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Evan Tyler Ruffin

University of Tennessee - Knoxville

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Kaleidoscope: An Original Screenplay

Evan Tyler Ruffin

English 498: English Honors Thesis

Submitted to the Undergraduate Department of English

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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Project Director: Dr. Charles Maland

Second Reader: Dr. William Larsen
Kaleidoscope

By

Tyler Ruffin
EXT. - COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAWN

The sun is not yet perceivable above the horizon as we see various college buildings and dorm halls. No one is seen in the early hours of the morning. The campus is dead and silent. Rain falls lightly.

INT. - DORM ROOM - DAWN

As his roommate, JOE ROCKETT (21), sleeps, JACKSON PAINE (21) quietly packs a small backpack with a few clothing items and other necessities - toothbrush, comb, a couple of prescription medication bottles. Jackson's form and figure are somewhat difficult to make out in the darkness, and we do not see Jackson's face. But he is clearly on a mission to leave.

The room is set up so that the beds are stacked on top of the desks, maximizing space. The bed/desk pieces are on opposite walls from one another, with Joe's being near the room's door. Joe is therefore near the ceiling of the room, and he appears to be sleeping quite heavily. He breathes deeply, and his mouth is slightly open. Lying on his side, he is in a position so that he faces the rest of the room, not the wall.

As Jackson finishes packing, he pulls on a ball cap, straps on the backpack, and nearly silently walks to the door. He exits the dorm room, gently shutting the door behind him and opting not to lock it.

INT. - JACKSON'S DORM HALLWAY - DAWN

From behind, we follow Jackson walking down the dark, lonely dorm hallway and step into the elevator. The elevator doors shut, and we hold on the closed doors as we see -

SUPERIMPOSE: SATURDAY, DECEMBER 11. 6:53 A.M.

TITLE: KALEIDOSCOPE

EXT. - JACKSON'S DORM - EVENING

College students wander around outside the building. They are loading up cars to go home, bidding each other farewells, and generally happy. The sun is shining brightly this evening, but the dead grass and leafless trees are somewhat icy. It is freezing outside.

SUPERIMPOSE: TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14. 4:45 P.M.
INT. - JACKSON’S DORM ROOM - EVENING

Joe Rockett, an average-looking but overly confident young man is busily packing up his things. There are boxes on the floor and in his task, he has made the room quite messy. Joe has two computer monitors, and one of them reads "HAVE A GREAT WINTER BREAK!" He opens and closes drawers, carefully checking to make sure he has not forgotten anything vital.

There is a KNOCK on the door. Joe ambles to the door, opens it, and there stands STEVEN HOLLEY (22), a gaunt and pale fellow student dressed in a years-old polo t-shirt and badly fitting khaki pants with tennis shoes. He tries to dress nicely, but his appearance betrays him.

JOE
Steven!

STEVEN
Joe!

BOTH
Heeeeyyyyyyyy!!!!

Steven enters the room, and Joe closes the door behind him.

STEVEN
So how’s it going?

JOE
Fine, I guess. I’m just finishing up. About to head out.

Steven walks to Jackson’s side of the room, which is curiously unkempt. Steven pulls out Jackson’s chair, and turning it toward Joe, sits down.

STEVEN
Exams go well?

Steven does not sound really interested, and asks as if he already knows the answer. He does not even look at Joe, instead focusing on Jackson’s side of the room. His face shows his intrigue and curiosity as he looks around.

JOE
No, actually. Um, pretty sure I failed them all.

Joe is trying to be funny, attempting to sound ironic. He looks directly at Steven as he speaks, but Steven is not looking back. Joe continues with his packing, showing only the slightest ambivalence at Steven’s distraction.

(CONTINUED)
Despite this, Steven laughs.

STEVEN
Can’t get into law school like that, Joe. How will your resume look without a 4.0?

Steven’s tone is mocking, but Joe plays along.

JOE
I say, "Look, bitches. I work harder than anyone else, but I don’t care about geology or psychology or math. Economics. Latin. That’s what I want."

STEVEN
And they say, "Oh, Mr. Rockett, however could we have been so blind? Please please come to our school. We need you ever so much!"

JOE
Exactly. See how it works?

They both laugh. But Joe knows it is at his expense. He sighs.

Steven crosses his legs and attempts to look relaxed, while Joe sits down at his computer and clicks away.

STEVEN
So where’s Jackson these days?

Joe briefly glances toward Steven and Jackson’s side of the room. He sounds annoyed when he answers, but his words are slow and deliberate.

JOE
I don’t even know. I haven’t seen him since Friday night.

Steven looks around at Jackson’s area, distracted.

STEVEN
Looks like he hasn’t even begun to pack.

JOE
I think he has, actually. His toothbrush and stuff is gone. He must have packed lightly and left.
STEVEN
Maybe he had early exams.

JOE
I guess. I don’t know.

Joe genuinely sounds ignorant about Jackson. Steven briefly takes one last glance around, but then rises from his chair and replaces it under Jackson’s desk.

STEVEN
Well, I’m off. Can I give you a hand?

JOE
I think I’m good. Thanks though.

Steven steps toward the door.

STEVEN
I guess I’m out then. Have a good break! Happy New Year! And the usual rigamarole. You know the drill.

JOE
(rising from his seat)
I do, indeed. And to you as well!

Steven grabs the doorknob, but stops before turning it. He looks at Joe.

STEVEN
Is...is everything okay?

JOE
Yeah, I’m fine. Why?

Steven looks at Jackson’s area. A open laptop, an unmade bed.

STEVEN
Friday night, huh?

Joe responds with quick words, his eyes darting all around.

JOE
Yeah, he got in late. We chatted a bit. I put on my headphones, and he went to bed. He was exhausted.

Steven looks at the ground, thinking.

(CONTINUED)
STEVEN
Sorry I’m being weird. I guess I just don’t get it. Why would he leave so early on a Saturday morning that you’re not even awake yet? He always slept in.

JOE
I mean, I don’t know. Maybe he just wanted to get home. He’s had a tough semester, you know.

Joe and Steven exchange an uncomfortable glance.

STEVEN
Right...

Steven suddenly lightens.

STEVEN (CONT.)
Heh, sorry. Didn’t mean to sound paranoid.

JOE
(mocking)
You? Never!

Steven smiles but does not laugh. He turns away from Joe and opens the door. Joe grabs the door to hold it open for him.

JOE
Farewell!

STEVEN
Farewell.

Steven exits the room. Joe follows.

INT. - JACKSON’S DORM HALLWAY - EVENING

The hallway is full of several students, their hands full with luggage.

JOE
Jackson’s like that, you know. He tries to be mysterious.

Steven turns to Joe, a smile on his face.

(CONTINUED)
STEVEN
I suppose he has a flair for the dramatic.

Steven waves and takes a few backward steps.

STEVEN (CONT.)
See ya!

He turns and disappears into the crowd of students.

Joe shouts after him.

JOE
Later!

Joe re-enters his room, closing the door behind him.

INT. - JACKSON’S DORM ROOM - EVENING

Glancing around at Jackson’s area, Joe’s face is blank. He steps toward his boxes, and begins to stack them.

INT. - EMMA PAINE’S HOUSE - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: 7:35 P.M.

A lovely but small abode, the house is decorated with warm colors, fluffy couches, and lots of big windows for natural light. It’s a homey place. There is a DOG curled up in a bed on the hearth, next to a burning fireplace. Offscreen, a phone rings, and Jackson’s mother, EMMA PAINE (45). Emma, a fit woman who is in casual dress, glides into the room and reaches for the phone. She delicately picks up the receiver and -

EMMA
(casually)
Hello?

INT. - JACKSON’S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Joe is sitting at his desk. His things are completely packed up now, but he sits in the room lit only by one small lamp. In his hand he has a cell phone.

JOE
Mrs. Paine? This is Joe Rockett.
INT. - EMMA PAINÉ’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Emma looks confused.

EMMA
Um... Hello. How are you?

INT. - JACKSON’S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Joe stands up from his desk.

JOE
I’m doing well. I was calling to speak to Jackson.

INT. - EMMA PAINÉ’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Emma is still confused, and now her face shows signs of worry.

EMMA
Um... Jackson isn’t home yet. Is he not there?

INT. - JACKSON’S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Joe suddenly looks alarmed, but he speaks calmly.

JOE
No, ma’am. I haven’t seen him since Friday. I assumed he had gone home. I - I just wanted to check...

INT. - EMMA PAINÉ’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Emma interrupts him. Now she is scared. Her voice quivers.

EMMA
Have you tried his friends? (beat) His other friends?

INT. - EMMA PAINÉ’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Joe rifles through some papers on Jackson’s desk, but at Emma’s question, he stops and stares forward.
INT. JULIA SANDERS’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

It's a dinner party. Music plays softly. There is talking among the party-goers, but nothing obnoxious. It is not a wild, drunken event, but a more intimate gathering. There are not beer cans, but wine glasses. No preppy clothing, but more sophisticated attire among the group. Suddenly, a cell phone rings. From a couch, JULIA SANDERS (21), a dark-haired, well-dressed and groomed, pretty, and confident girl, looks twice at the caller ID, but answers her phone.

JULIA

Yes?

INT. DANCE AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

A dance team onstage has just finished rehearsing.

INSTRUCTOR

Nice job, everyone. I’ll see you all tomorrow for dress rehearsal.

A phone rings. KATHARINE MOORE (22), a very athletic girl, walks to her gym bag and shuffles through the contents until she finds her phone. She appears exhausted. She looks at the caller ID and a curious expression comes over her face. We do not see who is calling.

KATHARINE

(breathless)

Hello?

EXT. UNIVERSITY PARK - NIGHT

Steven is sitting on a bench, bundled up in a thick coat, reading a book by streetlamp light. It is a crisp evening. His cell phone rings, and he fumbles in his pocket for the phone before curiously glancing at the caller ID, looking a touch unwilling to answer before finally answering.

STEVEN

Hello again.

