

ROVER

Written by
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OVER BLACK

The din of a CROWD. Sports fans shouting and clapping, then steadily unifying their roar into a CHANT that builds...

CROWD (V.O.)
commodus. commodus. Commodus.

FADE IN:

EXT. THE COLOSSEUM, ANCIENT ROME - DAY

On the ROMAN COLOSSEUM in its heyday. A glistening, towering edifice of stone, fit for the gods. We stare down at it. And the Colosseum stares back at us. 87,000 spectators. CHANTING.

CROWD
Commodus. COMMODUS. COMMODUS!

SUPERIMPOSE:

ROME, 192 AD

ARENA

CLOSE ON: the dusty limestone floor. Two SANDALED FEET step out of a tunnel to the seats. We pull up to--

A RED-HAIRED WOMAN (early-40s). Back to us, we don't see her face. Just scarlet hair down ragged toga, as she surveys...

From the nosebleed seats, CONFETTI rains. On the arena floor, massive TORCHES spit embers into the sky.

CROWD
COMMODUS! COMMODUS! COMMODUS!

The DESIGNATORES, the Colosseum's stadium ushers, feign attempts to pacify the chanting crowd with sporadic calls--

DESIGNATORES
order... / order...

--to no avail, as if they even try. Meanwhile, the redhead's sightline cuts past them, following the crowd's roar...

REDHEAD'S POV - upwards. Past banners whipping in the wind. Past armored guards. To the IMPERIAL BOX. To its center, a throne. Upon it, a PURPLE-ROBED MAN. Burly. Self-satisfied.

As the chant swells, we PULL BACK. The redhead now stands with her arms EXTENDED. *Gripping* something... A tablet? Bowl?

No, a flintlock **pistol**. Heavy, ornate, deadly. And unmistakably from the *future*. Her hand trembles.

CROWD
COMMODUS!! COMMODUS!! COMMODUS!!

We stare over her shoulder down the barrel of the gun, aimed up at the Imperial Box, at the EMPEROR.

DESIGNATOIRES
order... / order...

Her finger tickles the trigger.

CROWD / DESIGNATOIRES
COMMODUS!!! / *order...*

She starts... pressing... down... and--

CALVIN (V.O.)
Freeze.

FREEZE FRAME on the gun-wielding redhead. Silence.

CALVIN (V.O.)
You see that woman? All cool with her robes and vintage pistol? Well, that woman is my mom.

Suddenly - a HAND moves in front of the frozen frame, and--

INT. KITCHEN, SOMBRERO EXPRESS - NIGHT

THE FRAME MORPHS INTO A BURRITO? We start rolling again.

CALVIN (V.O.)
Okay. Not technically my mom. Food art of her. How I like to imagine her life. What I like to dream she's doing.

Food art. You know the visual medium of adding two Hershey's Kisses and a Twizzler to a cookie to make a smiley face? That's what the hand is doing, but with cheap Mexican grub.

CALVIN (V.O.)
Each dream starts off with my mom as the hero. On a mission to keep my brother and I safe.

MANAGER (O.S.)
Order?

CALVIN (V.O.)
 Black ops, of course. Far from home,
 undercover.

A burrito as a torso, taquitos as limbs, hot sauce as her red
 hair. For food art, this is pretty good.

MANAGER (O.S.)
Order.

CALVIN (V.O.)
 Protracted missions too...

The young hand chisels a burnt chip into a gun with a spoon.

CALVIN (V.O.)
 ...which is why she's always on the
 road, away from home, away from us--

MANAGER (O.S.)
 Calvin! The order!
 (beat)
 And what the hell is that?

We pull back to... a surly RESTAURANT MANAGER. He glares at--

CALVIN (19), the food artist. A pale, messy-haired young man.
 Down on his luck. Bad. But who, unlike this manager, still
 has a glimmer of life left in his eyes.

CALVIN
 Oh this? I'm, uh...

Both the manager and Calvin wear neon green, branded POLO
 SHIRTS and paper sombrero hats inside a FAST-FOOD KITCHEN.

CALVIN
 I'm thinking outside the bun?

MANAGER
 And are you providing fast, accurate
 service?
 (beat)
 Here at Sombrero Express, we make
 dreams come true *with* burritos. We
 don't use burritos to make our own
 dreams come true. Got it, Calvin?

Calvin sighs, pushes the tray with his food art to the side.

MANAGER
 Good.

The manager walks away. Calvin returns to his role...

Fillings into tortilla, tortilla into burrito. A scoop rice, a scoop beans. No art. Just procedure. He looks miserable.

Just then, a call bell DINGS. Calvin slides the meal through the kitchen window, grabs a new tray to rinse, repeat, and--

CALVIN (PRELAP)
Hold still for one sec.

INT. RESTAURANT, SOMBRERO EXPRESS - NIGHT

That night, Calvin sits in a cheap laminated plastic booth beside a young boy, NOAH (6). Noah's mouth is wide open as Calvin gently wiggles one of the boy's loose BABY TEETH.

NOAH
It hurts.

It doesn't, yet Noah's hand grips Calvin's arm expecting pain. We notice they wear the same RED SILICONE BRACELET.

CALVIN
Still hurt?

Calvin opens his palm to reveal Noah's extracted UPPER CENTRAL INCISOR. Noah spots the denticle.

NOAH
Woah. Is there blood?
(Calvin shakes his head)
No blood...?

Noah lowers his gaze. Blood would have been a badge of honor. He runs his tongue over the gap in his teeth.

NOAH
How do I look?

Noah raises his gaze, flashes a toothless grin.

CALVIN
Awesome. Like a superhero who just kicked ass-- sorry, butt.

NOAH
A superhero? Really?
(Calvin nods; Noah smiles)
Well, once I get my adult tooth, I'll look just like you!

Calvin pauses, lets out a smile of his own. Touched, he puts his arm around the boy. The life left in his eyes radiates around Noah. He cleans the tooth, pockets it, and--

CALVIN
Dinner time?

Noah nods, salivating through the gap in his teeth. Calvin slides out of the booth, stands.

The restaurant is now empty, closed. All ceiling lights are off, save for the one above Noah's booth near the soda machine. All patrons are gone, save for them.

Calvin walks over to the checkout, grabs two TRAYS OF FOOD.

CALVIN (V.O.)
I do make dreams come true with
burritos, you know? Just not my own.

Calvin carries the trays back to the booth.

CALVIN
What do you think?

Calvin sets a tray in front of Noah...

The one with his FOOD ART. Noah's eyes SPARKLE, as if this burrito mercenary is the coolest thing he's ever seen.

NOAH
Is Mommy a ninja?

Calvin sets the other tray opposite Noah, takes a seat.

CALVIN
Ninja works.

Noah beams, digs into the food.

Meanwhile, Calvin studies his brother. Unlike Noah, who eats without a care in the world, something weighs upon Calvin.

CALVIN (V.O.)
As for my dreams? Well, they go
beyond rice and beans. Like one day
not having to drag my brother to
work.

CALVIN
Hey, Noah? I'm really sorry about
this again. One more night shift
next week, then I'm off the hook for
six months. I'll work while you're
in school, okay?

Noah nods, queso dripping from his lips. A happy kid, he's unbothered by Calvin's adult problems.

CALVIN (V.O.)
I also dream that this isn't my
eighth burrito this week.

Calvin releases his smile, turns his gaze to his own burrito.
He takes a chomp, GAGS. Spits his food into a napkin.

CALVIN (V.O.)
Above all, though, I dream about the
life we'd have if *she* was still
here...

Calvin looks down at the food art on Noah's tray.

CALVIN (V.O.)
I dream about the doors that'd still
be open, whether I alone can keep
them open for--

Just then, Noah DECAPITATES the burrito's head with a fork.

CALVIN (V.O.)
I dream *big*, like the world tells us
to. But every dream has a price. And
this reality I'm in seems to afford
me just enough to watch my dreams
get eaten alive.

From Calvin's gloom, we PAN OUT, away from him, the booth...

EXT. SOMBRERO EXPRESS - CONTINUOUS

...and away from the fast-food joint, positioned at the end
of an EMPTY STRIP-MALL PARKING LOT. Super:

Middle of Nowhere, USA, 2024 AD

We don't freeze frame this time. This is Calvin's reality
and, unlike Rome, it might have been built in a day.

Just then - the LED SOMBRERO affixed to Sombrero Express'
roof flickers. It keeps flickering, until ZAP. Lights off.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. BOX OFFICE, STUMPVILLE CINEMAS - DAY

A cinema box office on the main street of a rusted town. It's
mid-morning and the camo hat-wearing attendant, ABIGAIL (20),
is wiping clean a collection of TOY SOLDIERS on the counter.

She struggles reaching into a crevice of one dusty figurine.

CALVIN (O.S.)

Abigail?

Approaching from the street, Calvin. He's changed out of his fast-food polo, but the general unease on his brow remains.

ABIGAIL

Comrade Calvin! The almost-birthday boy. Got nothing for ya, just like you asked.

CALVIN

It's still live-action Bambi?

ABIGAIL

Unfortunately.

CALVIN

I'll take one ticket for the 11 AM.

ABIGAIL

Again?

CALVIN

If you shut your eyes during the hunting scenes, you can kind of pretend it's a war movie.

ABIGAIL

Suit yourself...

Abigail punches a few buttons on her computer.

ABIGAIL

So, given any more thought on Texas?

CALVIN

Yeah, second thoughts. I don't want to force Noah to move schools.

ABIGAIL

Isn't your brother five?

CALVIN

Six.

ABIGAIL

He'll get over it. But even if he doesn't, you will. You'll have your grandparents to help watch him.

CALVIN
I don't know. Based on their
Facebook, I think they might be part
of some doomsday cult.

ABIGAIL
Well, at least he'd have structure.

Abigail rips Calvin's movie ticket out of the printer.

ABIGAIL
If I were you, I'd think about it.
You don't want to grow old here.

CALVIN
You haven't moved.

ABIGAIL
I will once I get my store online!
And the woke police out of my ass.
(picks up a toy soldier)
You know how many Southerners would
kill for this C.S.A. infantry set?

Calvin scoffs, reaches into his back pocket, pulls out a
smushed, tin foil-wrapped BURRITO. He sets it on the counter.

CALVIN
Keep asking about Texas and I'm
cutting my payment to a side of
beans.

Abigail exchanges the ticket for the burrito.

ABIGAIL
Fine. Let's talk burritos then.
There's a place down south with *lots*
of them...

Calvin lets out a smile, starts off towards the theater.

ABIGAIL
Lots of patriots too!

INT. THEATER, STUMPVILLE CINEMAS - DAY

A leg restlessly TAPS in a dim theater. We pull back to--

The only patron. Calvin. Mid-Bambi, slurping a 40-oz soda.

[NOTE: Calvin is always swaying, tapping, or fidgeting. He's
never sitting or standing still. Always restless.]

PHEASANT (O.S.)
Listen... He's coming!

Calvin jolts, a Pavlovian response to this line of dialogue.

PHEASANT (O.S.)
We better fly.

PHEASANT'S FRIEND (O.S.)
No. Whatever you do, don't fly!

Calvin leans forward, shuts his eyes. The eerie underscore INTENSIFIES and the screen's light DANCES across his face.

PHEASANT (O.S.)
He's almost here... I can't stand it
any longer!

Just then - a GUNSHOT. The score dies. The light settles.
Calvin holds his breath, opens his eyes...

To find live-action Bambi still on screen. No war epic. No
new reality. Just Bambi. A beat. His leg TAPS again, and we--

EXT. MAIN STREET, STUMPVILLE - DAY

Calvin steps out of the theater and plods to a 2003 Toyota Prius. Two hundred thousand miles, near death, a real chick-magnet of a car. He gets in, pulls away from the theater.

We follow the Prius down the town's main street. It blends in amongst the boarded-up buildings and payday loan shops. You can tell this town used to have a certain charm. Not anymore.

In no time, the Prius has covered all there is to see. As it sets off into the farmland outside town, it passes a sign:

STUMPVILLE
BEST TOWN IN USA
NEXT TO YOURS

INT./EXT. CALVIN'S PRIUS - DAY

The Prius comes to a stop in front of an ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, surrounded by fields and across the street from a CHURCH. Lined up among somewhat less rusted minivans, SUVs.

Then, in the distance, a school bell RINGS. And--

CHILDREN. They exit the school in Patrick Mahomes jerseys, Taylor Swift t-shirts. Some run, some walk with friends.

Including Noah. He strolls, smiling, head in the clouds.

When Calvin spots his brother, he smiles too. A cure for his ills. Noah finds his way to the Prius, opens the rear door--

CALVIN

Rocky Bal-Noah, kick butt today?

Noah doesn't answer. He shuts the door, opens his napsack, and fetches a DOLL, decorated to look like a SUPERHERO.

NOAH

We made dolls in art class-- Well, the girls did, but I made an action figure.

Noah clicks a button at the doll's base. It LIGHTS UP.

NOAH

A birthday gift, for you!

CALVIN

Noah, that's...

(smile falters)

I thought I said no gifts, remember?

Noah thrusts the art project into Calvin's hands anyway. A marker-scrawled uniform. A cape of tattered fabric. Little TACOS doodled onto it.

NOAH

His name is Taco Man. He fights crime with a sour cream gun.

(off Calvin's pause)

Do you not like it?

CALVIN

I... I love it, Noah.

The words stick in Calvin's throat. He forces a smile.

Just then - a KNOCK on Calvin's window. He startles, turns.

SCHOOL NURSE (THROUGH WINDOW)

Calvin, hi? Got a second?

A middle-aged SCHOOL NURSE looms outside. Calvin sees her, gulps. He shifts the Prius into park, turns to Noah.

CALVIN

Give me one minute to talk to Mrs. Davis, okay? Don't move.

Noah nods. Calvin unbuckles his belt, opens his door, and--

CALVIN
Mrs. Davis?

Calvin rises to his feet outside the car, holds the door slightly ajar behind him with Noah inside.

SCHOOL NURSE
Calvin, you're someone's guardian now. Call me Melissa. And don't worry, I got eyes on Noah.

CALVIN
(shuts door)
Sorry, Mrs.-- Melissa. Is everything okay?

SCHOOL NURSE
Noah came into my office today with gum pain. You don't know if he ate right after losing a tooth, do you?

Calvin's eyes widen. He remembers the food art he served Noah. The nurse catches the guilty look on Calvin's face.

SCHOOL NURSE
Calvin, no food for 30 minutes. And have him rinse with warm water and salt, if he can stomach it. Okay?

CALVIN
It won't happen again.

SCHOOL NURSE
Not to echo my sister, but ignorance is not an excuse.

CALVIN
Your sister?

SCHOOL NURSE
Rhonda, the CPS agent? I believe you two have met.

Calvin hesitates. He has met Rhonda, reluctantly.

SCHOOL NURSE
Calvin, if I may, you're not alone in this. If you aren't sure about something, reach out, ask for help.

CALVIN
Uh, thanks.

SCHOOL NURSE
I'm serious.

CALVIN
I know.

Calvin flashes the nurse a thin, obligatory smile, then hurries back inside the Prius, shuts its door.

Calvin abruptly shifts gears and SPEEDS OFF. The nurse looks on, concerned. After a beat, she sighs, shuffles away...

Meanwhile, we pan across the road to the church. A bare-bones chapel. Quiet, vacant. A single CROSS crowning the roof.

Suddenly, the cross GLITCHES. *Reality tearing for a moment like bad code.* When it stabilizes...

We see that the cross is not a cross anymore. It's shapeshifted, into a TACO? The Prius continues down the road, the nurse keeps walking, both unaware. *Did anyone see that?*

EXT. CALVIN'S HOUSE - DAY

On the outskirts of town, the Prius pulls off a dirt road, onto a short, gravel driveway. It parks, doors unlock.

Calvin and Noah exit. Calvin offers Noah his keychain.

CALVIN
I'm just grabbing the mail if you
want to go inside?

Noah takes the keys and scampers down the front walkway. Calvin, meanwhile, walks to his roadside MAILBOX, opens it--

LETTERS BURST OUT. It was overfilled.

CALVIN
Dammit.

He sighs, bends to gather the mess of envelopes. Once collected, he stands straight and turns to face...

His HOUSE. Rusted gutters, eroded paint. A home in name only. Its disrepair troubles Calvin, yet it seems too much to fix.

He moves to the front door where, pinned to the fiberglass frame, hangs another, more menacing envelope...

A YELLOW COLLECTION ENVELOPE, letters "CPS" printed on it. The same agency at which the nurse's sister works. "CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES". Below: "Mandatory Proof of Employment".

Calvin resents the envelope to his core. He cares for Noah, about Noah, deeply. So why must he prove it?

However, he yields... reaches into his back pocket, grabs his Sombrero Express PAY STUB, and JAMS it inside, before--

INT. FIRST FLOOR, CALVIN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Calvin enters his cramped home, flipping through his mail...

"DEBT COLLECTION" "GAS PAYMENT" "PEDIATRICS: UNPAID BILL"

One "DETOX TREATMENT CENTER" advertisement addressed to a woman named "AMY" particularly aggravates Calvin.

He TOSSES all the envelopes aside onto an old, rayon sofa, marches off towards the stairs, when--

Something rattles off the wood floor.

Calvin stops, looks down. A TINY, GOLD CYLINDER rolls away from him, wobbles to a stop. He approaches, leans in...

It's a small MONOCLE. Gold rim, emerald lens. Both classic and futuristic in design. Simple, yet elegant. And strange.

On the floor by Calvin's feet, a GREEN ENVELOPE. No names, no addresses, just a NOTE on its face. Calvin crouches, reads--

CALVIN

'Do you want to fix the past? Do you want to see her again?'-- Her?

Calvin snatches the envelope, continues reading silently...

*Use what's inside, Calvin
Your dreams are waiting...*

Aghast, Calvin tears open the green envelope to find--

Inside: two, stray FILM STRIPS. Old-school celluloid frames.

Calvin's brow hardens. He checks over his shoulder to ensure no one's watching. Then, he turns to his sofa, as if he's ready to feed its pile.

But, pauses. On second thought, maybe it can't hurt to hold onto these items. Better safe than sorry, right?

He POCKETS the monocle, the film strips, then climbs the house's creaky, carpeted stairs, onto...

SECOND-FLOOR HALLWAY

At the top of the staircase, Calvin looks up.

Folded into the second-floor ceiling, an ATTIC LADDER. He reaches up, pulls the ladder down, and climbs into the--

ATTIC

Where, suddenly, the dust gives way to...

PAINTINGS and MURALS blossom across easels and the walls. From watercolors of castles to oil paintings of sand dunes, vivid illustrations inject vibrant life into this gray world.

Art supplies too. Palettes and aprons, each one inscribed with its owner's name: "CALVIN".

You see, Calvin is far more than just a fast-food artist. He's a *real* artist. And this garret is his STUDIO. While he may not have found a new reality at the movies, he's certainly built one here.

His gaze drifts down towards one of the many easels. On its canvas holder, a PAINTBRUSH. Unremarkable, except...

The name engraved into its handle is not his. Instead, "AMY". The name from the rehab ad. Calvin fixes on the engraving, stoic on the surface, shattered underneath. And--

CALVIN (PRELAP)
Here you go.

INT. RESTAURANT, SOMBRERO EXPRESS - NIGHT

That night, Calvin situates Noah, wearing a rec soccer kit, at the Sombrero Express booth near the soda fountain.

Calvin hands Noah a coloring book, a pack of markers, and a CALL BELL from the checkout counter, which he taps. DING.

