

$$F = m.a$$

written by

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FADE IN:

TITLE CARD 1

Estimates suggest that up to 30% of the world's population will experience sleep paralysis at least once in their lifetime.

TITLE CARD 2

For over 400 million people, it is not a one-time event. It is a recurring condition.

TITLE CARD 3

As you read these lines, approximately 13 million people worldwide lie awake, trapped inside their own bodies.

TITLE CARD 4

Unable to move. Unable to scream. Paralyzed.

TITLE CARD 5

It can happen to anyone, any night.

TITLE CARD 6

Even to you.

EXT. NIGHT SKY - NIGHT

A full moon hangs in the deep black, casting sharp silver light. Stars TWINKLE.

MUSIC OVER: A music box plays BRAHMS' LULLABY. Tinking. Innocent.

INT. BEN'S CHILD'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

A window with bright, friendly curtains, half-drawn. A pillar of moonlight slices through the dark. A gentle breeze wafts the fabric.

THE ROOM: A childrens room. A nightlight projects rotating moons and stars onto the walls. Taped drawings of folklore characters cover the wallpaper.

There are pens and drawings on the desk. Lego spaceships are on shelves and the table.

A poster of a girl reads: "Will you wear blue, Jenny Jenkins?"

Toys litter the floor. Everything suggests safety.

THE BED: Light wood. A colorful duvet. BEN (6), blonde and sweet, clutches a stuffed animal, sleeping peacefully.

SUDDENLY HIS EYES SNAP OPEN. Pure horror fills his gaze.

SFX: A SHARP, DISSONANT STRING STING – cello and violin tremolo, sliding down in pitch.

He breathes heavily, but his mouth stays SHUT. His eyes dart frantically, searching the shadows.

His pupils DILATE. The blue iris is swallowed by a black void. It fills the frame.

A microscopic reflection flickers across the moist surface of his cornea: the fleeting, dark silhouette of a shadowy figure, as if he were standing beside his bed – leaning over him.

The last thing we see is the blackness of the pupil.

FADE TO BLACK.

INTRO / OPENING CREDITS

MUSIK: cuts out. A deep, vibrating, oppressive low-frequency hum swells – felt more than heard.

Interspersed are Ben's (20) breathing sounds. He's fast asleep.

Images of rooms shrouded in darkness emerge from the blackness. Blurry in their definition. More darkness and shadows than discernible details. They seem false, hostile, forbidding, inaccessible. Inviting the eye to search the shadows for something that may not be there.

Between the images, a subtle, almost imperceptible, yet noticeable breathy whistle. A melody, staccato, as if placed erratically between breaths.

It sounds harmless, approachable, almost childlike, so that it lodges itself in our minds. We don't know if it's coming from Ben or someone else.

The names of the contributors and the film's title appear from the shadows: "F = m.a"

When the opening credits end, the screen remains black for a moment. So that it remains unsettling.

Ben's breathing becomes shallower, faster, more ragged.

The breathy whistle falls silent.

SFX: The vibrating drone intensifies into a distorted, screeching noise. Almost like a circular saw tearing through the sound.

MATCH CUT ON THE PUPIL:

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The black of the pupil.

The blue iris.

In the eyes - a black void of terror.

SLOW PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

The terror-stricken, sleep-paralyzed face of a YOUNG MAN.

BEN (20). Soft, stocky, blonde hair, unassuming. Exhaustion masks the kindness in his round, gentle face. He lies on his back. No shirt. Just a trunks. A thin blanket covers his waist.

His head is pressed into the pillow. He tries to move. In vain.

Sweat beads on his forehead. His breath hitches, trapped behind a CLOSED MOUTH.

Ben's body trembles under the light sheet. His limbs are lead. Dead weight.

Slowly—agonizingly—Ben's jaw CRACKS open. He GASPS. A deep, guttural rattle for air.

He BOLTS UPRIGHT, defeating the paralysis.

MUSIC CUTS TO SILENCE.

A tormented scream rips through the house. Ben sits there, chest heaving.

CRACK — the door flies open. Blinding hall light spills in.

MARTIN (40s, Bens Dad) stands in the doorway in his boxers. Breathless. Wide-eyed.

The light reveals the room's evolution:

Star charts and rocket posters.

A WINDHAND poster looms over a high-end PC.

On the wall, a SCHRÖDINGER poster: "If the box hisses, the cat is alive. And pissed."

Ben stares back. Drenched. Trembling.

INT. FAMILY HOME - BATHROOM - DAY

Soft daylight filters through a frosted window into a bright, tiled bathroom.

Green plants on the windowsill. Toothbrush cups, bottles, a lived-in, friendly space. Small bath mats on the floor.

Steam hangs in the air.

We are positioned slightly behind Ben, off to the side, near the shower.

The SHOWER ROARS.
The water shuts off.
It still DRIPS.

The shower door opens.
Ben steps out, wet.

He crosses to the fogged mirror.

With his finger, he draws a SMALL SMILEY in the upper left corner.

Then he wipes a clear patch on the right side of the mirror.

In the reflection: his face.

His gaze meets us head-on.

A long, quiet moment.

Then Ben turns away from the mirror — toward us.

Now we see him directly.

His bare upper body fills the frame: shoulders, chest, neck, face.

The framing keeps his lower body out of view.

Water beads on his skin.

Tired eyes. Soft dark circles.

Wet lashes.

His hair is soaked.

We see him breathe.

No pose.

No expression.

Just presence.

He holds our gaze.

Then he steps closer.

Only at the very last moment do we realize — his eyes are aimed just slightly past us.

His hand reaches out of frame.

A towel.

He rubs his hair dry.

CUT TO:

INT. FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Sunlight streams in. SAM (Ben's sister, 22, intellectual indie type) and Ben sit at the breakfast table. They are fooling around.

PAMELA, BEN'S Mom, (42), a nurse - friendly but exhausted - pours coffee. MARTIN gives her a goodbye kiss, waves, and leaves.

Ben looks haggard. He wears a physics pun T-shirt and sweatpants. His blond hair is still damp.

SAM

(laughing)

Forget it, Ben. Forget it, I'm not writing your paper for you. Besides, I don't get any of your physics crap anyway.

BEN

(grinning)

I give you the data, you wrap it in pretty words. I get a good grade. You get a ride to the Windhand show.

SAM

What kind of brother are you? You shouldn't put conditions on being nice.

BEN

Is that what they teach you in lit-grad school?

SAM

It's common knowledge.

(laughs)

No, but we actually read books that mention things like "decency."

BEN

(grinning)

Energy always seeks the state of least resistance. Gibbs and Bohr said so. I'm just acting within the laws of nature.

SAM

Just ask Nico. He'd be thrilled to help you out.

Ben stares at her and blushes. Then he looks shyly at his plate. Sam grins. Pamela joins them.

PAMELA

(friendly)

You guys are writing your own papers. I'm just happy you're both home for the break.

She catches Ben's eye. Her expression shifts to concern.

PAMELA (CONT'D)

Since when?

Ben doesn't answer. He chews his bagel.

BEN
It only happened once.

PAMELA
Yesterday?

BEN
(mumbles in agreement)
MHMHM.

PAMELA
On a scale of one to ten?

BEN
Six.

PAMELA
It's been quiet for almost nine
years. Is there anything you want
to talk about?

SAM
Your paralysis?

Ben nods. Sam watches her mother. Pamela's fingers tapped
anxiously on the tabletop.

PAMELA
Lucid dreams too?

Ben hesitates, then nods.

BEN
Those never really went away. But
they were never a problem.

PAMELA
Problem or not. The fact that it's
back worries me.

BEN
(slightly annoyed)
It's probably just stress. Finals
were brutal. and I still have to
write two term papers. Just
stressed out. This stuff just
happens.

PAMELA
You remember how it was back then.

BEN
(snapping)
Yeah, Mom, I was there.

PAMELA
Should we make an appointment with
Karen?

Ben stands up, annoyed, and shoves his plate into the
dishwasher.

BEN
(looking at her for a
beat, giving her that
'you know me' look, a
small shrug)
F equals M times A.

Pamela rolls her eyes and looks at Sam.

PAMELA
Which means... what?

BEN
Every equation CAN be a problem,
but not every equation IS one, Mom.

PAMELA
Yeah, well, problems are problems.

BEN
Mom, who says it even is one? Give
me a chance for it to be NOTHING
first.

He heads for the stairs.

PAMELA
Running away won't fix anything.

BEN (O.S.)
I'm way too fat to run away. That's
why I became a physicist.

PAMELA
(calling out)
And I love every pound of you!

From the stairs: a faint, annoyed "I love you too" groan.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - SCREEN - EVENING

MUSIC: Something heavy or melodic, like WINDHAND or DEPECHE MODE, bleeds from headphones.

A computer screen. A blank Word document. Title: "The Influence of Consciousness on Photons."

CLACKER - Ben types: "Does consciousness consist of particles, or a wave?"

He pauses, sighs, and deletes the sentence.

BING - A messenger window pops up. It's NICO (20), a fellow student.

NICO (ON SCREEN)
Hey, how's it going?

BEN (ON SCREEN)
Fine. Stuck on the topic. And slept like crap. You?

NICO (ON SCREEN)
Same. Exhausted after finals. Need help?

BEN (ON SCREEN)
I need a ghostwriter. :)

NICO (ON SCREEN)
If the pay is good...

Ben opens a browser tab and searches for "sleep paralysis." An encyclopedia entry appears with a picture: THE NIGHTMARE (a demon sitting on a woman's chest).

He deletes the entry and types: "sleep paralysis, pause." He finds no matching entry. Ben sighs and deletes his entry and closes the browser.

NICO (ON SCREEN) (CONT'D)
Ask Professor Weber. He always has something motivational to say when you're blocked.

NICO (ON SCREEN) (CONT'D)
... but I can help you too. :]

BEN (ON SCREEN)
Thanks, I'll figure it out. Maybe I just need a day or two off.

BEN (ON SCREEN) (CONT'D)
Gaming session?

NICO (ON SCREEN)
Let's go!

Ben closes the Word document and launches a game.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room is bathed in an unnatural, piercing moonlight.
MUSIC: Eerie and enchanting.

BEN lies in bed, shirtless, sleeping. He wears trunks. A thin blanket partially covers him.

CLOSE UP - BEN'S FACE

His eyes flutter open. He blinks, groggy.

CHEST-MOUNT POV

Ben sits up. He rubs his eyes. Looks at the nightstand: A digital clock reads 1:21. Beside it, a Star Trek lamp. Ben stands up. He scans the room, then exits into the--

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

CHEST-MOUNT POV

Ben walks down the hall. Everything is drenched in blue moonlight. He slowly heads down the--

INT. STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

CHEST-MOUNT POV

Ben descends the steps, moving toward the--

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

CHEST-MOUNT POV

Ben grabs a glass from a cupboard, fills it with water. He turns back and goes up the--

INT. STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

CHEST-MOUNT POV

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

CHEST-MOUNT POV

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

CHEST-MOUNT POV

He approaches the bed and his eyes widen.

POV BEN: BED-Ben lies there, fast asleep.

CHEST CAMERA:

Ben stares at his sleeping self, paralyzed with confusion.

Slowly, he places the GLASS OF WATER on the NIGHTSTAND and lies back down.

WIDE ON SCENE:

Ben jolts awake with a sharp gasp. His heart is racing.

He reaches for the STAR TREK LAMP and switches it on.

He looks around.

The glass of water is on the nightstand.

He breathes a sigh of relief. He takes a sip.

SUDDENLY - He wakes up AGAIN.

CLOSE UP - BEN'S FACE

His eyes are wide open. His nostrils flare. His mouth is tightly closed.

He breathes heavily through his nose, trapped in fear.

THE BED

Ben lies on his back, paralyzed.

His body trembles in the effort to break free from the paralysis.

A tremendous, invisible weight presses him into the mattress. Complete immobility.

His head is pressed deep into the pillow. Pure, primal fear in his eyes.

SFX: A high-pitched, sawing noise - like a distorted circular saw - echoes through the room.

Ben tries to swallow. No sound escapes his lips.

Ben's body trembles as he fights against the paralysis. He winces inwardly.

The immense weight presses him deeper and deeper into the pillows and mattress.

Ben's breathing is shallow and labored.

His eyes dart around the room in panic.

CLICK. A door slams shut somewhere in the house.

