaps the cases closed.

THOMAS

Forty-eight Joes, ready to go.

Joelle passes through, hearing him.

JOELLE

You're not taking those to school,
are you?

THOMAS

I know, I know, be careful.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - MORNING

History class again. Ethan and James each have an action figure in their hands as Thomas proudly places another one back in its case.

THOMAS

I try to keep them as clean as possible but they're meant to be used. Anyway, my dad would send like one a month or so and--

MRS. LATTIMORE

Let's get this morning started.

The history teacher. She's late-20s, her style heavily influenced by Cyndi Lauper.

MRS. LATTIMORE
Seats, seats. In them, now. Boys,
let's get those put away.

Thomas collects his toys, snaps up the cases, then tucks them into the cubbie under his desk seat.

MRS. LATTIMORE
So, Europe, the Dark Ages, Serfdom.
Let's get back into it.

Class moves on with Thomas furiously scribbling notes. This is one of favorite subjects.

LATER. Class has ended. Students are hurriedly packing up and leaving.

Thomas finishes up his notes, one of the last in the room. He pulls his pack onto his lap to load his books and supplies into it. Zips it up.

His hand reaches into the cubbie below him. It can't find the toy cases. He leans over to reach in farther. Nothing.

Thomas gets out of his desk and kneels down to look into the cubbie. Nothing there. *Panic setting in.*

He stands and looks around. It's just him now, and Mrs. Lattimore.

MRS. LATTIMORE
Thomas, you better get a move on or
you'll be late to the next class.

Thomas is moving row by row, looking into all the desks.

MRS. LATTIMORE
Thomas?

THOMAS
(without stopping)
Sorry. I think someone played a joke
on me and moved some of my stuff.

He gets to the last desk and they aren't there. He scans the room searching the shelves. Nothing.

MRS. LATTIMORE
Thomas--

THOMAS

Did you see anyone leave with...

He rolls his eyes and shrugs at having to say this--

THOMAS

Two G.I. Joe action figure cases?

MRS. LATTIMORE

I'm sorry, I didn't. Are you sure they aren't here?

THOMAS

They aren't. Thanks.

He grabs his pack and rushes out.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL HALLWAY - LATER

Thomas wades through the traffic and catches up to Marlon.

THOMAS

Marlon, hey, sorry, sorry, um--

They keep moving through the throng.

THOMAS

Did you see if anyone took my Joes.

MARLON

(genuine)

They're gone?

THOMAS

They weren't in my desk. Someone took them while we were in class.

Marlon pulls over to a side of the hall.

MARLON

Oh, man, no.

THOMAS

Yes.

Thomas is somewhere between mad and distraught but trying to keep it in because you can't let that out in a busy hallway with other kids around.

THOMAS

You're sure you didn't see?

MARLON

I didn't. Really. That is a crappy, crappy prank. I'm sorry.

THOMAS

Okay, um, thanks.

And he turns and wades back into the stream.

EXT. SOMEWHERE ON THE WAY HOME FROM SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

A nicer part of town closer to the school. Broad lawns push back houses from this street.

Close on Thomas's legs as he sits on a city bus bench.

His fist punches his thigh. Hard.

Again.

And again.

His jaw is clenched as he hits his leg one more time. Tears welling into his eyes.

He wipes away the tears and hangs his head. In this distance, down the walk, someone moves toward him.

Thomas is unaware when the person arrives until she sits next to him. It's Katie.

KATIE

I thought we were walking home together?

Thomas wipes his eyes again.

KATIE

What's wrong?

THOMAS

I took my action figures to school today...

EXT. THOMAS'S HOUSE - A BIT LATER

Thomas and Katie are nearly home.

KATIE

I don't think she'll ground you.

THOMAS
I kind of want her to.

KATIE
Will it help?

THOMAS
No.

He reaches into their mailbox and pulls out a big stack. At least a week's worth.

Unnoticed, a letter poking out of the stack is from MATTHEW PARKER, ESQ.

INT. JOELLE'S ROOM - EVENING

Thomas helps Joelle fold some laundry.

THOMAS
Am I grounded then?

JOELLE
No, no, not at all.

THOMAS
I'm sorry.