CALVIN
Remember, if anyone talks to you,
ring the bell. I'll have Joanne
bring you an order of cheesy tots
before you finish a single picture.

Calvin starts off to the kitchen, when--

DING DING. He looks back to find Noah giggling.

NOAH
You're talking to me.

Calvin lets out a smile. He grabs a paper sombrero from behind the counter, enters the kitchen, and--

INT./EXT. DRIVE THRU WINDOW, SOMBRERO EXPRESS - NIGHT

Later, he finishes wrapping a to-go burrito in tin foil, adds it to a plastic bag.

CALVIN
Okay, I have two supremos, one
chaluperia, one veggie taco, one--

JOSH (O.S.)
Calvin?

Calvin looks up. Outside the drive thru window, a SEDAN packed with five TEENS, including the driver, JOSH (19).

JOSH
Calvin, is that you?

Calvin gulps. He knows Josh, but wishes he didn't.

JOSH
That *is* you! How's it going, man?

CALVIN
Hey, Josh...

JOSH
How's college, bro?

CALVIN
College...?

Calvin's too embarrassed to tell him.

CALVIN
It's... I'm good. How're they
treating you up at State?

JOSH
Bro, money. I'm rushing Sig Ep and
the house has a pool with an
underwater kegerator. Also...
(leans in, whispers)
So many smokes. It's a liability.

The GIRL in the passenger seat SLAPS Josh's arm.

JOSH
Ow! You know I only got eyes for
you, babe.

Calvin offers Josh his bag of food through the drive thru window, trying to end this exchange as quickly as possible.

JOSH
So, you getting in some shifts
during fall break?

CALVIN
No, I, um...

Josh takes the bag, hands Calvin a credit card.

CALVIN
Just getting in shifts. Receipt?

Calvin swipes the card. Josh realizes...

JOSH
Oh. No, I'm good. Thanks.

Josh sets his hand on the wheel, the mood in his car subdued. He watches with sympathy as Calvin closes the transaction.

JOSH
Say, Calvin, have you met Soph's
little sister, Olivia?

The teenaged girl sitting behind Josh smiles at Calvin.

JOSH
She's looking for babysitting gigs,
if you ever wanted the help...? I'd
just hate for you to miss out on
college cause of what happened with
your mom. You should be at State,
not me. I had like half your GPA.
(beat)
Alright, maybe a third. Anyways,
want me to send you Liv's number?

Calvin steals a glance at Olivia. Her cute smile's crippling. He sheepishly removes his paper sombrero, crumples it up.

CALVIN
I appreciate it, but Noah and I are
doing good with child care. You said
no receipt, right?

JOSH
Yeah... no receipt.

CALVIN
Well, have a good one.

Calvin throws away the ticket. Josh offers Calvin a quick parting smile, shuts his car window, drives off.

Calvin exhales, both comforted that the exchange is over and regretful it ended as it did.

He gazes down at a security monitor beneath the window. A grainy screen shows Noah sitting at his booth, coloring.

Just then - a BEEP from Calvin's headset. He lowers its mic.

CALVIN
Hello, welcome to Sombrero Express.
What can I get for you today?
(punching in order)
Total's six forty. Second window.

Calvin lifts his mic, looks back down at the--

ON SECURITY MONITOR

When suddenly, A MAN APPEARS OUT OF THIN AIR BY NOAH'S BOOTH!

An Indiana Jones lookalike, he wears a safari shirt, pleated trousers, fedora. He also holds a GOLD MONOCLE to his eye...

The man lowers the monocle, looks around, awestruck. Then, spots an exit and SPRINTS out of the restaurant.

BACK TO SCENE

On Calvin, speechless, before we--

INT. RESTAURANT, SOMBRERO EXPRESS - MOMENTS LATER

CALVIN (O.S.)
Did you see that?!

Noah looks up from his drawing to find Calvin barrelling towards him.

NOAH
See what?

CALVIN
That man.

NOAH
What man?

CALVIN
The safari man! He just appeared,
out of nowhere!

Noah gazes at his brother, clueless.

MANAGER (O.S.)

Calvin!

Calvin turns, spots his manager marching at him.

MANAGER

Why aren't you in the kitchen?

CALVIN

There... There was this guy, on the security monitor.

MANAGER

A guy?

CALVIN

(to Noah)

You're okay, right?

MANAGER

There are customers at the window.

CALVIN

I know. It's just, I saw--

MANAGER

I don't care what you saw!

NOAH

Hey, don't yell at my brother!

The manager SNARLS at Noah. Noah clings to Calvin's side.

MANAGER

You see, that's your problem, Calvin. Always looking around. Never putting your head down, never working. I'd fire you...

(side-eyes Noah)

If you weren't such a charity case.

Calvin pulls his little brother in tight as the whole restaurant watches now, silent.

CALVIN

I'll go back to the window, alright?

Calvin starts off towards the kitchen.

MANAGER

Yes, you will go back. But not just tonight.

Calvin halts, looks back.

MANAGER

Until you learn to do your job,
you'll do it more. Next week. Three
shifts. *Nights*.

CALVIN

Three night shifts?
(manager doesn't flinch)
Three *more*?

The manager proudly puffs out his chest, a knight in shining armor to his half-dozen customers.

CALVIN

No, you don't have to fire me.
(RIPS nametag off polo)
I quit! Keep selling dreams with
your shitty burritos.

Calvin SPIKES his nametag to the floor. He seizes Noah's hand and STORMS OUT, SLAMMING the glass door behind him.

The patrons look on in stunned silence, mostly impressed by this employee's defiance.

That is, save for a bystander we didn't spot in the fray, the SCHOOL NURSE. She sits alone with a half-eaten burrito, and a stare that betrays sympathy and responsibility... Before we--

INT. CALVIN'S PRIUS - NIGHT

Calvin drives his Prius down a rural road, fingers restlessly tapping on the steering wheel. Noah sits in the rear.

CALVIN

I'm sorry I cursed.

NOAH

You showed him who's boss, Taco Man!

CALVIN

Well, now I have no boss. No money.

NOAH

Does math cost money?

CALVIN

Noah...

NOAH

Maybe I can get a job!

CALVIN

Noah, it's not-- it's never your job to get a job, okay? It's mine.

NOAH

But I can help, Cal...

CALVIN

I know you can. Thank you for standing up for me back there.

Calvin smiles through the rearview. Noah beams back, yet--

When Calvin looks back out at the road, his smile slowly crumbles. He stares off into the distance, encumbered, lost.

After a moment, he looks over his shoulder.

CALVIN

Noah... be honest with me, are you sure you didn't see anyone?

Noah tilts his head... then SHAKES IT with childlike honesty.

Calvin gulps. Any trace of optimism vanishes from his face. He turns forward. No job or plan, and now he's seeing things.

EXT. CALVIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

On their doorstep, Calvin unlocks their home. Noah enters.

Calvin remains outside, however. Pushes the door forward and gazes helplessly at the COLLECTION ENVELOPE pinned to it.

He pats his back pocket. No pay stubs. No money. Despair.

He tries his front pocket, rummages, retrieves his wallet. He grips it hard with one hand, fingers it angrily with the other for something, *anything* he can put in the envelope.

Food stamps, expired gift cards... it's not like he wants to be here, in this rut. It's not like he isn't trying! A high school ID, but no cash. Finally, in an atypical fit of rage--

Calvin PUNCHES the door with his palm! And--

PING. A COIN falls out of his wallet, hits the cement. It rolls away from Calvin, *twinkling under the porch light*...

RAPID FLASH TO: the GOLD MONOCLE rolling away from him on his home's floor / the GOLD MONOCLE in the safari man's hand.

Suddenly, Calvin blinks. An IDEA forming...

INT./EXT. BOX OFFICE, STUMPVILLE CINEMAS - DAY

Calvin marches down main street with newfound determination.

CALVIN
Abigail, I have a favor to ask.

Behind the box office, Abigail blows a gum bubble. It pops.

ABIGAIL
Fine, but nothing kinky.

INT. PROJECTION BOOTH, STUMPVILLE CINEMAS - DAY

Abigail and Calvin enter a PROJECTION BOOTH above a theater.

ABIGAIL
You're lucky we still have an old-school projector.

Calvin hands her the FILM STRIPS he received in the mail.

ABIGAIL
Just two individual strips?

CALVIN
And a creepy note.

ABIGAIL
Weird. Well let's find out what your stalker wanted you to see.

Abigail approaches one of the two PROJECTORS jutting into the theater, powers it up. It WHIRS. She inserts a film strip.

ABIGAIL
Go. Take a look.

THEATER

Calvin exits the booth. He turns to face, projected--

ON SCREEN - a PAINTING OF AN ANCIENT CITY. Vividly cast like digital art on one of those fancy frame TVs. Stone streets. Pillared buildings atop rolling hills. It's beautiful.

But, it doesn't recall anything. Confused, Calvin reenters--

PROJECTION BOOTH

CALVIN
It's, like, a painting of Ancient Rome or something.

ABIGAIL
 (scrunches brow)
 Want me to try the other one?

Calvin nods. Abigail changes the film strip. Calvin exits.

THEATER

He turns to face the screen again, looks up to find--

ON SCREEN - a still-image of a PHOTOSHOOT BACKDROP. One of those white curtains used for headshots. But, no one's having their picture taken. It's just a curtain.

Calvin stares at the image, trying to understand, thinking...

FLASH TO: the safari man by Noah's booth, MONOCLE TO HIS EYE.

Curious, Calvin retrieves his MONOCLE from his pocket. He lifts his gaze towards the screen, raises the monocle up to his eye, and...

THROUGH THE MONOCLE (CALVIN'S POV):

*...the still-image starts MOVING.
 A GIRL (18) steps in front of the photo backdrop.*

Calvin GASPS, jerks the monocle down and checks the screen.

Again, it's just a fixed image of the photoshoot backdrop. Deep breath, Calvin returns the monocle to his eye...

*...and the image turns back into a MOTION PICTURE.
 The same girl steps on screen. We hear her FOOTSTEPS,
 see her red hair. She starts turning towards the camera,
 but before we see her face--*

Calvin DROPS the monocle, jaw nearly on the floor.

PROJECTION BOOTH - MOMENTS LATER

Calvin enters the booth, goggles at Abigail.

CALVIN
 You have to come see this.

THEATER - MOMENTS LATER

In the theater, Abigail brings the monocle to her eye, and--

ABIGAIL
 Is... Is that your mom?

Calvin nods.

ABIGAIL
Well, praise be to Glenn Beck...

Abigail lurches, PASSES OUT.

INT. THEATER, STUMPVILLE CINEMAS - DAY

Later, Calvin sits in the theater with Abigail, ice pack to her head. On screen, the still of the photoshoot backdrop.

CALVIN
Do you think it's some gimmick? An optical illusion, maybe?
(answering own question)
A picture of my mom, though, that can't be a coincidence.

ABIGAIL
I think it's a portal.

CALVIN
A what?

ABIGAIL
A portal. Aim the monocle at an image of 1998 and you see *into* 1998.

CALVIN
So you think someone wanted me to use this monocle to see *into* my mom's high-school yearbook picture?
(Abigail nods)
That's insane!

ABIGAIL
How is that insane?

CALVIN
So they wanted me to see into Ancient Rome too?

ABIGAIL
Well, what happened on that day?

CALVIN
In Rome?

ABIGAIL
No! The day of your mom's picture?

CALVIN
I don't know. I'm guessing she took a photo.

ABIGAIL

Calvin, work with me here. What else was going on at that time? Any injuries that'd become lingering one day? Accidental lead exposure?

(Calvin tilts head; *huh?*)

How about alcohol? Had she started drinking by then...?

Calvin balks, offended by the query.

ABIGAIL

C'mon. Someone's gotta ask the hard questions, the *insane* questions.

(off Calvin's umbrage)

Fine. If you won't use it, let me.

Maybe I can go back and destroy

Antifa. Ooh, or Karl Marx!

As Abigail's imagination runs wild, Calvin grips the monocle with a jolt of possessiveness. He gazes up at the image on screen, thoughts churning, and--

EXT. CALVIN'S HOUSE - DAY

The Prius SKIDS to a stop on Calvin's gravel driveway. Calvin exits, hurries to his front door, still on edge, but also--

EXCITED. There's a magic monocle in his pocket!

He unlocks the door, dashes inside, SLAMS it behind him.

Meanwhile, we stay outside and notice the collection envelope on the front door is no longer yellow. It's now RED. Before--

INT. ATTIC, CALVIN'S HOUSE - DAY

A PHOTO ALBUM titled "1998" rests beside two bouncing feet.

Calvin's, of course. He's seated on a stool, putting the final touches on a PAINTING, using the "AMY" paintbrush.

The painting is part of a collection of images he's lined up. Some PAINTINGS, some PHOTOGRAPHS. Each of a RED-HAIRED TEEN. In every image, as always, her face is HIDDEN. Turned away.

[NOTE: we will refer to any image that becomes lifelike, when viewed through the monocle, as "lucid."]]

Calvin grabs his MONOCLE, lifts it to his eye, and looks at--

- PHOTO #1 - of the redheaded teen on a BEACH, as...

*...a wave CRASHES, gently washes over her feet.
She walks down the shore, away from us. LUCID.*

- PHOTO #2 - of the redheaded teen sitting atop a green meadow, looking out over a valley...

...PAINTING a canvas, wind WHISTLING. LUCID.

CALVIN
(sotto)
The photos work. However...

- PAINTING #1 - a watercolor of the redheaded teen at a house party, head in a plastic cup. It remains STATIC, clouded green when seen through the monocle's lens. Not lucid.

- PAINTING #2 - the one Calvin just finished, of the redhead facing a birthday cake with lit candles. Not lucid.

CALVIN
The paintings don't work. Except...

- PAINTING #3 - his final piece. The redhead on an auditorium stage, facing away. Calvin brings the monocle to his eye...

...and she starts ACTING, in a school play.

Calvin lowers the monocle. He has an idea.

He returns the monocle to his eye but, this time, doesn't stare. Instead, he LEANS towards the painting, and...

INT. AUDITORIUM, HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT (INSIDE PAINTING) [1998]

...a hushed crowd. The redhead performs her lines on stage.

*Calvin looks around. HIS UNBODIED HEAD HOVERS OVER THE CROWD.
He is inside the painting, inside the moment.*

*The redhead stops walking upstage, turns to face the crowd.
But, before we see her face, we see something else, something
revealing, in her side profile...*

A BABY BUMP. Is she pregnant? She keeps turning, and--

INT. ATTIC, CALVIN'S HOUSE - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Calvin YANKS his head out of the painting, mouth agape.

As what he just witnessed sinks in, his mouth curves into a SMILE, optimism returning. Before we--

INT./EXT. CALVIN'S PRIUS - DAY

Calvin can't wipe the hopeful smile off his lips as he pulls his Prius into the pick-up line outside Noah's school. Across the street, the church's emblem is still a taco, not a cross.

Children proceed from the school to their parents' SUVs and minivans, but Calvin's gaze drifts past them. That hopeful smile lingers, his mind lost in reveries of the monocle.

Beat. Another beat. Finally, Calvin looks up. Where's Noah?

He turns, peers through the Prius' windows, but doesn't see his brother approaching. He powers off the Prius, exits.

Outside, he shuts the door, looks over his car's roof towards the school's stooped entrance. And there--

A CPS AGENT. Standing beside a teacher. Grave faces...

By the car, Calvin's smile shatters. He knows exactly what their stares signify. His whole world's been taken from him.

INT. OFFICE, DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY & PROTECTIVE SERVICES - DAY

Calvin's legs furiously bounce as he sits facing a desk in a dimly lit government office. Labor law compliance posters cover the drywalls. Manila folders strewn about the desk.

Behind Calvin, a DOOR OPENS. He stops fidgeting, turns to find a middle-aged CPS AGENT walking in, nametag:

"RHONDA", the nurse's sister. She shuts the door behind her.

RHONDA
Sorry for the wait, Calvin. Coffee?
...Juice?

CALVIN
Where's Noah?

Rhonda takes a seat at the desk, opposite Calvin.

RHONDA
He's with a family.

CALVIN
Who? The Bakers? Kaminskis? Their
house smells like a porta potty.

RHONDA
What happened to your job, Calvin?

CALVIN
You've let one missed pay stub slide before.

RHONDA
No proof of employment--

CALVIN
I'll get another one.

RHONDA
--and an altercation at work, which Noah witnessed. Is that correct?
(Calvin simmers)
No proof you understand where the line is. That's the bigger issue.

CALVIN
What are you suggesting?

RHONDA
There's a parenting skills course we offer. It reviews limit setting, leading through positive behaviors.

CALVIN
How much?

RHONDA
Money? Free. Time? A few weeks.

CALVIN
Weeks?

RHONDA
For the record, I fought my ass off to get you this as the *only* penalty, Calvin. Your mom did the course, you know.

CALVIN
Yeah, and look how that turned out! Cause of the situation she left me in, I'm meant to lose her son, my brother.

RHONDA
Temporarily lose. And stop playing the victim. You can't change the past.

Calvin looks away, pats his pocket. Little does Rhonda know.

RHONDA

Calvin, listen to me. We all know you're a nurturing guardian. That's not the issue, never has been. But Noah needs a *home*. And you can't provide that if you haven't figured it out for yourself... Am I wrong?

Calvin glances up at Rhonda, a vulnerable stare. Before we--

INT. THEATER, STUMPVILLE CINEMAS - DAY

CALVIN

I have a plan.

Calvin paces up and down the empty theater aisle. Abigail is seated, munching on popcorn.

CALVIN

I can get Noah back, permanently.
And I can get our lives back.

ABIGAIL

You never thanked me, by the way.
That's rude.

CALVIN

Sorry, you were right about the
monocle. Thank you.

ABIGAIL

The monocle? Will it ever be okay to
wish you happy birthday again?

CALVIN

This is more important.
(Abigail rolls her eyes)
So, you know the film strip? The one
of my mom's yearbook photo?

FLASH TO: the PHOTOSHOOT BACKDROP on the theater's screen.

ABIGAIL

Yes, Calvin, I know the film strip.

CALVIN

Well, I found out what was going on
in her life at that time. That photo
was taken right before my mom got
pregnant in high school.

Abigail eats more popcorn, clueless to Calvin's intimation.

CALVIN

You asked me when she started drinking. From what I know, it was after that pregnancy failed...

ABIGAIL

So?

CALVIN

So, if my mom doesn't have that miscarriage, she never starts drinking. She stays healthy, safe, and maybe, just maybe--

ABIGAIL

Hold on.

(swallows bite)

You're saying you think a rando gave you a time-traveling monocle, for you to go back in time and stop your mom from getting laid...?

(Calvin nods)

Okay, that really *is* insane.

CALVIN

I thought insane was good?

ABIGAIL

Not insane as in insane! I'm better off killing Mao.

CALVIN

It's *my* monocle.

ABIGAIL

It doesn't explain the other strip.

CALVIN

Paintings don't work with the monocle. For the most part.

ABIGAIL

Convenient...

CALVIN

Do you have a better idea, then?

(sighs)

Look, it's the only reason that makes any sense. If I stop her pregnancy--

ABIGAIL

Your life sucks less?

CALVIN

No, it's not that. It's... what if Rhonda's right? What if I'm not the person, the *hero* Noah thinks I am?

ABIGAIL

Surely you can be all he needs you to be without going back in time.

CALVIN

And if he needs a mom?