He hears a whistled melody. It's catchy, familiar, almost childlike.

Footsteps crunch on gravel.

The steps and the whistling fade into the distance.

The paralysis breaks instantly.

Ben rolls out of bed and collapses on the floor. He lies there, gasping for air, utterly devastated.

On the nightstand: No water. The lamp is off.

He calms down. Then he goes back to bed.

Ben lies in bed, staring into the void. Sleep is a distant country. His smartphone glows on the nightstand. He picks it up, scrolls listlessly for a few seconds, then tosses it back.

He stares into the dark again. His eyelids grow heavy. He blinks. Yawns. Finally, his eyes close.

TIME-LAPSE:

The shadow of the window frame crawls across his body. Ben shifts slightly in his sleep.

EERIE, DRONE-LIKE MUSIC RISES.

The digital clock on the nightstand reads: 1:21 AM.

Ben's eyes SNAP OPEN.

He is paralyzed. Pure terror is etched into his face. He breathes heavily through his nose; his nostrils flare with the effort. He tries to force his mouth open, but it's as if his jaws are welded shut.

His entire body trembles under the immense strain of trying to break the paralysis.

A TREMENDOUS WEIGHT suddenly presses down on him, crushing him deeper into the mattress. His breathing becomes shallow, ragged gasps.

POV BEN:

His eyes dart frantically. The nightstand. The window. Moonlight bleeding through the curtains.

The far corner of the room

SERIES OF SHOTS - THE MORPHING DAY

A SINGLE, UNBROKEN TAKE.

The camera is locked onto BEN (17). He is the anchor of this sequence; the world around him is fluid, unstable, and irrelevant. While his environment and the people in it SHIFT and MORPH, Ben's movements remain a continuous, weary flow.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Ben sits on the edge of his bed, pale and hollowed out. He stands up—and as his feet hit the floor, the floorboards DISSOLVE into white tiles.

INT. SHOWER - CONTINUOUS

He is already standing under the spray. He doesn't wash; he just lets the water hit his face. He reaches for a towel, wipes his eyes—and as the towel passes his face, the shower walls SHIFT.

INT. HALLWAY / MIRROR - CONTINUOUS

He's mid-motion, brushing his teeth. He stares at his reflection with dead eyes. He spits, lays the toothbrush down, and exhales a heavy, weary breath. He lets himself fall backward—

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

—and lands on the sofa. MOM, MARTIN, and SAM (16) are there. They move in fast-forward, a blur of domestic life, laughing and talking. Ben is a static statue among them. He looks at them, but he is lightyears away. He stands up, grabbing a jacket from the "air"—

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

—and zips it up while already in stride. He's holding a leash. The DOG pulls at the frame, but Ben just stares at the pavement. He shrugs the jacket off his shoulders—

INT. BEN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

—and drops it onto his chair. He sits at the glowing monitor. A chat window pops up: NICO: "heyho."
Ben stares at the blinking cursor. He doesn't type. He reaches for the hem of his shirt, pulls it over his head—

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The shirt comes off. He is back in the dark, in his trunks. The frenetic energy of the day vanishes instantly. Silence.

The camera ZIPS in on his face.

The "One-Shot" ends.

Real-time resumes.

Ben lies in the dark. Sleep-paralyzed. Wide awake. Waiting.

Ben's gaze sweeps the room, trapped in his immobile shell.

The corner of the room opposite him is shrouded in deep, impenetrable shadows.

His breathing is shallow and comes in gasps. Fear resonates in it.

His gaze wanders around the room.

He looks back at the corner.

Something is there. Barely a suggestion. An outline. His eyes flicker to the window, then back to the shadow.

The shape is clearer now. A silhouette peeling itself away from the darkness, transitioning from a dull grey to a sharp, terrifying reality.

Ben's breath hitches in a silent panic. He can't look away.

AN OLD MAN (80+)

Naked. His eyes and mouth are ripped wide open in a silent scream. He is FROZEN mid-stride, caught in a running motion, his gaze locked onto Ben.

Still frozen in that distorted pose, he glides slowly out of the corner toward the bed.

Ben's breathing hits a fever pitch. He tries to scream - Nothing. The old man floats through the room, a statuesque nightmare closing the distance.

SUDDENLY:

Just before reaching the bed, the old man's paralysis lifts. With explosive speed, he sprints the last step, leaps towards Ben, and jumps directly into his chest.

WIDE ON THE BED:

The paralysis breaks instantly. Ben SCREAMS, a raw, primal sound. He lunges out of bed, collapsing against the wall, hyperventilating, completely shattered.

The door BURSTS open. PAMELA and MARTIN rush in, alarmed. SAM follows close behind, pale with shock.

Pamela reaches the trembling Ben first, pulling him into a tight embrace. She shouts an instruction to Martin—we can't hear her over the ringing in Ben's ears. Martin turns and bolts back out of the room.

Sarah kneels beside Ben, trying to comfort him, her face a mask of fear. She and Pamela exchange a heavy, knowing look.

INT. PSYCHOTHERAPY - DAY

A beautiful summer day outside.

The therapy room is sunny, friendly, and bright. Light-colored furniture, pleasant pictures on the walls. A bookshelf holds professional literature. Among them: "The Philosophy of Time Travel" by Roberta Sparrow.

On the wall next to it hang three Rorschach inkblots, artistically painted in friendly watercolors. The middle one has the outline of a rabbit's head.

BEN sits in a cozy armchair. He looks tired and haggard, though showered and otherwise well-groomed. The paralysis is clearly taking its toll. He sits with crossed arms. A glass of steaming tea stands before him. Ben wears a shirt that reads: "Why do meteorites always land in craters?"

Opposite him sits Dr. KAREN HEDGES (late 50s), a psychotherapist. She wears earth-toned, comfortable clothes, a wooden necklace, and wooden earrings. She gives off an alternative, relaxed vibe. She smiles, meeting Ben's guarded posture with an open, relaxed stance. She holds a clipboard with paper, taking notes during the conversation.

KAREN

Ben, it's so good to see you again.
How many years has it been? At
least ten. Look how much you've
grown.

Ben smiles uncertainly.

BEN

Can't be helped. Puberty gets us
all.

KAREN

Oh yeah, and apparently it won't
let my husband go.

BEN

(laughs)
What's he into again? CB radio?

KAREN

(reminiscing)

Oh, I wish. I miss those days. When you guys came over for dinner, he had that radio setup in the living room, right?

(sighs)

Right now, it's astronomy.

BEN

But that's actually cool.

KAREN

He thinks so too. He finished the attic, and now he's got his radio gear and all his telescopes up there. I just hope he doesn't start milking snakes or something.

They both laugh. Karen looks at Ben affectionately but seriously.

KAREN (CONT'D)

But we're not here to gossip about Greg. You mentioned the paralysis with the old man on the phone... you look really exhausted. I can see how much this is getting to you.

Ben looks helplessly around the room. He doesn't want to talk about it.

KAREN (CONT'D)

It's important that you say it out loud. That's the first step to making sure "it" doesn't control you, but you control "it."

BEN

(quietly)

They're back.

KAREN

(serious, nods)

The paralysis?

BEN

Mm-hm.

KAREN

The lucid dreams too?

BEN

Those never really went away. They show up now and then. They don't bother me. But...

KAREN

But the paralysis does.

Ben nods and relaxes slightly. He sips his tea.

KAREN (CONT'D)

How long was it quiet?

BEN

Almost nine years.

KAREN

That's a long time. It's great that it stayed away that long. A lot of people with sleep paralysis have it constantly, regularly. Nine years is great. But also enough time to forget everything and think you're finally over it.

Ben nods.

KAREN (CONT'D)

How often?

BEN

Every night for the past few nights.

KAREN

Since you've been back home?

Ben nods.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Is anything different at home?

BEN

No, not really. Everything's the same as always. And nothing happened during the last spring break either.

KAREN

(smiles)

Unrequited love, maybe?

Ben turns red, looking at the floor shyly.

BEN

No?

KAREN

(grinning)

Happily in love?

Ben turns red and says nothing.

KAREN (CONT'D)

How are your studies going?

BEN

Good.

KAREN

Physics, right?

BEN

Yeah. Specializing in quantum physics now.

KAREN

Tough subject.

BEN

Yeah, but incredibly exciting.

KAREN

And are you making progress?

BEN

I have a few papers to write, and finals were brutal—but they're like that every semester. I'm actually looking forward to the papers because I like the topic.

KAREN

Which one?

BEN

It's about the influence of consciousness on reality.

KAREN

That really is fascinating. And what do you think about it?

BEN

Some physicists say that reality is a resonance chamber for consciousness. It reacts to our thoughts, attitudes, and feelings.

KAREN

Happy and loving people live in a happy, loving world?

BEN

Maybe... or if you want to be more patient, you get put in situations where you can practice being patient.

KAREN

That's super interesting. How far along are you?

BEN

I haven't written anything yet.

KAREN

How come?

BEN

"It"... takes too much out of me.

KAREN

It?

BEN

You know...

KAREN

I'm going to play dumb for a second: No, I don't know what you mean, Ben.

BEN

(nervous)

The paralysis.

KAREN

Tell me about it.

BEN

It's been every night for a few days now. Sometimes multiple times. And... really bad.

KAREN

Meaning?

BEN

Like before. I can barely breathe. Weight pressing me into the bed. Completely frozen. Sawing noises in my head. False awakenings.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)
Lucid dreams. Honestly, I'd be happy if it were just the paralysis and maybe a side effect or two. But I'm getting the whole nine yards, and it's just... wearing me down.

KAREN
(concerned)
The whole works?

Ben remains silent.

KAREN (CONT'D)
You told me about the old man on the phone. A terrible shock.

BEN
(whispering)
Yeah.

KAREN
In that moment, were you aware that you were in a state of paralysis? That a part of your brain was still asleep and translating that discrepancy into visual threats? Or did the situation overwhelm you?

Ben shrugs, shakes his head, then nods uncertainly. Karen watches him in silence for a moment.

KAREN (CONT'D)
Ben, we're dancing around the subject. You have to say it. The old man. Aside from the paralysis, is he the only thing that happens?

Ben looks at her and shakes his head. Cold sweat on his forehead.

KAREN (CONT'D)
What else?

INTERCUT - BEN'S POV

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

We hover at the ceiling above Ben, looking down at him in bed. His eyes are wide open. His body is paralyzed. Shaking. His eyes stare upward in panic. A sharp, distorted BUZZING CIRCULAR SAW NOISE tears through the silence.

BACK TO SCENE

BEN
I'm floating above myself, watching
myself lie in bed.

KAREN
During a paralysis?

Ben stays silent and nods. Bites his lip.

KAREN (CONT'D)
What happens then?

INTERCUT - SLEEP PARALYSIS FLASHBACK

ANGLE ON BED - HIGH CORNER OF THE ROOM

A sharp, distorted BUZZING CIRCULAR SAW NOISE tears through the silence.

The camera is positioned in the upper corner of the bed. We see:

- BEN (above, floating, transparent, panicked but silent).
- BEN (below, in BED), eyes wide, paralyzed, trembling, looking sideways in fear. A FIGURE, pitch black, just a shadow but clearly recognizable, leans over him.

BACK TO SCENE

Ben wipes a tear from his eye with the back of his hand.

BEN
(desperate)
Of course I still remember
everything you taught me back then.
And I'm a physicist. I think
rationally; I can follow all your
arguments. But when it's happening,
it's just real. No matter what
anyone says.

Karen hands Ben a box of tissues. Ben nods gratefully and smiles briefly before taking one.

KAREN
It's awful. You're helpless and
defenseless, and things are
happening that you can't control.
It's completely terrifying, and
understandably so.

Ben nods.

KAREN (CONT'D)

You said it yourself—you know the facts. You know sleep paralysis is normal and everyone has it. It's only abnormal to be awake during it. And because part of your brain is still asleep, it constructs these horrible images, sounds, and figures.

Ben nods.

KAREN (CONT'D)

But that doesn't help you, does it? Not in the moment.

Ben shakes his head. He leans back, exhausted.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Has anything ever actually happened to you, other than it feeling completely real?

BEN

No, not that...

KAREN

And even if it doesn't help in the moment—that knowledge helps you afterward. You can tell yourself it's just in your head, that your brain is partly asleep, and nothing will happen to you. It doesn't help during, but it helps you not to go crazy afterward. Some people actually manage to build an almost friendly relationship with the hallucinations while they have "visitors."