There is a moment’s beat, and Steven’s face changes.

STEVEN (CONT.)

Yes. I’m not sure...

More confused silence, as Steven fiddles with his book.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

STEVEN (CONT.)

Uh huh. Okay.

A dreadful look comes over Steven’s face. His free hand slowly moves toward his face, as if he is very distressed. He places his hand on his forehead. Still listening, his face changes expression. He now looks frighteningly determined. He stands up and begins to walk down the bricked university walkway.

STEVEN (CONT.)

Alright, I’m on my way now. (beat) Yes, yes where? No, I’ll be there in ten minutes. Okay, goodbye.

Steven replaces his cell phone into his pocket. His stride turns into a jog. He looks worried, and eventually, he begins to run. His skinny frame sprints into the distance, toward the center of the university. The bell tower begins to ominously chime - ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR times, etc.

INT. - UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: 8:51 P.M.

It is an empty library except for Joe, Julia, and Katharine sitting silently at a large table. The study lamp in the center of the table provides most of the light. They barely look at each other, but all have a combination of annoyance and worry upon their faces. Suddenly, Steven enters. He acknowledges everyone with a head motion and joins them at the table.

STEVEN

What’s going on?

Joe tries to control his emotions. He spits out his words with anger.

JOE

I told you. We don’t know where he is, and none of us has spoken with him in a few days. His cell phone goes straight to voicemail.

Steven begins to speak, but Julia interrupts him.

JULIA

(to Joe)

You, of course, were the last to see him. And mysteriously, you have no idea where he went. Nice.

(CONTINUED)
JOE
What do you want from me?

Katharine interjects, looking angry and frustrated.

KATHARINE
Your rambling recount of events made my head spin, Joe.

STEVEN
Whoa, now. From what I understand, Jackson just came in Friday, and then Joe went to bed after only a brief conversation. Jackson must have left in the night. Isn’t that right Joe?

Joe attempts a response. His face has a desperation. Julia interrupts.

JULIA
You told us you saw him leaving in the early morning.

Steven’s confusion grows. He looks at Joe.

STEVEN
What?

JULIA
Yeah, and you saw him packing on Saturday morning. A vague silhouette packing his bag, I think those were your exact words.

KATHARINE
Which is it, Joe?

Joe stammers but his response is steady.

JOE
Yes, I saw him leaving Saturday morning.

STEVEN
Why did you tell me you didn’t know when he left?

JOE
At the time, I didn’t remember I had seen him. I didn’t care that much when we were talking earlier.

(CONTINUED)
STEVEN
But he’s not at home?

JOE
No. His mother is on her way here now. She wants to go to the police.

KATHARINE
The police? Oh Christ, Joe, how serious is this?

Joe stands up and paces. The others exchange glances for a moment.

JULIA
Joe, I swear. No one can be as careless as you. Four days. And you just now decide to check things out.

Joe continues pacing, and does not lift his eyes from the ground.

JOE
I’ve been busy.

KATHARINE
Right. You’re always busy. Always too busy to notice when something is wrong. And you’re just the roommate, right? Wasn’t that your excuse once?

JOE
I am just the roommate, not his keeper.

KATHARINE
You have a responsibility, Joe! Why the hell would you wait so long to check?

Joe is at a loss for words. He paces back and forth, in a straight line, looking at the ground. Katharine resigns, and shakes her head, never removing her gaze from Joe.

KATHARINE (CONT)
A real fucking robot you are, Joe. A real nice guy.

Joe finally loses his cool. He stops pacing and yells directly at Katharine.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

JOE
Christ! I’m sorry, alright? I’m sorry I didn’t watch his every move and log his every moment. I’m sorry I had exams. And I didn’t see YOU checking up on him. Or you, Julia. Neither one of you has come around in a while.

Joe looks at Steven, who has been silently listening, trying to take it all in.

JOE (CONT)
(quietly)
It’s been a good amount of time since you’ve visited him, too, friend.

Steven lifts his head to Joe, and cannot speak. There is a moment of silent exchange between them. All four of them are quiet for a moment.

STEVEN
We’ll go to the police. We can’t do anything else.

Joe, Katharine, and Julia look around at each other. There is a combination of fear, hatred, and annoyance.

JULIA
I’ll call Mrs. Paine.

She pulls out her cell phone. Joe slowly walks to a window. As he looks outside, into the night, he says -

JOE
Sure. Police. Why not?

INT. - POLICE STATION - NIGHT

The graveyard shift at a small police station. Somewhat quiet, with dimmed lights and only a few officers on duty. At a desk in the squad room, a large man with a tired face sips coffee and sighs deeply. This is DETECTIVE MARK KIGER(51). Kiger’s desk only has a few tiny pieces of paper work, and he thumbs through them absentmindedly. He looks around the room and sees a few other officers also drinking coffee and trying to kill their boredom.

(CONTINUED)
Kiger leans back in his chair, puts his hands behind his head, and closes his eyes. For a moment he rests, for noise is all but absent. There is a general sense of commonality among the officers. This is a typical night for a college town with an empty campus.

Suddenly, Kiger’s eyes open upon hearing the squeak of the station door. Struggling to focus for a moment, he looks toward the door and sees a group of four people - Joe, Steven, Katharine, and Julia. The four of them walk into the station, looking lost and confused.

Kiger sighs, scoots back his chair, and rises. He walks toward them as they stand waiting. His footsteps come heavy and he looks somewhat intimidating as he approaches. The kids take notice of his approach and look toward him.

KIGER
Can I help you kids?

STEVEN
We’d like to report a missing person.

Kiger looks unsurprised, unemotional. He stands before them like a wall.

KIGER
Oh?

STEVEN
He’s been missing for four days.

Steven’s voice shakes as he speaks. His face shows his nervousness.

KIGER
He? What’s his name?

JULIA
Jackson. Jackson Paine. No one has heard from him since Friday.

Julia is not nervous in the least, and her words are smooth and authoritative.

Kiger nods his head. He turns toward a nearby desk and speaks to JIM, 29, an administrator.

KIGER
Jim, can you get me a missing person form?

(CONTINUED)
Kiger waves his arm toward his desk.

KIGER
Come sit down. Please. I’m Detective Kiger.

The students follow him to his desk. He has two chairs available for sitting, but he retrieves two more from nearby desks. The students all sit down.

KIGER
Alright, then. So you all are students here at the university?

KATHARINE
Yes.

KIGER
I guess you’re ready for the break, then?

The students all give affirmative answers, but they are distant. Each of them, particularly Joe, seems quite annoyed.

JOE
This is kind of an emergency.

Kiger looks at him, surprised at his snappy tone.

KIGER
Yes, I’m sure it is. What’s your name, son?

JOE
Joseph Rockett. I’m Jackson’s roommate.

KIGER
You two were close, then?

There is an awkward moment of silence. The other three students do not dare look at Kiger or Joe.

JOE
We were close enough.

Jim arrives with the missing person form, breaking the tension.

(CONTINUED)
JIM
Here you are, sir.

KIGER
Yes, thanks Jim.

JIM
Anything else?

KIGER
No, I think we’re fine here. Thank you.

Jim leaves them. Kiger watches as he walks away, then his eyes pan over to the four kids before him, taking in their faces, their manners of dress, their postures.

KIGER (CONT.)
So tell me. Why all four of you?

STEVEN
What do you mean?

KIGER
Well, it just seems like a one-man job to me. But looks like this, uh, Jackson fellow has quite a close crowd of friends.

Silence. Joe and Steven - who are seated farthest from each other - exchange a quick glance.

STEVEN
Yes. He did.

KIGER
Well. Should I expect more? Another gang of students who care too much to go home to their families.

The faces of the students change to confusion, shock.

KATHARINE
What do you mean, sir?

KIGER
I just think it’s strange, all you kids taking time away from yourselves to come down here so late at night. (beat) Jackson Paine. Nice name.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

JULIA
This isn’t a joke, Detective.

KIGER
No?

JULIA
I’d much rather be at home right now. I think we all would.

KIGER
Then why are you here?

The kids clearly do not understand.

KATHARINE
Excuse me?

KIGER
Forgive me, kids. I’ve been through these things before. End of the year pranks. “Let’s goof the police.” Wasting our time. Believe me, I’m in no mood right now. So if you all can just see the door, I’d appreciate it.

He rises. None of the students move, and their faces contort into disbelief.

KATHARINE
Are you serious? We came to you for help.

KIGER
Well, your timing couldn’t be worse. If you wanted to get us, you should have come in when it wasn’t the dead of night. Please, go.

He motions to the door. After a moment of exchanged glances, Joe stands up to face the detective.

JOE
Excuse me, sir. But I think you’re out of line here. You’re the police. This is a serious situation, and we are doing exactly what we’re supposed to do. My roommate is missing, and I would appreciate it if you could give us the time of day!

(CONTINUED)
The two stare at each other, while Steven, Julia, and Katharine squirm. Kiger’s face is still unemotional, but there is a hint of respect for Joe.

KIGER
Sit down, son.

Kiger motions for Joe to return to his chair. Joe sits, and Kiger follows suit. The showdown has apparently impressed him.

KIGER (CONT.)
Fair enough. If you say he’s missing, he’s missing. But if this is some kind of joke...

The student’s faces, by now, show that this is not a joke. Kiger stops in mid-sentence, takes a breath, and grabs the missing person report form and a pen.

KIGER (CONT.)
Full name of missing person?

EXT. - POLICE STATION - NIGHT

The four students exit the building just as Emma Paine gets out of her car. She immediately spots them. The parking lot is empty.

JULIA
Mrs. Paine.

EMMA
Julia. I got here as fast as I could. What did they say?

JULIA
We’re all due back here in the morning for questioning. They’re sending out a couple of men now to do some searching, but there just aren’t that many people on duty at this time of night.

Emma looks daunted. She puts her hand to her face as if she will cry, but she doesn’t.