(beat)

Why else would I have access to that exact moment in time?

ABIGAIL

...Fair question. *Hard* question.

CALVIN

Speaking of, I have another...

Calvin gestures at the theater's screen.

ABIGAIL

Oh. Finally asking for help I see?

CALVIN

Just access to the theater for one night. If I decide to go, that is.

ABIGAIL

If? Calvin, you know me saying your life would suck less isn't an attack? If you actually believe you should do this, then go. Do it.

Calvin looks up. He and Abigail share candid eyes. And we--

INT./EXT. CALVIN'S PRIUS - DUSK

The Prius parks in the lot outside SOMBRERO EXPRESS at dusk.

From the driver's seat, Calvin stares out the window at his old workplace. The despair he once bled ripened into bargaining.

Inside the restaurant, he sees his former MANAGER, perched behind the counter and inspecting his domain with a scowl.

Calvin turns off the car, opens the door, exits. Head down, he walks to the restaurant, ready to beg for his job back.

As he nears Sombrero Express, he lifts his gaze, and--

HALTS. His eyes lock on something inside the restaurant...

THROUGH THE WINDOW - a MOM with her YOUNG DAUGHTER. The mom holds a napkin to her daughter's BLOODY MOUTH. She pours a salt packet into a water bottle, shakes it up, and moves their food out of reach. All before pocketing her daughter's BABY TOOTH. Everything Calvin didn't do...

Calvin remains dead in his tracks, watching this skilled mother at work, culpability in his eyes.

Behind Calvin, the sun sets, the sky dims, and--

INT. THEATER, STUMPVILLE CINEMAS - NIGHT

Click. LIGHTS ON. An empty movie theater. Red upholstery looming down, the BOOM of a closing door echoing around...

Calvin. He enters, alone. Backpack on. His face has hardened from bargaining into resolve, set for whatever lies ahead.

Up the theater aisle, he climbs... into--

PROJECTION BOOTH

He flicks on the light, takes a step inside--

CLUNK. His foot bumps into a BOX. A NOTE written on it:

CALVIN
'You may want to take one of these
when you go, *if* you go. -Abigail.'

Intrigued, Calvin opens the box to find--

PORTABLE VINTAGE FILM PROJECTORS. Small, light, battery-powered. Collector's items the theater's probably stored away for years. He smiles, takes one, and stuffs it into his bag.

Then, from his pocket, he grabs one of the FILM STRIPS, and--

THEATER - MOMENTS LATER

Steps out of the booth, slowly turns towards--

ON SCREEN - the PHOTOSHOOT BACKDROP. The anointed image from his mom's high-school, senior yearbook portrait session.

Calvin faces the screen, wide-eyed. Hopeful. Fearful...

As an insurance policy, he snaps a quick PHOTO of the theater with his phone, before pocketing the device. He also removes the red bracelet from his wrist, pockets that too.

Then, from his other pocket, the MONOCLE. Calvin exhales.

CALVIN
Dream big, right...?

Another breath, before he brings the monocle to his eye,
WALKS FORWARD. But, instead of colliding with the screen...

CALVIN'S WHOLE BODY PASSES THROUGH THE SCREEN, fading into--

INT. AUDITORIUM, HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

A SCREAM! And another.

A chorus of shrieks, as Calvin struggles to get his bearings.

FEMALE STUDENTS (O.S.)
How'd he get in? / Where'd he come
from? / Did he just, like, appear?

Calvin looks around. He's in an empty auditorium, on stage. A
CAMERAWOMAN, pigtails and denim vest, stands with a camera.

Behind her, a LINE of overly made-up HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS on the
stage. They all stare at Calvin, including--

POPULAR GIRL (O.S.)
Who the hell are you?

Calvin gasps, turns to face this TEENAGER.

POPULAR GIRL
I asked you a question.

Sitting in front of the white curtain backdrop. Wearing a
sundress, cowgirl boots, and a pretty smile. All framed by...

POPULAR GIRL
You speak English?

...blonde hair. Calvin sighs. This is not the girl he seeks.
He keeps scanning, and--

POPULAR GIRL
Hello...?

--his JAW DROPS. To the curtain's left, another GIRL. She
walks towards the auditorium's exit away from us. Bouncing
off her back as she strides: RED HAIR.

POPULAR GIRL
Answer me, dweeb!

CALVIN

Um...

Without answering the popular girl, Calvin TAKES OFF. He runs after the redheaded teen, and--

HALLWAY

Into a hallway. He stops, scans. Championship pennants pinned to the wall. Rows of lockers in each direction.

CALVIN

(sotto)

Mom?

But, the hallway is empty, quiet. Until suddenly, the TRAMP of marching feet. Calvin turns...

A HALL MONITOR stands across from him. Vest, sash, dour gaze.

HALL MONITOR

Hey. You got a hall pass?

Calvin doesn't answer. He turns, WALKS AWAY.

The hall monitor follows. Calvin's pace quickens. The monitor CHASES. Calvin DASHES around a corner and out through--

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Its main entrance, where he skids to a HALT. His eyes GAPE. They behold a sight he wasn't prepared for...

PAN TO: a neighborhood, one just as plain, simple, and working class as Calvin's hometown. However...

The sun here is BRIGHTER. The air DUSTIER. And, the people...

They listen to WALKMANS, they use PAGERS, they wear DENIM, HEADBANDS. This isn't 2024 anymore. No, this is:

WEST TEXAS, 1998

Calvin takes it all in. Pale, realizing *when* he is. Until, the hall monitor BURSTS THROUGH the school doors.

HALL MONITOR

Hey! Get back here!

Calvin snaps out of his trance. Continues his RUN, down the front steps, the sidewalk, and away from the school, out of the hall monitor's jurisdiction.

EXT. EMPTY LOT, AMY'S HOMETOWN - DAY [1998]

Calvin stops, catches his breath in an abandoned, weedy lot.

He surveys to make sure no one is around. Then, he sheds his backpack and rummages through it to retrieve...

A PRINT. A furled enlargement. He unravels it to reveal--

A photo of his CREAKY HOUSE IN STUMPVILLE. Not a cozy-looking place, but a path back home nonetheless.

CALVIN

Let's make sure this thing works.

With the photo laid out on the ground, Calvin draws out the monocle from his pocket, brings it to his eye, and--

PLOP. He pauses. What was that? PLOP. Calvin looks down...

WHITE BIRD POOP HAS SPLATTERED ALL OVER HIS ENLARGEMENT.

Overhead, the culprit flies away, leaving the print looking more Pollock than photo. This can't be good... Calvin hoists the monocle back up to his eye, but--

THROUGH THE MONOCLE - the image is STATIC. Not lucid.

PANIC in his eyes, Calvin DIVES into his backpack, grabs a spare shirt, wipes the turd off the enlargement, tries again.

But, the photo is still lifeless... What now?

EXT. MAIN STREET, AMY'S HOMETOWN - DAY [1998]

Calvin marches through Amy's hometown on a mission. He passes by forgotten relics. A BLOCKBUSTER. *Huh?* A RADIOSHACK. *Double huh?* Then, he spots a third store, HALTS.

CALVIN

Jackpot...

Eyes on a building with a blue sign over it:

kinko's
Copy & Print Center

INT. KINKO'S - MOMENTS LATER [1998]

The door chimes as Calvin enters. A few patrons inside. The checkout counter manned by a tabloid-reading CASHIER (20s).

Calvin walks up to the counter, sets down his SMARTPHONE.

CALVIN
I'd like to blow up a picture.

The cashier side-eyes Calvin, unamused.

CALVIN
It's on there.

CASHIER
Is this some sorta prank?

CALVIN
Sorry?

CASHIER
What in God's name is that?

The cashier points to Calvin's FUTURISTIC, TOUCHSCREEN PHONE.
Calvin still doesn't get it...

CALVIN
It's--
(GASPS, realizing)
Oh. It's just this... this prototype
thing. You can forget I showed you.

Calvin awkwardly laughs, conceals his phone.

CASHIER
Whatever.

The cashier returns to her magazine.

CALVIN
Wait. If I wanted to enlarge a
photo, what would you need?

CASHIER
You got a floppy disk?

CALVIN
A floppy what?

CASHIER
Sir, I ain't got the time--

CALVIN
How about one of those? If I used
one of those, could you develop it?

Calvin points to a rack of DISPOSABLE CAMERAS on display.

CASHIER
If you pay for one, yeah...

LATER

Calvin sits at a computer rental. Leg tapping, furtive eyes, he grabs his SMARTPHONE from his pocket, opens the insurance photo he took of the MOVIE THEATER IN 2024, and--

OLD WOMAN (O.S.)
Excuse me, sweetie?

Calvin quickly COVERS his phone with his hands.

OLD WOMAN
Are you using the computer machine?

A hunchbacked OLD WOMAN (70s) stands behind Calvin. Warm, benign demeanor, oblivious to his touchscreen device.

CALVIN
...I can sit somewhere else.

The woman smiles. Calvin grins back, then sweeps his phone into his backpack and walks to a desk in a far, empty corner.

Once seated, he retrieves his phone again. This time, more discreet, checking over his shoulder for onlookers.

He aims the disposable camera at his phone. Plan? A photo of a photo. An analog shot of the digital image from 2024, which he can then enlarge and use to travel back home.

He raises a finger over the shutter button, when--

STOCK CLERK (O.S.)
I've seen one of them before.
(Calvin freezes)
Don't cover it up now.

Calvin slowly turns, gazes up to find...

A tall, eccentric STOCK CLERK (40s), standing over him. Stack of envelopes under his arm, EYES ON CALVIN'S SMARTPHONE...

STOCK CLERK
It's a pocket computer, ain't it? A message from the designers?

CALVIN
You... must be mistaken. I--

Suddenly, the clerk LUNGES for Calvin's phone.

CALVIN
Wait, don't!

But the stock clerk SNATCHES the phone before Calvin can stop him. He holds the device to the sky, entranced.

STOCK CLERK
It's the seer stone... The Elohim
have made contact! They're her--

JANITOR (O.S.)
Gary!

From the other side of the store, an unassuming, middle-aged JANITOR abandons his mop bucket and approaches.

JANITOR
Leave the kid alone, Gary.

Gary, the stock clerk, hesitates.

JANITOR
And hand him his... thing back.

Gary glances between the phone and the vigilant janitor. Reluctantly, he hands the phone back to Calvin, scurries off.

JANITOR
Sorry 'bout that, sir.

The janitor offers Calvin a polite smile. Calvin vacantly nods. The janitor lingers a beat, then walks away.

Phone safely in his hands, Calvin lets out an exhale. It's only a crazy person. There's plenty of them where he comes from too. Once settled, he returns his focus to the camera.

Meanwhile, over at the mop bucket, the janitor casts Calvin another glance. Eyes knowing, *ominous*, he looks down toward--

His own wrist, a red bracelet worn around it... And we--

CUT TO:

Calvin marches back to the checkout counter. He sets the disposable camera in front of the cashier.

CALVIN
There's only one photo on there.
Can you enlarge it to 24 by 36?

CASHIER
Sure. It'll be done tonight.

CALVIN
Tonight? Can it be done sooner?

The cashier is out of patience. She SLAMS her hand down.

CASHIER
Tonight. Now scram!

Calvin promptly hurries to the exit. And we--

EXT. KINKO'S PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS [1998]

Calvin exits the store, aimless. For the first time back in time, he doesn't know where to go, what to do, when--

A MAN IN A TRACK SUIT (40s) emerges from a payphone booth near the Kinko's. An unscrupulous grin on his lips.

PIMP
You looking for some fun, amigo?

Calvin appraises the man walking towards him.

CALVIN
I'm good. Thanks.

PIMP
C'mon, chavo. You look lost.

CALVIN
Actually...

Calvin stares at the PAPER COLD CUP in the pimp's hand.

CALVIN
Where'd you get that soda?

PIMP
Sombrero Express?

CALVIN
Is there one close by?

PIMP
Highway 83. Over by the tracks.

CALVIN
Weird question, but you don't happen to know if a kid my age works there, do you? Plays baseball I think?

PIMP
A kid?

CALVIN
Never mind. Thank you.

Calvin starts to walk away, but--

PIMP
Amigo.
(Calvin stops)
That information ain't free.

The pimp skulks over to Calvin. From his track suit, he fetches a BUSINESS CARD with photos of SCANTILY CLAD WOMEN.

PIMP
I service the whole town. Whatever you're into, I got.

The pimp forces the card into Calvin's hands. Calvin blushes, pockets the card to avoid any trouble. And we--

EXT. HIGHWAY 83 - DAY [1998]

Between a four-lane highway and train tracks, Calvin treks. Strip malls and fast-food joints frame his dusty path.

He's wearing a familiar shirt, his old SOMBRERO EXPRESS POLO. And a familiar expression, one of nervous determination...

EXT. SOMBRERO EXPRESS, TEXAS - DAY [1998]

Calvin's march halts under a pylon sign of a SOMBRERO. The restaurant's façade is less sleek, more Y2K than his own.

Calvin doesn't care how it looks, though. He's worried about what's inside. Deep breath, he steels himself, and--

INT. RESTAURANT, SOMBRERO EXPRESS, TEXAS - CONTINUOUS [1998]

Calvin enters, scopes out the restaurant...

Half-full. An elderly CASHIER. A teenaged COOK in the kitchen. Calvin's gaze lingers on that cook...

He approaches the counter, sweat dripping from his brow. For anyone, this is nervy. For Calvin, this is plain terrifying. He gives a slight wave to the cashier, and...

LIFTS OPEN the flip-up countertop, WALKS BEHIND the counter, *acting as if he works at the restaurant.*

The cashier glances, but does not stop him. Calvin enters--

KITCHEN

In close quarters with that burly cook, nametag: "DILLON".

Dillon is Sombrero Express' dream. Tortilla, fillings, wrap, repeat. In such a groove he doesn't even notice Calvin.

Calvin walks up beside him, sets down his backpack. Then, just as Dillon reaches for the next order slip--

Calvin STEALS it from him.

CALVIN

A cheesy burritolada? Let's see...

Dillon GLARES at Calvin, who starts filling a fresh tortilla.

CALVIN

Standard load... enchilada sauce...

DILLON

Who the hell are you?

CALVIN

You know, I, for one, think
'enchirito' sounds better.

Calvin awkwardly laughs. Dillon leans in.

DILLON

You hear me?

CALVIN

I always struggle wrapping beans
neatly. Like sculpting with Play-
Doh. Messy. No structure. You?

DILLON

Who are you?!

CALVIN

(stops wrapping)

Oh. I'm... I'm Calvin, the new guy?

Dillon inspects Calvin. He lowers his eye-daggers.

DILLON

You don't say. Well, I'm Dillon.

They exchange brief nods. Calvin anxiously waits, until--

Dillon takes the next order, starts wrapping his own burrito.
It's working.

CALVIN
So... how long you been working
here, Dillon?

Dillon keeps wrapping, uninterested in small talk.

CALVIN
Reason I ask is, when I got the job,
my... girlfriend? She gave me crap
about it. Guess she's not cut out to
date a Burrito Builder. It can be a
lot to wrap your head around, no pun
intended.

(Dillon doesn't laugh)
So how does yours feel about it?

DILLON
What makes you think I got a girl?

CALVIN
Well... do you?

DILLON
Yeah. She don't care.

Calvin grabs the next order slip. His hand is *shaking*.

CALVIN
Her name's Amy, right? She likes
art? Painting?

Dillon stops wrapping, GLARES at Calvin.

CALVIN
She might not care what you do, but
I'd care about her if I were you.

DILLON
How do you know her name?

CALVIN
...It's a small town?--

Just then - Dillon GRABS Calvin by the shirt.

DILLON
You into her, creep??

CALVIN
No! God, no. I just... I hear she
gets around. I don't want you
getting hurt!

CLANG! Dillon shoves Calvin against a metal service cart.

CALVIN
Wait, stop! Please, let me explain!
(Dillon tightens his grip)
Listen, I'm... I'm a...
(racking his brain)
I'm a scout! Okay? I'm a baseball
scout!

Suddenly, Dillon releases Calvin.

DILLON
You're a what?

Calvin stands up, catches his breath.

CALVIN
I'm a scout. A, uh, talent scout. I
know I don't look like it, but I'm
one of those... new analytics guys?

DILLON
Who could you possibly scout for?

CALVIN
The... Giants?

DILLON
The *San Francisco* Giants?

Calvin meekly nods. Dillon scoffs.

CALVIN
And if I said we're scouting you?
(beat, Dillon wavers)
You play ball, don't you, Dillon?

Calvin sees the lure in Dillon's eyes.

CALVIN
What if... What if I said we were
thinking of calling your name next
draft? First round, signing bonus,
the works. You'd believe me then,
right? That I'm a scout?

Calvin clenches his teeth, nervously awaiting Dillon's
reaction... until, at last--

DILLON
Well I... I can't believe it. I just
made varsity last year!

Calvin's eyes gape. *It's working again.*

DILLON

First round... What should I do?? Do I need an agent? A lawyer?

CALVIN

No! No agent, no lawyers. Just, uh, keep practicing. And, above all... no Amy. I've seen big talents fail because they were distracted by women. You don't want that, do you?

DILLON

No, sir, not at all.

CALVIN

Promise?

DILLON

Yes, of course, sir. No Amy. She's immature, and I'm...
(convincing himself)
Well, I'm a pro now.

Calvin pauses, goes back to something Dillon just said.

CALVIN

You said Amy's immature?
(Dillon nods)
If I may ask, in what way?

DILLON

Oh, you know, playin' hooky. Boozin'. Stuff you'd never catch me doing out of respect for the team.

CALVIN

Boozing?
(Dillon impassively nods)
But I thought-- I mean I heard Amy is still naïve for her age?

DILLON

Naïve? In that household?

CALVIN

What do you mean?

DILLON

Sir, if I may, what does this have to do with me playin' ball?

CALVIN

Uh, I need to vet my prospects, who they associate with.

DILLON
Right... Well, I don't like talkin'
poor of nobody. But her pa's a mean
son of a gun. He don't treat his
kids right. I reckon he's still
bitter about what happened to him.

CALVIN
What happened to him?

DILLON
He was swindled out of his business
back in the day. Cost him millions.

CALVIN
Millions? Grandp-- I mean Marv had a
million-dollar business??

DILLON
Uh, yeah. Somethin' with computers.

CALVIN
When? Where??

DILLON
I don't know... the 80s? Think they
were living out by you at the time.
(beat)
You're not swindlin' *me* for
information now, are you?

Suddenly--

TITO
Dillon?

From the restaurant, another brawny teen, TITO (18), enters.
He's wearing a Sombrero Express polo, the 1998 VERSION.

DILLON
Tito? What are you doin' here, man?

TITO
I just got a job here!

Dillon looks at Calvin, then at Tito, then back at Calvin...
Calvin gulps. *Shit*. He grabs his backpack.

CALVIN
Well, see you guys later.

Calvin hurries to the exit.

DILLON

Sir?

(Calvin stops)

Why's your shirt different?

Calvin gazes down at his polo, the 2024 version.

DILLON

Why's it fancier?

CALVIN

It was, um, the best I could find to come and meet with you.

DILLON

Why didn't you come to my school?

CALVIN

To keep the conversation private.

DILLON

A classroom's private.

TITO

Dillon, who is this guy?

DILLON

Says he's a baseball scout. Wants me to call it quits with Amy.

(to Calvin)

Sir, who manages the Giants?

CALVIN

I'm not one for trivia.