Ben is silent.

KAREN (CONT'D)

But you're not there yet, are you?

Ben nods.

KAREN (CONT'D)

I'd like to see you regularly for a while. We'll categorize the paralysis and work on making sure YOU control them, not the other way around.

(MORE)

KAREN (CONT'D)

It's important to figure out what's going on and why they're back, but also to make sure we look at the good parts of your day.

BEN

Why now? It's been quiet for so long.

KAREN

It could be many things. For some, it's stress. For others, it's grief. Poor sleep hygiene. Sometimes, there's just no reason at all. It could just be that as you get older, your brain—which isn't fully matured yet—is going through a developmental phase that's triggering them. It's important to create breaks and nice moments for yourself so your days don't belong to the paralysis too.

BEN

In short: You don't know.

Karen nods.

KAREN

I think the reasons are individual, and sometimes they just can't be explained. We'll look at it together, and especially why they're so massive for you. They were like that even back then.

(pause)

If you want, we can talk about medication. There are some that interrupt your REM sleep phases. We can do that alongside the therapy. But it's important that you manage to see the paralysis as a neurological phenomenon—something that won't physically hurt you.

BEN

(intense)

Did you ever have it?

KAREN

Yes, once.

Ben watches her in silence. They both know she's only saying it to back up her argument.

KAREN (CONT'D)

No, Ben. I haven't. And I'm glad. I can't imagine what it's like since I've never been in that situation. But that's not why you're here. What I can help with is talking about it, framing it, and getting you to a place where you have enough knowledge to realize—first afterward, and then eventually DURING the paralysis—that it's just an REM sleep disorder.

BEN

(exhausted)

Have you ever woken up, and then again, and again, and again? So many times you don't even know if you're actually awake or still dreaming?

KAREN

No. That must be horrific.

Ben nods. He struggles with himself.

BEN

We can try, Karen. Let's try your way. Maybe it'll help. Without meds for now.

KAREN

(nods)

... Ben.

Ben knows what's coming. He doesn't look at Karen, but at the pictures by the bookshelf. Karen watches him. Ben swallows. He has to force the words out.

BEN

I heard him whistling. He's coming. Maybe even tonight. He was in the house.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - SCREEN - EVENING

MUSIC: Something heavy or melodic, like WINDHAND or DEPECHE MODE, bleeds from headphones.

A computer screen. A blank Word document. Title: "The Influence of Consciousness on Photons."

He opens a chat window to NICO.

BEN (ON SCREEN)

Hey :)

He types into the Word document: "If consciousness forces photons into a shape during the double-slit experiment, then consciousness itself must have a form in order to act upon waves or particles. Or else, what we perceive as reality is part of our consciousness. The question of whether consciousness exists as a wave or a particle is therefore closely determined by the question of the structure of reality."

Nothing happens for a moment. Then, in the last sentence, Ben inserts "and causality" after the word "reality."

BING - A chat window opens.

NICO (ON SCREEN)

Whoa, it's alive.

BEN (ON SCREEN)

Yeah, sorry. I've been struggling with some health stuff lately.

NICO (ON SCREEN)

You sick? :[

BEN (ON SCREEN)

No. It's more of a sleep thing.

NICO (ON SCREEN)

I bet you're just hibernating and snoring like a bear. :D

NICO (ON SCREEN) (CONT'D)

Want to talk about it?

BEN (ON SCREEN)

Nah, I'll be fine soon. :)

NICO (ON SCREEN)

Ah, Mr. Tough Guy. :P

Ben laughs.

BEN (ON SCREEN)

As if.

NICO (ON SCREEN)

I can see it now. You're gonna come back with a full beard and covered in tattoos.

BEN (ON SCREEN)
 The department's bad boy. :) The
 guy who intentionally moves the
 nerds' perfectly aligned lunchboxes
 by a single micrometer.

NICO (ON SCREEN)
 Lol.

Ben starts typing several times, but keeps deleting it.

NICO (ON SCREEN) (CONT'D)
 ?Qe?

BEN (ON SCREEN)
 Want to meet up when I'm back?

NICO (ON SCREEN)
 What kind of "meet up"? :]

BEN (ON SCREEN)
 Do I have to define it?

NICO (ON SCREEN)
 Nope. :]

NICO (ON SCREEN) (CONT'D)
 I'd love to. I'm looking forward to
 it.

Ben LEANS BACK, the chair CREAKS. He exhales a long, shaky
 breath.

BEN
 (relieved)
 Phew!

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben leans back in his chair, exhausted. The sleep deprivation
 is etched into his face.

He rubs his face and eyes, yawns, switches off the monitor,
 and heads into the bathroom.

SFX: The SOUND of Ben brushing his teeth bleeds from the
 bathroom.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

MUSIC: Dreamlike, slightly dark.

CHEST-MOUNT POV:

Ben wakes up and sits up in bed. He rubs his eyes, blinks, and looks around the room.

The moon casts an unnatural, pale light into the room.

Ben stands up. The desk clock shows 01:21 AM.

The room is normal, except for the unnatural, bright, pale light.

WIDE ON SCENE:

Ben, wearing only trunks, looks around somewhat confused. He looks at his hands and realizes he is dreaming.

Ben goes to the closet, puts on a black hoodie, black sweatpants, and his sneakers.

He puts on the hood and prepares to leave the room. Then he looks at the bed, where he sees himself lying asleep.

He goes to the bed, leans over his sleeping self, and looks at himself.

Then he goes to the door.

CHEST-MOUNT POV

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: Continues.

CHEST-MOUNT POV:

Ben walks slowly through the hallway.

The room looks deceptive; at first glance, it's Ben's bedroom, but the walls loom with an unnatural height, their vertical lines stretching toward a ceiling lost in shadow. The architecture feels "wrong"—as if the entire space is leaning in to whisper in his ear.

INT. STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: Continues.

CHEST-MOUNT POV:

Ben walks down the stairs. His face reveals that he knows what he is doing, but is still slightly confused.

INT. FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: Continues.

WIDE ON SCENE:

Ben stands in front of the kitchen window at the sink and looks out. The window looks into the front yard toward the street.

A large, bright half-moon stands in an unnaturally clear and full starry sky.

INTERCUT - BEN'S FACE:

Ben smiles a strangely knowing smile.

WIDE ON SCENE:

He carefully places a glass in the sink that he didn't have in his hand before and leaves the kitchen while we look out the window.

A door opens and clicks shut.

Ben walks in front of the window toward the street. He stops and looks toward us at the window.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: Continues.

Ben walks the path through the front yard to the street. The sky is unnaturally rich with stars. A large, bright half-moon casts a bright, unreal light.

The houses in the city are dark and forbidding, yet brightly lit by the moon.

Their facades are partly colorful or tinted and strangely distorted, even though they look normal at the same time. Some windows in the city are lit, most are dark. But there are no people anywhere.

Ben's breathing is the only sound, and his steps crunch on the gravel. He looks down. The path from the house consists of gravel.

Ben smiles.

He stands on the street and looks around. The houses look forbidding and lifeless. You almost believe they are moving, as if they consisted of a wave.

Streetlights at regular intervals cast pale, orange cones of light.

At some distance, a person leans against a lamppost and smokes. They have one foot braced against the post.

Ben walks toward them. His breathing and steps sound loud.

The person at the lamppost takes no notice of him.

Ben realizes it is PROF. WEBER (55), his professor for particle physics.

He blows smoke rings into the air and smiles.

WEBER
(smiling)
Ah, Ben. Finally joining?

BEN
(confused)
What do you mean? Were you waiting
for me?

JUMP-CUT-HEAD-TURN. Weber looks at the confused Ben, smiling. He takes a drag from his cigarette and blows a smoke ring toward Ben.

WEBER
Waiting is such a defined term,
isn't it? Look around. What's
actually defined here?

Ben looks at Weber in silence.

WEBER (CONT'D)
By now you know your way around
photons and strings. Reality is
subjective.

BEN
(confused)
How do you mean?

Weber flicks the cigarette away and taps his forehead, smiling.

WEBER
Double-slit, Ben. Reality and consciousness influence each other. Only through our observation does speculation become fact.

Weber gestures almost overly animated. He seems slightly surreal.

WEBER (CONT'D)
Just look, the quantum level is all around us. Right now. In your fingertip, there's an entire universe.
(laughs)
You really don't get it, do you, Ben? Time and space. On the quantum level, they're totally relative.

He looks at Ben seriously, almost conspiratorially.

WEBER (CONT'D)
Completely arbitrary. Everything exists simultaneously. Crazy, right? And everything is exactly how consciousness defines it. So, if I was waiting for you here...

BEN
(muttering)
... it's because I wanted to.

Weber grins. He suddenly has a cigarette in his hand again.

WEBER
Guess you're not that stupid after all.
(pause)
Have you ever thought about how subtle our consciousness really is?

Ben shakes his head.

BEN
(confused)
I have to go back.

WEBER

(serious)

I saw the Hat-Man. He went to your house. Yesterday. The day before. He was whistling that song.

Ben turns around. Horror is written on his face.

BEN

(whispering)

Who is he? What does he want from me?

Weber lets out a cynical laugh.

WEBER

You don't get it, Ben. You're so smart and you don't get it.

(low voice)

Time and space are relative here. Find the first dreamer. Then you'll understand.

BEN

Who is that? Where do I find them?

In the distance, a WHISTLED MELODY begins, so catchy and simple that it saws through the night.

WEBER

(serious)

Maybe you should go now. He is coming.

Weber taps Ben on the forehead.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

BEN WAKES UP in his bed and jolts upright. He sits in bed breathing heavily and looks around the room. The bedside clock shows 01:21 AM.

Everything seems normal.

In the distance, the WHISTLED MELODY begins.

Horror creeps onto Ben's face.

BEN WAKES UP again and jolts upright. He is confused and looks around. He looks at his clock. It shows 01:21 AM and then the number jumps to 01:20 AM.

The whistling sounds again. It's getting closer. STEPS CRUNCH on gravel.

BEN WAKES UP again and lies paralyzed in bed. Part of the opposite wall is warped and bent, as if a computer glitch were tearing it apart.

Ben uses all his strength to move.

He WAKES UP and jolts upright, breathing heavily. Beads of sweat glisten on his forehead.

The clock shows 01:21 AM again.

A door downstairs clicks shut. There is a single STOMP of a shoe on the floor.

Ben's eyes fly open in shock.

MUSIC: Threatening, drone-tone.

The stairs CREAK under an invisible weight.

Pure fear is in Ben's eyes.

MUSIC: A barely perceptible, almost electrical BUZZING blends into the music.

The air in the room suddenly becomes thick, almost liquid. The light seems to lose substance, becoming ominously murky and heavy like stagnant water.

All details in the room seem to step unnaturally sharp out of the shadows. The shadows in the room become sharp, material, dangerous.

Ben breathes heavily and recoils in his bed. He looks at his hands and searches the room for an escape route. The moon shines bright and ominous into the room.

The bedroom door is open.

CLICK - a bright light goes on in the HALLWAY and shines into Ben's room.

Ben whimpers.

A single STEP in the upstairs hallway.

MUSIC: The electrical BUZZING increases.

Ben looks frantically at the light shining through the door.

Another step sounds in the upstairs hallway.

Then another.

In the glow of the light at the door, one thinks they see a movement.

Ben screams, jumps out of bed, rips his bedside lamp off the nightstand, and throws it toward the door.

HE WAKES UP in a paralysis.

An unbearable weight presses him into the bed. The bed CREAKS UNDER A HEAVY LOAD.

Ben moans barely audibly. His breath is shallow, fitful. He is completely paralyzed.

He tries to swallow, but it's impossible. He tries in vain to open his mouth. His breathing shows he is trying to make a sound, but nothing is heard.

The weight lowers even more heavily onto him. His breathing becomes even shallower, even more fitful.

Pure horror lies in his gaze.

POV BEN:

Ben looks at the ceiling, his eyes dart to the window.

MUSIC: The electronic BUZZING is at its peak. The music is terrifying and ultimate.

The whole room feels hostile, forbidding, sharp.

Ben's gaze wanders to the foot of his bed. A shadow, dark but material. A Shadow Person stands by his bed and watches him.

Ben's breathing is shallow, panicked.

The shadow stares at him, motionless.

Ben's eyes try not to look toward the door. In vain.