JOELLE
You don't have to apologize to me.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

PRINCIPAL DAVIES sits behind her desk. In her mid-50s with short gray hair, she tries to be sympathetic.

PRINCIPAL DAVIES
All the parents I've spoken with said
the same thing. None of their
children have Thomas's toys.

Joelle and Thomas sit across from her. Thomas looks like he's the one in trouble.

JOELLE
Of course that's what they're going
to say.

PRINCIPAL DAVIES

There just isn't more I can do.
Thomas, can you look at me for a
moment.

THOMAS

Yes, ma'am.

PRINCIPAL DAVIES

In the future I want you to consider
leaving those sort of things at home.
Not because you aren't a good
student. You always have been. But,
unfortunately, not everyone is like
you. I'm really sorry. I think we're
at a dead end.

THOMAS

Okay.

JOELLE

Thank you for trying.

Joelle stands and leads Thomas out of the office.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Thomas looks at his makeshift shelf, where all his figures
should be standing.

He smacks down on it with a fist.

THOMAS

Ow! Grrrrrrr.

In a rage, he unzips his tent door.

EXT. BACKYARD - SAME

The wooden plank is heaved out of the tent, clacking as it
bounces off the hard ground.

Next comes one brick, followed by the other. They land with
thuds just outside his door. Thomas follows them out and
picks up the closest one. He's furious.

With both hands, he shot puts it away from his tent. He
grabs the second brick and does the same. Neither go very
far.

He picks one up and gives it another chuck. Then the other. Until finally, each one smacks into the far fence.

Thomas ends his fit with a kick to the fence then stalks back to his tent.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Joelle stuffs her wallet into her purse on the counter.

JOELLE

Milo should be back around four.

She taps a memo pad on the counter. A Nail Salon and phone number are written on it.

JOELLE

This is where we'll be in case you need us. Sure you're good?

Thomas looks over from the fridge he's digging through.

THOMAS

Yeah, we'll be fine.

Nina walks in. Thomas closes the fridge.

NINA

Just check in on her every so often. See if she needs anything.

THOMAS

I will.

NINA

She's eaten and usually naps for about an hour or so. Thank you, Thomas.

THOMAS

You're welcome.

INT. LIVING ROOM - A MOMENT LATER

Katie and Wren are waiting at the door. Joelle, Nina, and Thomas come in.

Nina puts a hand on one of Charlene's. She's awake. The trach tube now a common place item.

NINA

Thomas is here if you need anything.

Charlene nods. Thomas steps up next to them.

THOMAS

We'll be good, right?

Charlene gives a thumbs up.

NINA

No wild parties. We'll be back soon.

THOMAS

We'll try.

Charlene and Thomas smile at each other.

Katie, Wren, Joelle, and Nina all head out. Goodbyes from all on the way.

Thomas closes the door behind them and crosses back to Charlene.

THOMAS

Would you like me to read a book or anything?

She shakes her head no. Then lays her head back and closes her eyes.

THOMAS

Have a good nap.

INT. KITCHEN - SHORTLY AFTER

Thomas is back in the fridge, digging out sandwich fixings. He builds a very tidy looking sandwich.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Thomas flips a page in one of his textbooks. Takes another bite of his sandwich. It's a big bite. He helps it down with a swig of water. Turns another page.

He hears Charlene grunt a little. Then a moan, a grunt, a choking sound.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SECONDS LATER

Charlene is wide-eyed as Thomas hurries in. She can't breathe.

THOMAS

What can I do?

She's flailing at her throat and turning pale. Her choking intense now. She's panicked and scared.

THOMAS

It's okay. Let me suction.

Thomas grabs the catheter from the nearby suction machine. Turns on the device. Its whir adds to the chaos.

THOMAS

It's okay, Char. You're okay--

He tries to slide the catheter into her trach tube. She struggles more and begins convulsing. He's doing his best to hurry but he can't get it threaded in.

And then she stills and slumps back into her bed. Eyes locked open.

Thomas shakes her arm a little. His eyes are red.

THOMAS

Char, come on. Please, come on.

He gets the catheter part way into her neck. It sounds clogged--

Thomas pulls it out and bolts--

EXT. THE BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS

Out the back door, across the yard, and out the back gate--

DOWN THE ALLEY. Running as fast as he can up and into--

The CAR LOT. Thomas hurtles between the cars. He tears open the door to--

The OFFICE. No Bart. He rushes back out to--

The CAR LOT. Thomas looks around. *Where is he?*

THOMAS

Bart! Bart?!