Calvin inches towards the exit. Dillon gives Tito a look.

DILLON

I said who manages the Giants?

CALVIN

...Barry Bonds?

DILLON

Manages?

Beat...

Then, Calvin BOLTS for the exit! Tito LUNGES at him, whiffs. Calvin escapes into the--

RESTAURANT

He slides under the checkout counter, SPRINTS for the door.

From the counter, Dillon grabs a burrito off a tray. He winds up like a baseball pitcher, HURLS it--

Strike. The burrito nails Calvin in the face. Beans and sour cream explode like fireworks. Calvin CRASHES into the door.

Meanwhile, Tito LAUNCHES off the counter, DIVES at Calvin.

But, Calvin manages to get up, open the door, and SLAM the heavy door behind him on Tito's outstretched arms.

Tito SCREAMS! Windmills to the floor, as another burrito FLIES through the air, EXPLODING against the window, and--

THROUGH THE SMEARED WINDOW - Calvin is RUNNING FREE, away from the Sombrero Express, into the Texas steppe...

Back in the restaurant, Tito writhes on the floor in pain. Burrito shrapnel all over the door, wall. Calvin's wake.

Yet, despite the ruin, Dillon is GRINNING behind the counter. He holds something Calvin dropped: the pimp's TART CARD.

DILLON

I got you...

EXT. MAIN STREET, AMY'S HOMETOWN - DAY [1998]

Down the main street of Amy's hometown, Calvin trudges. Nacho cheese coagulated in his hair. Dazed, a soldier after battle.

He passes a saloon, a pawn shop, an ART SUPPLY STORE, and--

Halts. Snaps out of his daze. This store is familiar.

Calvin gazes through the window. The shop is open, yet empty. No patrons, workers. He reaches for its front door, when--

LAUGHTER from outside. Calvin stirs. This laughter *certainly* is familiar... He scuttles around the storefront to find--

Two TEENS in staff shirts, sitting on a loading dock, facing away from us. A brunette girl. A REDHEAD GIRL.

They laugh as they pass a FLASK back and forth, take pulls from it. On the clock and under the influence.

BRUNETTE

Take a bigger one, Amy!

Amy, the redhead, CHUGS the whole flask, holds it upside down to prove it's bare. Nothing spills. She's proud. Light work.

Back on the sidewalk, Calvin can barely watch. Dillon was right. His mom is already boozing. Head down, he walks away.

INT. KINKO'S - DAY [1998]

The door chimes as Calvin enters, approaches the counter.

CALVIN
You got that enlargement?

The cashier looks up from her magazine, taken aback by Calvin's bluntness, and by the burrito in his hair.

LATER

Calvin is seated at a computer rental station, legs bouncing. On screen, a primitive web search: "M&D SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS".

The search returns a handful of headlines. Calvin scrolls...

- M&D SOLUTIONS FILES FOR HOTLY ANTICIPATED IPO
- M&D CEO DANE ANDREWS BUYS \$5 MILLION ATHERTON HOME
- WHO WAS M&D SOLUTIONS CO-FOUNDER, WYATT 'MARV' LEE?

He clicks on the third link. An article opens. Headline below a photo of a 1980s OFFICE PARK.

Calvin opens the image. Right click. Print. Scale: "Large format". He drags his mouse down to the "OK" button, and--

Pause. Cursor hovers. A hollow look on his face. *Why bother?*

CASHIER (O.S.)
Here you go.

Calvin turns, looks up to find the cashier holding a PACKING TUBE.

CASHIER
Your enlargement.

CALVIN
(takes the packing tube)
Thank you.

Just then, a walkie-talkie BEEPS and the front door CHIMES. The cashier turns to see two POLICEMEN enter.

CASHIER
Well, have a good night.

The cashier offers Calvin a brief, parting smile, before she leaves to attend to the cops, and we--

EXT. KINKO'S PARKING LOT - DUSK [1998]

Moments later, Calvin exits the Kinko's, tucking something into the side pocket of his backpack.

He steps behind a dumpster and opens the packing tube. Ready to abandon his mission, to return to 2024... When--

PIMP (O.S.)

Hey! You!

Calvin FREEZES, turns.

PIMP

You punk. You ratted us out!

The PIMP and two HENCHMEN march towards Calvin.

CALVIN

...Sorry?

PIMP

You gave my card to the cops!

CALVIN

Your card?

PIMP

Don't be stupid. My business card.

Calvin remembers, checks his pockets. The card is GONE.

CALVIN

I... I didn't. I swear.

PIMP

Who they here for then?

The pimp eyes the POLICE CAR parked in front of the Kinko's. Calvin gulps, as the pimp, henchmen draw nearer.

HENCHMAN 1

You ever visit the desert, niñato?

HENCHMAN 2

Nothin' but stars. No one to hear you scream.

The henchmen snicker. Calvin backs up against the dumpster. Is this really how it ends, in a place and era far from his own?

Suddenly - a CAR HORN. Idling behind the pimp, a TRANS AM.

JANITOR
If you like breathin' phone guy, hop
in.

At the wheel, the KINKO'S JANITOR, the one who helped Calvin earlier that day. He POUNDS the horn again. Now, he implores.

Without hesitation, Calvin SPRINTS for the car. He splits the henchmen. The pimp LUNGES at him, but Calvin slips under his grasp, cuts around the car, opens the door, and--

INT./EXT. TRANS AM - CONTINUOUS [1998]

Calvin slides into the passenger seat.

JANITOR
Hold on.

The janitor FLOORS the Trans Am. Veers it around the pimp.

Calvin manages to shut his door. Gripping the arm rest, he turns to the janitor, aghast.

CALVIN
What the hell is going on?!

JANITOR
The sheriff's inside the store,
lookin' to arrest you.

CALVIN
Me? Why?!

JANITOR
His son told him he saw you at the
burrito joint, solicitin' women?

CALVIN
No... That's a lie!

Just then - a THUD. A henchman has leaped onto the hood!

Calvin SHRIEKS. The janitor SWERVES the car onto main street, but the stooge hangs firm.

The henchman FORCES his hand inside Calvin's window. Calvin spins the hand crank. The henchman GRABS his shirt. And--

SCREECH!

The janitor SLAMS the brakes. The henchman FLIES OFF the hood. Calvin watches through the side-view mirror, stunned.

JANITOR
Look, I trust you, man. But that's
what the sheriff claims.

CALVIN
What do we do now...?

JANITOR
We git.

The janitor re-accelerates, drives his Trans Am down main street and out of town, away from danger...

EXT. HIGHWAY 83 - DUSK [1998]

The Trans Am cruises through the outskirts of town.

INT. TRANS AM - CONTINUOUS [1998]

Inside the car, Calvin clutches his packing tube.

CALVIN
I can't thank you enough.

One hand on the wheel, the janitor nods. No response.

CALVIN
You saved me back there.

JANITOR
Course.

The Trans Am keeps cruising, nothing said.

CALVIN
Well, you can drop me off anywhere.
(points to roadside)
Here's good.

The janitor JERKS his car to the shoulder, parks. Safely at a stop, this custodian keeps staring forward, saying nothing.

Calvin glances over at this man who helped him, hoping for something more, for connection, meaning... Instead--

CALVIN
Thanks again...

Calvin reaches for the door handle to exit, when--

JANITOR
Wait.

Calvin looks back. The janitor faces him now, eyes opaque, before reaching into his chest pocket and drawing out...

A MONOCLE. Gold rim, emerald lens. Calvin's jaw falls slack. A beat of silence.

Then - PANIC. Calvin digs into his own pocket.

JANITOR

Don't fret. I didn't take yours.

The teen locates his own monocle in his pocket, relieved.

JANITOR

It's mine.

The janitor's monocle GLINTS in his hands. As Calvin tucks his own away, his gaze returns to it, stunned.

JANITOR

Look, maybe it ain't my place. But I can't let you walk without lettin' you know... the only thing harder than what you're doin' is livin' with yourself after you quit on it.

CALVIN

...Quit on what?

JANITOR

Your dream.

Beat. Calvin absorbs those words like a blow to the chest.

JANITOR

The thing that drove you back.

CALVIN

How... How did you know?
(another beat)
About me?

JANITOR

Saw your phone, remember? Though, ain't like you scream Texas. Or '98.

A faint smile escapes Calvin's lips.

CALVIN

How about you? Texas suits you well.

JANITOR

That's cause I'm from here. 2034 here. The Swift presidency era.

CALVIN
The *Swift* presidency?

JANITOR
Abortion's legal again, but
friendship bracelets are mandatory.
Fair trade, I reckon.

Another smile on Calvin's lips. A bit wider this time.

CALVIN
Is this where I'm supposed to say
where I'm from?

JANITOR
Only if you want.

Calvin pauses, lingers on that thought.

JANITOR
Or you can ask somethin' else.

CALVIN
...Are we alone?

JANITOR
Alone?

CALVIN
People with monocles. Are there
others?

JANITOR
Rovers? Only every place and time.

CALVIN
Every place and time?? How does no
one know about them?

JANITOR
Well, I'm sure you saw some oddballs
in your time, but didn't
automatically think time traveler.
(Calvin considers; *he has*)
Like you, each one is driven by
somethin'. A dream. Like the one
you're about to quit.

Calvin lets that sink in. As he does, the janitor rolls his
monocle across his fingertips.

JANITOR
Futuristic machinery, they say.
Drifted back to us.

CALVIN

To us? Why *us*? Why you and me?

JANITOR

Well, maybe *us* are the only folks
insane enough to open the snail mail
most people toss.

CALVIN

You got yours in the mail too?

The janitor gives a sober nod. Beat.

JANITOR

Kid, I don't know why you're here.
Don't know if your plan fell apart,
if you even had one. But that don't
mean you should just give up. Might
be there's another way...

Calvin stares, torn. He's not ready to give up. But--

CALVIN

I can't risk not getting home. I
have a younger brother. CPS took
him... Wandering around here isn't
going to bring him home any faster.

JANITOR

Fair. But is quittin' on your dream
goin' to keep him home?

(beat)

Whatever the root cause is for your
troubles, it's not in your era.

CALVIN

How far back should I go, then?

JANITOR

...Pardon?

QUICK PAN TO: a PRINT OUT in Calvin's backpack side pocket.

CALVIN

I came to this era thinking I had to
stop just one thing with my mom, but
the root cause of her problems goes
back at least twenty years, to my
grandpa. At what point does it end?

JANITOR

To be clear, I wasn't tryin' to
point you *further* back. I was sayin'
to fight for your dream here.

CALVIN
I can't reach my dream here.

JANITOR
You sure about that?

CALVIN
Have you reached your dreams here?

JANITOR
...No.
(beat)
Quit tryin', to be honest. That's
why I know what I'm talkin' about.

CALVIN
But if *I* didn't quit, what do you
think?
(janitor winces at the idea)
If I help my grandpa keep his
business, or go back until I get rid
of that root cause, will it work?
Will it keep him home?

JANITOR
It might... But there's somethin'
else to consider.

CALVIN
What's that?

The janitor sees the hope in Calvin's eyes. The same fire
that once burned inside of him.

JANITOR
It's...

Suddenly - a distant ECHO. It amplifies, crystallizes...

IN REARVIEW MIRROR - POLICE CARS on the horizon. SIRENS.

Calvin and the janitor lock eyes. The janitor opens his
mouth, but nothing comes out...

CALVIN
You know, you should take your own
advice. It's good.

The janitor lights up at the comment, almost despite himself.
The two, kindred rovers exchange an honest smile.

Then, Calvin grabs his backpack, EXITS. Before we--

PAN BACK TO: the janitor, REGRET now flooding his face. His conscious-stricken gaze falls to--

A small, worn PHOTO, taped to the dashboard.

ON PHOTO - his younger self, standing in Times Square beneath a Tik Tok ad. At his side, a BOY. They smile together. An old photo from a happier, *more recent* time.

With a resigned expectancy, he grabs his monocle, raises it to his eye, peers down...

...to find that the photo is lifeless. Not *lucid*.

The janitor barely reacts. He's tried this before. It never works. And that fact fills him with even more numbing regret.

Then, a louder SIREN. The cops gaining.

The janitor eyes the window, reaches for the door handle, his red bracelet catching the twilight outside. Before--

CUT TO:

EXT. OFFICE PARK - NIGHT

The sidewalk outside a suburban OFFICE BUILDING. It's nighttime. A single lamppost shines muted light on--

Calvin. Standing totally alone, tense, eyes darting.

SECURITY GUARD (O.S.)

Can I help you?

Calvin jolts at the voice. He finds a SECURITY GUARD approaching from the adjacent, empty parking lot.

SECURITY GUARD

You looking for something?

CALVIN

You don't happen to know when the building opens, do you?

SECURITY GUARD

It opens to anyone with a badge. But most employees show up at 9.

CALVIN

Understood. Thanks.

The guard glares at Calvin. Calvin offers a polite nod in return, then HURRIES AWAY, not looking for trouble.

Once safely down the sidewalk, Calvin reaches for his phone. Opens up a rideshare app: "No Connection".

He puts the device back into his pocket, bewildered.

Then, in the distance, the sound of old brakes SCREECHING. A BUS. It idles at a stop at the far end of the parking lot.

CALVIN

Wait!

Calvin runs for the vehicle, and we--

INT. BUS - MOMENTS LATER

Just before doors shut, Calvin slips inside the coach. The bus lurches forward. Calvin catches his breath, surveys...

The vehicle is half-full, illuminated by dim, flickering interior lights. Its riders wear oversized t-shirts, acid-wash jeans. A fairly Gen Z aesthetic, if not for the NEON.

A dance-pop song blares from a boombox. Its owner, a young woman, clocks Calvin's stare. She leers. He drops his gaze, retreats into the nearest seat and clings to the cold window.

THROUGH THE BUS WINDOW - cars with boxy designs drive past. Lights flash above storefronts: "CASSETTES", "ROAD MAPS", "PAGERS", posters for "SUPERMAN II". Campaign posters, too. They read: "REAGAN BUSH | Too Great for Small Dreams".

Calvin can scarcely fathom his eyes. However close home once felt, it now feels like another world away. SUPER:

BAY AREA. 1982

He gulps. Then, something catches his eye outside. He PULLS the yellow cord. The bus SCREECHES to a stop, and we--

EXT. MAIN STREET, CALIFORNIA TOWN - MOMENTS LATER [1982]

The bus drives off, leaving Calvin at the stop, fixated on--

A MOVIE THEATER across the street. A palace of red brick and lights. Calvin lets out an exhale. At last, a taste of home.

INT. THEATER, CALIFORNIA - NIGHT [1982]

Calvin climbs the aisle of a theater before a showing, finds an isolated seat in the rear, sheds his backpack, plops down.

He opens the backpack and inspects inside for the Kinko's PACKING TUBE. He touches it, ensures it's still there. Satisfied, he zips up the bag and releases another exhale.

A few rows down, a WOMAN (30s) guides her SON (6) to their seats. The boy, wearing a rec soccer kit, bounces with joy. Calvin SMILES at the sight. He lets himself sink back, and--

LATER

The lights now dim, a machine gun's HAMMERING and a wounded soldier's CRIES boom from the theater's speakers. This is a real war movie, but Calvin is fast asleep.

Suddenly, from the speakers, an EXPLOSION! And we--

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. THEATER, CALIFORNIA - MORNING [1982]

Calvin wakes with a start, still in the theater seat.

THEATER ATTENDANT (O.S.)
You can't sleep here, sir.

Calvin looks around. The theater's empty. The lights are now on. An ATTENDANT stands over him.

THEATER ATTENDANT
I need to ask you to leave.

Calvin leaps to his feet, frenzied, looking for something.

CALVIN
My backpack? Where's my backpack??

The attendant points to a neighboring seat. Calvin's backpack rests on the seat, unmoved, untouched. Dazed, he grabs it.

And promptly hurries out of the theater.

EXT. MAIN STREET, CALIFORNIA TOWN - DAY [1982]

Calvin staggers outside into the morning light, finds his way to the bus stop, and parks himself on its bench, where--

A posted SIGN stares him in the face: "BUSES DELAYED DUE TO ROAD CONSTRUCTION". Calvin groans. Another hurdle.

Suddenly, a TAXI pulls up. Its DRIVER lowers his window.

CAB DRIVER
(thick Russian accent)
Want ride? Bus no good.

CALVIN
A ride? How much?

CAB DRIVER
Town: dollar fifty. Airport: two.

CALVIN
Wow, cheap.

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS [1982]

Calvin slides into the taxi's back seat, shuts its door.

The driver is a middle-aged man wearing sunglasses and a gray, short-sleeved hoodie. Hood up, Rocky-style.

CAB DRIVER
Where you go?

CALVIN
M&D Software Solutions.

CAB DRIVER
M what?

CALVIN
M and D?

The cabbie opens his glove compartment, removes a PHONE BOOK. He tosses the book back. It hits Calvin's lap with a THUD.

CAB DRIVER
Here.

CALVIN
What's this?

CAB DRIVER
Phone book.

CALVIN
(skeptical)
Phone *what*...?

Calvin opens the directory. Finds a list of people and businesses, phone numbers, ADDRESSES.

CALVIN
Hey. This thing's pretty good.

He keeps flipping, finds the "M" names, but no M&D.

CALVIN
The address is not in here.

CAB DRIVER
Not in phone book?

CALVIN
It's in one of those office parks.
(off driver's confusion)
Big building. Corporations. Suits?

CAB DRIVER
Businessmen?

CALVIN
Yes! Businessmen.

CAB DRIVER
No businessmen. Saturday.

CALVIN
It's the weekend?

Calvin sighs. He can't catch a break.

CAB DRIVER
You know, when Igor wants business,
Igor goes to house. No secretary. No
bullshit. Igor makes deal at house.

CALVIN
House? You think I should go to my
grandpa's house?
(cabbie nods with a grunt)
But I don't know where he lives...

The cab driver points over his shoulder at Calvin's lap.

CALVIN
Right. The damn phone book.

Again, Calvin preferred not having a choice. He starts
flipping through the book for his grandpa's address, and...

The LIGHT LAUGHTER of children sends us to--

EXT. MARV'S HOUSE - DAY [1982]

A middle-class neighborhood. Small, yet cozy ranch homes,
packed tightly together, including--

One quiet property. Unlike the others, no children on its yard, no cars in its driveway.

The taxi pulls up, parks. Calvin exits. As it SPEEDS OFF behind him, Calvin stares at his grandpa's lifeless home.

The house is simple. One story, beige stucco siding, single-car garage. It's also unkept. Unlike the neighboring homes, the grass is overgrown, the hedges too.

Calvin cranes his head towards a window. No glimmer of light inside. No sign of life. He sways, unsettled.

NEIGHBOR (O.S.)

Hello?

Calvin flinches.

NEIGHBOR

Are you looking for someone?

On the neighboring lawn, a WOMAN with a loud dress, fake smile, permed hair, and nosy ears. The local gossip queen.

NEIGHBOR

Or are you lost? The skate park is two towns over...

CALVIN

Uh, Marv. Your neighbor? Do you know if he's home?

NEIGHBOR

Marv? Marv Lee?

CALVIN

Yes. We're... old friends.

NEIGHBOR

Marv and his family are gone.

CALVIN

...What?

NEIGHBOR

They moved back to Texas last week.

Beat. Is this woman being serious?

NEIGHBOR

Packed up and left, right after he quit his business.

CALVIN

He quit?

(the neighbor nods)

It wasn't stolen from him?