EMMA
I’ve been driving for three hours. Jackson hasn’t called. I called our entire family. Nothing. Right after Joe called this evening, I (MORE)
EMMA (cont’d) tried to call the administrative office at the university, but they’re all closed now. I don’t know what to do.

Julia puts her arms on Emma’s shoulders, and Steven steps forward and tries to sound upbeat.

STEVEN
It’ll be alright, Mrs. Paine. I’m sure he’s just taking a break or something. He told me once he wanted to do that one day. Just take a break. You know, away from the world. (beat) Maybe his cell phone is dead.

At "dead," Emma looks up from the ground. This time, she can not hold back her tears. She begins shaking her head.

EMMA
He would have called. He would have called...

She breaks down in Julia’s arms. The five of them stand in the empty parking lot, lost.

INT. - POLICE STATION - MORNING

SUPERIMPOSE: WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 15. 8:21 A.M.

The station is busier during the morning hours, but not much. There are a couple of phones ringing, and now there are maybe a dozen or so officers on duty in the squad room. Most of them are sitting at their desks with paperwork, but there is a general sense of calm.

Through the windows, we can see that it is raining again. It is a light rain, but the dreariness is palpable. Detective Kiger sits at his desk reading over the missing person report. He scratches his eyes, which are bloodshot from lack of sleep. The men he dispatched last night have provided a short summary for him, which he now scans.

KIGER (V.O.)
No evidence of foul play. Luggage remains; backpack missing. Personal toiletries missing. Dorm rooms closed to students as of this evening, December 14, 8:00 P.M.

(CONTINUED)
His face looks confused, but suddenly -

HELFER
Detective Kiger?

Kiger looks up at KYLE HELFER (49). His eyes are also swollen from fatigue, but he looks generally cheerful and energetic. Helfer stands in front of Kiger’s desk.

KIGER
Helfer, I was just reading your report. Seems odd.

HELFER
Oh?

Kiger looks over the report again, then shakes his head.

KIGER
Could be nothing.

Helfer sits in one of Kiger’s chairs, looking fairly relaxed.

HELFER
So when are we expecting the kids?

KIGER
Any time now.

HELFER
Got any ideas?

Kiger leans back in his chair, clasping his hands in his lap.

KIGER
Seems like something a kid this age might do. Disappear for some unknown reason. Scare his loved ones. Show up a few days later and laugh it all off.

Helfer nods thoughtfully.

HELFER
Everything I found seems to indicate he’s going on a short trip somewhere. I guess the question is where.
KIGER
And why.

There is momentary silence as Kiger shrugs.

KIGER (CONT.)
I don’t know. I’m banking on a hoax.

HELPER
Wouldn’t shock me. But why these kids don’t call their parents beats the hell out of me. Remember when college was fun?

The two exchange a glance, like that of two wise old men who have traveled the world and seen everything twice. These two are obviously old friends. Kiger smiles at Helfer with a nod.

KIGER
Yes. I surely do.

The station door squeaks open, and Kiger has a direct eyeshot of a group of five people entering the building - Joe, Steven, Julia, Katharine, and Emma.

KIGER (CONT.)
Here we go.

Helfer turns around to see what Kiger sees. Kiger rises from his desk and straightens his clothes before starting toward the door where the five are waiting for assistance. Helfer stands up and follows Kiger.

All of them look worn, exhausted. Emma wears the same outfit from the night before, and Julia’s arm reaches around her shoulder as if to keep Emma from collapsing. Emma’s eyes are dazed and directionless. Julia is clearly concerned. Katharine seems to keep a distance from the rest of them, what distance she can keep. Steven’s face has become pallid and emotionless. Joe looks the most rested, but his confident air has noticeable diminished.

Kiger’s approach catches their attention.

STEVEN
Detective Kiger.

KIGER
Good morning.

(CONTINUED)
JOE
What’s good about it?

Kiger is almost amused.

JULIA
Detective, this is Emma Paine. Jackson’s mother.

Emma looks up from the ground and sees Kiger.

KIGER
Mrs. Paine?

He puts out his hand. Emma does not.

EMMA
Hello, Detective. Have you found anything out?

Kiger turns to look at Helfer, who clearly looks shocked at the sight of all the physical and emotional exhaustion. Helfer shoots a look to Kiger.

KIGER
Um... no ma’am. We have found very little. But we still have men on the case.

STEVEN
Any leads?

KIGER
Nothing concrete yet. We certainly would have contacted you.

All faces become disappointed. Joe crosses his arms. Katharine stares at the floor, motionless. Steven continues to stare directly at Kiger. Julia’s focus is Emma, who appears to be unable to keep herself steady.

KIGER (CONT.)
This is Officer Helfer. He is one of the investigators on this case.

Helfer does a quick nod to them.

HELPER
Nice to meet you.

KIGER
Please, come sit down.

(CONTINUED)
They follow him to a questioning area in the back of the station. There is a row of small chairs waiting for them. To the right of those chairs is a holding room.

KIGER
This isn’t typical procedure, but we knew you would all be coming together today. You can wait here while we get each of your stories in the room.

JOE
Jesus, I feel like we’re under arrest.

HELFER
I can see why you feel that way, but I assure you, this is in no way going to be a grilling. We just have to find out a few things.

They all take a seat in the outside area. Julia physically helps Emma sit down. Emma’s face remains unfixed, unemotional. Katharine sits next to Julia, and Steven sits next to her. Joe takes the seat beside Steven, which is at the end of the row.

KIGER
Mr. Rockett...

JOE.

Joe.

KIGER
Joe, you can come on in.

Joe almost looks surprised that he is the first. But he gathers himself.

JOE
Well, I always love being first.

Joe rises from the seat he has just taken. Kiger opens the door to the holding room and motions him inside. The others watch as Kiger, Helfer, and Joe disappear into the room and the door closes heavily behind them. There is only silence among them.
INT. - HOLDING ROOM - MORNING

It is a typical, windowless holding room. But all the lights are on, making it a fairly welcoming room all things considered. Joe makes his way to a large table in the center of the room.

JOE
This side?

KIGER
Yes, that’s fine.

Joe sits on one side of the table. Kiger sits across from him, trying to look as casual as possible. Helfer remains standing and walks to a small corner table with a coffee pot.

HELPER
Can I get you some coffee, Joe?

Joe is stiff, worried.

JOE
Um... no thanks.

KIGER
Listen, Joe, I think you’ve seen too many movies. This isn’t...uh...what do you call it...?

HELPER
Law & Order.

KIGER
Right, this isn’t Law & Order.

JOE
That’s a TV show.

Kiger and Helfer glance at each other, then back at Joe. It only seems to make him more nervous.

JOE (CONT)
Sorry.

Brief, uncomfortable silence. Kiger waves a dismissive hand to Joe.

KIGER
Nah, don’t worry about it. I think Helfer and I are getting too old to know TV anyway, right Helfer?

(CONTINUED)

Kiger
Alright, just relax.

Kiger leans forward and folds his hands on the table.

Kiger (CONT.)
This shouldn’t take too long. And you’re not under arrest.

Joe nods and loosens up a bit. He smiles weakly.

Joe
I guess I’m just tired. And I’ve never done this before.

Helfer turns toward them with a fresh cup of coffee.

Helfer
Most people haven’t. Especially your age.

He stands beside Kiger, sipping his coffee. Kiger almost looks concerned because Joe is so nervous.

Kiger
The room is a little scary, but it’s all we could do. I apologize.

Joe
No, it’s fine. Really, I’m alright. Let’s do this.

Kiger picks up a folder with the missing person report and flips it open.

Kiger
Last night, you said you were the last to see him. At least, among the five of you that are here today.

Joe
Yes, that’s right.

Kiger
Can you tell me about that?
Joe takes a deep breath. He sees both Kiger and Helfer looking at him, waiting. After a moment’s pause, he speaks.

JOE
Y-yeah. It was Friday.

Joe clears his throat.

JOE (CONT)
Friday night.

INT. - JACKSON’S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Joe is alone in the dorm room. The room is lit solely by Joe’s desk lamp, which is heavy and expensive looking, and the two computer monitors that Joe uses. He is using a word processor, typing, and looks very involved in his task. There is no noise except for Joe’s rapid keystrokes.

SUPERIMPOSE: FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10. 8:54 P.M.

Joe’s desk is on the wall of the room’s door. Just past his computer screens is this door, and as he is focused so tightly on his task, the door bursts open. Light from the hallway floods onto Joe’s face and the noise of a body shuffling into the room is rather noticeable. The bed above his desk blocks the view of this intruder’s face. Joe is instantly distracted from his typing, which ceases. The headless body shuffles past him and the door slams shut.

JACKSON (O.S.)
Hey.

Joe leans back in his chair and sighs.

JOE
Hey.

Joe hears the noise of a backpack coming off, a coat being removed. He simply closes his eyes for a moment. Finally, he opens his eyes and turns toward Jackson.

JOE (CONT)
So...haven’t seen you all day.

Joe speaks very politely. Jackson, his back to Joe, briefly stops what he is doing, as if he was not expecting to hear these words. He places his coat on the back of his desk chair and stands with his hands on the chair for a moment before finally turning to face Joe.
JACKSON
I guess I’ve been pretty busy.

Jackson speaks like he is making up with someone, and his face looks somewhat expectant. He is physically short, and his eyes look tired. He seems to be uncomfortable.

JOE
I heard that, man. So much to do by Monday.

JACKSON
Yeah. Me too. Not sure I can get it all done in time.

Jackson laughs sleepily and turns his chair to face Joe. After a moment, he sits and crosses his legs, trying to look relaxed. Joe follows suit by turning his chair to face Jackson. The setup seems conversational, but the two boys are somewhat far apart from each other.

JOE
What all do you have left?

JACKSON
Mostly papers. I’ve already taken my exams. I’ve just got to turn in a couple of things. Of course, I have to write them first. Ah, the life of an English major.

Jackson laughs lightly and looks ponderous. Joe looks at him almost nervously.