His gaze wanders to the door.

In the light from the hallway, behind the shadow, stands a figure. It is completely shadow-like, yet clearly visible. It is tall, powerful, wearing a black coat and a hat.

He exudes a tense aura of aggression and malice.

The Hat Man stares at Ben.

MUSIC: Builds to a crescendo.

From Ben's breath, one can hear that he is trying in vain to let out a panicked, traumatized scream.

INT. CLINIC - DAY

MUSIC: "Aition" by Windhand - Heavy, slow, melancholic.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP - BEN'S EYE

The eye opens. It stares into the void. One or two slow blinks.

SLOW PULL BACK TO REVEAL (**ONESHOT**):

A clinical hospital room. BEN lies in bed, motionless. Electrodes are attached to his chest and limbs. More electrodes are taped to his head, their wires snaking toward a monitoring device. Ben continues to stare at nothing, barely blinking.

CAMERA RISES, soaring toward the ceiling. The room is filled with medical equipment, blinking lights, and screens spewing out diagrams.

PAN SIDEWAYS to reveal an open door and a large observation window on the opposite side of the bed.

THROUGH THE GLASS - INT. MONITORING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Hospital staff sit in front of glowing monitors. In the background: PAMELA and MARTIN stand, their faces etched with worry, watching the staff analyze Ben's brainwaves.

One staff member stands up, checks a monitor, and scribbles something on a clipboard. He heads for the door.

CAMERA TRACKS the staff member as he opens the door to the hallway. He exits and turns LEFT.

CAMERA SWINGS RIGHT into the hallway.

INT. CLINIC - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

ONESHOT CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: "Aition" continues.

The camera glides down the bright, empty corridor. At the far end, a clock hangs above a door.

TIMELAPSE WITHIN SHOT: As the camera approaches, the clock hands SPIN RAPIDLY. It reads 10:10 AM. By the time the camera reaches the door, 45 minutes have passed.

A nurse enters from the right, opens the door, and steps inside.

CAMERA FOLLOWS.

INT. CLINIC - MRI ROOM - CONTINUOUS

ONESHOT CONTINUOUS

Ben is inside the MRI machine. It rotates with a clinical hum.

CAMERA CIRCLES the machine once, then follows another staff member as they exit the room back into the hallway.

INT. CLINIC - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

ONESHOT CONTINUOUS

CAMERA TRACKS RIGHT down the corridor toward another door.

A YOUNG DOCTOR in a white coat, clutching a file, approaches the door. He stops, flips through the file, and sighs. He steels himself, adjusts his posture, and opens the door.

CAMERA FOLLOWS HIM INSIDE.

INT. CLINIC - DOCTOR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

ONESHOT CONTINUOUS

A sober, functional office. A desk with a computer, shelves filled with medical books. In the back, a treatment table.

In front of the desk: Three chairs. BEN, MARTIN, and PAMELA are already seated there (TIMELAPSE).

The Doctor takes his seat behind the desk.

MUSIC ENDS.

Ben looks tired and worn out. The strain of the last few days is written all over his face.
He's wearing a dark green hoodie, nervously fiddling with the drawstrings of the hood.
Pamela sits next to him, gently patting his knee.
The doctor gives everyone a brief, polite smile, then looks back down at the file.

DOCTOR

Ben, have you slept at all in the past few days?

Ben forces a weak smile.

BEN

Hardly.

DOCTOR

(nods)

What you're describing sounds severe. According to your records, you had this problem as a child?

Nico nods.

PAMELA

Since he was about four. That's when we first noticed it. We tried everything. Sleeping on his stomach, on his side. Nothing helped. He had these paralyses until he was about ten. Then they stopped for a long time.

DOCTOR

Was there a trigger for them stopping? Or did it happen suddenly?

Pamela looks from Ben to Martin. He shrugs.

MARTIN

Nothing changed. Ben didn't have any major problems or stress. No big events, no turning points. He was a normal kid with a difficult condition.

PAMELA

Even back then, the paralyses were intense. There were phases where he had several in one night.

DOCTOR
(to Ben)
You took Imipramine for a while.
Did it help?

Ben shakes his head.

BEN
Barely.

The doctor nods and writes something down.

DOCTOR
We need to talk about this. You
know it. Your parents know it. I
know it. Sleep paralysis is often
accompanied by frightening
hallucinations.

Ben nods.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Who was it? Shadow people? The Old
Hag?

Ben shakes his head. He looks at his mother. She gives him an
encouraging nod.

BEN
Shadow people. And the Hat-Man.

DOCTOR
And now?

BEN
Same thing. The Hat Man came last
night. It was one of the worst
paralyses I've ever had. Worse than
the old man. I could barely
breathe.

DOCTOR
The old man?

BEN
He came out of the corner of the
room and jumped into me.

Pamela looks at Ben, shocked.

DOCTOR
You know that—

BEN

(irritated)

—yes. My brain is hallucinating because it's still in REM while my consciousness is already awake. I know.

(beat)

Sorry. I've just heard it so many times. But it doesn't make it better. Not when you're lying there, completely paralyzed.

(he hesitates)

... and you can barely breathe because you're being pressed into the mattress, and they're standing next to you. Staring at you. In those moments, explanations don't help. It's too real. The explanations are for afterward.

DOCTOR

It's okay, Ben. It's extremely distressing.

BEN

(quietly)

I'm almost afraid to go to bed anymore.

The doctor nods.

DOCTOR

Biologically speaking, Ben, you are completely healthy. There are no abnormalities in your ECG or MRI. No brain lesions. No developmental issues. Your blood work is normal. From a medical standpoint, you're healthy.

Pamela and Martin exchange worried looks.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Of course, we also see that your paralysis experiences are more severe than those of many others. You're an intelligent person. If I started saying now that it's the fear of fear making the paralyzes more likely, combined with exhaustion and so on... then you and I would both know that what I'm really saying is that we don't have clear answers yet.

(MORE)

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

That's why I'd like to admit you to the sleep lab as soon as possible, for a longer stay, so we can monitor your brain activity during the paralyses and see where the problem actually is.

Ben nods.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

That said, this needs preparation. Sleep labs are often fully booked. We'll find an appointment as soon as possible. Until then...

(beat)

I'm prescribing benzodiazepines and Imipramine. Take them as needed. Talk to people. Relax during the day. Don't burden yourself with fear of the night. Eat properly again. Take naps during the day. And if it becomes unbearable, come back. We'll keep you here.

Ben nods.

BEN

Thank you, Doctor.

DOCTOR

We'll figure it out. And we'll find a way.

The family and the doctor stand, say goodbye.

EXT. CLINIC - PARKING LOT - DAY

The family walks across the parking lot. The sun is shining.

PAMELA

I'm relieved they didn't find anything.

BEN

(muttering)

I'd rather they had found something and given me a pill for it.

MARTIN
 (grinning)
 Hey... at least he didn't say you're
 just imagining it.

Ben looks at his father, says nothing.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
 An ice cream sundae would do us all
 some good. You in?

BEN
 Only if you don't make one of your
 infamous ice-cream dad jokes.

MARTIN
 (deadpan)
 Kids, come eat. Your ice cream is
 getting cold.

Pamela and Ben groan. Martin laughs.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - SCREEN - NIGHT

MUSIC: Something doomish / gothic-electronic. Not very
 emotional. More calming than dramatic.

WIDE ON SCENE

Ben sits at his desk, freshly showered, hair still wet. On
 the desk next to him are orange pill bottles. A plate of
 pasta and a bar of chocolate sit nearby.

We look over his shoulder.

On the screen: a search engine window. In the search field:
 "Hat Man, history."

Below it are several results:

- "Shadow figures during sleep paralysis"
- A supposed personal account: "I knew I wasn't alone."
- Historical context: "Night hag, witch, shadow man -
 hypnagogic hallucinations."
- Below that, the well-known image of the demon sitting on
 the sleeping woman's chest.

Ben clicks the article and scrolls while eating.
 He closes it and opens another one - the personal account.
 He reads. Then abruptly closes it again and sighs, annoyed.

CUT TO SCREEN:

He opens Skype, scrolls past Nico's name - Nico is online.
 He hesitates, then scrolls further until he finds Weber's
 name.
 Weber is online as well.

The cursor hovers, uncertain.
 Ben closes Skype.
 After a moment, he opens it again and clicks on Weber's name.
 He sees the phone icon and the chat icon.

The cursor switches back and forth between them.

He chooses the chat icon.

BEN (ON SCREEN)
 Hello Professor Dr. Weber, this is
 Ben from your particle physics
 class.

Ben deletes the message and writes to Nico instead.

BEN (ON SCREEN) (CONT'D)
 Gaming later?

NICO (ON SCREEN)
 <3

NICO (ON SCREEN) (CONT'D)
 Gotta run real quick. Catch you
 later.

BEN (ON SCREEN)
 Bye

Ben scrolls through the search results again.
 He sighs.
 Then he opens Weber's Skype again.

BEN (ON SCREEN) (CONT'D)
 Hey Professor Weber, this is Ben
 from your particle physics class. I
 hope it's okay to message you this
 late. I have a question about my
 term paper and I'm kind of stuck.
 What does it mean when people say
 that consciousness creates reality,
 and that time and space are
 relative in relation to dreaming?

The message is marked as read.
 Ben waits.

WEBER (ON SCREEN)
Hello Ben, nice to hear from you.
That's a tough question. Very
specific. It touches on the fringe
areas of physics. Are you writing
your paper about this?

BEN (ON SCREEN)
Yes, exactly.

WEBER (ON SCREEN)
That's ambitious. People write PhDs
about that.
A term paper is meant to show that
you can work scientifically with a
topic. It doesn't require you to
develop new theories. If you like,
I have a few minutes to Skype.

WIDE ON SCENE

Ben quickly shovels a few more bites of pasta into his mouth.

BEN
(mouth full)
Wow. This is good.

He turns off the music and puts on his headset.

CUT TO SCREEN

The call rings. The chat window opens.
PROFESSOR WEBER sits in his office. Bookshelves behind him.
He looks less ominous than in Ben's lucid dream and smiles at
him.

In a small window, we see Ben's face. He smiles too.

WEBER
There he is. Hi Ben. Enjoying
semester break?

BEN
Yeah. And you?

WEBER
Lots of work, unfortunately. But
it's self-inflicted suffering at a
very high level.

BEN
Everyone's allowed to complain
sometimes.

They laugh.

WEBER

So, what exactly is your topic?

Ben hesitates.

BEN

Well... um... it's kind of about how...
how relative reality, time, and
space are on the quantum level, and
how consciousness creates reality.

WEBER

Can you be more specific?

BEN

(nervous)

Does our consciousness kind of drop
down to a quantum level when we
sleep or something?

Weber looks at Ben for a moment, thinking.

WEBER

Ben, I've known you for several
semesters now. You're a good,
analytical student. You like the
unknown and you're not afraid to
think outside the box. But you're
not someone who asks vague
questions that sound general but
are actually very specific. That's
not like you. Can you tell me
what's really on your mind?

Ben looks at Weber and crosses his arms. He's clearly
struggling with himself.

BEN

What if it sounds stupid?

WEBER

Then we'll both laugh about it. But
if something is bothering you, it
makes sense to look at it so we can
form hypotheses or gather
information.

BEN

(nods)

Yeah.

WEBER

But one thing needs to be clear.
We're separating your term paper
from whatever it is you want to
talk about.
For a term paper, this topic is far
too big. You're supposed to write
twenty pages at most and show that
you can work scientifically. We can
talk about the bigger ideas later.
(pause)
So. Tell me.

Ben hesitates.

BEN

Well... I read an article by someone
who deals with consciousness. And
he says that reality is a resonance
space for consciousness. And that
consciousness retreats to the
quantum level during sleep.

WEBER

(nods)

I know those theories. They're more
metaphors physicists use when
language starts to fail them. They
really do touch on the border
between particle physics and
philosophy. One popular theory says
that consciousness itself consists
of particles while we're awake, so
it can interact with the material
world, and that it retreats into
the quantum level we all carry
within us during sleep, where it
exists as a wave. That's why,
according to these theorists,
consciousness can influence the
double-slit experiment while we're
awake - because particles influence
matter. Whether it's actually
consciousness interfering or just
measurement is something people
have argued about for decades. Are
you still with me?

BEN

Yeah.

WEBER

That said, this is highly
speculative.

