

THE SANDMAN

by

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Based on the short story “Der Sandmann”
by E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776-1822)

A Creative Thesis in Screenplay Form
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Abstract

The Sandman is a feature-length screenplay adaptation of E. T. A. Hoffmann's short story "Der Sandmann." The screenplay re-imagines the story as a contemporary horror film with surrealist underpinnings. The script draws heavily on the gothic tradition. It also draws on the German Romantic tradition out of which Hoffmann writes. The theoretical structure of the screenplay owes a great deal to Sigmund Freud's ideas about the "uncanny" and concerning the Oedipus complex, the repetition-compulsion, and the death-drive. I do not hold slavishly to these theories so much as use them as points of departure.

The story: the young Nathan discovers one day that the Sandman is not a fairytale but a very real creature seemingly bent on his destruction. After abusing Nathan and causing the death of his Father, the Sandman disappears, only to return as Nathan moves away from home to begin his studies at university. Nathan, already haunted by the events of his childhood, spirals further and further into madness.

The screenplay is followed by two informal essays concerning the approach taken to the construction of the text.

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This work is dedicated to my family: in a good way, as thanks for helping me and supporting me in my studies, not in the terrible ways that the text might otherwise suggest.

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FADE IN:

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

A round metal object, the size of a fist, sits on a desk.

The object is globular, constructed out of entwining curves of twisted metal. Jagged ends stick out of the sphere.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

Light flickers across the surface of NATHAN BALLANTYNE's open eye.

Nathan, 11, is transfixed by the television set. The wavy, distorted images fill his eyes and the crackly, degraded sound commands his full attention.

A sharp click startles Nathan, bringing both silence and darkness.

A sombre, warning voice addresses him.

MOTHER

The Sandman is coming.

Nathan looks up at his aging MOTHER, half gray at 35.

He turns to a large clock on a stand in the corner of the living room. The clock is ultramodern, metal and glass, its moving interior workings on display. Its cold, precise nature encapsulates the general atmosphere of the house.

It is twenty to twelve.

NATHAN

Can't I stay up a little longer?
Just until the show is over.

MOTHER

I've let you stay up too late
already. If I didn't tear you away
from it you'd spend all day there,
eyes on the screen...

She looks around the room nervously. Throws a glance over her shoulder.

MOTHER

Come on, now. Go to your room.

Nathan rises reluctantly.

NATHAN
I still need to brush my teeth.

MOTHER
Hurry.

Mother ushers him toward the hallway at the far end of the living room, past Nathan's FATHER. The youthful man appears to be asleep in his easy chair.

As Nathan passes Father, however, the older man's hand darts out to grab Nathan's wrist, hard.

FATHER
Listen to Mother. The Sandman is coming. Go to your room. Close the door.

Mother pulls Nathan's arm free.

MOTHER
Cut it out.

FATHER
You know what the Sandman does, don't you boy?

Huddling close to Mother, Nathan shakes his head.

FATHER
He sneaks into rooms at night--

As he speaks, Father rises, creeping toward Nathan with his fingers bent like claws.

FATHER
--and he sprinkles sand into the eyes of children who do not sleep, so that their eyes pop out, and he steals their eyes away from them--

Mother slaps Father's hand, just as it is about to touch Nathan.

MOTHER
Stop it.

Father pulls away.

MOTHER
He's scared half to death.

FATHER

A little fear is healthy for a boy.

Father looks up at Mother, softens a little, and reaches over to ruffle Nathan's hair.

FATHER

You'd better get yourself to bed,
Nathan. It's almost midnight.

Nathan nods. Father looks up toward Mother.

FATHER

I'll be in my study.

Mother cringes, almost imperceptibly.

Father moves away, down the hallway, retreating into the depths of the house.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME

Nathan pulls his dripping face from the washbasin. His hands brush the water away.

Mother stands nearby, holding a tube of toothpaste. Nathan takes up his toothbrush and she squeezes out the paste.

NATHAN

Dad hurt my arm.

MOTHER

He doesn't mean to. He doesn't know
his own strength.

Nathan brushes.

MOTHER

Is it really hurt? Are you bruised?

NATHAN

I don't think so.

MOTHER

Well, don't complain then.

Nathan rinses and spits. Mother taps her foot, impatient.

NATHAN

What does Dad do in the study?

MOTHER

You know you're not allowed to go in there.

NATHAN

I know. I was just wondering.

MOTHER

It's his private place. Just like your room is your own private place.