JACKSON (CONT)
How about you?

JOE
Oh, same. I’m finishing up this paper, got an exam on Monday. It shouldn’t be a big deal though. Tuesday is my last exam. It’s damn early, too. 8 A.M.

Jackson laughs another light laugh.

JACKSON
Heh, thanks for the warning.

JOE
No prob. Thought you’d like to know.

(CONTINUED)
JACKSON
Listen, with earplugs, I can sleep the sleep of the angels.

JOE
No kidding. I’ll be using some tonight.

JACKSON
Don’t you use them every night?

Joe looks sheepish, and shrugs and grins cheesily.

JOE
Guilty.

The two of them laugh, and the room suddenly seems free of tension. Joe looks to Jackson with a comfortable smile.

JOE (CONT)
Do you wanna talk?

Jackson looks genuinely surprised at this question.

JACKSON
About what?

Joe shrugs.

JOE
Anything. Whatever’s on your mind.

JACKSON
Why?

Joe seems to be growing frustrated, but not overly so.

JOE
I don’t know, I just thought you might want to have a conversation.

JACKSON
I would. I really would.

JOE
Then let’s do...

JACKSON
But I’m not sure I should.

Joe looks confused.

(CONTINUED)
JACKSON (CONT)
What I mean is, I’ve really got a lot to do, you know? I’m probably going to bed early.

Joe looks at his clock.

JOE
It’s only 9:00.

JACKSON
Oh, I know, but I really work better in the mornings.

Joe is at a loss, looking almost dejected. He shrugs.

JOE
Oh. Okay then...

JACKSON
But maybe after Monday, huh?

JOE
Sure. Yeah, that’s fine.

Joe genuinely looks disappointed. He stands up from his chair and turns it back toward his desk.

JACKSON
Sorry, Joe. It’s just...it’s a busy time, you know?

Joe looks at Jackson, whose face looks almost desperate for Joe to understand. Joe waves the disappointment away.

JOE
No, yes of course I understand.

Jackson looks relieved. He stands from his chair and turns it around.

JACKSON
Until Monday, though, it’s work work work.

JOE
Indeed.

JACKSON
I wish you the best of luck on your paper there.
JOE
And I, you.

JACKSON
Thanks. I’ll need it.

There is a bit of tension again as the boys look at each other expectantly. Finally, Joe breaks the silence.

JOE
Well, back to it.

JACKSON
Right.

JOE
I’m gonna put on my headphones, so I probably won’t hear you if you talk to me.

JACKSON
Oh, I’m going to bed, I think.

JOE
Fine then.

JACKSON
Goodnight, sir.

He does a mock bow toward Joe and smiles. Joe gives a short laugh.

JOE
Goodnight.

Joe returns to his chair and desk. He grabs his headphones from the other end of his desk, hooks them to his speakers, and places them over his ears. He begins playing music through them, and hears nothing from Jackson.

Jackson shuffles around his desk a bit, but shortly after Joe returns to his computer, he climbs up into his bed, and pulls the covers over himself.

INT. - POLICE STATION - MORNING

Helfer is scribbling notes as Joe talks. Kiger is listening intently.

JOE
That’s really all there is to it. When I woke up the next morning, he was gone.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

Joe looks away into nowhere for a moment.

JOE (CONT)
I haven’t seen him since.

Helfer stops scribbling, while Kiger leans back in his chair.

KIGER
So... So there was a sense that Jackson would be around. At least by Monday?

Joe seems thoughtful, and his words are almost childlike.

JOE
Yeah. Yeah, I guess there was.

Kiger and Helfer look at each other, before Joe finally returns his focus to them.

JOE (CONT)
But there was never any real worry in my mind.

KIGER
You said last night that you two were, quote, "close enough." What did you mean by that?

JOE
Oh. I just meant we were typical roommates. We didn’t really hang out or anything. Just whenever we were in the room together.

Kiger nods thoughtfully, looking at Joe the whole time.

KIGER
I see. So you weren’t best friends or anything. Just pals.

JOE
That’s a good way to put it.

KIGER
But you wanted to be better friends?

Joe is confused and lifts his eyebrows.

(CONTINUED)
KIGER (CONT.)
What I mean is... This conversation you were going to have. You wanted to know him more personally?

JOE
Well... Not really. I just thought that Jackson was feeling a bit lonely lately.

KIGER
Any idea why?

JOE
Well, I hadn’t seen Julia or Katharine around much recently. They were really his close friends. Steven was probably his best friend though.

Kiger nods in understanding. Helfer nonchalantly scribbles more notes. Joe looks at them, expectantly.

KIGER
You and Jackson got along pretty well?

Joe looks surprised at the question, but he contains himself.

JOE
Sure. We had our moments, but what roommates don’t?

KIGER
Had?

JOE
Sorry?

KIGER
You HAD your moments? Why the past tense?

JOE
Oh, I don’t know. I’m just...talking about the past year and a half.

KIGER
Lived together for a while, huh?

(CONTINUED)
JOE
Yes. A year and a half.

KIGER
What about next year? Planning on staying together.

Joe is overwhelmed. He looks like he is searching, and his words are halting.

JOE
We...hadn’t really talked about it.

KIGER
More of a spring conversation, huh?

JOE
Right.

Kiger nods, and Helfer looks up from his notes to Joe. A bead of sweat has broken out on Joe’s forehead. He has the face of a guilty person. Suddenly, his face becomes angry.

JOE (CONT)
Wait a minute. If this isn’t a grilling, I wouldn’t want to know what one is!

Kiger and Helfer are not moved. Joe stands up from his chair quickly and angrily.

JOE (CONT)
For God’s sake, you’re acting like I’m a murder suspect.

KIGER
Are we? Officer Helfer, I think we forgot what we’re doing here today.

HELFER
Maybe so.

JOE
I’m getting the hell out of here now.

Joe walks to the door, and tries to open it. Finding it locked, he furiously continues to turn the knob. Finally, he beats on the door. Helfer slowly rises from his chair and pulls out keys.

(CONTINUED)
HELPER
It locks automatically. Let me get that for you.

Joe stands aside as Helfer finds the correct key for the door.

JOE
I wish I hadn’t come here with everyone else. I wish I could just go home now!

Kiger, who hasn’t turned around to see Joe’s furious attempts to exit, finally swivels in his chair to face him.

KIGER
Oh, I meant to ask. The dorms closed yesterday. Where did you stay last night.

Joe is calming down. Helfer finally finds the key to the door, and inserts it into the hole. Joe looks at Kiger.

JOE
I’m staying with Steven. In his apartment.

HELPER
There you go.

The door opens. Joe takes a brief look at the two policemen, then exits the room. Kiger looks out at the other four people, who all look confused about what is going on. Joe fussily takes his seat at the end of the row of chairs, and looks away from everyone. Finally, his head slowly drops, and he is still.

INT. - HOLDING ROOM - MORNING

Kiger and Helfer are seated on their side of the table. On the other side is Emma Paine. She sits weakly, staring blankly.

KIGER
Mrs. Paine, I know you must be worried.

Emma lifts her eyes to him. She looks unconvinced but desperate.

(CONTINUED)
EMMA
Do you?

KIGER
Well, yes. I have two kids of my own. 28 and 25.

Emma looks away again.

EMMA
Do you know where they are?

Kiger looks surprised at the question. He looks at Helfer, who has a distinct expression of worry on his face.

KIGER
Erm... Yes I do.

EMMA
(sadly)
Then you don’t know I must be worried.

Her face contorts into a painful expression, and she is ready to cry. Somehow, she manages to control her emotions, and snaps to focus on the two policemen.

EMMA (CONT.)
Please, what do you need to know? Anything that might help.

KIGER
Well, most importantly, when was the last time you heard from him?

EMMA
Friday afternoon. Around 3:00.

KIGER
How did he sound then?

EMMA
Just fine. Normal.

She shrugs with her words.

KIGER
And he never mentioned he might be going away somewhere? Maybe a weekend trip with some friends?

Emma is silent, staring blankly again. Helfer’s concern comes out in his voice?

(CONTINUED)
HELFER
Mrs. Paine, if you can’t do this...

EMMA
I’m fine.

She snaps back to attention. Helfer has no words, but nods that he understands.

KIGER
No hints that he was leaving?

EMMA
No, of course not. He was talking about how busy he was, how much writing he had to finish. How he thought his exams went. He wasn’t talking about running away!

KIGER
We didn’t say that he may have run away.

EMMA
But that’s what you think. I know it.

KIGER
No, ma’am. We have no evidence that he was attempting to run away. But he may have been planning a trip.

EMMA
Why do you say that?

Kiger pulls out Helfer’s report from the night before. He reads aloud.

KIGER
Luggage remains; backpack missing. Personal toiletries missing. Some clothes hangers empty. Laundry basket empty.

Kiger replaces the report to the folder and folds his hands on the table. He explains gently.

KIGER (CONT.)
He took a small bag, some clothes, and some toiletries. He was planning on staying somewhere, but not for very long.

(CONTINUED)
Emma nods in agreement.

EMMA

Yes, that’s what it sounds like.

Her face shows glimmers of hope.

EMMA (CONT.)

So he may just be at someone’s house somewhere. But why wouldn’t he call?

KIGER

Actually, that’s something else. We found his cell phone in his dorm room. It was powered off under his pillow.

Emma looks at the two men as if she expects more. They say nothing else.

EMMA

Maybe he just forgot it.

KIGER

It would seem that way. But there is always the possibility that he left it behind on purpose.

Emma once again becomes concerned and unsure. Her face becomes blank again.

EMMA

But that would mean that he did run away.

KIGER

We don’t know what it means.

EMMA

(talking to herself)

Did I do something to him?

Kiger and Helfer look at her in anticipation.

KIGER

Mrs. Paine?

She snaps out of her daze.

EMMA

I’m sorry. I’m just trying to think. I wonder if he was trying to get away from Joe.

(CONTINUED)
KIGER
Get away from him?