NEIGHBOR

Stolen? No, no. Marv went back to take after his ill sister...

(beat, Calvin processes)

I'm so sorry an old friend kept you in the dark like that. Marv was a bit prideful about the move as I'm sure you can imagine. They only gave their new number to their *closest* friends. Happy to put in a word?

CALVIN

Wait. You said his sister is sick?

NEIGHBOR

Oh, *that* information too? Shame... Yes. Sick her whole life. Coughing, hysteria. Just awful, terrible.

CALVIN

Do you know why?

NEIGHBOR

Marv said his mother smoked during the pregnancy. Such a nasty habit.

ANGLE ON: a pack of cigarettes in the chest pocket of the neighbor's blouse. Nasty, indeed.

CALVIN

Say, you don't happen to know how old Marv's sister is, do you?

The neighbor hesitates. That's an odd question.

CALVIN

And where she was born?

A disconcerted stare on the neighbor's face, before we--

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - NIGHT [1982]

In between tall library stacks, Calvin peruses a shelf of large, coffee-table HARDCOVERS.

CALVIN

(sotto)

Here.

He extracts a thick volume from the shelf. Its title:
 "PHOTOGRAPHIC ALMANAC, 1953".

CALVIN
 This'll do.

And we--

EXT. MAIN STREET, MARV'S HOMETOWN - DAY

Calvin marches down another small-town main street. However, unlike his hometown's or Amy's, this one is BUSTLING.

The street is packed with PEDESTRIANS. Men in HIGH-WAISTED TROUSERS, women in SHIRTWAIST DRESSES. They windowshop MOM-AND-POP STORES, drive BIG, GLOSSY SEDANS with tailfins.

This is post-war, postcard America. A place full of small towns. An era, unlike Calvin's, when they weren't forgotten.

MISSOURI, 1953

Calvin is still wearing his 21st-century t-shirt and shorts, unbothered by the stares. They're familiar now.

Besides, he's on a mission. A stack of FLYERS under his arm.

Suddenly, he HALTS. Something catches his nose...

CIGARETTE SMOKE. It wafts out from the window of a "DINER". Calvin zeroes in on this retro luncheonette. *Bingo*.

INT. DINER - DAY [1953]

Calvin enters the diner. Black-and-white floor tiles. Neon lights on the walls, ceilings. Red booths.

He approaches the hostess stand, manned by a WAITRESS (40s).

CALVIN
 Table for one? Smoking section.

WAITRESS
 Smoking section?

Calvin looks around. The whole diner is a smoking section.

CALVIN
 Right. Can you sit me over there?
 I'm expecting someone.

Calvin points towards a WINDOW.

WAITRESS
Yeah, sure...

The waitress grabs a menu, leads Calvin towards the window.

LATER

Calvin is seated at a table by the window, sipping orange juice, eyes darting between the open booth facing him, and--

THROUGH THE WINDOW - a FLYER hung on the streetlight outside. It reads: "SMOKING = BIRTH DEFECTS!"

Just then, the waitress approaches, ushering a YOUNG FAMILY. A man, pushing a baby stroller. A woman, PREGNANT.

WAITRESS
The usual, Mr. Lee?

The waitress sets two menus on the open booth. The husband, JAMES LEE, nods as he helps his expectant wife, BETTY, sit.

WAITRESS
Okay, be out in a jiff.
(to stroller, cutesy)
And I'll get some sweet porridge for
you, chunky cheeks.

She makes a goofy face. The BABY in the stroller giggles.

As the waitress departs, Calvin peeks above his juice.

Betty bites her nails. James taps his fingers on his menu. A shared, uncanny restlessness, not unlike Calvin's, until--

BETTY
C'mon, James. I said not near me.

Calvin sits up, sees James reaching into his pocket.

JAMES
Betty, look around you. You think I
make a difference?

Calvin watches as his great-grandfather, James, not his great-grandmother, Betty, unpockets a pack of CIGARETTES.

BETTY
Don't you see?

She points at the window towards Calvin's flyer.

BETTY
It's bad for me.

JAMES
(extracts a smoke)
Marvin turned out fine.

QUICK PAN TO:

CALVIN
(sotto)
He's smoking...?

BACK TO:

James lights up, takes a drag. Betty scowls.

BETTY
You know damn well we can't afford
insurance, James. If this one has
any problems, we'd have to move back
in with Pa. No more touring.

JAMES
(carelessly exhales smoke)
Betty...

BETTY
I'm serious.

JAMES
Yeah, and I'm serious too. Unlike
you, I didn't have Ma's pecan pie to
settle me down when things got tough
over in *Bastogne*.

James takes another drag. Betty groans. Meanwhile--

CALVIN
Are you kidding me?

James, Betty, and other patrons pause, turn towards Calvin.
He's standing, arms thrown up, nothing sotto in his voice.

CALVIN
You know what, screw this.

Calvin SLAPS cash down on the booth, MARCHES toward the exit.
Annoyed to have yet another plan derailed by the unexpected.

CALVIN
I'll keep going if I have to.

The whole restaurant watches in silence, as--

EXT. MAIN STREET, MARV'S HOMETOWN - CONTINUOUS [1953]

Calvin SLAMS the diner door shut behind him.

He storms off down the street. A few storefronts along, he spots a YOUNG HIPPIE in a 1960's flower-power jumpsuit. She hangs up flyers of her own. "End Gun Violence in America!"

CALVIN

Hah. Good luck with that.

The hippy side-eyes Calvin as he blows past her. Meanwhile--

INT. DINER - SAME TIME [1953]

Back in the diner, the front door creaks open. A MAN IN A BASEBALL CAP steps in, furtive eyes sweeping the room. He lifts his gaze just enough to reveal...

It's the JANITOR. He's searching for Calvin, regret still heavy on his face... And we--

EXT. ARMY RECRUITING CENTER - DAY [1942]

A line of YOUNG MEN outside a brick building in suburban--

NEW JERSEY, 1942

Fresh-faced and barely legal, they're all spiffed up. Collared shirts tucked into pleated pants, slicked back hair. No talk, as if they're about to interview for a job.

But, this isn't any job. They stare at a BANNER plastered on the building's exterior. A picture of UNCLE SAM under the words "I WANT YOU" and above the words "AVENGE PEARL HARBOR!"

As the boys face the banner, another young man steps into the frame, walking past the line with gusto--

CALVIN

Private Lee? Is there a Lee here?

Calvin. A crumpled GARRISON CAP on his head, SCOWLING.

CALVIN

Private Lee? Lee?

One of the young men in line raises his hand, timid.

JAMES

Uh, I'm Lee, sir.

Calvin sizes the boy up, a young James Lee (18), terrified. But so are all the boys. To them, Calvin is a drill sergeant.

CALVIN
Come with me, Lee.

Calvin walks towards an alley flanking the center. James dithers but ultimately follows. The other boys watch in fear.

CALVIN
In there.

Calvin sharply waves James into the alley.

As young James nervously shuffles past him, Calvin's mien abruptly CHANGES. From officer to objector, he grimaces.

CALVIN
(sotto)
I'm so sorry, great-grandpa.

Then, Calvin grabs a BASEBALL BAT off the ground, reassumes his drill-sergeant persona, and disappears into the alley...

JAMES (O.S.)
Sir, why do you have a baseball bat?
...Sir?!

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE, ARMY RECRUITING CENTER - DAY [1942]

A door FLIES OPEN.

James enters a RECRUITMENT OFFICE, BANDAGE over his eye, BRUISE on his lip. He looks like he's already seen battle.

Sitting behind a desk, the center's COMMANDING OFFICER.

COMMANDING OFFICER
Sit down, James.

James shuts the door, hobbles to the desk, sits.

COMMANDING OFFICER
I spoke with your father.

JAMES
Sir, I'll do anything.

COMMANDING OFFICER
James, a medical waiver isn't something to be ashamed of, son.
(MORE)

COMMANDING OFFICER (CONT'D)
 You can help me out with the effort
 here, at the office.

JAMES
 I want to help over *there*--
 (off CO's pique)
 --sir. It's just... I can't stand by
 while the Krauts round up my
 mother's kind. There must be
 something I can do. A medic?
 (CO shakes his head)
 A translator? I'll start studying
 German now.

The CO sees there's no reasoning with this determined kid.
 Despite Calvin beating him down, he still wants to fight.

COMMANDING OFFICER
 Tell me, you need that eye of yours
 to keep playing music?

JAMES
 The sax, sir? No, I can still play.

COMMANDING OFFICER
 Well, they're looking for musicians
 to join the Army Band in North
 Africa. Help cheer up the boys.
 (James perks up)
 You'd double as support staff on
 base. Can't promise you'd see any
 action but you'd certainly be a lot
 closer to Berlin. What do you say?

JAMES
 Oh, sir, I'd like that. I'd like
 that very much.

COMMANDING OFFICER
 Good. I'll put in a call tomorrow.

James and the CO share a smile. Meanwhile--

EXT. ARMY RECRUITING CENTER - SAME TIME [1942]

Outside the window, Calvin watches the scene unfold.
 Frustration boiling over, he SPIKES the bat to the ground!

CALVIN
 You got to be kidding me!

Calvin doesn't sulk long. He MARCHES off, determined to
 continue his ancestral quest...

Until something across the road makes him pause. A BOY (6) with his mom, joyfully waving an action figure in the wind.

Calvin freezes. Despite it being set beneath the calm of this tree-lined street, this reminder of what he's left behind momentarily knocks him off track... Before we--

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET, SMALL TOWN - DAY

Another small town, another street. Tree-lined, but more urban. Harsher. Old buildings lean over the planted maples.

Then, out of nothing, CALVIN APPEARS. He surveys, orients...

This place is *different*. The weather is hostile. Dark skies, barren trees with icicles dangling from branches. Moreover--

VICTORIAN. DIRT streets, not asphalt. HORSES tied to hitching posts, not cars parked. HALF-TIMBERED buildings, not brick. And signs that are written in GERMAN, not English.

BRAUNAU AM INN, AUSTRIA-HUNGARY, 1889

Everything is VACANT, quiet... As Calvin surveys, he shivers, from the cold, the task ahead.

INT. SALZBURGER VORSTADT 15 - DAY [1889]

A door to a building's vestibule CREAKS as Calvin opens it.

CALVIN

Hello?

Calvin stands outside, peering into this shadowy edifice.

CALVIN

Alois?

No answer. He enters the lobby, shuts the door behind him.

From this narrow entryway, crooked stairs rise into darkness. The fog from Calvin's breath is visible against the shadows.

Calvin gazes up at the stairs. One thing left to change...

Then, he starts CLIMBING... Eyes, ears peeled, he reaches a small landing. Turns, looks up to find--

LIGHT. Orange and red hues dancing on the walls above. Menacing, yet just the sight he's seeking. He continues...

SECOND-FLOOR LANDING

And emerges onto the SECOND FLOOR. A single long hall, doors flanking, each shut, except ONE. *The one emanating light.*

That's not the only thing pouring out of this open unit...

Sound emanates as well, the echo of MUFFLED SOBS.

CALVIN

Alois?

At the door, Calvin stops, peeks--

ALOIS' APARTMENT

A simple unit. Persian rug. Small, lit fireplace, emitting those amber hues. A few belongings littered, including a Star of David pendant, which twinkles by the fire's glow, and--

Beside the fire, a MAN. Kneeling, head in his hands, *weeping.*

He's not the only person in this flat. A SURFER DUDE, long-haired, wearing a Hawaiian shirt, paces back and forth.

CALVIN

Hello?

This Hawaiian shirt-wearing surfer bro stops pacing. The weeping man keeps his head in his hands, but stops crying.

CALVIN

Are... Are you...?

SURFER DUDE

Bruh. *Another one?* He's in there...

The surfer dude points towards a BEDROOM DOOR, ajar. Calvin eyes the door. As for what lies inside, *he knows.*

CALVIN

Is he still...?

SURFER DUDE

Yeah, listen.

In their silence, the coos of a BABY sound from the bedroom.

SURFER DUDE

In a crib. Rollin' around. Vibin'.

CALVIN
And you came to also...?

SURFER DUDE
Kill him? Yeah, dude! Same with
mister weepy over there.

The kneeling, weeping man sniffles, gaze low.

CALVIN
But you haven't?

SURFER DUDE
Seemed like a chill idea, but then I
saw he's, like, a baby, you know?

CALVIN
A murderous baby.

SURFER DUDE
Yeah, but with pillowy cheeks. All
happy and cheesin'.

CALVIN
...How were you going to do it?

The surfer dude gestures down at the rug. A GUN lies on its
pile, a Victorian-era FLINTLOCK PISTOL.

SURFER DUDE
You can have it.

CALVIN
(stares at gun, considers)
Okay. Yeah... Yeah, I can do it.

SURFER DUDE
Really?
(beat, Calvin meekly nods)
Well knock 'em dead in there, bruh.
Literally.

Despite his misgivings, Calvin leans down, picks up the gun.
He eyes the surfer dude. The surfer dude shrugs back.

Calvin approaches the bedroom, enters.

We stay in the living room, facing the door, listening in. A
baby's GIGGLE echoes out. It's undeniably adorable, and...

Calvin EXITS the bedroom, a broken stare.

CALVIN
You're right. He's just a baby.

SURFER DUDE
Doesn't he look so much less gnarly
without the 'stache?

CALVIN
Yeah, he doesn't look like Hitler at
all.

Calvin sets the gun down on the rug. Beat.

SURFER DUDE
So...

CALVIN
So... What brought you here?

SURFER DUDE
Oh, you know, no Holocaust, no bomb.
Would've been sick. You?

CALVIN
If I kill baby Hitler, my great-
grandpa never enlists in the war.

SURFER DUDE
And you save his life? Dude, that's
righteous.

CALVIN
No. Actually, it stops him from
picking up smoking in the army.
(surfer dude furrows brow)
Which means my great aunt is born
without disabilities. My grandpa
doesn't quit his business. And my
mom never starts drinking.

The surfer dude looks blank, as if Calvin spoke calculus.

CALVIN
You wouldn't get it.

SURFER DUDE
Right...

Another beat. The surfer dude raises his hand to scratch his
head, a TATTOO of a waterskiing turtle inked across his
forearm. Calvin spots the tattoo, moving with each scratch.

CALVIN
Wait.

Wheels suddenly SPINNING in Calvin's head, he hurries and
grabs the abandoned STAR OF DAVID PENDANT off the floor.

CALVIN
Is this yours?

The surfer dude shakes his head.

SURFER DUDE
Maybe a rover left it?

CALVIN
It's *exactly* what we need.

Calvin takes a pair of TONGS from the fireplace tool holder. He clasps the pendant with the tongs, and--

THRUSTS THE PENDANT INTO THE FIRE, heating up the metal.

SURFER DUDE
Bro, what'chu cooking?

Once the pendant GLOWS, Calvin withdraws it from the fire.

CALVIN
I'm dreaming big.

With that, Calvin BARGES into the baby's bedroom. A loud HISS, followed by--

WAILING! Harrowing, guttural SCREAMS from baby Hitler off-screen. Calvin exits the bedroom, drops the tongs, pendant.

CALVIN
It's done.

SURFER DUDE
(off the cries, aghast)
What'd you do to him, man?!

CALVIN
I tattooed him with the Star of David. Can't be the leader of the Nazi Party with that on your arm.

SURFER DUDE
You branded a baby...?

CALVIN
I branded *Hitler*. And, now, I'm going home.

SURFER DUDE
Home?

Calvin takes off his backpack, unzips its main pocket...

From his backpack, he removes the KINKO'S PACKING TUBE, the one with his enlarged photo of the movie theater from 2024.

CALVIN

Yes, home.

He opens the tube, removes the enlargement, lays it on the floor.

CALVIN

See you in the future.

With baby Hitler still WAILING off-screen, Calvin fetches the monocle from his pocket, brings it to his eye, LEAPS, and...

Lands on the enlargement. The floorboards beneath it GROAN.

CALVIN

What?

Calvin steps back, tries again, HOPS... lands. Monocle to his eye, he's *not* entering the image.

SURFER DUDE

Dude, uh, that's not gonna work.

Calvin steps back, tries again. JUMPS... lands.

CALVIN

What...?

He steps back again. But this time, he doesn't leap onto the image. Instead, he gazes down, monocle to his eye, and...

THROUGH THE MONOCLE - the image is STATIC, clouded green by the monocle's lens. Not lucid.

CALVIN

No...

Calvin RIPS the monocle from his eye. Squats and wipes the enlargement free of nonexistent dirt, the monocle's lens free of nonexistent dust. He brings the device to his eye again.

But, his demeanor does not improve. It worsens, turns pale.

SURFER DUDE

You know photos of the future don't work with the monocle, right?

Calvin turns, looks up at the surfer dude, unmoored, reeling.

CALVIN

What do you mean they don't work...?

SURFER DUDE

You don't know, bruh? You can't go
forward in time. Only back.

Calvin stares, shakes his head. *No. No, that can't be...*

Suddenly - the apartment door SWINGS BACK.

JANITOR

Oh, thank goodness.

In the doorway, THE JANITOR. He smiles, relieved to have
found his fellow rover. But then--

He spots the enlargement on the floor, the hollow-eyed,
speechless Calvin. He hears baby Hitler's wailing off-screen.
His gaze shifts to the surfer dude.

JANITOR

...He knows?

The surfer dude nods. The janitor's smile slips away. He
cautiously inches towards Calvin.

JANITOR

Look, I shoulda spoke up. I just...

(beat)

Truth is, every step you take back
in time, it shifts things... Twists
history just enough to make them
photos you got from 2024 obsolete.

(beat)

I didn't want you hurt again. I know
what you've been through. Your pain.

(softens)

If you'd just let me explain...

Silence hangs, aside from baby Hitler's cries. Calvin stares
the janitor down.

CALVIN

Save it.

Calvin grabs his enlargement, heads for the door.

JANITOR

Wait.

(beat)

Please, hear me out.

The janitor moves to follow, but Calvin wheels, POINTS.

CALVIN

NO. You stay away from me.

Calvin keeps walking away...

JANITOR

I knew your mom, *Calvin*.

FREEZE. Calvin halts, turns back. *What did the janitor say?*

SURFER DUDE

Woah, maybe I don't get it.

Even the weeping man wipes his eyes and lifts his gaze.

JANITOR

She was an old friend. I know what happened. I know who you are.

CALVIN

...You know who I am?

JANITOR

You work at a fast-food joint.
You're an artist, like her.

CALVIN

Have you been stalking me?

JANITOR

No! Well, not least since we crossed paths.

CALVIN

Did... Did you give me the monocle?
Put it in my mailbox?

JANITOR

God, no. No, I came back for my own family. To stop my son from...

(trails off)

When I went back, I quickly realized I was stuck. I settled into a new era, gave up on *my* dream. But, then, you showed up. You reminded me I can still help folks. I can still be like a father for someone...

(approaches Calvin)

I messed up. Said what I thought would make you happy. But you didn't need protective lies. No, you needed humility. I see that now, Calvin.

The janitor leans in, gauging Calvin's reaction... when--

CALVIN

Humility?

Beat.

CALVIN
Humility? From you? No, what I need
is to get home.

JANITOR
Home...?

Calvin's gaze is unyielding. To the janitor, it's heartbreaking. He, the surfer dude, and the weeping man all share a look. They've been there themselves.

CALVIN
I'll figure out a way.

JANITOR
Calvin...
(Calvin walks off)
Calvin, stop and look at me!

Calvin pauses, reluctantly peers back over his shoulder.