(MORE)

WEBER (CONT'D)

Physics relies on evidence, and at this point we don't even know what consciousness actually is. Is it produced by the brain? Or is the brain the vehicle that carries consciousness? You see what I mean? It's like asking whether whatever exists outside the universe is part of the universe - when we don't even know what's outside it.

Ben nods.

WEBER (CONT'D)

And this is where the problems begin. If - and that's a big if - if that were true, then your line of thinking might make sense. But we have to remember that cause and effect require linear time. On the quantum level, those rules only apply in limited ways. An effect can exist before a cause is set. It's crazy. Retrocausal. But that's still considered normal theory - if you can call particle physics normal.

(laughs)

You sound like you're trying to get at something very specific.

BEN

If someone dreams about a monster under their bed... can it come into existence because someone dreams it?

Weber is quiet for a moment. He looks at Ben.

WEBER

That's exactly the point where these thought experiments become dangerous. We start looking for patterns on a mirror level. The risk of getting lost in answers and questions we create and then answer ourselves is huge. The biggest problem with quantum physics is the lack of objectivity. We always have to ask ourselves: are we still dealing with the subject, or are we just working through ourselves?

(MORE)

WEBER (CONT'D)

Particle physics is incredibly fascinating, but because we have to go so small, we also need distance - as strange as that sounds. Is it possible for consciousness to create something in a theoretical resonance space? Yes, because it's a resonance space. Is the quantum level, or even the dream level, such a space? Research isn't there yet. And the danger of losing yourself in these questions is real, Ben. That's a topic for a PhD. And also the kind of thinking that can end the way Ted Kaczynski did. It's definitely not something a student should dive into during semester break.

BEN

(nods)

I get that.

(desperate, insistent)

And... what if someone else dreams something like that?

WEBER

A monster under your bed?

BEN

Sorry if that sounds stupid. I'm just curious.

WEBER

No problem. We're right at the edge of metaphysics and philosophy here, discussing almost dangerous ideas. I just want to help you put this into context. Generally speaking: if consciousness existed as a wave on the quantum level, it would theoretically be capable of creating reality, because the usual physical laws don't apply there the way they do here. That's the theory. For a monster someone else dreamed to appear under your bed, all quantum levels would have to be connected.

BEN

Aren't they? We all live in the same universe.

WEBER

Let me put on my academic hat for a second. Consistency arises from continuity. In a resonance space where natural laws function differently, causal chains are no longer reliable lines of argument. At a certain point, these models lose any clear cause-and-effect structure.

(pause)

And beyond that, we're being very dark here, Ben - and talking in a lot of hypotheticals.

BEN

But it would be possible.

WEBER

Possible, yes.

BEN

And then the first dreamer would be the source of everything.

WEBER

If you think that way, yes. But it's not a productive way of thinking.

(pause)

You also shouldn't forget that all of this is highly speculative and not validated in any way. We still don't understand the nature of dreams, consciousness, or the psyche even remotely. And trying to understand a phenomenon created by the mind using the mind itself - that can drive you crazy.

BEN

(forced laugh)

Yeah. You're probably right.

WEBER

Ben, semester break is meant for switching off and clearing your head. Take a few days away from the university. Meet people. Enjoy your time. The paper can wait.

BEN

(smiles)

Thank you, Dr. Weber.

WEBER

Do you have anything nice planned?

BEN

Maybe a few concerts. Hanging out with Nico.

WEBER

(gently)

That sounds good. And after the break, I'd like to talk to you. And if anything comes up before then, feel free to reach out. For now, put your studies aside.

BEN

(nods)

Of course. Thanks again, and sleep well.

WEBER

(smiles)

You too, Ben.

WEBER closes the Skype window.

WIDE ON SCENE

PAMELA knocks and enters. Ben quickly closes the search window.

Pamela hugs Ben from behind and kisses his cheek. He blushes and smiles.

PAMELA

I love you, Benny. You know that, right?

BEN

(lovingly)

I love you too, Mom.

PAMELA

What are you up to?

BEN

I Skyped with Dr. Weber.

PAMELA

(gently firm)

But for today, university is over, okay?

BEN

Okay.

PAMELA

Did you take your medication?

BEN

I will in a minute.

PAMELA

Okay. I'm so glad you're here.
Everything else will work itself
out, I promise. I love you, honey.

Ben nods.

BEN

Love you too.

MUSIC: "Waiting for the Night" by Depeche Mode swells.

Pamela leaves the room.

Ben picks up a pill bottle. He opens it and shakes a pill
into his hand.

CLOSE ON HAND

The pill rests in Ben's palm.

BACK TO SCENE

Ben hesitates for a moment.

Then he gently puts the pill back into the bottle and sets it
aside.

Ben takes a piece of chocolate.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

MUSIC: "Waiting for the Night" continues.

Ben lies in bed, wearing only trunks. A thin blanket is
draped over his waist.

The moon bathes the room in soft light.

Ben's phone lies on the nightstand.

Ben has his arms folded behind his head, staring into nothing.

The phone VIBRATES.

He picks it up and reads the message. The glow of the screen lights his face.

He smiles shyly, takes a deep breath in and out, and records a voice message.

BEN
(smiling)
I'm a well-behaved, shy boy.

The phone vibrates again.

He opens the message.

His eyes widen. He swallows. Then bites his lower lip.

SERIES OF SHOTS

- Ben sleeping on his back.

- Ben sleeping on his side, clutching the pillow. The clock reads 12:16 AM.

- Ben on his back again, head turned toward the wall. The clock reads 1:18 AM.

BACK TO SCENE

CHEST-MOUNT POV:

Ben wakes up and sits upright in bed. The moon casts an almost unreal, enchanted blue light into the room.

Ben rubs the sleep from his eyes and looks at the clock.

CUT TO CLOCK

The clock reads 1:21 AM.

BACK TO BEN

Ben stands up. The room feels unreal.

Ben turns toward the bed.

WIDE ON SCENE

Ben sees himself lying asleep in bed.

He goes to the closet, puts on black cargo pants and a black hoodie. Then pulls on black sneakers.

He returns to the bed, kneels beside the sleeping Ben, and gently strokes his hair.

Then he leaves the room.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: "Waiting for the Night" continues.

CHEST-MOUNT POV

Ben walks through the strangely distorted, blue-lit hallway. He smiles.

INT. STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: "Waiting for the Night" continues.

CHEST-MOUNT POV

Ben walks down the stairs, looking around as if everything is new and exciting.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: "Waiting for the Night" continues.

CHEST-MOUNT POV

Ben opens a dresser in the hallway and takes a flashlight from a drawer. Then he walks to the door.

Ben opens the door and stands in the doorway.

In front of him, a large half-moon in an overfilled starry sky casts an unreal light onto a distorted city. The houses seem to move subtly, wave-like. They are barely warped. Some windows are lit. But a vast emptiness radiates from the city.

Ben slips the flashlight into his pocket and steps out into the night.

MUSIC: Ends

EXT. DREAM CITY - STREET - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: Dark, surreal, atmospheric.

Ben's footsteps CRUNCH on gravel as he walks under a star-filled sky into the Dream City. No people anywhere.

The houses lie still and abandoned in the moonlight, subtly RIPPLING as if made of waves. They are unnaturally warped. Some are brightly colored. Some have no front doors at all.

A few windows glow yellow, but there are no people behind them.

The enormous moon hangs low, flooding the scene with light.

Ben looks down the street to the left. Streetlights cast a sulfurous, dirty yellow onto the sidewalk.

He looks to the right.

WEBER leans against a streetlamp, one foot braced against it, smoking.

Ben smiles and walks toward him.

Even the ground beneath Ben's feet seems to ripple almost imperceptibly.

When Ben reaches the streetlamp, WEBER is completely MOTIONLESS. Frozen. His smiling face locked in place.

A SMOKE RING floats in midair in front of him – perfectly still.

Smoke rises from the cigarette and hangs, suspended.

Ben waves a hand in front of Weber's eyes. No reaction.

Ben moves on, walking farther down the street, deeper into the Dream City.

Everything is silent. No living thing can be seen or heard.

Ben's breathing and footsteps ECHO loudly.

At an intersection, Ben stops.

The traffic lights FLICKER, the colors jumping erratically.

Ben decides to go left, turns into a street – then immediately right into the next one.

His footsteps and breathing echo loudly.

A soft, whispered, sing-song murmur reaches his ears.

Ben stops and listens.

The murmur FALLS SILENT.

He lifts his foot, about to take a step.

VOICE
(whispered, murmured)
Step...

Ben freezes. Silence.

He tries again.

VOICE (CONT'D)
Step...

Ben takes the step, then prepares another.

VOICE (CONT'D)
... step by step...

The voice comes from ahead and to the left, from a dark alley.

Ben walks toward it.

The VOICE – MURMUR – a bodiless presence, murmurs and whispers in a dark, almost mocking sing-song tone.

MURMUR
Step by step, the kid walks blind,
can't see his feet – just follows
mind.
(laughs)
Forward and back. Always... and
always... again.

BEN
Why are you saying that?

MURMUR
Because that's how you always walk.

BEN
Always?

MURMUR

Always. Step after step after step,
not knowing where you're going.

Ben looks into the alley.

CUT TO: THE ALLEY

Pitch black. Nothing moves.

BACK TO SCENE

Murmur chuckles softly.

MURMUR (CONT'D)

I know what you're looking for.

BEN

What?

MURMUR

The one who is what he will be..

BEN

Who is it and who are you?

MURMUR

(whispering)

I'm just a voice in the dark.

BEN

And how would you know what I'm
looking for?

MURMUR

(soft laugh)

Because you told me.

BEN

When?

MURMUR

Always.

BEN

Always? Why would I tell you?

Murmur whispers from every shadow surrounding Ben.

MURMUR

(laughing)

It's not about whether you should,
crooked child.
It never is.

Murmur falls silent.

A low, almost DRONING presence settles over the city.

Ben's breathing is loud.

BEN

I'm looking for the first dreamer.

A whispering laugh moves through the shadows toward Ben from all directions.

MURMUR

(laughing)

There you go.

BEN

Then tell me where to find him.

MURMUR

No. You have to figure that out yourself.

BEN

How?

MURMUR

Step... and step...

Ben turns a corner and comes to a FENCE. He turns around, unsure which way to go.

From the shadow of a streetlamp:

MURMUR (CONT'D)

(whispering)

You already know where you have to go.

BEN

(annoyed)

If you don't want to help me, leave me alone.

Ben walks on.

From the shadow of a doorway he passes:

MURMUR

You're forgetting where you are, crooked child.

BEN

And where am I?

MURMUR
(laughing)
Here.

Ben stops.

He looks into the shadow, then up at the moon.

He smiles.

BEN
Of course.

Ben turns to leave.

MURMUR
So... where are you going?

Ben smiles, something knowing in it.

BEN
To the end of the street.

Murmur chuckles.

MURMUR
Of course.

Ben takes a step.

MURMUR (CONT'D)
Step...

Ben takes another.

MURMUR (CONT'D)
Step...

Ben starts walking down the street, past warped houses and subtly, surreally shifting roads. Some houses have no front door. Some have two. Every now and then, twisted trees stand motionless along the sidewalk.

Streetlights cast a dirty, milky, viscous glow.

MURMUR (CONT'D)
(from the shadows)
To the end of the street, of course.
Of course.
To the end of the street.

BEN
Are you coming with me?

MURMUR
No.

BEN
Then why are you here?

MURMUR
You ask crooked questions, crooked
boy.

Ben stops.

BEN
Then what's the right question?

A whispering murmur flows out of the shadow beside Ben, down
the street, splits, circles him on both sides, merges behind
him, then returns to the shadow beside him.

MURMUR
Do you think there are right
questions?

BEN
But I just asked a question.

MURMUR
Yes. You did.

BEN
What's your name?

MURMUR
What's my name?
What is it?
What?

BEN
You're just a murmur.

Murmur laughs.

MURMUR
The crooked boy said something
straight.

Ben continues down the street.

BEN
Is it far?

Murmur's whisper spreads like a wave, then fades into the city.

MURMUR

Is it far?
Still far?
Is it far?

Ben stops and stares thoughtfully into the shadow of a house corner.
He folds his arms.

BEN

We're almost there.

A soft laugh whispers from the shadows.

MURMUR

Of course.
(unintelligible whisper)
We're almost there.