NATHAN

You come into my room.

MOTHER

If you would clean it yourself I wouldn't have to. Hurry up, we have to get you into bed.

NATHAN

I have to go to the bathroom.

Mother frowns, fussing over the delay.

MOTHER

I swear, Nathan, you are the slowest kid I've ever--

The bang of a door slamming startles Mother.

Loud footsteps can be heard echoing through the house.

NATHAN

That's the front door. I thought Dad was--

MOTHER

He's early.

Nathan's mother slams the bathroom door, shutting herself and Nathan into the room together.

NATHAN

What are you doing? I have to go to the bathroom!

MOTHER

Quiet!

NATHAN

I have to go!

MOTHER

Then go quietly! Please, Nathan.

The footsteps are getting louder. Coming closer. Mother is panicked.

MOTHER

Please.

Nathan turns away, pulls down his pants, and begins to urinate, trying to be as quiet as possible.

Mother holds the bathroom door shut.

The footsteps clump closer, closer. But they soon fade away.

Nathan finishes and pulls up his pants.

Mother listens, still holding the doorknob, but there is nothing to be heard. She shakes nervously.

Nathan moves to comfort Mother.

She is startled, and pushes him away. Then she realizes who it is, and calms a little. She draws Nathan in to her, and releases her grip on the door.

MOTHER

Off to bed with you now. And be quicker next time.

Nathan nods silently. Huddling into her.

DREAM

EXT. SNOWY FIELD - DAY

A small wooden shack stands at the end of an empty, snow-blanketed field.

The dreaming Nathan moves toward the log shack, slowly. He pauses before its small, nondescript wooden door.

The door opens before Nathan to reveal a vast darkness. A fire burns far in the distance.

INT. DARKNESS - CONTINUOUS

The dreaming Nathan drifts toward the fire, with an agonizing slowness.

As he draws nearer, Nathan sees a figure hunched over some debris, its back to the dreamer.

As Nathan approaches, the figure turns to greet him.

It is the SANDMAN. He is a large, ugly man with a squat nose and bright, glittering green eyes.

He is dressed in a dark suit which would look good on a normal man. He wears a battered, too-small top hat upon his head, slightly lopsided.

SANDMAN

What took you so long?

With huge, hairy hands, the Sandman reaches down into a pile of severed human body parts. He tosses a few pieces of meat into the fire, which burns not wood but flesh, as he roots through the pile.

The Sandman pulls a pair of eyeballs out of the fleshy mess. Dirty fingers with long, ragged nails present the eyes to Nathan.

SANDMAN

I have new eyes for you. But you were too slow in coming and they've dried out. You couldn't squeeze a tear from these now. Look...

The Sandman closes his fingers around the gaping, bodiless stare.

END DREAM

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nathan wakes in a cold sweat. He chokes down gasps.

Startled by the voice of his Father.

FATHER

What are you dreaming about?

Nathan is shocked to find Father standing in the doorway, watching him sleep.

Father moves toward him sluggishly, obviously intoxicated.

FATHER

Did he bring you bad dreams?

Father leans down toward Nathan. The boy retreats into his blankets as Father's face comes closer.

FATHER

I'll kill him.

Father looks Nathan over. A tenderness breaks through his usual hardness. Coupled with anger.

FATHER

I'll kill the bastard.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nathan sits on the living room couch. The television is on, but he is not watching. Instead, he's drawing in a notebook.

Mother enters the room, scolding.

MOTHER

You're not even watching the damn thing. Turn it off.

Nathan complies, then returns to the notebook.

He is trying to sketch out a rough drawing of the Sandman, back turned, sitting to face a growing fire.

NATHAN

I like the noise. It's too quiet otherwise.

He continues to sketch, but shortly looks up from the drawing, distracted by the silence.

Mother has left the room already.

NATHAN

Mom?

No reply.

NATHAN

Dad?

Again, nothing. Nathan closes the notebook and rises, warily. The house seems empty. Nathan steps into the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Nathan creeps down the long corridor, taking great pains to keep silent. His eyes dart nervously, but no one appears to be lurking in the shadows.

Slowly but surely, and very, very cautiously, Nathan approaches a large, imposing doorway at the end of the hall.

Timidly, Nathan places his small hand upon the doorknob. It turns.

He steps inside.

INT. STUDY - SAME

The study is vast, easily the largest room in the house. It is a place of mystery, alive in comparison to the dull-colored, antiseptic surroundings in the rest of the Ballantyne household.