Bart pops out of the Ferrari, a detailing rag in his hand.

BART
Over here, Tom.

Thomas is there in a flash. He's shaking.

THOMAS
Please, come fast. Something's wrong.
Please. You have to help.

INT. DINING ROOM - A MINUTE LATER

Thomas and Bart hurry inside from the back patio and on to--

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Charlene's still body greets Bart. Thomas stands at his side, trembling.

THOMAS
I tried to help. I tried to help.

Bart hurries to Charlene. He's concerned and confused.

BART
Tom, who is this?

Bart touches her cheek. He knows she's gone.

BART
Who is this?

INT. KITCHEN - A FEW SECONDS LATER

Bart grabs the phone off the wall. He dials 911 on the rotary handset.

BART
Tom, where are her parents? I need to know what's going on.

Tears stream down Thomas's face as he looks up at Bart. No words come. 911 picks up--

BART
Yes, there's a girl here and she's not breathing... a teenager. She's got a, a, tube in her throat but...

EXT. FRONT OF THE HOUSE - LATER

A cab pulls up in front of the house. Joelle and Wren get out and walk toward the door.

Bart and Thomas are sitting on the front step. They both stand and Joelle folds Thomas into her arms.

THOMAS
I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

She runs her hands through his hair as she holds him.

JOELLE
Shhh. It's all right.

Joelle looks to Wren--

JOELLE
Wren, sweetie, can you head inside for a bit while I talk to Bart and Thomas?

Wren nods her little head then pulls open the screen door and head into the house.

JOELLE
Why don't you sit back down.

Thomas does. Bart and Joelle join him on either side.

THOMAS
Did Nina and Katie go to the hospital?

JOELLE
Yeah.

THOMAS
It was so fast. I tried the suction like Nina showed us. And I couldn't get it in right, and then, then, so--

JOELLE
Getting Bart was the right thing to do, honey.

BART
The paramedics tried but I think they knew right away.

JOELLE
Thank you for coming to help.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

The hanging flashlight spreads its light downward from the dome. Thomas lays on his side on the sleeping bag, staring at nothing.

His door unzips. He looks up to see Nina coming in.

Thomas sits up. He's been dreading this moment.

Nina leaves the flap open and takes a seat across from him. She's exhausted and emotionally drained.

NINA

I've never been in here. It's nice.

Thomas is so afraid he's in unforgivable trouble right now. Nina can see it.

NINA

Your mom said you're worried about me and Katie blaming you. Don't.

Thomas gives a stiff, quick head nod.

NINA

Her whole airway collapsed. It was weak and that's what lead to her tracheotomy in the first place. It was something we thought could, might happen. The hospital said that even if the paramedics had gotten here as it was happening, they couldn't have helped.

THOMAS

Oh.

NINA

She... this is where it was headed at some point. I didn't think this soon but, you know. She really liked you, Thomas. Enjoyed your company. Thank you for that.

INT. A SMALL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - DAY

The ORGANIST plays *Just A Closer Walk With Thee*. A flowered urn holding Charlene's ashes sits in the middle of the chancel.

An easel with pictures of Charlene. When she was small then progressing through the years, smiling throughout.

A dozen mourners join Nina, Katie, and the Frost family. They offer parting condolences and filter out of the chapel.

Thomas stands near Katie as the last of the mourners exit. She is all cried out for the moment, tired, and pulls Thomas into a much needed hug.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

A new day. Thomas and Katie kneel on the couch, looking out the front window, flanked on either side by Milo and Wren.

MILO

Mom looks upset.

Out the window, in the front yard, they see Bart talking with Joelle and Nina.

WREN

What are they talking about?

KATIE

That we shouldn't be living here.

WREN

I like that you're here.

KATIE

Me too.

The adults' conversation ends and Bart walks toward his car on the street. Joelle and Nina head for the house.

Joelle and Nina come in the front door--

JOELLE

Okay, time for a talk. Can you kids come outside with me?

NINA

Katie, let's head this way.