EMMA
Yes. They had been having problems.

KIGER
What kinds of problems?

Emma pauses and then takes a deep breath.

EMMA
Oh, my. Where do I even start? Normal roommate issues in addition to a complete lack of compatibility. Their personalities were so different. I think Jackson took it too seriously.

KIGER
Took what too seriously?

EMMA
Their relationship. I mean their roommate relationship. Jackson wanted to be Joe’s friend so badly. But Joe wasn’t interested in friendship.

Helfer begins scribbling notes again. Kiger leans forward to listen.

KIGER
Tell me more about the two of them together.

Emma looks at him, then looks away thoughtfully as if searching for the right words. Suddenly, her eyes snap back to him with a sharp focus.

EXT. - COLLEGE CAMPUS - MIDDAY

Jackson is walking among several other students. He weaves in and out of the crowd, walking somewhat faster than most of them. It is a bright, beautiful day outside, and by the dress of the students, it is blazingly hot.

SUPERIMPOSE: THURSDAY, AUGUST 28. 12:16 P.M.

Jackson reaches into his pocket and pulls out a cell phone. He flips it open and pushes only a few buttons before putting it to his ear.
INT. - EMMA’S HOUSE - MIDDAY

Emma has all the windows open on this day. A gentle breeze blows the curtains. Emma is seated on a large, fluffy couch, legs pulled up underneath her. Her dog sleeps on the opposite end of the couch. She is thumbing through a magazine when the phone rings. She brings the receiver to her ear.

EMMA
Hello?

EXT. - COLLEGE CAMPUS - MIDDAY

Jackson continues his trek with the crowd.

JACKSON
Hey.

INT. - EMMA’S HOUSE - MIDDAY

Emma’s face brightens.

EMMA
Hey you! Long time no talk. You getting too old for me?

EXT. - COLLEGE CAMPUS - MIDDAY

Jackson laughs and sheepishly replies -

JACKSON
I’m still your baby.

INT. - EMMA’S HOUSE - MIDDAY

Emma smiles, a face full of love.

EMMA
Then maybe call a little more often, huh?

EXT. - COLLEGE CAMPUS - MIDDAY

Jackson has stopped at a crosswalk, waiting for the signal.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

JACKSON
I’m sorry, mom. I’m just
distracted. Already.

INT. - EMMA’S HOUSE - MIDDAY

Emma looks inquisitive.

EMMA
Is it Joe? Already acting
very...Joe-like?

EXT. - COLLEGE CAMPUS - MIDDAY

The signal changes, and Jackson starts across the street
with the rest of the crowd. He is not surprised that his
mother guessed correctly.

JACKSON
Yep. Loud. Obnoxious. Arrogant. I’ve
decided that it’s still early
enough in the year to change rooms.

INT. - EMMA’S HOUSE - MIDDAY

Emma nods at his suggestion.

EMMA
I encourage that. If he bothers
you that much, then do it. Get
out. I don’t even know why you
decided to live with him again
anyway.

EXT. - COLLEGE CAMPUS - MIDDAY

Jackson rolls his eyes and nods.

JACKSON
I know, I know. I keep asking
myself that. I think I’m a little
crazy.
INT. - EMMA’S HOUSE - MIDDAY

Emma reaches for her dog and begins petting it.

    EMMA
    No, you’re not crazy. You just had a little hope that he would change over the summer.

Emma sounds like she knew it would never happen.

EXT. - COLLEGE CAMPUS - MIDDAY

Jackson continues his trek, and spots the building of his destination.

    JACKSON
    I guess so. That was a bad decision, but I’m gonna correct it. I really don’t want to deal with it this year.

A biker suddenly whizzes by in front of Jackson, almost hitting him. He jumps.

    JACKSON (CONT)
    Jesus!

INT. - EMMA’S HOUSE - MIDDAY

Emma looks shocked and confused.

    EMMA
    What? What is it?

EXT. - COLLEGE CAMPUS - MIDDAY

Jackson resumes walking. He is close to his building.

    JACKSON
    Just a bike. I coulda been road kill, mom!

They share a laugh.

    JACKSON (CONT)
    Well, hey, I’m almost to class, but I did want to check in with you.
INT. - EMMA’S HOUSE - MIDDAY

Emma nods. Her dog rolls over under her petting. She asks in a rush -

EMMA
What other news is there?

EXT. - COLLEGE CAMPUS - MIDDAY

Jackson shrugs. He is now standing outside the door to the building, but he stops before entering. Other students shuffle past him to get inside. He glances at his watch.

JACKSON
Really not a whole lot. Classes aren’t hard yet. Oh! I’m gonna hang out with Steven, Katharine, and Julia tomorrow night.

INT. - EMMA’S HOUSE - MIDDAY

Emma looks pleased.

EMMA
Oh, fun! How are they doing?

EXT. - COLLEGE CAMPUS - MIDDAY

The students are thinning out. Jackson knows he is rushed, and checks his watch again.

JACKSON
They’re good. I’ll have to tell you all about them later, but right now I’ve got to get to class.

INT. - EMMA’S HOUSE - MIDDAY

Emma stands up from the couch and stretches.

EMMA
Alright, well tell them I said hi. You guys should drive over here again some time soon.
INT. - ACADEMIC BUILDING - MIDDAY

Jackson steps through the door of his class building.

    JACKSON
    I will. And I wanna hear about home, too.

Jackson enters his classroom, which is just beginning. He whispers -

    JACKSON (CONT)
    Love ya! Bye.

He flips the phone closed and rushes to a seat.

INT. - EMMA’S HOUSE - MIDDAY

Emma tries to get the words out.

    EMMA
    Love -

She looks at the receiver, which has gone dead. She replaces the phone in its holder.

    EMMA (CONT.)
    Love you, too.

She looks at her dog, whose tail begins to wag. She rushes over to the him and becomes playful.

    EMMA (CONT.)
    (dog voice)
    And I love you too! Yes I do! Who’s my boy?

INT. - HOLDING ROOM - MORNING

Emma looks at the two men, who both gaze back at her. She lifts her eyebrows.

    EMMA
    Hello?

Kiger and Helfer start. Helfer writes a few notes down as Kiger leans in toward Emma.

    KIGER
    He didn’t change rooms. Would the housing department not let him?

(CONTINUED)
Emma’s face turns to disappointment, and she leans back into her seat.

EMMA
Actually, he changed his mind.

Kiger looks unsurprised.

KIGER
Everyone has a reason for choosing to deal with a negative environment instead of changing it. Any clue why he stayed?

EMMA
Like I said, he wanted Joe to be his friend. He wanted Joe to like him.

KIGER
But Joe wasn’t that kind of kid.

Emma shakes her head.

EMMA
No. Joe isn’t that kind of kid.

Emma and Kiger look at each other, and a look of knowing and understanding comes over them.

KIGER
I guess it’s hard to understand. But I think it takes a pretty tough guy to stick it out like that.

EMMA
Jackson never saw... He never saw that people can’t make friends with robots.

Helfer stops writing and looks up at her. He smiles.

KIGER
They’ll fail every time.

Emma sighs and looks down at the table again. Her sadness is palpable. Choking back tears and with determination, she says —

EMMA
You’ve got to find him, Detective. You’ve got to find my son.
INT. - PARKING GARAGE - MIDDAY

OFFICER LEE CASEY (31) steps out of the stairwell and looks across the vast expanse of Level 2 of a huge, virtually empty parking garage. He is alone, with only a flashlight to keep him company. Casey smacks chewing gum, blows a bubble, and pops it. The noise echoes loudly.

There are only a few cars present. We can see outside the garage that we are on or near the university campus. The rain continues to fall. Casey begins walking, looking around.

CASEY
White. Four door. Toyota.

His eyes wander around as he talks to himself. Each car he sees presents an opportunity to answer his own words. Spotting a red pickup, a yellow Mustang, a silver Ford -

CASEY (CONT.)

He continues this way for a few seconds, eventually ceasing to vocally answer himself. His eyes eventually fall upon a white car in the distance. He stops for a moment and pulls out a sheet of paper with some information written on it.

CASEY (CONT.)
White. Four door. Toyota. HG754B.

He approaches the car, and it is indeed a white, four door Toyota. He points his flashlight inside, seeing nothing of consequence. He approaches the back of the vehicle and shines his light on the license plate.

CASEY (CONT.)
HG754B. (beat) Yeps.

INT. - POLICE STATION - MIDDAY

Kiger replaces his phone on its receiver. He is sitting at his desk, with Helfer sitting on the other side.

HELDER
Well?

KIGER
Confirmed location of Paine’s car. Still sitting in the parking (MORE) (CONTINUED)
KIGER (cont’d)
garage at the opposite end of campus from his dormitory.

Kiger pauses, then chuckles.

HELFER
What could possibly be funny?

Kiger stops smiling, and turns his head to see the five people sitting in small, cheap plastic chairs. He turns back to Helfer.

KIGER
I was just thinking... do you think it’s odd that this kid seems to never have left at all?

HELFER
What do you mean?

KIGER
I mean that he packed lightly, left his cell phone and his car, and was finally about to get exactly what he wanted - a nice, long talk with Joe. Dear Joe.

Helfer still looks confused.

HELFER
But he clearly left. It doesn’t seem to me that he never left at all.

KIGER
Maybe. But I feel like we’re missing a lot. I feel like Jackson could be sitting in this room and none of them would know it.

He motions to his five interviewees. Joe manages to catch Kiger’s eye before turning away. The other four do not notice.

KIGER (CONT.)
I feel like this could have gone on for weeks without anyone giving it a second thought.
INT. - HOLDING ROOM - AFTERNOON

It is Katharine’s turn in the room. She is fidgety and has little patience for the formalities of interrogation, which she makes apparent by her frequent eye rolls.

KATHARINE
Look, I just want to say that I think Joe did something to Jackson.

Kiger and Helfer briefly sit in stunned silence. Finally, Kiger leans forward, and Helfer flips open his notebook.