The walls are lined with shelves, stuffed with book upon book. More books are piled upon desks and chairs, and in the corners of the room.

Odd curios litter the room. Some of them have obvious uses: a globe, a twisted metal lamp. Some are decoration, such as the antique sword.

Other items are not so easily identifiable, and have obscure and perhaps more dubious purposes. Small metal contraptions with no discernible function are strewn throughout the room.

There is a closet to the left of the room's entrance. Nathan opens the closet door to see a long row of pressed pants and suit jackets.

Nathan fingers the pants. He takes a suit jacket down and puts it around his shoulders.

The jacket slumps around the diminutive Nathan.

He replaces the jacket carefully and closes the closet door.

Nathan turns toward the sword, which hangs between bookshelves in a space across from and to the right of the closet. It looks medieval, a knight's sword.

Walking past a bookshelf, he runs a finger along it as he goes. There is no dust, though the books look ancient.

He stops before the sword. It hangs with its point toward the floor. Nathan reaches out to touch the blade.

NATHAN

Ow!

He recoils, having cut his finger. Blood drips onto the floor.

He puts the finger in his mouth and sucks it gently.

Nathan turns around. At the far end of the room, facing him, is a grand wooden desk. It is covered with papers and the small, fist-sized sphere.

Nathan moves toward the desk and examines the sphere. He handles it carefully, avoiding the sharp points.

He looks at the papers on the desk. They don't make any sense, full of mathematical and chemical formulae.

Nathan moves around the desk. He sits down in his Father's chair.

It dwarfs him.

He runs his hands over the arms of the chair.

Then begins to open the desk drawers. They are stuffed with more papers, pens, rulers, various engineering tools.

In the left-hand drawer lies a small metal box. Nathan pulls it out of the drawer and places it on his lap.

He opens it.

The box contains a large metal syringe that looks to be a hundred years old.

Nathan inspects the syringe, lifting it out of the metal box. It is clean and in good shape despite its age.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Nathan is watching an old horror movie on television.

Mother sits beside him on the couch, knitting.

MOTHER

I don't understand why you like
this scary stuff.

NATHAN

It's not that scary.

MOTHER

It creeps me out. Why would you
want to be scared anyway?

NATHAN

It's just a movie, Mom.

MOTHER

It's not healthy. A boy your age
should be outside.

NATHAN

It's cold outside.

MOTHER

Well, tomorrow I want you to spend
some time outdoors. Why don't you
play with some of the neighborhood
kids? You could make a snowman.

NATHAN

I guess.

MOTHER

I heard from your teacher that
you've been staying indoors at
recess. She's concerned that you
aren't trying to make friends with
the other kids.

NATHAN

I don't like the other kids that
much.

MOTHER

Why? Are they mean to you? Do they
hurt you?

NATHAN

No, they're fine. I just don't like them much. They don't have anything to say.

MOTHER

What do sixth-graders have to talk about?

NATHAN

I don't know. It doesn't matter.

MOTHER

Nathan, this is serious.

She turns off the television.

NATHAN

Mom!

MOTHER

Nathan, I want you to make more of an effort at school. I know that it's been hard on you, moving every year or two. But Father has promised that we're here to stay this time. You know he keeps his promises.

FATHER

Nathan knows nothing about promises.

The conversation ends. Mother and son turn to see Father standing in the entrance to the hallway.

Holding the sword in his hand.

MOTHER

What are you doing with that?

FATHER

Look familiar, Nathan?

He lifts the sword, stretching the blade out before him.

FATHER

You promised. That you would stay out of the study.

MOTHER

Nathan, you didn't!

FATHER
Mother, you'd better leave us
alone.

Mother opens her mouth to speak, but stops herself. She carefully puts down her knitting.

Slowly, she rises, and quietly leaves the room.

Father moves closer to Nathan.

FATHER
Your blood.

Nathan pulls back into the couch.

FATHER
I found a droplet of it on the
floor beneath this sword.

He regards the cold blade. Then the cowering Nathan.

FATHER
You probably think that I'm going
to hurt you.

He lowers the blade.

FATHER
I would never hurt you. But you
know who would hurt you. Don't you?

Nathan nods. A tear escapes him.

NATHAN
The Sandman.

FATHER
You must never speak his name.

Father sits down on the couch beside Nathan. He puts his arm around the boy. Nathan is not comforted.

FATHER
It's okay, Nathan. I'm not mad at
you. You're a growing boy. You're
curious.

Nathan nods.