JANITOR
If you could make it home, what do
you even reckon you'd find?

The janitor lifts his wrist. Around it, bathed in firelight--

The RED BRACELET. As Calvin realizes what the band is, his jaw slowly drops. He turns to face the janitor, speechless.

JANITOR
I'm from *your* future, and I still
wear one. In *her* honor...

CALVIN
Where... Where did you get that?

JANITOR
Her online memorial.
(beat)
Calvin... alcohol, trauma? I don't
need to be a doctor to figure out
that, no matter the root cause, a
brain aneurysm *ain't* preventable.

A chill rips through the young rover. He shudders. Meanwhile, the surfer dude and weeping man lock eyes. *It's time to go.*

JANITOR
Home or not, maybe it was time to
think of other ways to live out your
dream. No need to harm any babies...
(MORE)

JANITOR (CONT'D)
 (eyes Hitler's bedroom)
 But maybe you can still fix things.
 Rewrite our old history. Paint the
 future. For Amy, Noah. From here.

CALVIN
 Here...? Here?? I could've done that
 in 1998! I could've lived long
 enough to see my brother, even from
 afar. But you... you didn't stop me.

JANITOR
 Hey, don't pass blame. I tried. Told
 you fight for your dream there.
 (Calvin fumes)
 I just wanted you happy.

CALVIN
 I don't know you!

Just then, the floorboards CREAK as the surfer dude leaps
 into a grainy, mid 19th-century print of a TROPICAL BEACH.
 The weeping man quickly follows suit into his own photo.

CALVIN
 Look, I'm sorry. I really am...

Tears well in Calvin's eyes, yet his voice hardens.

CALVIN
 But I'm not some puppet for *your*
 dream. I'm not your kid.

Calvin pauses, hangs on that thought. He looks into the
 janitor's eyes. *Could it be?*

But, the janitor shakes his head.

Just then - another CREAK. Calvin, the janitor turn to find--

A MAN IN THE DOORWAY. Shaved head, handlebar moustache, civil
 service uniform. This is ALOIS HITLER (50s) and there's two
 intruders in his home. His son, Adolf, WAILS in the bedroom.

ALOIS
Der Eindringling!

Alois unholsters his PISTOL. The janitor raises his hands.

JANITOR
 What a lovely place you got here,
 Mr. Hitler, sir.
 (to Calvin, softly)
 Get the other gun...

Alois steps forward, trains his pistol at the janitor...

JANITOR
Calvin, now!

Alois PULLS THE TRIGGER. But his gun JAMS.

As Alois works to fix it, Calvin DIVES for the surfer dude's abandoned pistol. He grabs it, stands, points it at Alois.

JANITOR
Do it, Calvin. Take the shot!

Calvin looks down at the weapon in his hand, torn. But he lacks time to think. Just as Alois finishes reloading--

Calvin pulls the trigger. BANG! Alois ducks. A scream. Yet...

It's the JANITOR who doubles over. Collapses. Howling.

Without delay, Calvin sprints for the surfer dude's print... He brings the monocle to his eye, LEAPS at the photo, and--

EXT. BEACH, TAHITI - DAY [1863]

Another BANG!

Calvin TUMBLES to a tropical beach amidst a crowd of people. Pacific islanders fishing, European missionaries selling God.

He clutches his left arm. It's BLEEDING... a bullet wound.

SURFER DUDE
Dude, you made it!

Holding a surfboard next to the shoreline, the surfer dude.

But he's not the only person staring at Calvin. The fishermen and missionaries too, staggered eyes, one of whom SCREAMS.

MISSIONARIES
Demon. / Witch. / Satan!

SURFER DUDE
Uh, dude, your arm is bleeding...
Everything chill?

Calvin doesn't answer. He SPRINTS OFF, towards a PIER, and--

EXT. MERCHANT SHIP - CONTINUOUS [1863]

Onto a trade vessel, past a crew of sailors, into the--

INT. BRIDGE, MERCHANT SHIP - CONTINUOUS [1863]

Command deck. He pauses, surveys. It's quiet, empty...

That is, save for the ship's CAPTAIN. This skipper's eyes flare. He quickly reaches up towards a wall and RINGS a bell.

Outside the bridge, CLAMOR, FOOTSTEPS. Calvin aims the gun at the captain, frantic, as if he plans to shoot his way out.

But he falters, lowers the gun and searches for another exit...

There. Hanging on the wall, a PRIMITIVE PHOTOGRAPH. The photo is so rough that it's difficult to even make out its subject matter. However, when Calvin raises the monocle to his eye...

The photo comes to life. LUCID.

As the captain's forces enter, Calvin brings the monocle to his eye, runs forward, DIVES at the photo, and--

EXT. GRASSLAND, PÉRIGORD, FRANCE - DAY [1839]

The clamor stops. Birds are chirping. A gentle breeze faintly rustles as it drifts across a GREEN MEADOW.

Calvin, in his 2020's attire, lies atop this meadow. He props himself up a little, lifts his gaze to find--

A PHOTOGRAPHER (50s), standing behind an antique, wooden camera setup, and STARING DOWN AT HIM, horrified.

PHOTOGRAPHER
AU SECOURS!

His call TEARS through the meadow.

In the distance, on a dirt road, a HORSE AND BUGGY halts. Its DRIVER exits the carriage to inspect the situation.

Calvin leaps to his feet. He scans the meadow, then--

He BOLTS, again, across the meadow and towards a FOREST. We watch him fade into the distance, before we...

PAN BACK TO: the photographer. With Calvin gone, the photographer curiously leans down to examine an item that fell out of Calvin's backpack.

The Taco Man action figure. The one Noah gifted Calvin.

He picks up the superhero doll, taps the button at its base.

The doll LIGHTS UP. And this 19th-century man's eyes GO WIDE, *as if he just saw God*. He RIPS OFF his cross pendant, and--

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - SAME TIME [1839]

Fueled by GALLOPING HORSES, the SHOUTS OF MEN, Calvin runs.

HORSE AND BUGGY DRIVER (O.S.)
Reviens! Reviens!

Calvin keeps running, as fast as he can, backpack bouncing off his back, forging deeper and deeper into the bush.

BEGIN RUNNING SEQUENCE

- He keeps pushing, navigating aerial roots and slippery rocks with quick legs, determined eyes, running for his life.
- Despite the galloping and shouts having ceased, Calvin wills himself forward, laboring up a wooded HILL.
- The hill has grown steeper, his step slowed, bloody arm limp. Yet, Calvin doesn't stop. Whatever he's running from might not be chasing him, but it's certainly tormenting him.
- With his backpack barely on his shoulders and his pace down to a half-jog, both RAIN and NIGHT start to fall.

BACK TO SCENE - NIGHT

The rain now pours. It blends with the sweat dripping down Calvin's harrowed face. Unsteady, he TRIPS on a root, FALLS.

He lays there. Still. Spent. Ready to rot into the earth.

Then, suddenly, a noise, a *rumble*. Before Calvin can react--

THE GROUND GIVES OUT BENEATH HIM! He plunges, COLLIDING with a rocky floor, ten feet below.

As he struggles to push himself off the ground, spitting out blood from his bruised lip, he glances around and realizes...

INT. CAVE - CONTINUOUS [1839]

He's fallen through a sinkhole, into a subterranean CAVE. An ancient void of limestone, formed by years of weathering.

Overhead, the rain slows. From the clouds, MOONLIGHT emerges. It shines down into the cave, over Calvin.

He dusts himself off, looks up at the cave wall, and...

Pause. He stares, dumbfounded by what the light illuminates--

CAVE PAINTINGS. Prehistoric illustrations of cattle and bison dash across the wall, setting the stone ablaze with color.

Calvin fetches his monocle, aims it, and...

*The cave art transforms into a window
to a bright, untouched world. LUCID.*

A laugh escapes Calvin's lips, nightmare yielding to dream.

He hesitates for a beat, then stands, legs start moving. Step by step, he advances, drawn towards the art, and...

INT. CAVE - DAY

...into the same cave, except 1) it's daytime, and 2) it's--

THOUSANDS OF YEARS BEFORE THE CAVITY WAS BURIED UNDERGROUND.

To his left, the cave descends, deep into the Earth's crust. To his right, SUNLIGHT. He steps towards it, squinting, and--

EXT. ENTRANCE, CAVE - CONTINUOUS

His jaw FALLS. Pan around to--

CALVIN'S POV - the entrance to the cave is on a CLIFFSIDE, above a verdant VALLEY. Waterfalls spill out of glaciers, from which rainbows rise and through which birds soar.

Calvin blinks again, but the valley remains. *It's beautiful.*

FRANCO-CANTABRIAN REGION, EUROPE, 30,000 BC

As he beholds this prehistoric sight, Calvin does not tap, sway, fidget. He does not run. For the first time, at rest.

INT. CAVE - DAY [30,000 BC]

Later that day, Calvin faces a cave wall. A blank canvas.

He takes off his backpack and retrieves the PAINTING SUPPLIES he packed: a palette, tubes of paint, and--

A PAINTBRUSH, the one with "AMY" etched into its handle. With it, he starts PAINTING the wall. Doing what he loves most.

DUSK

Fast forward to sunset, Calvin is working on the same MURAL.

We don't see what he's painting, just his laser focus as he applies meticulous strokes of color to the cave wall.

NEXT DAY

The next morning, Calvin paints as it THUNDERSTORMS outside.

NEXT DAY

The next, a sunrise silhouettes Calvin as he paints, SMILING.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. CAVE - DUSK [30,000 BC]

ONE WEEK LATER

Despite the dirt, stubble, and lack of nourishment on his now, haggard face, Calvin's SMILE endures.

He places the finishing touches on his mural, and...

Exhales. At last, we pull back to reveal that the mural is--

A GIANT PORTRAIT OF NOAH, seated inside Sombrero Express, shading in his coloring book with that distinct, upbeat look.

Calvin inspects the mural, warmth in his eyes. It may be only a picture, but seeing his brother moves him regardless.

He reaches into his pocket for his MONOCLE. Tense with anticipation, he brings the monocle to his eye, and...

A quick breath. A sober, defeated gulp.

THROUGH THE MONOCLE - the mural is not lucid.

Calvin lowers the device, stares emptily ahead. Maybe paintings of the future don't work. Maybe *his* don't work.

After a beat, Calvin glances over at his injured arm, his bullet wound wrapped in a mucus-crusted shirt. He decides to check the injury, peeling back the shirt to reveal...

A PUS-FILLED WOUND. *White excretion oozing from the gash.*

Calvin gasps, redresses the wound. Turns away, faces the valley. Serene as ever, yet he's no longer smiling... And--

INT. CAVE - DUSK [30,000 BC]

It's quiet, sunset. Paintings cover the cave's walls.
Meanwhile, lying wilted and feeble on the cave floor--

ONE WEEK LATER

--the painter, Calvin. He rests on a bed of clothes and sticks. Emaciated, feverish, head propped up, facing...

His mural. He may be millennia away but the sight of Noah still fills him with a sense of peace, of home.

CALVIN

(raspy)

I'm so, so sorry, Noah...

From the cave ceiling, a STALACTITE releases drops of water onto the mural.

CALVIN

But I know you'll be strong.
Stronger than me.

Calvin lets out another weak smile. As he does, the stalactite's droplets run down Noah's face and the mural GLINTS with a new, tragic, lifelike aura.

Then, Calvin's solace sinks into a WHEEZE, HACK. He catches his breath, forces another look at his baby brother...

A wistful stare, before his eyes finally flicker CLOSED.

FADE TO BLACK.

Nothing. Then--

From nothing, the sounds of RUSTLING, FOOTSTEPS, GRUNTS.

FADE IN:

POV - moving in and out of consciousness. For brief moments, we see a NIGHT SKY, TREES, the GLOW OF FIRE.

Then, the consciousness fades, visions peter out, and we--

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. HUT - NIGHT [30,000 BC]

A GASP!

Calvin's eyes open in a panic.

CALVIN'S POV - a shelter constructed of animal bones and hide. A small, pitted fire in its center, and--

A FEMALE NEANDERTHAL (20s). She's dressed in loincloth, scraping FUNGUS from a moldy pear onto a long, flat STONE.

CALVIN
(hoarse)
Hello?

Calvin lies on a mat of animal pelt. Head on a bale of dried grass. Body under a blanket of wool. Still gaunt, still pale.

CALVIN
Hello?

The Neanderthal lowers her pear, turns towards Calvin.

CALVIN
Who... Who are you?
(no answer)
And where am I?

The Neanderthal harshly GRUNTS, APPROACHES with the stone.

CALVIN
Wait. What are you doing?

The Neanderthal reaches Calvin. Towering over him, she raises the stone of fungus over his wound, the pus, *the black skin*.

CALVIN
No, please!

But he's helpless. She SCRAPES fungus onto his wound, and--

MORNING

Calvin WAKES UP. He's still on the mat, in the hut.

Then, he remembers... *the Neanderthal, the stone, the fungus*. Was it a dream? He quickly checks his arm to find--

The pus is GONE. His wound is starting to heal... By his bedside, a bloody, ablated METAL BALL. Is that the bullet?

Suddenly, the Neanderthal ENTERS. In one hand, she carries a stone with COOKED MEAT. In the other, a POUCH OF WATER.

Calvin watches as the Neanderthal walks over, sets the stone on the floor by his mat, holds out the pouch of water.

Calvin studies her, trying to discern what she wants. Then, he smells the meat. His mouth waters. *It smells good*.

Starved, he doesn't hold back. He lunges over, grabs the steak, DEVOURS it. It's delicious, satiating, until--

He GAGS, struggling to keep the fare down. The Neanderthal is prepared for this. She grabs a woven basket, puts it under his chin, as--

Calvin VOMITS into the basket.

The Neanderthal shakes her head, disappointed. She offers him the pouch of water again, as if to say: *drink this first*.

Calvin obeys. He takes the pouch, sips the water, and carefully swallows. The Neanderthal half-smiles. *Good job*.

Calvin smiles back. Maybe this cavewoman only wants to help.

NEXT DAY

Calvin wakes up again to an empty hut. There's already a pouch of water and a stone of meat by his bedside.

He checks his arm. It's healing. His face less gaunt, pale.

He drinks some water, eats some meat, slowly this time. Then, he surveys the space. There's something he wants to do.

Determination on his face, Calvin attempts to STAND. Both hands on the ground, he pushes and pushes, until--

He GETS ON HIS FEET.

But almost falls. Puts out his hands, stabilizes, and--

Starts WALKING. A proud, giddy chuckle escapes his lips, as he gingerly does a lap around the hut. Before we--

NEXT DAY

Calvin wakes up. Stretches. Drinks water. Eats meat. As he chews, we pan down to his arm... nearly healed.

This time, he effortlessly stands up, STROLLS around the hut, a proud smile on his face. We angle on this expression, and--

FADE TO:

EXT. NEANDERTHAL VILLAGE - DAY [30,000 BC]

The same smile on Calvin's face as he EXITS the hut, wearing his old Sombrero Express polo and looking like himself again.

He takes a deep breath of fresh air, looks around...

He's in the heart of a primitive settlement. Wide, tent-like structures across the flat of the valley below the cave.

In the distance, a DIRT CLEARING, the remains of a campfire smoldering. He marches off towards it.

Meanwhile, we stay in the village. Notice its *emptiness*, its *silence*... items scattered: clothes, SPEARS, AXES. And--

EXT. CLEARING, NEANDERTHAL VILLAGE - SAME TIME [30,000 BC]

Calvin enters the clearing. There, alone on a log, the FEMALE NEANDERTHAL sits. Calvin approaches.

CALVIN

Hello?

The Neanderthal ignores Calvin, fleshing a rabbit hide.

CALVIN

I know you can't understand me. I just wanted to say thank you.

Again, no acknowledgment. Calvin steps in front of her, BOWS.

CALVIN

Thank you. For saving my life.

The Neanderthal finally raises her gaze at Calvin, smiles. Calvin smiles back. He thinks they're sharing a moment.

Until, the Neanderthal points over Calvin's shoulder to--

FROM THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE CLEARING - an angry MOB of Neanderthals marching towards Calvin with spears!

Calvin looks back at the female Neanderthal, frightened. However, she points over his other shoulder, where--

FROM THE LEFT SIDE OF THE CLEARING - an obedient CULT of Neanderthals meekly approaches Calvin with their heads bowed.

Half, ambush. Half, worship. Both, for Calvin, who stares out at these factions, speechless... Until--

CALVIN

What the hell is going on??

As the two groups stand by, the Neanderthal rolls her eyes. She looks at Calvin, sighs, as if to say: *c'mon, think!*

Frustrated, she sets her rabbit hide on the ground. Points at each group. Then, points at Calvin. *They care about you.*

Next, she points to herself, then at the rabbit hide. *I care about skinning this.* With that, she returns to her hide.

Meanwhile, Calvin gazes at the two groups, who still have not moved, his intellect processing something fundamental.

CALVIN

Huh...

He plops down on the log beside the Neanderthal.

CALVIN

You know, I also thought I needed something else, someone else. To make my life better. To blame...

(eyes the factions)

Now, I'm not so sure. My dream belonged to me, but it didn't actually *involve* me.

The female Neanderthal looks at Calvin. Despite the language barrier, or lack thereof, she seems to understand.

Just then - a BOY (6) Neanderthal and a GIRL (4) Neanderthal arrive.

The girl offers the female Neanderthal a ROCK she's painted, hands covered in dark, natural paint. The boy, who holds the SACK OF PAINT, gazes up at the female, awaiting her reaction.

But, the female Neanderthal IGNORES. As she did with Calvin, she keeps fleshing her hide, dismissing her own children.

Calvin watches, surprised. For all her maternal instincts, this Neanderthal takes uninvolved nurturing to a new level.

And, it shows. Her children act out. The girl hits the rock on the female's leg. The boy tries to grab her rabbit hide. Meanwhile, Calvin studies the kids' PIGMENT-STAINED HANDS...

He has an idea. Off the ground, he grabs a STICK, a discarded piece of HIDE. Pokes the hide with the stick, and--

CALVIN

May I?

The boy, whom Calvin talks to, looks up at him, scared. But, Calvin returns the boy's uneasiness with a smile. *Please.*

The boy acquiesces. He hands the SACK OF PAINT to Calvin, who graciously accepts. Calvin dips his device into it, and--

PAINTS. On the log, with his device, the outline of a deer. As the picture comes together, the children gasp. *Woah.*

Once done, Calvin hands the paintbrush prototype to the boy.

CALVIN
Keep it. It's yours.
(the kids stare in awe)
Just don't stab anyone with it.

The kids squeal with delight, then huddle to play with their new toy. Meanwhile, Calvin checks the female for her reaction, proud of himself.

But again, the female continues to skin her hide, to ignore. Calvin sighs. Resignedly, he rises, departs back to the huts.

As Calvin walks away, the right faction HOWLS at him, raising its spears. The left faction PINES over him, genuflecting.

Both factions MOVE FORWARD, about to PURSUE, until--

The female Neanderthal finally STIRS. She THROWS OUT her hand, GROWLS at the factions. *Don't you dare follow him.*

The sects halt. Tensions settle. Calvin glances back, smiles. And we--

PAN DOWN TO: the log. Next to Calvin's deer, a REPLICA. One made by the girl. We stay on this simple drawing, before--

INT. HUT - MOMENTS LATER [30,000 BC]

Calvin enters the hut. He wears that familiar look of determination. No longer a nervous one, though.