KIGER
You think Joe...did something...to Jackson? Like what?

Katharine rolls her eyes with an annoyed sigh. She sits up straight and tries to speak clearly.

KATHARINE
You’ve met Joe, right? A real charmer. Jackson saw right through him, and I think Joe resented that. I think Joe thought of Jackson as an obstacle on his odyssey of greatness.

KIGER
This is just your opinion, of course.

KATHARINE
I just think the stakes were high. Joe didn’t consider Jackson to be at his level of intelligence and achievement, but Jackson always read Joe like a book.

KIGER
I suppose that would be quite annoying for Joe.

Katharine shrugs and leans back in her chair, crossing her arms.

KATHARINE
I think it was more than annoying. I think Jackson must have known something about Joe. I don’t know what that thing was, or why it was a big deal, but I think Joe is the kind of person who would (MORE) (CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

KATHARINE (cont’d)
nap his grandmother’s neck for a chance to go to Yale.

Helfer’s pencil tip audibly breaks. Kiger, feeling the irony, slowly turns his head toward Helfer. Helfer blushes and pulls out another pencil.

KIGER
Miss Moore, do you understand that you are accusing Joe of murder?

Katharine suddenly looks frightened. She shakes her head and nervously plays with her hands.

KATHARINE
I’m not accusing him of anything! I’m just saying that... I think... I think Joe knows where Jackson is. Or at least knows where he was planning to go.

KIGER
But why would you think that? Do you have any hard evidence?

KATHARINE
Of course not. I just know how those two could get sometimes. And I know that they put a strain on all of our friendships. And I know what kind of person Joe is!

KIGER
Joe mentioned that you had not seen Jackson in a while. That true?

Katharine is silent for a moment. She looks at Kiger, then relaxes into a quiet answer.

KATHARINE
Yes, it is. Not since November. (beat) November 20th.

She pauses, then leans in enthusiastically toward Kiger.

KATHARINE (CONT)
You see, I really liked Jackson. I always thought we would be great together. But he had eyes for someone else, to be cliche.

(CONTINUED)
She laughs quietly and looks away. Helfer lifts his eyes from his notebook briefly and looks at Katharine’s reminiscent face.

KIGER
Julia?

Not changing her distant gaze, Katharine nods.

KATHARINE
Julia.

Katharine gets ahold of herself and returns her focus to Kiger.

KATHARINE (CONT)
Julia Sanders, the classiest bitch on the planet. Have you seen her outfit today? Oh, it’s stunning!

Kiger is not amused, and even Katharine finds herself a tad annoying. She shakes her head to snap out of it.

KATHARINE (CONT)
Sorry. Sometimes I forget myself.

She gives Kiger a falsely provocative look. Finally, she gives up and sits back with a disheartened look on her face.

KIGER
Miss Moore, what information can you give us that may provide some insight as to where Jackson went?

KATHARINE
(shaking her head)
None.

KIGER
Are you sure about that?

KATHARINE
Pretty sure. All I can give you is evidence for my Joe-Disappeared-Jackson theory. But you don’t seem to think that’s a worthy idea.

Kiger looks at her in the eye.

KIGER
On the contrary. I think any evidence is good evidence. After (MORE)

(CONTINUED)
KIGER (cont’d)
all, we don’t know what we’re
trying to prove yet, do we?

KATHARINE
Thank you.

Katharine takes a deep breath and blows it out
slowly. Kiger and Helfer wait patiently.

KATHARINE (CONT)
Here goes.

INT. - JACKSON’S DORM LOBBY - NIGHT

Jackson and Katharine rush into the lobby from
outside. They are wearing heavy coats, and the wind is
blowing fiercely. There is snow flying wildly around, and
it is clear that the two are freezing. Their noses are red
from cold.

SUPERIMPOSE: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20. 9:05 P.M.

The two of them struggle to close the door against the wind.

KATHARINE
Oh no! Catch it!

JACKSON
Got it!

The door closes. They notice that they are covered in snow
and laugh at their appearances. Katharine brushes Jackson’s
hair with her hand.

KATHARINE
You need some Head & Shoulders!

JACKSON
Says the girl with the hooded
parka!

KATHARINE
Hey, at least I prepared for a damn
blizzard, Mr. It-Looks-Light-and-Wimpy.

JACKSON
I don’t even want to hear it.

They smile at each other and remove their coats, crashing on
a couch in the lobby. Jackson rubs his hands together.

(CONTINUED)
JACKSON
Ah, it’s so cold.

KATHARINE
Your teeth are chattering!

Katharine wraps her arms around him and rubs his back.

KATHARINE (CONT)
You need to get warm.

She continues to embrace him, and eventually he relaxes into her arms. Suddenly, the two realize that they are locked together. Katharine, her chin resting on Jackson’s shoulder, closes her eyes. Jackson smiles. For a moment, they sit holding each other. Suddenly, Jackson looks at his watch.

JACKSON
What time is it? 9:15!

Katharine’s eyes snap open and the two let each other go. Katharine’s disappointment betrays her.

KATHARINE
What’s wrong?

Jackson stands up from the couch and starts for the elevator. He turns back to Katharine.

JACKSON
I was supposed to give Julia my notes for chem by 9:00. I’m sorry to cut this short.

Katharine’s face is painted with hurt feelings.

KATHARINE
No, it’s fine. Julia’s got to get those notes, right? Missing class again?

Jackson starts to the elevator again.

JACKSON
I knew you’d understand.

Katharine’s eyes drop for a moment before she looks at Jackson as he walks away. Suddenly, her face shows determination, and she chases after him.

(CONTINUED)
KATHARINE
Hey, wait up! There’s no reason
the night has to end. How long can
it take to send someone notes?

She catches up to him as the elevator doors open. The step
on together.

JACKSON
Good point.

INT. - JACKSON’S DORM HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jackson and Katharine step off the elevator. Jackson is
rushing down the hallway, and Katharine seems to have
trouble keeping up with him.

KATHARINE
Hey, slow down! We’re not all
Kenyans.

JACKSON
Sorry. I walk fast when I have
somewhere to be.

KATHARINE
I do, too. But I feel like I’m
running a four by four.

They approach the outside of the Jackson’s door, which is at
the very end of the hallway. Katharine lags slightly behind
Jackson as he gets in front of his door, pulling out his
keys. Suddenly, he stops, and leans in toward the door.

INT. - JACKSON’S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Joe paces in his room, lit only by his desk lamp and
computer monitors, while talking on the phone. His voice
carries through the door.

JOE
The thing about Jackson is that
he’s so sensitive. So damn
sensitive.
INT. - JACKSON’S DORM HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jackson steps closer to the door and leans in. Katharine finally arrives behind him. She whispers -

KATHARINE
What is it?

Jackson waves at her to be quiet.

INT. - JACKSON’S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Joe sits in his desk chair and folds his arm under the opposite elbow to support his phone arm. He is relaxed and unassuming.

JOE
Right. But it’s like, we keep having these conversations and I just want to say, "Give it a rest." (beat) It’s not even that! It’s that he doesn’t understand that I’m busy. And the other day, I told him that I would probably get the internship because I pretty much always get what I want. Which I do. (beat) Yeah, but I said it in that voice I always use...when I’m just fooling around. Oh, you know that voice I always use! (beat) He got so angry. I’ve never seen him so angry. (beat) I don’t know. I guess I just shouldn’t have shown that side of myself.

He waits for a response and then laughs heartily.

JOE (CONT)
Oh well! I have to keep reminding myself - I’m just his roommate.

INT. - JACKSON’S DORM HALLWAY - NIGHT

As he listens to every hurtful word, Jackson’s face sinks. Katharine’s expression is full of pity.
INT. - JACKSON'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Joe continues his conversation.

   JOE
   I don’t know. I think he’s a little jealous of me, frankly. (beat) Well, it’s whenever I mention my grades or my achievements, he always has some sort of comment. (beat) I mean, he makes good grades, but he’s probably got about a 3.5.

Joe laughs again.

   JOE (CONT)
   Yeah! And plus, I’m close with my family, my parents are still married, I keep having girls want to go out with me... (beat) I didn’t tell you that? (beat) Well, I’m not too crazy about it, so don’t worry.

Another loud burst of laughter.

INT. - JACKSON'S DORM HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jackson’s eyes close in sadness. He pulls away from the door, and turns to walk back down the hall. Katharine watches him, pitiful. His quick step is gone; he merely shuffles away. She walks after him, and after a few steps, she tries to console him.

   KATHARINE
   Hey, what the fuck does he know, huh? You’re the one who calls him a robot.

Jackson doesn’t answer. His face is blank and pale. He could either cry or vomit at any moment.

   KATHARINE (CONT)
   It turns out he IS the arrogant bastard you always thought he was. See, Jackson? If I were you, I’d feel vindicated. Fuck him!

Jackson continues his slow walk down the hallway, and when they arrive at the elevators, Katharine shakes him.

   (CONTINUED)
KATHARINE (CONT)
Jackson! Hey. Look at me. You
don’t need him.

Jackson looks at her in the face. There is a moment of
gratefulness in his eyes, and she begins to look
relieved. She smiles. But the moment is fleeting, and he
pushes her away.

JACKSON
I need to be alone.

Katharine is taken aback, and Jackson pushes the down button
at the elevators. He turns away.

KATHARINE
What? No. You need me.

Jackson stops. His back is to Katharine.

KATHARINE (CONT)
You need me. I need you.

He turns to face her, surprised and confused.

JACKSON
What?

KATHARINE
Yes! Don’t you see? We need each
other, Jackson. I can make you see
that you don’t need to be hurt by
that asshole. He is the weak one,
not you. You don’t need him. You
don’t even need Julia -

JACKSON
Julia? What does she have to do
with anything?

The elevator arrives and the doors slide open. Katharine
seems a bit lost for words.

KATHARINE
I just meant... I don’t want her
to hurt you.