And Nina moves toward her room. Katie gives a look to Thomas as she gets up. *Here it comes.*

EXT. FRONT OF THE HOUSE - A MOMENT LATER

The three kids sit on the porch step. Joelle squats down in front of them.

THOMAS

Do they have to move?

JOELLE

They do. But here's the thing, so do we.

THOMAS

Why?

MILO/WREN

No way./No, Mommy.

JOELLE

I explained everything to Bart about Mike leaving and us needing help and he understood. But we did break our lease so, we have to leave too.

MILO

Where?

THOMAS

And what about Nina and Katie?

JOELLE

I don't know yet. We have about a month to figure it out. And as for Nina and Katie...

Joelle sits right down on the ground at this point.

JOELLE

Probably sooner and I think the plan is to stay with Nina's sister in New Mexico.

Thomas doesn't say a word, but he takes it hard.

MILO

Can we go back to the mountains?

JOELLE

I don't know. After your dad and I split up, I thought moving us all to the Springs would be for the best. And I still believe that. The schools are better, you're learning more, and later on you're going to have much better shots in life because of it.

(MORE)

MARLON

Just three doors down from mine. I'm trying to get situated in this new locker before class last week. Where were you by the way? Hold that. Anyway, it's busy, I'm running late and Darcy Hoover is making all these lovey faces at James. I don't think she really likes him but, I look over while he's talking to her and they are in his locker.

THOMAS

Both cases?

MARLON

Both.

THOMAS

(dejected)

Ah man. You know if I ask he won't give them back.

MARLON

He won't. I feel like it's my fault since I told him about them.

THOMAS

Nah, you didn't know he would do that.

MARLON

I think you have to go the office and report it.

THOMAS

Oh, that's going to be so embarrassing. I don't want to make a bid deal.

MARLON

No, they're yours.

THOMAS

I know, ugh, let me think about it.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Thomas and Marlon catch up as they make their way through the busy hall.

THOMAS

She thought I should stay home for a while after it happened.

MARLON

I don't even know what to, I'm sorry. How are you now?

THOMAS

Okay, I guess. It's still weird to think about and we have to move to a new house now. But mom wants to keep us in district so maybe we can start riding again? If your mom's cool with that.

MARLON

She asked how you were a while back. I think she wants me to be more social so I'll ask.

They stop at Thomas's locker and he works the lock.

MARLON

Oh man, I can't believe we haven't talked about this but right before Christmas break--

THOMAS

Andy Morrison during biology?

MARLON

Yes! So nasty.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Bathing in the light of the TV-- A couple cans of Pepsi. Twizzlers. Junior Mints. A big bowl of popcorn.

Thomas and Katie sit near their snacks as the screen darkens and the movie begins.

They crack open their sodas, and take a swig as the title creepily slides onto the screen. HOUSE OF DRACULA.

LATER. The popcorn is half gone. Candy packages are opened. The black and white of the movie fades to a color commercial.

KATIE

Why do they think this one doctor can cure being a vampire and a werewolf?

THOMAS

It's a mistake, watch. Bet you three Twizzlers at least one of them dies.

KATIE

It's a monster movie. No bet. But I'll take two now anyway.

And she reaches into the Twizzler bag for a couple strands. Thomas swallows hard.

THOMAS

Hey, I...

Mid-twizzler bit, Katie looks at him.

KATIE

Yeah?

THOMAS

I'm...

He looks down for moment then back to Katie. She reaches over to hold his hand.

THOMAS

Sad you're leaving.

KATIE

Me too.

THOMAS

I like our walks. And having someone to talk to. And that you watch these amazing movies with me.

KATIE

You mean ridiculous.

THOMAS

Sometimes, but they're so fun.

KATIE

They are. And I love them.

She leans in and gives him a short, tender kiss.

Their fingers entwined, Thomas's face beams as the movie returns.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - MORNING

Nina's station wagon is loaded up. She hugs all of the Frost children and Joelle.

NINA

Thank you. For everything.

JOELLE

Likewise. Let us know when you get there?

NINA

Will do.

Katie hugs Milo, Wren, and then Thomas. For him, she adds a kiss on the cheek.

KATIE

I'll write soon.

She and Nina get into their car. Last waves from everyone as the wagon pulls out of the drive.

Joelle puts an arm around Thomas.