The street slopes downward.
The end of the street disappears into darkness.

Ben walks downhill.

BEN

The end of the street is back
there.

Murmur whispers and murmurs unintelligible words and fragments from the shadows.

At the end of the street stands a property enclosed by a fence of old, gray boards.
Behind it lies a slightly overgrown yet carefully kept garden.

Moonlight shines bright, silvery, unreal onto a large, dark house clad in old gray planks.

Dark windows line the front.

A side porch leads to a large, massive front door.

The house feels old, yet solid.
At the same time young, but worn – and intact.

Ben stops and looks at it.

BEN (CONT'D)

The first dreamer lives here?

Only a faint, unintelligible whisper drifts from the shadows.

BEN (CONT'D)
You're not saying anything?

Murmur softly echoes Ben's words.

MURMUR
...not saying anything?
Anything?
You're not saying anything?

BEN
You're not much help.

Murmur laughs quietly.

Ben walks up to the fence and looks across the property.
The grass stands tall and still.
Flowers – gray and dark in the moonlight – grow in the garden.

He runs his hands along the wood.

The house stands distant and dark.
Blackness churns behind the windowpanes.

Ben looks around.
Unease and fear in his eyes.

BEN (CONT'D)
I'm supposed to go in there?
Murmur. Say something.

MURMUR
Say something.
I'm supposed to go in there?
Say something.

BEN
And once I'm inside – then what?
What am I supposed to do?

MURMUR
(almost gentle)
Ask yourself.
Answer yourself.

Murmur's words fade into the open space of the garden.

BEN
It's on me, isn't it?
You're not going to tell me.
I have to know.

Murmur's laughter sounds very close to Ben's ear.
Ben spins around — no one there.
The laughter fades into nothing.

Ben takes a hesitant step toward an old cast-iron garden gate.

MURMUR

Step...

BEN

When you say that,
I know I'm doing it right.

He takes another step.

Murmur laughs in a whisper.

MURMUR

Step.

Ben reaches the gate and opens it.
A long, loud, rusty SCREECH tears through the silence.

Ben freezes, listening for any reaction.

When everything stays silent, he steps onto the property.
He pulls up his hood.

MURMUR (CONT'D)

(soft)

Step...

Ben turns back toward the street.
The Dream City lies silent and twisted behind him.

Quietly, Ben sneaks toward the porch and carefully steps up.

He searches the front door for a name — finds none.

He hesitates, reaches for the doorknob, then pulls his hand back.

BEN

(afraid)

Murmur... are you there?

Murmur's whisper drifts through the shadows of the porch.

MURMUR

Of course.

BEN

If I ask you whether I should do
this, you'll say I'm asking crooked
questions, right?

MURMUR

Yes.

BEN

I'm scared.

MURMUR

(gentle)

I know.

BEN

You're not going to take it away.

MURMUR

No.

Ben hesitates. Swallows.

He turns the doorknob.

CLICK — a loud click echoes through the night.
The door opens.

A deep, almost liquid darkness lies beyond the door. The
silver moonlight barely reaches past the threshold.

Ben breathes anxiously. He looks around. Peers into the dark,
listens for sounds.
Everything is still. Nothing moves.

From the darkness of the house, a MURMURING RUSHES toward
him.

MURMUR (CONT'D)

You're standing on the threshold.
Too scared to come in.

Ben stumbles back in shock and FALLS.

He sits up, rubbing his elbow.

BEN

(quiet)

Don't ever do that again.

On his knees, Ben slowly crawls back to the doorframe,
peering uselessly into the darkness.

MURMUR
Don't forget where you are.

BEN
(quiet)
It's just a dream. My dream.

Agitated whispering WAVES through the house.

Ben pulls a FLASHLIGHT from his pocket and clicks it on. He shines it into the house.

CUT TO:

HALLWAY

The beam lands on an old DRESSER with a PICTURE FRAME on top. Dust sparkles in the air.

Ben sweeps the light across a WOODEN FLOOR.
To the left and right of the wall with the dresser, DOORS lead deeper into the house.
Along the left wall, an old WOODEN STAIRCASE leads upstairs.

BEN (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Is he here?

MURMUR
(whispering)
Who?

BEN
The first dreamer?

Murmur whispers unintelligibly in the darkness.

BEN (CONT'D)
(to himself)
I have to look myself.
You're not gonna tell me.

Ben stands. Adjusts his hood.

Then he takes a step into the house.

MURMUR
Step...

INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The room is dark. An almost liquid, viscous darkness.

Ben's flashlight beam slices through it. Old dust glitters in the light.

He turns back toward the door.
Moonlight does not pass through the open doorway.
The city and its light stay outside.

The silence in the house is almost DEAFENING.

BEN
(whispering)
Murmur?

MURMUR
(soft, from the right)
Yes.

BEN
(voice breaking)
I'm scared.

MURMUR
(gentle)
Yes.

BEN
(almost pleading)
Say something comforting.

Murmur's whisper floats through the darkness around Ben.

MURMUR
(gentle, almost tender)
If you're where you want to be,
you don't need comfort.
You need encouragement.

Ben looks around the room, helpless.

BEN
So where do I go now?

Murmur echoes Ben's question. The whisper fades into the house.

BEN (CONT'D)
What do I do when I find him?

MURMUR
Why are you here?

BEN
To stop him from dreaming the Hat-
Man.

MURMUR
Then you're here to find and stop
him.

Ben shines the flashlight up the stairs and carefully starts climbing.

The stairs CREAK loudly under his steps.
He freezes, startled.

When everything stays quiet, he continues up the creaking stairs.

INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ben shines his flashlight down a long hallway.
Doors line both sides.

BEN
It's so dark.

MURMUR
Turn on the light.

BEN
Why?

MURMUR
That's what light is for.

BEN
Then everyone will know I'm here.

MURMUR
Who?

BEN
The people who live here.

MURMUR
Aren't they asleep?

BEN
I think so.

MURMUR
Exactly.

CLICK — the hallway light switches on. Almost blinding.

Ben flinches, shielding his eyes.
He stands by the light switch.

A long hallway stretches ahead, a dark green runner carpet
down the center.
Several doors line both sides.

BEN
(helpless)
Which one?

MURMUR
(from downstairs)
Yeah. Which one?

BEN
And how am I supposed to stop him?

Murmur's distant laughter drifts softly up from below.

Ben carefully opens a door and peers inside.
The room beyond is dark.

He stands in the doorway, staring into blackness.
In the spill of hallway light, a TABLE is visible with
GLASSES and several EMPTY BOTTLES.

Ben listens. He hears nothing.
He closes the door.

He opens the door on the opposite side of the hallway.
Hallway light falls on SCATTERED CLOTHES and TRASH.

Ben looks into the darkness.
Then closes the door again.

BEN (CONT'D)
(whispering)
How am I supposed to recognize him?

He opens another door.
Light falls on a STONE FLOOR.
STRAW lies scattered in the beam.
Ben hears restless sounds, like animals shifting.

He stands in the doorway, listens into the darkness.
Then closes the door.

He shakes his head.

BEN (CONT'D)

And what am I supposed to do when I
find him?

Ben opens another door.

WOOD CREAKS, as if rising and falling.
The sound of WAVES can be heard.

Ben stands in the doorway, peers into the darkness.
Sees nothing.
Closes the door.

Uncertain, Ben looks down the hallway.
Then he goes back to the stairs, switches off the hallway
light, switches his flashlight back on, and starts down.

The stairs CREAK under his steps.

INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The beam of Ben's flashlight drifts through the dark.

Ben walks through the hallway toward the left door beside the
dresser.

BEN

(whispering)

I don't know. I don't feel like the
first dreamer is here.
It's just strange rooms.
I didn't hear anyone.

MURMUR

Like no one's here.

BEN

Is the first dreamer here?

Murmur's whispering and murmuring drifts through the room.

MURMUR

If he's not here...
whose house is this?
Do you know, crooked boy?
Why did you come in?

BEN

Why do you always talk in riddles?

Murmur chuckles.

MURMUR

Because you always go to places
where something is, right?

BEN

But what is here?

As Ben cautiously steps into the passageway, Murmur slips
into an eerie sing-song.

MURMUR

On a crooked street,
there stands a crooked house.
From crooked, darkened windows,
crooked eyes look out.

In the passageway, Ben stands before a massive WOODEN DOOR
with an IRON KNOB.

He carefully turns the knob.

CLICK.

MURMUR (CONT'D)

And through the crooked house
a crooked child still roams,
searching for first dreamers
where the first never comes.

INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - CHAIR ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: Threatening. The film's main theme.

The door CREAKS open with a loud, ominous GROAN.

Bright moonlight pours through a large, arched window high up
on the wall.

In the garden outside, CROOKED TREES stand twisted and still.

The window casts a CROSS of light onto the floor.

In the moonlight stands a CHAIR in the otherwise empty room.

A deep black COAT hangs over the chair.
A HAT rests on the back of it.

THE hat.

Ben GASPS in shock and stumbles backward into the wall.

The flashlight slips from his hand and hits the floor.

MURMUR

And in the crooked house,
there lives a crooked man.
He ends down at the feet
and starts right there again.

Murmur GIGGLES.

Ben lets out a panicked sound and RUNS.

INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ben flees out of the room, out of the house, into the night.

The FLASHLIGHT lies on the floor behind him.
It FLICKERS.

Then goes DARK.

EXT. DREAM CITY - STREET - NIGHT

Ben runs around a corner and collapses, gasping, into a recessed doorway. He's breathing hard. Fear is written all over his face.

He pulls his hood down and runs a hand through his hair.

A whisper drifts down the street toward him and settles beside him.

MURMUR

Do you think he's following us?

Ben JUMPS up, startled, stumbling backward.

BEN

(shouting)

Go away! Are you him?
Why didn't you warn me?

MURMUR

Warn you about what?

BEN

About being in HIS house?

Murmur's laughter echoes through the shadows of the street.

MURMUR

What should I have warned you
about, crooked boy?
Be careful whose house you break
into.
It might be yours.

BEN

(angry, loud)
JUST GO!

He storms down the street.

MURMUR

(gently)
It's your dream, you said.
So why am I here?

Ben gestures furiously into the shadows.

BEN

YOU and your stupid riddles.
Talk to me like a normal person.

MURMUR

You don't go into houses you don't
live in.
You were in that one.
Maybe you live there.

Murmur GIGGLES.

Ben suddenly pats down his pants.
His face drains of color.
Panicked, he checks all his pockets.

BEN

The flashlight.
I lost it in the house.

BEN AND MURMUR (IN UNISON) (CONT'D)

If he finds it, he'll know I was
there. What if he realizes what I'm
trying to do?

Murmur's giggling fades into a side alley.

MURMUR (CONT'D)

You could go get it.
Maybe it's already been found.
By someone who knows who it belongs
to.

Ben gasps in horror.

BEN
What am I supposed to do?

MURMUR
(serious)
You know what you have to do.

BEN
I have to find the first dreamer.

MURMUR
And stop him.
Tonight.
An eternal promise.
Again.

Ben paces back and forth, agitated and terrified.

BEN
(muttering)
Where am I supposed to look?

MURMUR
Where do you look for something
thats "first"?

BEN
Yeah, where?
At the beginning.

Murmur chuckles, pleased.

BEN (CONT'D)
Where's the beginning of a city?

Ben thinks.
He looks up at the moon, watches the façades of the houses
gently ripple like waves.

BEN (CONT'D)
The oldest house.

He takes off.

MURMUR
Where are you running to?

BEN
To the first dreamer.

MURMUR
The moon is high.
Soon it will be time.
Then the Hat Man will be ready.

Fear is written across Ben's face.

BEN

I only get one shot at this.

MURMUR

(laughing)

Just one.
an crooked one.

Ben looks up at the sky above the houses, tired, with a hint of fear and sadness.

BEN

Does the sun ever rise here?

MURMUR

You brought the moon with you,
crooked boy.
It reflects their light.
It keeps their warmth.

MUSIC: "Black Star" by Lustmord swells.

CLOSE UP ON BEN'S FACE

His eyes are tired, fearful, sad. He knows there's only one way left – forward.
He closes his weary eyes and takes a breath.
Then opens them.

The moment Ben opens his eyes, the track begins – not with a hard beat, but a distorted pulse, full of echoes and space, as if coming straight from the heart of the city itself.