JACKSON
Hurt me? What are you talking
about?
KATHARINE
I think she’s using you, Jackson! I think she’s using your feelings against you.

Jackson steps farther away from her, a look of disbelief on his face.

JACKSON
What do you know about my feelings? Who do you think you are?

KATHARINE
Jackson. Please. Please don’t be like this. I only want what’s best for you.

The elevator doors close behind her. Jackson continues to walk backwards, away from her. Katharine remains in the same spot. She begins to cry.

KATHARINE (CONT)
I think I love you, Jackson.

JACKSON
Love me?

KATHARINE
Yes!

Jackson stops. He is nearly back into his hallway. They look at each other for a moment. His face is at once confused, upset, and scared.

JACKSON
You need to go, Katharine. I don’t know what to say. Just please go.

Katharine’s mouth opens, either to speak or because she is in shock. Jackson prevents her from speaking.

JACKSON (CONT)
I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.

He turns away and begins a jog down his hallway toward his dorm room. Katharine watches him get all the way to his door, pause outside it briefly, and finally unlock it and enter. She sobs and grabs her hair as if she wants to pull it out. Hitting the elevator button, the doors open. She enters the elevator, hits the lobby button, leans against the wall, and sinks down. The doors close behind her, obstructing our view of the crying heap on the floor of the elevator.
INT. - HOLDING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Katharine has tears streaming down her face, but she is not overtly sobbing. She sniffs, and wipes away the tears from her eyes.

KATHARINE
So. That’s it.

Kiger is actually moved this time. Helfer finishes taking notes, and gently sets his pencil down.

KIGER
And that’s the last time you saw him.

It is a statement rather than a question.

KATHARINE
Yep. We left on a positive note.

She continues to wipe her face off, trying to compose herself. Kiger looks thoughtfully over to Helfer, who shakes his head.

KIGER
I think that’s all we’ll need, Miss Moore.

KATHARINE
Is there some sort of consolation prize for all this?

KIGER
I’m sorry.

Katharine rises from her chair and shakes her head.

KATHARINE
A joke.

She walks toward the door, as Helfer jumps up.

HELFER
Oh, just a second. I’ll have to get that for you.

He approaches the door an unlocks it. Katharine steps out. The other four look at her, and she takes her seat. Steven’s eyes go from Katharine to Kiger. Kiger looks away from him, and Helfer shuts the door.
EXT. - COLLEGE CAMPUS - AFTERNOON

Officer Casey holds a backpack in one hand, a phone in the other. It is the same backpack that Jackson left with. Casey stands in a rather deserted part of campus, away from the buildings and among some trees and shrubbery.

The rain continues to pour, harder than before. Casey's raincoat blows wildly in the wind. Various other investigators walk around him at various distances, searching the area. He shouts into his phone.

CASEY
Yes sir! It's his backpack. We got clothes, toothbrush, and some meds! No sign of the kid, though.

Casey listens for a moment, trying to hear. He begins to walk to the nearest available shelter, a small storage building, which seems an eternity away.

CASEY (CONT.)
It's going kinda slow out here, sir! It feels like Katrina all over again!

He finally reaches the storage building and attempts to open it. It is locked. He angrily pounds the door.

CASEY (CONT.)
No, sir! We're looking at every inch of this place and focusing on the stretch from the garage to his dorm! It's a slow process!
(beat) Yes, sir! No problem!

Casey hangs up the phone, and pulls the backpack up closer to his face. After examining it for a moment, he holds it over his head as a barrier between his head and the rain. He rejoins the other investigators in the shrubs, and continues searching.

INT. - HOLDING ROOM SEATING AREA - AFTERNOON

The group of five sits in silence. Emma leans against Julia for support. Katharine keeps quiet. Steven occasionally glances at all of them. Joe stares forward. The door to the holding room suddenly opens and Helfer steps out.

HELFER
Miss Sanders? You can come in.

(CONTINUED)
Emma lifts herself off Julia. Katharine takes her place as Emma’s support. Julia stands and enters the room. The door closes behind her.

Steven looks over at Emma. Her eyes are closed with her head resting on Katharine’s shoulder. Katharine looks comfortable in her newfound role. He turns his attention to Joe. Joe stares forward at nothing in particular. Steven leans over to him.

STEVEN
How’s it going?

Joe snaps out of his stupor and takes a deep breath. He stretches.

JOE
Oh, nifty.

STEVEN
I could sure go for some Warcraft III right now.

JOE
Steve. Don’t get me excited.

INT. - HOLDING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Julia sits comfortably, confidently. She crosses her legs and sits up straight. Her face shows neither fear nor nervousness.

HELFER
Coffee?

JULIA
No, thank you. I don’t drink it.

HELFER
Really? How do you make it through the day?

JULIA
Sometimes I ask myself that very question.


KIGER
So how are you handling all this?

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

JULIA
I guess as well as can be expected. But I’m very concerned for Mrs. Paine.

KIGER
Aren’t we all? Well, most of us.

He laughs as if she is in on the joke. Julia scrutinizes Kiger.

JULIA
Actually, I think we all are.

Silence. Helfer stops what he is doing and looks at the two of them. They simply stare across the table at one another.

KIGER
So, when did you see Jackson last?

JULIA
I would say about three weeks ago. Before thanksgiving I think. Has it been that long?

KIGER
Thereabouts. Why so long?

JULIA
It was a personal matter. Nothing relevant to this case.

Kiger and Helfer are both silent. Julia sits patiently, waiting for the next question.

KIGER
Miss Sanders, you’ll have to forgive me. But it seems that anything and everything is relevant to this case.

Julia squints her eyes for a moment.

JULIA
I guess nothing I say in here can be repeated, correct? I mean, assuming that no crime was committed.

KIGER
Strict confidentiality.

(CONTINUED)
JULIA
Then I won’t beat around the bush.

Helfer sits down to his notebook. Kiger sits back in his chair and sips coffee.

JULIA (CONT.)
Joe and I were fucking. Jackson had a thing for me and found out about it. Three weeks ago. Before Thanksgiving.

Kiger and Helfer are stunned by Julia’s words. Kiger clears his throat and leans forward.

KIGER
Miss Sanders, I certainly appreciate your frankness.

JULIA
I don’t want to waste anyone’s time. Especially when someone is missing.

KIGER
Did anyone else know about your relationship with Mr. Rockett?

Julia shrugs.

JULIA
No idea. Don’t care. I felt sorry for Jackson, but Joe seemed more appropriate for me. He wasn’t interested in feelings. He just wanted a good lay. That’s the thing about Joe and I. We’re all business, and we don’t like to waste time.

Helfer furiously scribbles, while Kiger stares at Julia with wide eyes.

KIGER
I...I don’t know what to say.

JULIA
Then maybe I’m done here.

She scoots her chair back and stands.
KIGER
Not so fast. Sit please.

Julia reluctantly returns to her seat.

KIGER (CONT.)
You surely must see the implications of your actions. This could have everything in the world to do with his disappearance.

JULIA
I doubt that. Jackson was emotional, but I don’t think my casual sex with Joe would make him flee three weeks later.

KIGER
How did he find out about you and Mr. Rockett?

JULIA
He came back to his room unexpectedly. I was covered up in Joe’s bed. But he literally caught Joe with his pants down.

Julia laughs as if it were a hysterical joke. Kiger can’t believe his ears, and his face expresses such.

KIGER
Did he seem overly upset?

JULIA
You know, not as much as I would have expected. I think Joe was more upset than any of us.

KIGER
Why would you say that?

JULIA
I actually think Joe cared for Jackson, believe it or not. He truly never wanted to upset him. When Jackson left after he caught us, I thought it was hilarious. But Joe...Joe didn’t think it was that funny.

Her last sentence trails off, and she thoughtfully stares away.

(CONTINUED)
KIGER
Miss Sanders?

JULIA
Oh, yes. I’m sorry. Anyway, Joe had this kind of big brother feeling toward Jackson. I don’t think Jackson ever knew that.

KIGER
Oh?

JULIA
Well, he may have. But they had a lot of little spats. It could have been because Joe treated Jackson like a child. But he treats everyone like a child. You just have to know how to deal with it. Jackson thought about it too much.

She nods decisively on her last statement, almost as if she just discovered this truth. Helfer stops writing and begins chewing his pencil.

KIGER
You have Joe figured out pretty well, huh?

JULIA
(softly and firmly)
Joe and I are the same. I just choose not to be loud and arrogant all the fucking time. He’s not a monster, Detective. Which I’m sure Katharine has tried to suggest. But he is damn annoying, which Mrs. Paine probably knew about. Jackson never thought of Joe as evil, but when he found out about us... I can only imagine how betrayed he felt.

Kiger and Helfer hang on every word.

KIGER
Jackson’s cell phone shows that the last call he received was from you. At 6:30 A.M. Saturday. We know that Jackson’s phone was left behind in his room, off. So he must have still been there to

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
KIGER (cont’d)
answer your call. What did you
talk about?

Julia’s face turns to stone, but she maintains her
composure.

JULIA
I wanted to see if he could give me
a ride home for the break.

KIGER
At 6:30 on a Saturday morning?

JULIA
I’m an early riser.

KIGER
Yes, but he wasn’t. According to
Joe’s earlier statement, Jackson
liked to sleep in.

JULIA
Well, call me a rude bitch.

KIGER
You said you hadn’t spoken with him
in three weeks.

JULIA
No, I said I hadn’t seen him in
three weeks. Needless to say, he
refused me a ride home.

Kiger stares at her; she stares right back. Kiger leans
forward, very authoritatively.

KIGER
Miss Sanders, do you have any idea
where Jackson may have been going?

Julia hesitates, and for a moment, she loses her cool.

JULIA
None whatsoever.

EXT. - COLLEGE CAMPUS - AFTERNOON

The rain is beginning to let up. Officer Casey and the
other investigators continue to search. Presently, they are
in a remote part of the university campus. There is an old
academic building building, Morse Hall, with a sign reading

(CONTINUED)
"Condemned" sitting in the middle of a grassy field. Most of the investigators are spread out in the field, heads down, whacking grass out of the way.