He approaches a STONE ALCOVE, hollowed into the far wall. There, his backpack rests, waiting for him.

From it, he removes the PORTABLE PROJECTOR Abigail gave him. And, the second FILM STRIP. There's only one place to go. One place he can go. Wherever it leads, he's ready, and we--

CUT TO:

EXT. COLISEUM - DAY

Calvin stands facing a towering CORINTHIAN COLUMN.

The column is painted with the image of an ANCIENT CITY. Stone streets and pillared buildings atop rolling hills.

Calvin studies the column, disoriented.

BACK TO:

INT. HUT - DAY [30,000 BC]

Minutes earlier, inside of the Neanderthal hut, Calvin has blanketed the vents. It's dim. He turns on the projector, inserts the second film strip, lifts his gaze to find--

Cast onto a white animal pelt, THE PAINTING OF ANCIENT ROME. The image we last saw in 2024 on the movie theater screen...

EXT. COLISEUM - DAY

...and the same image painted on that Corinthian column, which towers over Calvin.

Off-screen, the din of a CROWD, accompanied by a faint *buzzing* sound. As Calvin studies the Corinthian column, that buzzing amplifies, and AMPLIFIES, until--

Suddenly, SOMETHING WHOOSHES RIGHT OVER CALVIN'S HEAD!

Calvin DUCKS. What was that? He turns, and...

Stares, frozen. Leading away from him, a wide-set COLONNADE of painted, Corinthian columns, including the one behind him. It funnels into a massive, packed, and neoclassical--

FUTURISTIC STADIUM. Superposed stories of glass. Transparent video screens as a roof. Biophilic lighting. Exposed steel. And hoverbikes WHOOSHING around it. This is not Ancient Rome. This is the FUTURE... or at least it looks like it.

There's something else. Something that makes Calvin's eyes go *wider*, jaw drop *further*...

Hovering above the stadium, like a cloud, a HOLOGRAM SIGN--

288°K | Oct. 11, 2023
STUMPVILLE COLISEUM

CALVIN
I'm... I'm home?

Suddenly, a nosy, humanoid robot STOPS beside Calvin. It shines a laser scanner on him, issues HOLOGRAM CREDENTIALS:

FIRST NAME: Calvin
AGE: 18
EDUCATION: Stumpville Prep Academy

Prep Academy? Calvin watches as this robot proceeds into the arena alongside other robots and humans in chrome jumpsuits.

The more Calvin stares, the more he can hardly believe his eyes. Neoclassical futurism. Robots. Holograms. All in *his* hometown. Then--

He sees it. Through the columns, on the VIDEO BOARDS, the reason he must've been given this strip of "Ancient Rome"...

ON VIDEO BOARD - a live feed of a POSH WOMAN (early-40s) in a LUXURY BOX. She faces away from the camera, so that we only see her red hair. A CHYRON reads: "HAPPY BIRTHDAY, AIMEE!"

CALVIN

Mom...?

INT. HUT - DAY [30,000 BC]

Minutes earlier, in the dark hut, Calvin lowers the monocle from his eye. He reaches into his backpack, removes--

The GREEN ENVELOPE, the one which delivered the monocle.

From it, Calvin extracts a LETTER we haven't yet seen, didn't know existed. He unfolds the note and silently reads--

ELDERLY MAN (V.O.)

(narrating)

Calvin, wherever your travels lead,
you can always enter these images,
whether they exist in your past...

INSERT CUT: the PHOTOSHOOT BACKDROP from Amy's yearbook.

ELDERLY MAN (V.O.)

Or your future...

INSERT CUT: the neoclassical, hologrammed Coliseum.

ELDERLY MAN (V.O.)

For these moments are universal.
While the future within them might
not be like the one you left, both
eras have the ingredients to get you
home. Yes, *home*. Confront what made
you go back in the first place,
remove any incentive to ever use the
monocle, erase your travels, and you
can get home, to *your* home, despite
what other rovers say. Not an easy
task, but not impossible. You just
have to face what you've avoided.

Calvin lowers the envelope, eyes the projection, stoic.

EXT. COLISEUM - DAY

The same stoic gaze on Calvin's face as he stares out at his mom from another timeline on the video board.

ELDERLY MAN (V.O.)

(continues)

You can't fix your life, Calvin, if you don't first change how you think, if you don't first own up to who you are. You can do that here. So, go. Take your life back. And I'll see you in Rome. *Our Rome.*

Just then, a HOLOGRAM flashes in front of Calvin--

KICKOFF IN 15 MINUTES

PLEASE GO TO YOUR SEATS

announcement presented by SOMBRERO XTREME

Urgency in Calvin's eyes, he looks towards the stadium, this ultramodern utopia... Deep breath, before we--

PULL BACK, away from Calvin, the colonnade, the coliseum.

CROWD (FROM SEATS)

commanders. commanders. Commanders.

Away from the holograms shimmering across the sky, the rivers of flying cars weaving through the clouds, and the spaceports glittering in the stratosphere. Super:

Stumpville, USA, 2023 AD
ALTERNATE TIMELINE

And we--

INT. CONCOURSE, COLISEUM - MOMENTS LATER [ALTERNATE TIMELINE]

CROWD (FROM SEATS)

Commanders. COMMANDERS. COMMANDERS!

Calvin hurries through a sleek concourse in the stadium, crowding through idling spectators, out onto--

PAVILION

An open-air deck, overlooking the arena.

On the athletic field below, American football players warm up. Above them, a SCOREBOARD. Its GAME CLOCK counts down:

14:01 ... 14:00 ... 13:59

When, suddenly--

TEENAGED GIRL (O.S.)
Calvin, you're here?

Calvin FREEZES. Grits his teeth.

TEENAGED GIRL (O.S.)
I didn't think you were coming!

He turns...

ABIGAIL
I thought you were at the hollies?

CALVIN
Abigail?

Yes, ABIGAIL. Alternate timeline-Abigail. Wearing a chrome romper and a big smile, she RUNS at Calvin and, before he can react--

She wraps her arms around him and KISSES HIM ON THE LIPS!

ABIGAIL [ALTERNATE-TIMELINE]
Babe, what are you doing here?

Abigail steps away. Calvin's cheeks are bright red.

ABIGAIL [ALT]
I thought you had plans.

CALVIN
You... You look amazing, Abigail.

She does look good here. Less skinhead, more self-assured.

ABIGAIL [ALT]
You look prehistoric.
(Calvin stops grinning)
You smell prehistoric too.

Calvin self-consciously gives his armpit a quick sniff.

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Why are you here? Aren't you
supposed to be at the hollies?

CALVIN
The hollies?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
With your dad?

CALVIN
My dad? You mean my brother?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Your brother? I mean the man married
to your mom.

CALVIN
My mom... yes! How do I get to her?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
...Get to her? Like spiritually?

CALVIN
Wait, she's already gone??

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Gone? Your mom works in Europe.
Teleports here on the weekends. What
are you saying right now?

Calvin pauses, trying to process what he's hearing.

ABIGAIL [ALT]
I mean you've always just called
them 'mom' and 'dad.' I didn't think
I needed to specify.

CALVIN
...Wait, I'm adopted?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Yes?-- Hold on...

Now, it is Abigail who steps back, REALIZING something...

ABIGAIL [ALT]
No... No, it can't be.

CALVIN
Can't be what?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
You're... You're the...
(hushed, leans in)
You're the rover.

Calvin freezes again.

ABIGAIL [ALT]
You're a traveler from a different
timeline. The chosen one!

CALVIN
...Chosen one?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
It explains the clothes, why you
don't remember anything.

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

ABIGAIL [ALT]
'The rover will ask questions, but
they will deny their identity.'

CALVIN
Listen, I'm not-- Look, I'm trying
to get to a suite. I'm meeting
someone there. A famous person? I
don't know where to go. I'm late...

Calvin checks the game clock:

12:01 ... 12:00 ... 11:59

ABIGAIL [ALT]
'The rover will come on their own
mission, blind to their role here.'
You're just as the theory predicts!

CALVIN
Theory? What theory?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Tacogate.

CALVIN
Tacogate?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Tacogate. The theory that a rover
will come from another timeline to
this timeline to save us from the
galaxyists in congress. The
lamestream media says it's a
conspiracy, but you prove it.

CALVIN
Tacogate? That's insane.

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Is it, Taco Man?

Abigail points at the collar of Calvin's Sombrero Express polo. It's adorned with TACO PRINTS. Calvin scoffs.

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Okay, you said you're looking for a famous person? In a suite? How about her?
(points behind Calvin)
Is she the mom you're looking for?

Calvin turns to find, displayed again on the video boards--

HIS MOM. The posh redhead in her suite, facing away. Chyron: "CELEBRITIES IN THE HOUSE!" The crowd CHEERS.

Meanwhile, Calvin turns back to Abigail, stunned, exhausted.

CALVIN
You know what, fine, yes, I'm a rover. Happy now?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Oh my Zeus. I knew it!

CALVIN
Listen, I know nothing about your weird theory. I just need help. Can you do that? Can you help me?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Yes.
(bows)
My lord.

CALVIN
Abigail. Please don't ever say that again.

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Sorry, my-- Calvin.

CALVIN
Tell me, what's she doing up there? And how'd you know she's my mom?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Aimee? She's the most famous artist alive.
(Calvin gasps)
Maybe the most famous *human* alive.
Of course she'd be the rover's mom.

CALVIN
Can she sing too?

Abigail stares blankly at him. The sarcasm doesn't land.

CALVIN
Oh, you see, in my timeline,
painters, at least modern ones,
aren't that well known.

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Here, painters are heroes. If early
humans hadn't discovered
paintbrushes when they did, we'd
still be living in the dark ages.

Calvin's eyes widen, realizing *his* role in that history.

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Any major mural or painting in the
last decade, Aimee's done it,
including the colonnade here.

CALVIN
Does she have kids?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Please. The media would make you
think she's the Virgin Molly. Part
of their agenda to convince us to
depopulate the planet.

CALVIN
So no...?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Well, there are rumors she had a
pregnancy scare when she was young.

CALVIN
And, let me guess, the rover from
your theory is the product of a--

CALVIN
Complicated past?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
Complicated past!

CALVIN
You haven't changed, Abigail.

Calvin and Abigail share a smile.

ABIGAIL [ALT]
So, Taco Man, what's your plan? How
can I help you drain the marsh?

CALVIN

I... I don't know. But I do know I
need to get to *her* in the next--
(checks scoreboard)
Ten minutes and seventeen seconds.

ABIGAIL [ALT]

What happens then?

CALVIN

She dies.

Abigail flinches.

ABIGAIL [ALT]

Like clinical death?
(Calvin nods)
How...?

CALVIN

Well, in my timeline, she isn't
famous. And this isn't football.
It's a minor league hockey game...

*FLASH TO: a BLACK-AND-WHITE SHOT of an old, second-rate arena
from 2020's America, Calvin's America, our America.*

CALVIN

Her sponsor, her AA sponsor, was
throwing her a birthday party. She
was six months sober, and had just
finished a commissioned mural on the
arena where the team played. Nothing
like this, but still cool.

*FLASH TO: the arena's brick façade, where a small mural of
Rome is painted, like the one on the columns here.*

CALVIN

Her sponsor asked me to come...

*FLASH TO: Calvin's Prius drives towards the arena. Calvin is
driving, Noah is in the back. Both smiling, laughing.*

CALVIN

But, I wasn't ready. It's hard to
forgive someone who keeps letting
you down...

FLASH TO: Calvin's Prius drives past the arena.

CALVIN

I did get her a gift, though.

FLASH TO: a wrapped PRESENT. It sits atop a folding chair inside the old municipal coliseum.

CALVIN

I asked her sponsor to give it to her at her party. But, before gifts were opened, during the anthem, she collapsed...

(beat)

Safe to say the whole experience ruined birthdays for me.

ABIGAIL [ALT]

The national anthem, you said?

Calvin nods. Hasty, Abigail points to the scoreboard:

9:01 ... 9:00 ... 8:59

CALVIN

How can I get up there?

ABIGAIL [ALT]

To the suite level? There's laser detection systems, auto stun guns in the walls, robotic attack dogs.

CALVIN

What is this? Fort Knox?

ABIGAIL [ALT]

There *is* something I could try.

Abigail looks up towards the luxury boxes and TAPS on her right temple, as if it's a smartphone. Her eyes GLITCH, open wide. Pupils scan left, right, up, down. Then, she BLINKS.

ABIGAIL [ALT]

That's it. A diversion...

She turns, points up at a METAL BOX near the stadium roof.

ABIGAIL [ALT]

If we hit the power supply box, you'd have just enough time to pass the firewalls and get to her.

CALVIN

Hit the power supply box?

ABIGAIL [ALT]

Fire your handgun at it.

Abigail gestures at Calvin's backpack, then at her eyes.

ABIGAIL [ALT]
 Smart contacts with x-ray vision.
 Say, are those tighty-whiteys?

Calvin blushes, covers his nether regions with his hands.

CALVIN
 Abigail, I can't make that shot.

ABIGAIL [ALT]
 No, but I can. It's just like the VR
 games I play. Small targets. Long
 ranges. Ancient weapons.

CALVIN
 Abigail, with all due respect,
 you're the exact person they say *not*
 to give a gun to.

ABIGAIL [ALT]
 You know, they never said the rover
 would be so sassy.
 (Calvin rolls his eyes)
 C'mon, Calvin, you said I could
 help. Let me help, please.

Her eyes reveal a desire to prove herself. Calvin sighs.

CALVIN
 You're right. You can.

Calvin takes off his backpack, unzips its main pocket, and
 slyly passes his flintlock PISTOL to Abigail. She beams.

CALVIN
 Put it away before someone sees.

Abigail tucks the gun into her jumpsuit.

As Calvin puts his backpack back on, he turns his gaze up to
 the suites, towards a speck of red hair. Doubt creeps in.

CALVIN
 I don't know... In my home, she'd
 have given anything for me to show
 up today. Here, she doesn't know who
 I am. How am I supposed to confront
 someone who doesn't know me?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
 You could do what you didn't do in
 your timeline.
 (Calvin eyes Abigail)
 Give her your gift.

CALVIN
My gift?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
You must have something.

CALVIN
But it's not her peace of mind I'm chasing. It's my own.

ABIGAIL [ALT]
You're right. It is. So *dream big*.

Calvin eyes Abigail. She knows him all too well. And we--

INT. CONCOURSE - MINUTES LATER [ALT]

Calvin hurries through the crowded concourse, alone.

CALVIN
Purple doors... Purple doors...

Behind him, on the scoreboard, the game clock counts down:

4:31 ... 4:30 ... 4:29

CALVIN
Aha! Purple doors.

Calvin approaches two doors of PURPLE TINTED GLASS set in the wall of the concourse. They automatically slide open, when--

MANAGER [ALT] (O.S.)
Hey! Don't move!

Calvin halts, turns to find--

A familiar face. It's his Sombrero Express manager... In this timeline, a SECURITY GUARD. He wears a form-fitting yellow uniform, smart glasses.

MANAGER [ALT]
Where do you think you're going?

CALVIN
Uh...
(he has a plan for this)
Actually, I'm glad I found you. Does that kid work for you?

Calvin points to another familiar face: JOSH. A junior guard here, he's posted by a gate to the seats, scrolling through a holographic SOCIAL MEDIA FEED above his wrist.

CALVIN
He's been on his pho-- watch for the
past five minutes!

Calvin waits for the manager's reaction, tense... Then--

RAGE begins to boil within the manager. He beelines for Josh.

MANAGER [ALT]
Hey! Turn that off!

Calvin grins. His lie worked. With the manager gone, Calvin
SLIPS INSIDE the purple doors, and--

HALLWAY, CONCOURSE LEVEL

They shut, leaving him alone in a hallway. He scans...

The walls and ceiling are dizzying, all ONE SCREEN flashing
Commanders highlights. Acrobatic catches, goal-line stands.
Ultramodern, yet disorienting. Calvin tries to focus, when--

There. An ELEVATOR at the end of the hall. Calvin runs for
it, but we stay put, listen as, back in the concourse--

MANAGER [ALT] (O.S.)
Wait... Where'd he go?

ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER

DING. The elevator, which Calvin is now riding, HALTS. He
staggers. The doors open to--

THE SUITE LEVEL. A marble hallway wrapping around the stadium
mezzanine. Picture windows overlooking the field. Pristine.

Calvin steps out of the lift...

HALLWAY, SUITE LEVEL

Until, a HATCH opens in the ceiling, revealing a STUN GUN.
The gun aims at Calvin. Quickly, he retreats back into the--

ELEVATOR

ZAP! The gun's wires shoot down, missing Calvin by an inch.

He stands frozen in the doorway, checks the scoreboard
through the panorama windows:

3:21 ... 3:20 ... 3:19

CALVIN
Where are you, Abigail...?

INT. PAVILION - DAY (FLASHBACK) [ALT]

FLASH TO: minutes prior, Calvin and Abigail on the pavilion.

CALVIN
You'll do it at three minutes?

ABIGAIL [ALT]
On the dot.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT) [ALT]

Suddenly - a HORN! The elevator doors PUSH against Calvin.

AUTOMATED VOICE
Please step away from the doors.

Calvin promptly digs his feet in, leans on the doors. HORN!

AUTOMATED VOICE
Elevator requested on concourse.
Please step away from the doors.

Holding the doors back, Calvin returns his gaze towards:

3:11 ... 3:10 ... 3:09

CALVIN
Come on, Abigail...

He watches the clock tick down, second-by-second, when--

A BARK! Calvin jolts. What was that? Another BARK! He turns.

At the hallway's end, the ROBOTIC ATTACK DOG. The one Abigail warned him of. It trains its red eyes on Calvin, BARKS.

CALVIN
No...

3:03 ... 3:02 ... 3:01

The dog SPRINTS at Calvin!

CALVIN
Abigail!

CROWD (FROM SEATS)
Commanders. Commanders! COMMANDERS!

AUTOMATED VOICE
Please step away from the doors.

HORN!

CALVIN
(ducks, shuts eyes)
Please, Abigail...

INSERT CUT: quiet. Muffled crowd noise. Abigail slides the PISTOL out from her jumpsuit. We swing behind her, stare over her shoulder, down the barrel... The pistol aimed up high, at the POWER SUPPLY BOX, as the CHAOS swells back...

CROWD (FROM SEATS)
COMMANDERS! COMMANDERS! COMMAN--

BANG! The lights go out. The scoreboard dies. The voice quiets. The crowd hushes. HVAC sputters to a stop. *Silence.*

Calvin trembles, crouched. After a beat, he opens his eyes...

To find the robotic attack dog, SUSPENDED MIDAIR, inches from his face, iron jaws open wide, red eyes powered off.

Calvin stares at the dog, dumbstruck. Then, he snorts out a LAUGH. Abigail did it! After a beat, he slides away, stands.

Sunlight shines indirectly into the stadium, casting mostly gray shadows into the hallway. Monochromatic, eerie.

HALLWAY, SUITE LEVEL

He steps out, looks through the windows. Fans shelter below seats. Eerily still, save for a few, hushed shrieks.

The hallway to the left of Calvin, however, is even quieter. It bends away from the stadium, into DARKNESS...

Calvin stares down it. Deep breath, and--

MOMENTS LATER

He creeps along the corridor. Footfalls SQUEAK on the floor. Traces of sunlight worm through small transom windows in the suite doors. Calvin approaches the first one, peeks inside.

CALVIN
Mom?