The camera slowly PULLS BACK from Ben.
He turns and walks down the street.
Then turns right into the next alley.

The camera RISES high above the rooftops of the city.

The moon casts its pale light over a dead, unreal, twisted city stretching all the way to the horizon.
It seems endless.

The camera SWINGS BACK and begins moving in reverse.
In the opposite direction, the city also stretches to the horizon.

After covering a great distance in reverse, the camera begins to DESCEND again into the canyons of buildings.
It finds Ben, wandering through a street.

Montage: In several overlapping sequences, Ben is seen wandering through the streets. He tries in vain to get his bearings. He stands uncertain at forks in the road. Peers into an alley, hesitates - then turns away and take a different path.

EXT. DREAM CITY - STREET - NIGHT

MUSIC: "Black Star" by Lustmord - CONTINUES

The enormous moon and the overcrowded star-filled sky cast a cold, unreal light over the Dream City.
The houses stand distant, subtly shifting, warped, twisted. Some have surreal details - no doors, garish colors, or none at all.

Although a few windows glow yellow, the city feels dead.

Trees stand crooked along the street at irregular intervals. Streetlights cast a sulfurous, hostile glow.

Ben moves past the houses through the night.
Beneath his feet, the ground seems to ripple almost imperceptibly, like waves.

Ben passes a dark playground.
The carousel, the seesaw, the swing - all motionless, lifeless, crooked in the moonlight.
He looks at the image for a moment.
Then hurries on.

Almost without notice, the houses grow older.

Half-timbered houses and brick buildings begin to mix into the cityscape.
They too feel distant, warped, almost hostile.

Wooden shingles appear on rooftops.
Roof tiles.
Large windows give way to old frames and leaded glass panes.

Cobblestones begin to appear more frequently in the sidewalk.

The farther Ben walks, the older the city becomes.

He stops and looks around.
He takes it in.
Then keeps going, turning aimlessly into streets.

Clay houses and roofs thatched with reed and straw begin to appear among the half-timbered buildings.
Brick and roof tiles become fewer.

Soon, there are only clay houses with timber frames.

The cobblestone gives way more and more to roads of hard-packed earth.

EXT. DREAM CITY - NIGHT

Scattered between the houses stand yurts and wigwams.
Abandoned. Still.

Between two clay huts stands a TIPI. Cold, pale moonlight washes over the canvas.
The TIPI looks strangely twisted, even though it also looks normal at the same time.
Subtle, wave-like motions seem to ripple through the fabric.

Ben stops in front of it and looks at it.
The tent feels unwelcoming. Empty. Abandoned. Almost hostile.

The entrance flap hangs open.
Behind it: nothing but cold, silent blackness.

Ben moves on down the road.

The old medieval clay houses give way to huts and roundhouses.
They lie pale and motionless in the moonlight.

There is more space between the buildings now.
The cobblestone path has turned into a dirt road.

Twisted, dark trees stand between the huts and tents.

Ben feels uneasy. Afraid.
He pulls his hood back up and briefly folds his arms around himself, protective,
then continues cautiously.

The huts come to an end.
Ben has reached the edge of the city.

Ahead, the path leads uphill.

In the moonlight stands a WOODEN LONGHOUSE.
Its thatched roof hangs almost to the ground.
The walls are made of thick beams and planks.
Small window openings radiate blackness.

The moon falls pale and unreal onto the longhouse.
The road ends here.

Ben turns around.
Behind him, the twisted, abandoned city lies dark in the
moonlight.
The lit windows look dangerous. Like a warning.

Ben stands on the path, staring at the house.

BEN
(low, hollow)
This is where the road ends.

MURMUR
(whispering)
This is where it begins.

BEN
The first dreamer.

MURMUR
This is where the Hat Man starts.
Any second now.

Ben realizes what he's about to do.
Fear washes over him.

BEN
(pleading)
I can't do this.

MURMUR
Then he comes.

BEN
(desperate)
He knows I was there.
He knows what I'm trying to do.

MURMUR
And who you are.
(giggles)
The first dreamer is asleep.

Ben scans the shadows, desperate for something—anything—that
might help him.
There is nothing.

BEN
I have to go in there?

MURMUR
Step by step...
Quiet.
Like the night itself.

BEN
And then what?
I wake him up?

MURMUR
Are you asleep when he comes?

BEN
No, I—

Ben understands something.

BEN (CONT'D)
I'm awake.

Murmur chuckles softly.

MURMUR
Then go.
Wake someone who's awake.

Ben stands there, unsure, staring at the house.

MURMUR (CONT'D)
Tick... tock...
The foot stands still.
The dreamer breathes in and out.
Tick... tock...
When he wakes,
he'll have a guest in his house.

Murmur's whispered laughter drifts up toward the house,
over the hill,
and flows back to Ben.

Ben pulls his hood deeper over his face.
He struggles with himself, lets out a small, almost desperate
whimper.

Then he slowly starts toward the house.

MURMUR (CONT'D)
Step...

MURMUR (CONT'D)
Step...

Ben's footsteps crunch loudly in the sand.

In a clearing before the house stands a tree trunk sunk into
the ground,
carved with a face and arms.
A GOD STELE.

A DOG lies curled up in the yard, asleep.
 As Ben approaches, it lifts its head.
 It watches him closely.
 It doesn't growl.
 It doesn't bark.
 Almost curious.
 Its gaze follows Ben.

At the front of the house is a low door,
 covered with dark hanging fabrics.

SNORING comes from inside.
 Ben looks, frightened, then retreats.
 He circles the house and finds a larger entrance at the back.

Animal noises drift out.
 This house is alive.

Murmur's voice whispers from the stable:

MURMUR (CONT'D)
 You're running out of time.

Ben wrestles with himself.
 He looks for an escape—there is none.
 Fear overwhelms him.
 He sinks down silently,
 then steadies himself,
 bites down on his fist,
 and sneaks carefully into the stable.

INT. HOUSE - STABLE - NIGHT

MUSIC: Threatening, dangerous, foreboding.

Moonlight floods the stable with Ben.
 Cows stand and lie tethered in straw along the walls.
 Goats and sheep sleep among them.

Soft SNORTING and RUSTLING can be heard.

The animals don't react.
 Only a CAT watches Ben's steps closely.

At the far end of the stable is a door covered by a dark
 curtain.
 Ben pulls it aside and peers in.

He sees and hears nothing.

Then he quietly enters the house.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The floor is packed clay, but clean.

Ben stands in a hallway that opens into a large room at the far end.

Firelight flickers.

Sleeping sounds drift out.

To the right, an opening leads into a room with a window. Moonlight falls on garden tools—shovels, a spinning wheel, ropes, hooks.

Ben glances briefly into another room.

A pantry.

Moonlight seeps in through a small opening.

He moves quietly down the hall and reaches the main room.

A FIRE burns and CRACKLES in a central hearth.

Clay pots and jugs line the shelves.

Bundles of herbs hang from the ceiling.

Chests stand against the walls.

Three sleeping areas made of straw and furs.

A MAN and WOMAN sleep arm in arm.

A BABY lies before them.

In the center, an old WOMAN.

Near the door, two half-grown BOYS sleep together.

Murmur's voice whispers from the pantry.

MURMUR

Here, crooked boy.

Ben sneaks to the pantry and stops in the doorway.

THROUGH THE DOORWAY

MUSIC: Threatening, building tension.

Sacks, clay jugs, vases, baskets of supplies.

Herbs and strings of dried fruit hang from the ceiling.

Beneath the window, on furs and straw, lies a BOY (about 10), asleep.

His breathing rattles slightly, as if he's been sick.

But it's steady.

MURMUR (CONT'D)

This is where it happens.

Ben watches the boy, terrified, thoughtful.

He bites his lip.

BEN
(whispering)
Should I wake him?

MURMUR
(close to Ben's ear)
Stop him.
If it happens, it happens.

Ben hesitates.
Takes a careful step forward—then pulls back.

BEN
(whispering)
What am I supposed to do?

MURMUR
Do something straight.

MUSIC grows more urgent, desperate.

The music STOPS.

Murmur whispers cold, emotionless, inescapable, right in front of Ben.

MURMUR (CONT'D)
One, two, three,
moments slipping past quietly.

Ben steps into the room, then recoils again,
shifting helplessly from foot to foot,
staring at the sleeping child.

OPPRESSIVE SILENCE.

The boy makes an uneasy sound.
His eyes snap open.
His head trembles.
His breathing turns shallow and fast.

MURMUR (CONT'D)
Six, seven, eight,
now he's wide awake.

Murmur laughs.

Ben flinches in horror.

MUSIC resumes, rising dramatically.

BEN
(desperate)
What do I do?

MURMUR
 (loud, shrill)
 He's coming, crooked boy, he's
 coming.
 Can't you hear him far away?

In the distance, a WHISTLED MELODY may be heard.
 Or maybe only in Ben's head.

MUSIC swells toward a crescendo.

Ben paces helplessly in the doorway, groaning.

BEN
 Help me, Murmur.

MURMUR
 Stop him, crooked boy.

BEN
 (screaming)
 HOW?

MURMUR
 (laughing)
 You have to choke him!

Ben moves.

The child's eyes dart to the doorway.
 He stares at Ben in shock.

INT. HOUSE - PANTRY - NIGHT

MUSIC: Crescendo.

POV - CHILD

The room lies in pale moonlight.
 Breathing shallow. Ragged.
 Eyes dart around, land on the doorway.

A SHADOW stands there, staring.
 No face.
 Dark.
 Solid.

Breathing grows faster.
 Panic.
 A soft whimper.

Suddenly the shadow rushes forward,

jumps on him,
hands closing around his throat.

Breath turns into a desperate fight for air.
Eyes locked on the shadow.

WIDE ON SCENE:

Ben kneels on the paralyzed boy, choking him.
The boy doesn't scream.
Doesn't fight.
Only whimpers softly.

Sounds come from the main room.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Lino?

Footsteps approach.

Ben looks back in panic,
jumps up,
and flees through the window.

EXT. DREAM CITY - STREET - NIGHT

Shocked, Ben runs away from the house.

Behind him, the child SCREAMS.

From the roadside shadows comes Murmur's cold,
annihilating laughter.

Ben runs until tents and huts turn back into old houses,
then into more modern ones.

When he can't go on,
he collapses in a doorway,
screams,
buries his face in his hands.

In the distance, Murmur's laughter draws closer.

BEN

(screaming)

JUST GO AWAY!

MURMUR

You wanted me to stay.

BEN

WHEN?

MURMUR
One, two, three—

BEN
STOP IT!

BEN (CONT'D)
(shocked)
You told me to choke him.

MURMUR
I said you should do something
straight.
But you waited till eight.

Murmur giggles.

BEN
(enraged)
GO!

Ben jumps up.

BEN (CONT'D)
I failed...

MURMUR
Depends on who's saying it.

Ben gestures toward the house on the hill.

BEN
(guilty, sad)
I probably traumatized him for
life.

MURMUR
(whispering)
It was just a dream.

Murmur's whispering and murmuring circles Ben once, then
comes close to his left ear.

MURMUR (CONT'D)
You know that.

BEN
(intense)
But I'm not like that.

MURMUR
(giggling)
No...

Ben takes a few steps toward the center of the city, then stops.

BEN
Murmur, you know this city.

MURMUR
I'm just a voice in the shadows.

BEN
This is a dream. In dreams, voices
in the shadows always know things.

A ghostly, whispered laughter runs down the facades of the houses and gathers in the shadows.

MURMUR
Voices in the shadows...

BEN
If the first dreamer is here...

Murmur's whisper drifts aimlessly.

Ben realizes something.

BEN (CONT'D)
... then is everyone here?

MURMUR
Everyone?

BEN
Everyone? Always?

Ben looks at the street, which seems to move gently in wave-like motions.

MURMUR
Everyone... always...

BEN
(murmuring)
Because everything here is
relative.
(laughs)
How do I find the house, Murmur?

MURMUR
Which house, crooked boy?

BEN
MY house. Just from earlier.

Murmur whispers and murmurs into the shadows.

Ben starts moving, walking aimlessly into the city.

MURMUR

You know how you get to places.

BEN

How?

MURMUR

(laughing)

By going there.

Ben stops.

BEN

Of course.

MURMUR

So where are you going now?

BEN

To the end of the street?

MURMUR

You always find things at the end
of the street.

Ben keeps walking.