Casey begins circling the crumbling building. There are several large bushes around every side, and he checks those areas closely. When he reaches the back of the building, he spots a baseball cap. Casey walks up to the cap, bending down to pick it up. When he bends down, he notices something else.

Someone’s foot is sticking out from under a collapsed section of the building. Approaching the foot, he attempts to lift the pile of rubble to no avail. He calls out to his men -

**CASEY**

Over here!

**INT. - HOLDING ROOM - AFTERNOON**

Steven sits anxiously at the table. Kiger chooses not to sit this time around, and walks around the room as Steven talks. Helper remains at the table, writing as always.

**KIGER**

So. Where do you think he went?

**STEVEN**

I honestly have no idea. I only have a few ideas.

**KIGER**

I’m all ears.

Steven takes a deep breath and looks up at Kiger.

**STEVEN**

I think he just went...away. He always just said that one day he would just go away for a while. Take a break from all his problems.

**KIGER**

Did he have a lot of problems?

Steven’s face changes.

**STEVEN**

I guess no more than the rest of us.

(CONTINUED)
KIGER
You know, from what I’ve heard, he had a lot more problems than the rest of us. Did you know he was on medication?

STEVEN
Yes, I did.

KIGER
Did you know what for?

STEVEN
Mood swings. He took stabilizers.

Kiger, arms behind his back, walks toward Steven, slowly.

KIGER
Mr. Holley, as his best friend and confidant, do you think Jackson was unstable?

STEVEN
Maybe off the meds. But he seemed fine to me.

KIGER
We’ve heard a lot today about Jackson’s emotions. What do you think about him in that regard?

Steven thinks for a moment and shrugs.

STEVEN
He was normal, I guess. Honestly.

KIGER
I guess what I’m asking you is whether you think Jackson was having an emotional breakdown. Do you think he ran away because he couldn’t handle the pain?

Steven stares up at Kiger, who is glaring down on him. Kiger’s head blocks a significant part of the light, shadowing Steven’s frail body.

STEVEN
I assume you’re talking about Joe. And Julia. And Katharine.
Indeed.

To the contrary, I believe that things were being fixed with all those relationships.

Being fixed? Why the passive voice, Mr. Holley? Who was fixing things?

Steven looks down and fiddles with his hands briefly.

I was.

You were? The final piece of the puzzle.

What do you mean?

I mean that all of these accounts we’ve heard today are connected. And it sounds like the only stable relationship Jackson ever had was with his mother.

Kiger stops and stares at Steven.

And you.

Yes, I would say that’s fair. I tried to help him out as best I could.

How so?

I spoke with them. All of them. Joe first, then Katharine, then Julia. I tried to get them to work through their issues with Jackson.

Kiger nods in understanding. He turns away from Steven and begins walking slowly away.
KIGER
Were you successful?

STEVEN
Yes, I think so. Joe was actually the most receptive to the idea. I think he was genuinely sorry for hurting Jackson, even if it was unintentional.

KIGER
I agree that no one seems to have done anything to him intentionally.

STEVEN
Right. That’s why the relationships could be salvaged. He throws up his hands in exclamation.

STEVEN (CONT.)
You see, I believe that everyone deserves a second chance. What’s more, I believe that everyone deserves a fair chance. I sometimes think Jackson didn’t give them a fair chance.

KIGER
How did Katharine take your suggestion of reconciliation?

STEVEN
Very reluctantly. But she understood that Jackson had just been through a rough moment, hearing Joe say all those things.

KIGER
And Miss Sanders?

STEVEN
Julia agreed with me. She said she’d meet with him.

Kiger turns toward Steven.

KIGER
Oh?

STEVEN
Yes. She wanted to meet up with him and fix things. Probably where (MORE)
we all first hung out as a group three years ago.

Steven’s face suddenly has a look of realization.

KIGER
And where was that place, son?

STEVEN
An old condemned building on the outskirts of campus.

Helfer looks at Kiger and the two of them know. Kiger leaves the holding room.

INT. - POLICE STATION - AFTERNOON

Kiger passes the seated four people outside the holding room and strides through the police station toward his desk. He arrives at the desk and grabs the phone receiver. Suddenly-

JIM
Detective Kiger! Officer Casey is on Line 2 for you.

Kiger smiles, and excitedly pushes the button to take the call.

KIGER
Officer Casey? This is Kiger.

INT. - HOLDING ROOM SEATING AREA - AFTERNOON

Steven walks out of the holding room back into the seating area, followed shortly by Helfer. Steven looks excited.

STEVEN
I think we know where he is!

EMMA
Where is he?

Steven is about to answer when he looks across the station to Kiger, who is standing with the phone to his ear, facing them. His face is deflated, sad. Steven’s confusion is apparent. The others follow his stare to Kiger, who shortly thereafter replaces the receiver. He walks slowly, heavily, thoughtfully toward them.
KIGER
Everyone. If you could all follow me into the holding room. Please, bring your chairs with you.

The five, confused and lost, pick up their chairs and walk back into the holding room. Kiger whispers to Helfer outside the room, while everyone watches. As Helfer’s face sinks, they all begin to exchange glances. Helfer walks away, out of sight. Kiger stands still for a moment, then takes a deep breath, and turns to enter the room.

INT. - HOLDING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Everyone has seated their chairs on one side of the table, facing Kiger. He takes his seat.

EMMA
Detective, please, what is going on? Have you really found him?

Kiger looks at her desperate face, with the saddest look he could possibly have.

KIGER
Yes, Mrs. Paine. We found him.

EMMA
Is he alright?

The room is airless, and if a pin dropped, it would echo. Kiger looks at all their clueless, pleading faces. He inhales.

KIGER
I’m sorry to be the one... Jackson has been killed.

Silence. There is momentary stillness.

EMMA
What?

KIGER
Jackson is dead. His body was found a few minutes ago, crushed by a collapsed portion of a condemned building.

(CONTINUED)
Emma’s body turns to jelly. She cannot hold herself upright, but she does not faint. Katharine and Julia struggle to catch her. Steven’s mouth is open in shock. Joe seems unable to process the news. Kiger rushes to the door and calls out -

KIGER (CONT.)
We need a doctor in here!

Emma begins to weep. She clutches at Katharine and Julia, who also release their tears. Joe closes his eyes drops his head. Steven stares at the ground.

A medic enters the room and approaches Emma. He manages to escort her out of the room. The four students remain, each expressing their own form of sadness.

STEVEN
I don’t believe it... This isn’t happening.

KIGER
(softly)
I’m sorry. It’s true.

KATHARINE
(through tears)
But why? How is it...?

JULIA
I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I’m sorry!

They all look at Julia, who falls out of her chair onto her knees. She puts her face in her hands, gasping for breath, and trying to speak.

JULIA (CONT.)
I was going to meet with him in our spot...to try to apologize...to try to heal the wound. But I changed my mind.

Kiger watches her pitiful form on the floor, struggling to explain. Steven breaks into tears.

JULIA (CONT.)
I called him to meet me at Morse, and to bring some extra clothes because it was raining. But I couldn’t do it. I just couldn’t do it. As soon as I hung up, I tried to call him back. But it went straight to voicemail.
KIGER

He didn’t want to wake up
Joe... That explains the
toothbrush and medications,
too. Sink in the room. Brushing
your teeth is noisy. So is
rattling pill bottles.

Joe weakly lifts his head from his hands.

JOE

I wear earplugs. He knew that.

KIGER

Maybe. But he probably thought he
would need to look like he went on
a short trip anyway. He didn’t
want you to know he was meeting
with Julia.

Julia shakes her head back and forth. Joe looks at her
crying, with only regret on his face.

JOE

I knew he liked you, Julia. And I
did it anyway.

KATHARINE

(to Julia)

He must have stood there waiting
for hours. He must have been so
excited to see you.

JULIA

I’m so so so so sorry! I don’t know
what to do. I don’t know what to
say.

Steven shakes his head. He is not angry, but his tearful
face shows his true heartbreak.

STEVEN

Why did the building collapse?

KIGER

Years of erosion. The rain must
have been the last straw. He was
probably close to the building to
stay dry.

Julia sobs in the floor. Katharine watches her, herself
crying almost uncontrollably. Joe is in a complete
daze. Katharine finally breaks the wordless atmosphere.

(CONTINUED)
KATHARINE
I hate you, Julia. Everything about you. And you, Joe. You're disgusting. How long do you think he was alive under the rubble? 1 day? 2 days? I wish it had been you two under that building. Jackson deserved better.

She loses her voice through tears. Julia does not respond, but Joe lifts his head from his hands.

JOE
He did. He really did.

On his words, Julia finally gains control of herself. She sits up, and stops sobbing. Kiger watches the whole thing in despair. There is silence.

STEVEN
When can we see him?

KIGER
I advise that you wait until the visitation services.

Steven closes his eyes, and tears fall out. He shakes his head. Julia now can only stare forward in disbelief. Joe stands from his chair, and walks to the door. He tries to turn the knob, finding that it is locked. He tries again, and in frustration, beats one beat with his fists before collapsing against it in tears.

Kiger rushes to his aid. Standing Joe on his feet, Kiger unlocks the door and opens it. Joe looks at his three friends, then turns and walks out the door.

After a moment, Julia lifts herself from the ground, wipes her face once more, and without glancing backwards once, walks out the door.

Steven and Katharine look at each other, and finally, they embrace each other in a hug. Kiger looks on the one salvaged friendship, and manages to smile.

Steven and Katharine, arms around each other’s backs, walk out of the holding room, nodding to Kiger as they leave. Kiger follows them.
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Steven and Katharine walk slowly through the station, the officers looking on as they go. Helfer returns to Kiger's side. From the doorway of the holding room, Kiger and Helfer watch silently as the two of them walk out the front door of the station. As they push the door open, it lets out one final squeak.

THE END