THROUGH TRANSOM WINDOW - a packed suite, wealthy fans crouching behind the minibar. But, no redheads, no Amy.

Calvin walks further, checks the next door.

CALVIN
Aimee?

She's not there. He checks the next one.

But, again, no Amy. Door-by-door, Calvin peeks inside each suite. His footsteps grow quicker, squeakier.

CALVIN

Aimee? Aimee, where are you?

He peeks through the last suite door, when suddenly--

The lights TURN BACK ON! The HVAC HUMS to a start. A collective EXHALE from the crowd as the power resumes.

Calvin scans, panicked. Where is she? Is he out of time?

Then, the *PATTERING* of metal. The robot dog, it's returned...

Calvin gasps, swings around, looks up, and--

AMY [ALT]

Well that was strange.

The patter of GOLD HEELS. They stop in front of Calvin.

AMY [ALT]

I don't know about you, but I got all turned around by the outage.

Calvin marvels at this WOMAN (40s) standing in front of him. Her face, framed by RED HAIR, we see for the first time.

AMY [ALT]

You know where the elevator is?

Behind the next-gen skincare, Amy has a gentle smile, eyes.

But, they don't inspire a response from Calvin. The sight of her is more paralyzing than a robot dog, a Neanderthal army, or baby Hitler.

AMY [ALT]

Do you speak Anglish?

No response. Anything Calvin planned to say, lost.

AMY [ALT]

The el-uh-vay-tor. Where. Is. It?

CALVIN

The... The elevator?
(Amy smiles, nods)
It's that way.

Calvin points in the direction of the elevator.

AMY [ALT]
Thank you.

And, with his response, Amy turns, WALKS AWAY. Calvin's long-awaited interaction with his mom is over. Just like that.

Quickly, he comes to his senses.

CALVIN
Wait!

Calvin hurries after Amy. She stops, turns back.

CALVIN
I... I think you dropped something.

As Calvin approaches her, he reaches over his shoulder, rifling through the side pocket of his backpack to fetch--

CALVIN
Here.

Cautious, Amy examines what Calvin offers. She GASPS.

AMY [ALT]
Where... Where did you get that?

CALVIN
I made it.

AMY [ALT]
You made it?

Amy accepts, then scrutinizes the utensil in her hands...

It's the "AMY" PAINTBRUSH, the one with her name engraved.

AMY [ALT]
I had one just like it as a kid...

Calvin doesn't respond. He watches his mother from another timeline trace her fingers along the engraved letters.

She looks up, studies the young man in front of her.

AMY [ALT]
Why are you giving this to me?

CALVIN
I... wanted to give it to someone special. An artist.

AMY [ALT]
An artist?

Amy stares at Calvin, something weighing on her.

AMY [ALT]
 Hate to let you down then.
 (offers the brush back)
 Haven't announced it yet, but I'm
 hanging up shop. Retiring. Today's
 my last outing. Was actually on my
 way out to prep the statement.

Amy extends the paintbrush for Calvin to take.

CALVIN
 Oh. No, please keep it. A memento.

Amy wistfully eyes the paintbrush in her hand, ruminates.

AMY [ALT]
 Well, if I may ask then, how do you
 think people will react?

CALVIN
 To what?

AMY [ALT]
 Me quitting.

CALVIN
 Honestly? I have no clue.

AMY [ALT]
 How are you reacting, then?
 Disappointed?

CALVIN
 No. Surprised, I guess.

AMY [ALT]
 You have to understand, I'm tired of
 all the fuss, the scrutiny.

CALVIN
 I get that. But can you not still
 paint for yourself?
 (beat)
 My mom used to say that, even if
 you're sad, it's impossible to hate
 art because you never set out--

CALVIN
 To paint anything ugly.

AMY [ALT]
 To paint anything ugly.

AMY [ALT]
 My dad would say the same thing.

CALVIN
Great minds.

AMY [ALT]
To tell you the truth, I haven't
thought about him in some time now.

CALVIN
Well, I'm sure the fans in those
seats would appreciate his message.

AMY [ALT]
You're right. They want a motivator,
not a quitter.

CALVIN
No. They need a humble person, not a
superhero.
(sotto)
At least that's all my brother ever
needed from me...

AMY [ALT]
Maybe I can still be that for them?

CALVIN
(looks up, forces smile)
I'm sure you *still* can.

Amy smiles back. She pockets the paintbrush, when suddenly--

ANNOUNCER (ON PA SYSTEM)
Ladies and gentlemen, we apologize
for the unexpected outage. Your
safety is critical to us. We've
reviewed the situation with law
enforcement who have confirmed we're
safe to proceed with today's event.

Off-screen, another crowd EXHALE. Meanwhile, Amy eyes Calvin.

AMY [ALT]
I'm grateful for your ear. Can I
return the favor somehow?

CALVIN
To me? I--

ANNOUNCER (ON PA SYSTEM)
Now, please, rise, as we honor the
United States of Erikson with the
singing of our national anthem.

Suddenly, PANIC flushes across Calvin's face.

CALVIN
I... I can't. I have to go.

AMY [ALT]
Go?

Calvin blows past Amy, towards the elevator.

CALVIN
I'm sorry.

AMY [ALT]
Wait!
(Calvin halts, looks back)
You sought out an artist for this.
Why is my name on it?

CALVIN
Aimee, you have returned the favor.

He continues down the hall, then looks back again.

CALVIN
And I do think about my mom often.

With that, Calvin departs for good, towards the elevator.

We stay with Amy. She watches her son from another timeline hurry off. A small twinkle of perception in her eyes. Is it hope? Realization...? Maybe it's just mindfulness. And we--

CUT TO:

Calvin. He propels himself down the hallway, tears welling up. But they don't stop him from smiling-- no, BEAMING too.

MANAGER [ALT] (O.S.)
There he is!

Calvin looks up. Across the hallway, next to the elevator--

The MANAGER, POLICE OFFICERS, and the ROBOTIC DOG. Calvin doesn't run. He simply raises his hands, as--

LUXURY BOX

At the same time, Amy reenters her suite. She walks through the lesser celebrities and socialites who occupy her box.

AMY [ALT]
Y'all were right. Just cancel the
press conference.

The B-listers softly gasp, share relieved glances.

Amy, meanwhile, approaches a high-top overlooking the field. She sets down the paintbrush on an EMPTY CHAIR below, and--

HALLWAY, SUITE LEVEL

OFFICER #1
Don't move!

Calvin keeps still, hands raised, as the cops approach.

OFFICERS
Stay where you are. / Order!

A tranquil look on Calvin's face, one of closure, as--

LUXURY BOX

ANTHEM SINGER (ON PA SYSTEM)
O, say, can you see...

Amy watches the anthem, an elbow resting on the high-top.

ANTHEM SINGER (ON PA SYSTEM)
...by the moon's pearly light.

Her other arm dangles over the empty chair. Angle on it, as--

HALLWAY, SUITE LEVEL

In defiance of the police officers, Calvin TURNS AROUND.

OFFICERS
Order! / I said don't move!

The cops chase, but Calvin doesn't run, eyes towards--

LUXURY BOX

ANTHEM SINGER (ON PA SYSTEM)
And the missile's white flare!

Where, suddenly, Amy's dangling arm *FALLS OUT OF FRAME*. Beat. Thud.

HALLWAY, SUITE LEVEL

OFFICERS
Order! / Order!

Calvin stares forward, as if he can see through the walls...

OFFICERS
ORDER!

...to his mom, one last time. The officers LUNGE, and we--

SMASH CUT TO:

INT./EXT. DRIVE THRU WINDOW, SOMBRERO EXPRESS - NIGHT

A night sky, seen through a fast-food DRIVE THRU WINDOW. Two elbows rest on its sill. Light chatter, music off-screen.

MANAGER (O.S.)

Order?

Above the elbows, a neon green, branded POLO SHIRT drapes.

MANAGER (O.S.)

Order...?

Below one elbow, around a wrist, a red silicone bracelet.

MANAGER (O.S.)

Calvin, the order!

We abruptly pull back to: the SOMBRERO EXPRESS MANAGER. He wears his own branded polo inside the restaurant's KITCHEN, scowling at...

Calvin. His call stirs the daydreaming teen, who leans off the drive thru window, rubs his eyes free of the food-art fantasies he was lost in, lowers his headset mic, and--

CALVIN

Hello, welcome to Sombrero Express.
What can I get for you today?

INT. RESTAURANT, SOMBRERO EXPRESS - NIGHT

SNAP. Calvin lowers the flip-up countertop, steps out of the fast-food kitchen into the restaurant. Closed for the night.

He discards his paper sombrero, grabs TWO TRAYS, and walks to the BOOTH by the soda fountain. There, he sits, alone, when--

The CREAK of a door. *Little footsteps*. Calvin turns...

CALVIN

Noah-constrictor, there you are.

NOAH, Calvin's little brother, strolls from the restroom with wet hands and that big smile of his.

CALVIN

I got the food.

The tray opposite Calvin is topped with FOOD ART: Amy, in burrito form, as an ARTIST. Sour cream spread into a flowy dress, black beans as a beret. Noah approaches, examines.

NOAH
Is Mommy an artist?

CALVIN
Yeah. A great one.

Calvin watches as Noah sits, DIGS IN. Despite Noah's delight, Calvin's demeanor clouds over. Something troubles him...

CALVIN
Hey, Noah, remember what tonight means?
(Noah keeps devouring)
No more night shifts for *six* months.
Pretty cool, right?

Calvin smiles, contrived. But Noah only returns a nod, queso dripping from his mouth. He's unbothered by Calvin's adult problems.

Beat. Calvin sighs. He grabs his own burrito, takes a bite--

GAGS, spits the food into a napkin. Melancholy descends upon his face, the life left in his eyes fading.

We pan around the restaurant. No robots, no holograms, no one appearing out of thin air. Just a fast-food joint. Under the booth, Calvin's legs start to TAP. And...

It's official. Calvin did it. He faced his trauma, erased his travels, and made it back to 2024, *his* 2024. But, at the same time, all he saw, learned... *it's as if it never happened.*

As Calvin attempts another sad bite of his burrito, we slowly PAN OUT, away from Calvin, from the booth...

EXT. SOMBRERO EXPRESS - CONTINUOUS

...and away from the fast-food joint at the end of the EMPTY STRIP-MALL PARKING LOT. The LED sombrero atop the roof short circuits, flickering and flickering, until--

ZAP. Lights off. Beat. Then, OVER BLACK:

Stumpville, USA, 2024 AD
Calvin's Timeline

EXT. CALVIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Later that night, on his doorstep, Calvin unlocks his home, lets Noah in. He stays outside, pushes the door forward...

The YELLOW COLLECTION ENVELOPE awaits him. He glares at it, fetches his pay stub from his pocket, JAMS it in, and--

INT. FIRST FLOOR, CALVIN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Enters his home, locks the door behind him.

On the old couch in the adjoining den, the MAIL he'd spurned earlier that day rests. Reluctantly, he grabs it, heads upstairs...

ATTIC - MOMENTS LATER

Calvin climbs into the attic. His refuge, his art studio.

He pulls the ladder shut behind him, approaches his artist's stool and, once seated, begins going through the mail.

Loan offers, invoices, junk upon bills upon junk, and--

A BLUE ENVELOPE. No logos. Just an American flag stamp and two handwritten addresses. Return city: "DALLAS, TX". Huh?

Calvin studies the envelope. A personal letter? That's weird. He drops his other mail to the floor, slips his finger into the blue envelope's crease, breaks the seal, and--

PAN DOWN TO: unbeknownst to Calvin, a PHOTO falls out of the blue envelope. It lands next to the stack of mail he dropped, a separate GREEN ENVELOPE peeking out from the pile, as--

Calvin draws a NOTE from the blue envelope. Unfolds, reads:

CALVIN
'Calvin, before you throw this away,
I just wanted to tell you--'
(stops, peeking ahead)
'I just wanted to tell you: your
paintings--'

He stops again. The more he peeks, the more his jaw FALLS...

CALVIN
'Your paintings...'

CLOSE ON LETTER - Calvin's now, TREMBLING finger sits under the first, carefully handwritten line, as we transition to--

JANITOR (V.O.)

(narrating)

I just wanted to tell ya, your paintings are *beautiful*. I know cause your mom showed 'em to me.

Calvin gulps. He wasn't ready for a handcrafted message. He continues, silent.

JANITOR (V.O.)

Your mom was good with a brush, too. However, I'm not so sure she painted a good picture of me. Can't blame her to be fair. As I'm sure she told you, I never wanted little ones back then.

FLASH TO: Dillon Walker and Amy as teenagers, holding hands as they stroll down the hallway of their high school.

JANITOR (V.O.)

In fact, I must say that I was a little relieved when our pregnancy didn't pan out. Unlike her, I could move on. Unlike her, I didn't have the scars to show for it. Wish I appreciated that at the time.

FLASH TO: Dillon, in a college frat shirt, watching a moving van pull out of his driveway, an immature, aloof gaze.

JANITOR (V.O.)

Years later, after your mom moved north, fate had its turn on me. My boy, Gabe - the best kid a father could ever want - lost his battle with leukemia... The scars it left on my wife and I still bleed.

FLASH TO: an older Dillon (30s), sitting alone in a hospital waiting room, head in his hands, keening.

JANITOR (V.O.)

The reality of our situation sent me to a dark place. Until, one day, I finally sought out some help... I reached out to your mom.

FLASH TO: Amy, phone to her ear, in the same attic as Calvin, surrounded by her art, talking to Dillon, smiling, as we--

DISSOLVE TO: Calvin, tracing the note's text with his finger.

JANITOR (V.O.)

Luckily, she accepted my apology. We reconnected, catching up from time to time. She had her demons, but she cared about you boys deeply. When I heard she passed, I knew I had to reach out. Your mom got me back up on my feet. I owed it to her to do the same for you, which brings me to why I'm writing this...

(Calvin leans in)

My wife runs an after-school program at our home. It's nothing big, but the little ones love her. My offer? If you ever relocated to Dallas, we'd love to give a spot in the program to Noah. For free.

(Calvin's breath catches)

Perhaps you could use the extra time and cash to take classes at the art school in town. It'd be damn foolish to abandon *that* dream.

Calvin's mind, heart races. He continues--

JANITOR (V.O.)

Look, I know how it seems, the taller the dream, the heavier the cost, the longer the fall. But big dreams are only doomed if they ain't true to you. So, go. Find where your dreams and reality complement each other, and shoot for the damn stars. Maybe that's in Dallas?

Calvin refolds the letter, sets it on his lap, as we finish--

JANITOR (V.O.)

Take your time. And, if you'd like to talk, my number is below.
Sincerely, Dillon Walker.

Calvin sits on the stool in silence. No tapping, no fidgeting. Just a big, tearful smile on his face.

PAN BACK DOWN TO: the fallen PHOTO on the floor. It's a class portrait of the AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM. Two adults flank the class. A woman, DILLON'S WIFE, and DILLON (40s)...

An unassuming, gentle man. And none other than a younger version of: THE JANITOR.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. BOX OFFICE, STUMPTVILLE CINEMAS - DAY

The cinema box office on Stumptville's main street. Abigail is wiping clean her collection of toy soldiers, still struggling to reach into the dusty crevice of that one figurine.

CALVIN (O.S.)

Abigail?

Abigail looks up, spots Calvin approaching from the street.

ABIGAIL

Comrade Calvin! Happy birthday.

CALVIN

(doesn't object)

Thank you.

ABIGAIL

I do have a gift for you. No more Bambi. We're now showing cartoon Old Yeller.

CALVIN

Have you seen it?

ABIGAIL

Hell no! I'd have watched the live-action remake, but PETA shut it down. You want a ticket?

CALVIN

Actually, I came to say goodbye.

(beat)

I'm leaving town. Moving to Texas. Like you told me to.

A smile takes shape across Abigail's face, a complicated one.

ABIGAIL

That's... really cool, Calvin. Honestly, you deserve it.

CALVIN

Thank you.

ABIGAIL

Are your grandparents happy?

CALVIN

They might be happy that I'll be closer, but I'm not moving in with them. I'm going to Dallas.

ABIGAIL

Dallas?

CALVIN

Yep. Gonna get Noah started in school and enroll in art college.

Her smile is now 100% genuine.

ABIGAIL

Godspeed, comrade.

CALVIN

You know, Abigail, if you ever get tired of boycotting PETA, arguing with Marxists, or whatever it is you do, you're always welcome to crash with me. I know it's not as simple as picking up and leaving, but you'd have a roof, if you wanted it.

Abigail twinkles. Her rough exterior can't hide her emotion.

ABIGAIL

I really appreciate that, Calvin.
Thanks.

CALVIN

One more thing.

Calvin points to Abigail's dusty TOY SOLDIER.

CALVIN

This may help more than a burrito.

Calvin sets the "AMY" PAINTBRUSH on the ticket counter.
Abigail sees the name, hesitant to accept.

ABIGAIL

Are you sure?

CALVIN

Yes. I'll see you soon, Abigail.

Calvin walks away. Meanwhile, Abigail takes the brush, slots it into the soldier's dusty crevice. A few twists, and...

Voila. It's clean. She BEAMS as the Prius drives off. And--

EXT. GREAT PLAINS - DAY

Rolling wheat fields cut in half by asphalt. A HIGHWAY, down which the Prius cruises, trailer in tow.

INT. CALVIN'S PRIUS - CONTINUOUS

Inside the car, Calvin drives. Noah sits in the passenger seat. Their belongings are stuffed in the back.

CALVIN
We'll be down the road from a lake.
Oh, and a theme park. With *lots* of
superhero rides. We can go one day.
(beat)
Noah?

Calvin gazes over. Noah stares out at the passing wheat fields, a scared look on his face.

NOAH
Cal, does Texas have soccer?

CALVIN
Yes...?

NOAH
How about math?

CALVIN
Afraid so.

NOAH
And the tooth fairy?

Calvin notices Noah tonguing a loose tooth.

CALVIN
With no income tax.

Noah's eyes widen, more scared than before. He doesn't know what income tax is, but it sounds spooky, foreign. A tear falls down his cheek. He looks away.

CALVIN
Hey...? Hey, Noah?
(beat)
Did I tell you? I figured out your
gift's superpower?

Noah quickly wipes away his tear, looks back.

NOAH
You mean Taco Man?
(Calvin nods)
What is it?

CALVIN
Burrito making.

NOAH
...Burrito making?

CALVIN
Fighting crime with a sour cream
gun, like you said.

NOAH
That's... That's his weapon, Cal.
That can't be his superpower.

CALVIN
Why not?

NOAH
Well, cause that's not a superpower.
Our team would die!

CALVIN
Die? I sure hope not.
(beat)
I know we'd be happy though.

Happy? Noah scrunches his brow, unconvinced. Meanwhile,
Calvin looks into the distance. Something catches his eye.

CALVIN
Want to put it to the test?

Noah follows Calvin's eyes. Immediately, his mouth curves
upwards into a guilty smirk. He NODS, and he and Calvin share
a giggle. It swells between them, blossoming into warm,
intimate LAUGHTER.

As they laugh, each roar shaking loose those years of burden,
we pull back to--

EXT. GREAT PLAINS - CONTINUOUS

A pylon sign of a SOMBRERO rising from the prairie horizon.

The Prius pulls off towards that horizon, yet we angle on the
EXIT SIGN it passes, a new location with a familiar name...

Exit 19
Rome, Kansas

We stay on the sign, on the name "Rome." *Their* Rome.

A beat... And another beat... Before we--

CUT TO BLACK.