JOELLE

Remember when you were sure she didn't like you?

THOMAS

You said to give it some time.

The sound of bicycle chains driven by 12 year old legs builds--

EXT. A SIDEWALK - AFTERNOON

Thomas flies down the walk on his bike, Marlon right behind him. They veer off onto a shortcut through a field. Over a small dirt pile, both catching a little air.

They hit the sidewalk on the other side, streak down the block and skid to a halt at--

EXT. 7/11 - CONTINUOUS

They dismount and lean their bikes against the building--

THOMAS

I'm a new man, Marlon.

MARLON

Yeah, but she just moved away.

THOMAS

True. But listen, she knows I love
G.I. Joes and she likes me.

INT. 7/11 - A MOMENT LATER

The boys are grabbing sodas out of the back display fridges.

THOMAS

She's knows all about my family and
she likes me.

On to the candy aisle.

THOMAS

My house. You've seen my house. And
she likes me.

At the front counter. The CLERK rings up Thomas's soda and
candy.

CLERK

Dollar sixteen.

Thomas lays down a crumpled dollar and pulls out a handful
of change from his pocket.

He's not embarrassed about being poor now. Doesn't even
phase him as he sorts the change--

THOMAS

(to Marlon)

All of that. And she still likes me.

He's down to counting pennies.

MARLON

You need some--

THOMAS

Nah, I've got it. Five, ten, eleven,
twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen,
and sixteen.

He pours the change into the Clerk's waiting hand.

CLERK

(impatient sarcasm)

Thank you.

THOMAS
Thank you, sir.

EXT. 7/11 - LATER

The boys sit on the sidewalk near the front door. Their bikes leaning on the wall behind them. Munching their snacks and sipping their sodas.

MARLON
Are you going to see the principal tomorrow?

THOMAS
Only if my new plan doesn't work out.

MARLON
What did you come up with?

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - MORNING

The campus is busy with students arriving. From above: Thomas strolls through the hubbub toward the main entrance.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - MORNING

Thomas moves down the main hall. It's busy in here too.

Marlon meets him en route to his locker.

MARLON
Are you sure about this?

Thomas stops in the hall. Bites his lip a little and nods yes. He's ramping himself up. He nods again.

THOMAS
Yeah. This is it.

Thomas steps off down the hallway. Marlon tailing behind.

A few paces down, James's locker bay. His locker is open but he's talking to a nearby kid.

Thomas breaks into a jog. *This is the only way.*

He's closing in on James, who sees him coming now. Thomas charges--

And hits James in the chest with a two-armed shove. It blasts James back into another locker and he falls.

THOMAS

Suck it James. You dick!

Thomas is fast and reaches into James's locker, grabs his action figure cases and scrambles up to run away.

James recovers and takes off after Thomas.

Thomas is running down the hall back to the main entrance. Passing Marlon--

THOMAS

New man, Marlon. I'm a new man!

And his skinny little legs carry him out the front door with James in pursuit.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Thomas streaks across the front lawn. James can't keep up and Thomas speeds across the street and keeps on moving until he's out of sight.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Joelle sits on the couch, sorting through the giant stack of mail that's piled up over the last few hectic weeks.

She stops on the envelope from M. PARKER, ESQ. It's addressed to her.

Joelle pulls the letter out, takes a sip from her nearby coffee cup, then begins to read.

INT. KITCHEN - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Joelle leans her head to one side, pinning the phone receiver to her shoulder. She looks at the letter in her hand as she talks.

JOELLE

This morning will work. Nine?

She looks at a wall clock. 8:15 AM.

JOELLE

Sure. Nine will work. And you're on Academy... Great.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Thomas bursts through the front door. Out of breath. His backpack on, his toy cases held triumphantly above his head.

THOMAS

New man.

Joelle, confused, comes in from the kitchen.

JOELLE

Why aren't you in school, new man?

THOMAS

Look. Look.

He slowly shakes the action figure cases at her.

THOMAS

See what I did?

JOELLE

Oh, honey, that's great. Where were they?

THOMAS

That jerk James had them this whole time.

JOELLE

And why aren't you in class?

THOMAS

I shoved him down and grabbed them out of his locker. And then ran. And just kept on running. This seemed like the safest place to bring them.

JOELLE

Did you hurt him?