BEN

I can end it.

MURMUR

How?

BEN

Shouldn't you be asking when?

MURMUR

When?

BEN

At the beginning.

MURMUR

Of course.

Ben walks down the street.

The end of the street lies in deep blackness.

MUSIC: Threatening

BEN
Over there.

MURMUR
Over there.

As Ben gets closer to the end of the street, a wooden fence and the Hat Man's house emerge from the darkness, pale and dark in the moonlight.

Ben stops. Fear fills his eyes.

BEN
What? I didn't want to come here.

MURMUR
Where did you want to be?

BEN
(quiet)
...with me. Back then.

Ben moves closer, hesitantly, staying close to the house walls. He studies the house.

BEN (CONT'D)
But I didn't live here.

MURMUR
Then why did you come here?

Ben stands at the fence, helplessly staring at the house. It lies silent and abandoned.

MURMUR (CONT'D)
You can leave again.

BEN
But if I'm here—

MURMUR
—then you came here.
(gently)
Crooked thoughts.

BEN
What's in the rooms, Murmur?

MURMUR
You looked inside. What did you find?

BEN
Nothing.

MURMUR

Then there was nothing in them.

BEN

Tables. Clothes. Wood—

MURMUR

And what were you looking for?

BEN

The first dreamer.

MURMUR

And did you find him?

BEN

No.

MURMUR

No.

Ben looks at the door, uncertain.

BEN

(whispering)

What do I find if I go in there?

MURMUR

What you're looking for, if it's there.

And if it isn't, then not.

BEN

And if I'm not looking for anything?

MURMUR

Then you'll find what's there.

BEN

Of course.

MUSIC: Threatening announcement of the theme. In the style of LAIBACH - B MASHINA / WUMPSCUT - IT IS YOU, but without lyrics. The music orchestrates two narrative strands: Ben's attempt to protect his younger self, and the emergence and "birth" of the Hat Man, who should have a bombastic, dramatic rise.

With an unbearably loud SCREECH, Ben opens the garden gate and sneaks carefully through the garden toward the door. He pulls his hood lower.

BEN (CONT'D)
 (whispering)
 I don't have my flashlight anymore.

MURMUR
 (whispering)
 Then you'll have to go through the
 dark.

CLICK — Ben opens the front door quietly. A CREAK tears through the silence. Ben flinches.

MUSIC: Swells

Ben slips quietly into the house.

INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

MUSIC: Continuous — the music carries the scene; only the creaking stairs and the breathing of the paralyzed are layered over it. It becomes more urgent, more driven, more final.

The hallway lies in semi-darkness. Light spills in through the door Ben left open during his escape. The chair with the coat and the hat stands in the middle of the room, bathed in moonlight.

Ben shudders. Fear washes over him. He stops, considers leaving the house — then forces himself onward, moving quietly. He steps onto the stairs. They CREAK under his weight.

INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: CONTINUOUS

Ben flinches and shields his eyes with his hand. He looks at the doors he's already been in, then moves toward the doors on the right side of the hallway. He grips the knob of the first door, opens it, peers inside, then slips quietly in.

BEN
 (whispering)
 Are they sleeping?

MURMUR
 Look.

INT. SLEEPING ROOM 1 - NIGHT

INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - CHAIR ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: Threatening, driving, final.

Ben stands in a bedroom belonging to a WOMAN (mid-30s). It's tidy, an ordinary bedroom. Soft moonlight fills the room. Ben sees a figure lying in the bed. He carefully sneaks closer to see if she's asleep.

POV: WOMAN IN BED
Her breathing is fast and shallow.
Panicked.
Her eyes are fixed on a shadowy figure slowly approaching.

WIDE ON SCENE:
Ben leans over the woman. She stares at him with eyes filled with terror.

POV: WOMAN IN BED
A shadow figure bends over her.

INTERCUT: CHAIR ROOM
The chair stands in the moonlight.
The camera slowly begins to circle it.
END INTERCUT

The woman jerks upward. The paralysis breaks. She bolts upright in terror.
Ben is sucked out of the room.

INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: CONTINUOUS

Ben breathes heavily, shocked. He leans against the wall. He realizes that paralyzed sleepers lie behind these doors - and that time is running out. He reaches for the next doorknob.

INT. SLEEPING ROOM 2 - NIGHT

INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - CHAIR ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: Threatening, driving, final. Whenever the Hat Man's chair is shown, dramatic, fateful tones weave in, gradually forming the whistled melody of the Hat Man — his theme.

Ben opens the next door. It's a child's bedroom. A boy's room. It resembles his own from back then. A nightlight glows in the corner, but the bed lies in darkness.

Ben hesitates to enter, unsure if this is the right room. He struggles with himself, his face tightening like someone who knows what he's about to do may be terrible — but unavoidable.

He looks at the desk, searching for a name, but finds nothing.

Ben creeps cautiously toward the bed.

POV: CHILD

The child's breathing hints at terror and fear.

Eyes locked on a shadow figure slowly crossing the room.

INTERCUT: CHAIR ROOM

The coat on the chair stirs as the camera circles it. A shadow takes shape inside and begins to rise.

END INTERCUT

BACK TO SCENE:

The BOY (around 10, dark-skinned) sits upright and screams — a scream we cannot hear.

Ben is sucked out of the room.

INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: CONTINUOUS

Ben stands before the door, head lowered. He turns and leans against the wall.

He wipes tears from his eyes with the back of his hand.

It's hard for him to approach the next door, but he takes a deep breath and turns the knob.

Ben peers inside. The hallway light gives no clue what lies beyond.

INT. SLEEPING ROOM 3 - NIGHT**INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - CHAIR ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

MUSIC: Threatening, driving, final. When the Hat Man's chair appears, dramatic, fateful tones weave in, echoing the whistled melody of his theme.

Ben cautiously enters the room. Everything is black. Dark.

Suddenly, a light turns on.

A WOMAN (around 50) has switched on a bedside lamp and leans over another WOMAN (around 40), who lies paralyzed, staring at Ben in panic.

POV: WOMAN

Her breathing is shallow and ragged.

Her gaze is fixed on a shadow figure slowly approaching.

She blinks. Her eyes shift — she sees her friend's face.

INTERCUT: CHAIR ROOM

A shadowy, human-shaped figure grows inside the black coat — nearly complete.

END INTERCUT

BACK TO SCENE:

The woman in bed snaps out of her paralysis as her friend tends to her.

Ben is pulled from the room.

INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: CONTINUOUS

Ben stands before the door, devastated. He knows what's happening.

Tears run down his face. Silent tears.

Almost resigned, he moves to the next door and turns the knob.

Light spills in. Bottles and trash litter the floor.

INT. SLEEPING ROOM 4 - NIGHT**INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - CHAIR ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

MUSIC: Threatening, driving, final. When the Hat Man's chair is shown, dramatic, fateful tones weave in, building his theme.

Ben stands in the doorway, staring into the room. It's filthy, filled with trash.
At the edge of the light, a mattress is visible — two men's feet protrude from the darkness, trembling slightly.

POV: MAN

His breathing is fast, shallow, panicked.

His eyes fix on a shadow figure standing in the doorway.

INTERCUT: CHAIR ROOM

A massive shadow now sits slumped in the coat on the chair. Large. Heavy. Menacing.

The hat hangs over the backrest.

As the camera circles slowly, the figure plants its arms on the chair, about to rise.

END INTERCUT

BACK TO SCENE:

Ben closes the door.

INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS**MUSIC: CONTINUOUS**

Resignation fills Ben's eyes.
He moves to the next door and opens it.
Through the crack, we glimpse a room:
Blue moonlight slips through a gap in a colorful curtain.

Ben opens the door fully. It's his childhood bedroom.
He's arrived.

INT. BEN'S CHILD BEDROOM - NIGHT**INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - CHAIR ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

MUSIC: The music surges toward its climax — dramatic, threatening, driving, final. When the Hat Man's chair is shown, fateful tones weave in, shaping his theme.

Ben enters the room and looks around. It's his childhood bedroom.
For a brief moment, he almost loses himself in it.
Then he jolts, remembering where he is. He looks to the bed.

BEN (CHILD) lies paralyzed, eyes wide open. His body trembles slightly.
Panic fills his eyes.
He tries to scream, but his mouth won't open.

The bedside clock reads 01:21.

Adult Ben walks toward the bed. He knows this is his only chance.
He reaches the child and opens his mouth to speak.

POV: BEN (CHILD)

Breathing is jerky, panicked.

A frightened whimper barely escapes, tangled in breath.

His gaze locks onto a shadow figure leaning over him.

No face — only blackness.

Within the black, the suggestion of a wide-open mouth.

INTERCUT: CHAIR ROOM

The shadow man in the coat stands up.

No facial features. No ears. No indication of hair.

He lifts the hat from the chair and places it on his head.

END INTERCUT

BACK TO SCENE:

The bedside clock jumps to 01:22.

The paralysis breaks.

Adult Ben is sucked from the room before he can speak.

INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

INT. HAT MAN'S HOUSE - CHAIR ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC: At full peak. The Hat Man's signature melody plays whenever he's shown. He whistles along.

Ben pounds on the door – unheard by us. He tries to open it, but it won't budge. Realizing it's locked, he screams – a silent, desperate, knowing scream.

INTERCUT: CHAIR ROOM

In moonlight, the Hat Man stands in profile – black, featureless.

He wears the hat, elegantly brushing the brim with index and middle finger.

He straightens his coat.

The music swells, preparing his melody.

For a brief moment, the Hat Man breaks the fourth wall and conducts the music.

As his theme plays, he whistles along.

END INTERCUT

BACK TO UPSTAIRS HALLWAY:

Ben searches desperately for a solution.

There is none.

He makes a decision and runs for the stairs.

INTERCUT: CHAIR ROOM

Elegant, almost dancer-like, the Hat Man stands in the room.

SUDDENLY – the atmosphere snaps.

An almost electric CRACKLING creeps into the music.

The air around the Hat Man thickens, begins to ripple.

Shadows sharpen unnaturally. Every detail turns hostile, harsh.

The Hat Man shifts into an aggressive, malevolent posture.

Then, abruptly, he turns toward the door and leaves the room.

EXT. DREAM CITY - STREET - NIGHT

MUSIC: Faster. More frantic. More hopeless.

Ben runs through the warped streets.
In the distance, he sees a figure leaning against a
streetlamp.
He reaches him. Weber is still frozen.

JUMP-CUT - HEAD TURN:

Weber turns his head toward Ben. Still smiling. Still frozen.

WEBER
(amused)
Effects don't always follow causes.
Sometimes they just keep them
alive.

Ben stares at Weber in panic and runs on.

JUMP-CUT - HEAD TURN:

Weber watches him go, unmoving.

Ben reaches the path leading to his house.
He stops, breathing hard. Then climbs the path.
Gravel crunches under his feet.
He opens the front door.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ben rushes inside, slams the door, stumbles - catches
himself, stomps hard.
He reaches the stairs and climbs them. They CREAK under his
steps.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

MUSIC: CONTINUOUS

Ben looks exhausted. Empty.
Almost casually, he flips on the hallway light and opens his
bedroom door.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

MUSIC: CONTINUOUS

Ben enters. He's finally home.
Moonlight pours unnaturally bright into the room.
He walks cautiously to the foot of the bed and looks in.

He sees himself lying there in retro shorts.
Paralyzed. Breathing shallow, panicked.
Bed Ben stares at him in shock.

POV: BED BEN

A shadow figure stands at the foot of the bed.

BACK TO SCENE:

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

Horror creeps across his features.

He realizes he was his own shadow man.

SUDDENLY —

THE MUSIC STOPS

A dissonant, almost electronic CRACKLING fills the air.

The air thickens, begins to ripple.

ON THE BED:

The clock reads 01:21.

All shadows deepen, sharpen, turn cold.

Color drains from the room.

Moonlight becomes sharp, cutting.

Bed Ben's eyes shift toward the door.

They widen in panic.

A whimper mixes with his breath.

BACK TO BEN:

Recognition gives way to pure terror.

He slowly turns his head to the left.

WIDE ON SCENE:

The Hat Man stands behind him.

CUT TO BLACK

The Hat Man's whistling is heard.

END

CREDITS

MUSIC:

The Mamas and the Papas - "Dream a Little Dream"

OR

Lustmord - "Black Star"