THOMAS

No, I don't think so. But lots of kids saw me shove him down so hopefully he's super embarrassed. He's got to be twice my size.

JOELLE

Hmm. Well, I'm glad you have them back. Hey, go put on a nice shirt. We've got an errand to run.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Downtown Colorado Springs, with its small skyscrapers, shines in the sunlight through the office window.

MATTHEW PARKER, ESQ., heavy set, late-50s, leans against his desk as he talks to Joelle and Thomas.

Thomas sits up nice and straight, wearing his best button down polyester shirt, a little Western, a little Disco.

MATTHEW PARKER

He hadn't updated your address on the policy so it took us a bit to track you down.

JOELLE

And it can be used for...

MATTHEW PARKER

It'll be set up in a trust. Nothing frivolous but things the kids may need. Clothes, school supplies, anything medical. Basic needs.

JOELLE

Rent? Because I cut hair and things are tight as is and--

MATTHEW PARKER

Yes, yes, there is a provision for that as well. Here--

He moves behind his desk to sit and picks up a set of papers.

MATTHEW PARKER

Let's walk through the particulars.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - MORNING

Joelle and Thomas walk out of the office building. She wraps an arm around him.

JOELLE

Your dad sure loved you guys.

THOMAS

I still miss him.

JOELLE

I don't think that's a bad thing, kiddo. Want to grab a late breakfast then head back to finish up the day?

THOMAS

How about just the first part?

JOELLE

Sorry, that wasn't meant to be a suggestion.

EXT. THE BACK YARD - AFTERNOON

Sun shines down on Thomas and his tent.

THOMAS

Thank you, tent.

He kneels down and pulls one of the tent poles from its pocket on the ground. It SPROINGS up at him and he flinches out of the way.

He's much more cautious as he pulls the next one out. And then the next. And then the last as his home for most of the last year collapses onto the ground.

EXT. THE NEW HOUSE - DAY

A yard full of lush green grass fronts this new house. The house itself is bigger. Not giant or extravagant but enough.

A U Haul truck jostles into the driveway.

INT. THE NEW HOUSE - DAY

Joelle's backside pushes open the front door, her arms carrying a box. Thomas, Milo, and Wren follow her into this new living room, each carrying some sort of luggage.

Joelle sets her box down.

JOELLE

Everyone follow me.

She leads them upstairs. The intro to *This Must Be The Place* by the Talking Heads seeps in...

JOELLE

On the right we haaaaave... Wren's room!

It's empty but all hers.

WREN

Yay. Mommy, thank you so much.

Wren dumps her luggage and plops down in the middle of the floor. She lays back, hands tucked behind her head and stares up at the ceiling.

WREN

If you could see yourselves out and close the door.

Joelle laughs and rolls her eyes.

JOELLE

Continuing on to our left we have Milo's room.

Milo upends his suitcase on his new carpet. Clothes and toys go everywhere.

JOELLE

Okay, we're gonna need a little more organization from you there, Milo. And last but not least, on the right back here, Thomas, your very own room.

Thomas stands in the doorway and looks at the space. He doesn't step in.

JOELLE

All yours, buddy.

Thomas walks in and slowly looks around.

JOELLE

Take a moment then let's get the beds out of the truck.

THOMAS

Hey, Mom, is the phone hooked up yet? I want to call Marlon and tell him where we're at.

JOELLE

Yes. Make it quick.

THOMAS

I will.

INT. KITCHEN - A MINUTE LATER

Thomas holds the handset to his ear and paces excitedly as he speaks--

THOMAS

Yeah... No, it's super close. Only three blocks, maybe four if you count the park... Yeah. Totally awesome.

He chatters on as Joelle props open the front door. Milo and Wren barrel down the stairs and out to the U Haul truck.

INT. THOMAS'S NEW ROOM - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

David Byrne's voice chimes in-- "*Home is where I want to be. Pick me up and turn me round...*"

His hand reaches into the collector's case and Thomas brings out the first of his action figures, SNAKE EYES.

From his bed now, the shelf is filled with action figures all neatly lined up. An open spiral notebook flops down on the comforter next to the collector's cases.

Thomas begins a writing a letter... *Dear Katie.*

FADE OUT

And the song plays on as the CREDITS ROLL.