FATHER
But it's not me you have to worry
about.

(MORE)

FATHER (cont'd)
He's out there, and he's watching.
You've seen him, haven't you? He
has eyes, Nathan. Eyes everywhere.
Thousands of eyes, from thousands
of people, all over the world...

NATHAN
I think he wants my eyes.

FATHER
You're safe here, Nathan. I can
protect you. But not if you wander
around drawing attention to
yourself.

He leans in closer.

FATHER
Tempting him.

Father rises from the couch. He starts toward the hallway.

FATHER
Stay out of my study, Nathan. I
know that you are curious. But
there are some things that a boy
should never know.

Nathan nods, sniffing back his tears.

Father swings the sword up to rest over his shoulder.

FATHER
I'm glad we had this talk.

He steps into the hallway. Then pulls back.

FATHER
And mind your mother.

Father walks away. Down the hallway. Toward the study.

INT. SCHOOLROOM - DAY

Nathan sits still, staring through his desktop.

He holds a pencil in one hand, resting it on a small stack of
loose paper.

The bell rings. The class bursts into a blur of activity.

Roused as if from slumber, Nathan slowly puts his pencil down. Other children pass by as he puts his papers away.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - SAME

It is the middle of winter. Snow blankets the schoolyard.

Nathan pads down the front steps of the school. He looks over at a group of boys carrying hockey sticks, moving towards the parking lot. They move farther and farther away.

The girls and a few of the other boys begin making snowmen. Some of the boys throw snowballs playfully at the girls.

Nathan wanders over to the swing set. He brushes some snow off one swing, turns it over to the dry side, and sits down. He swings back and forth, slightly.

A young blonde girl, CLARA, walks over to Nathan.

CLARA

Hi.

Nathan nods at her.

CLARA

Is it okay if I swing with you?

NATHAN

Sure.

CLARA

Thanks.

Clara brushes off the next swing. She turns it over and sits down, beginning to swing with only slightly more gusto than Nathan.

CLARA

Why aren't you playing with the other kids?

Nathan shrugs.

NATHAN

I don't know.

CLARA

What's your name?

NATHAN

Nathan.

CLARA

I'm Clara.

They swing beside one another, shyly.

CLARA

My family just moved here. I don't know anybody yet. What grade are you in?

NATHAN

Four.

CLARA

I'm in Grade Five. But I don't know anybody in my own grade yet.

Clara looks at her feet.

CLARA

This is my first day of school, and the teacher forgot to introduce me to the class.

Nathan is quiet. Then, slowly, begins to laugh.

Clara is startled at first, but joins him.

CLARA

(laughing)

I was so nervous I didn't say anything all morning. I doubt anybody noticed me at all.

They laugh louder. And begin to swing a little, kicking their legs.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nathan is lying in bed, reading by the light of a small lamp.

He begins to fall asleep. As he is drifting off, the sound of the front door slamming wakens him.

Loud footsteps clump toward the hallway. Turning, Nathan sees that his bedroom door is open a crack.

Quickly and quietly, he shuts the door. Leans against it on the floor, nervous, listening.

The footsteps clump down the hallway. They pass Nathan's door and continue onwards, fading.

Nathan listens. He hears nothing. Quietly, he rises.

Opens the door a crack. Looks out.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

The hallway is darkened, deserted.

At the end of the hall, a sliver of light shines under the study door.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

Nathan closes the door. Bites his lip.

Opens the door and steps out.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Nathan moves slowly, carefully, towards the study.

All manner of strange noises emanate from behind the door. Muffled voices, clanging metal, the hiss of escaping gas.

Nathan draws nearer.

Until he is just outside the door. Leaning in, listening.

The door bursts open, knocking Nathan backward.

Light and heat spill out. Father fills the door frame

FATHER
Go back to bed.

An immense shadow rises on the wall behind Father. Blacker than Hell. With a voice to match.

SANDMAN
Who is it? Who dares...

The door slams shut. Father's voice, muffled, inside.

FATHER
Nobody-- nothing--

SANDMAN
Let me see.

Nathan bolts.

Footsteps fall.

The study door begins to open just as Nathan reaches his room.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

Nathan shuts the door. Leaps into bed. Turns out the light.
Shivers.

The footsteps enter the hallway. Voices outside the door.

FATHER
Forget it-- we must finish.

SANDMAN
Someone is watching.

FATHER
Our work.

The Sandman grunts. Footsteps signal his return to the study.
Nathan shuts his eyes. Tightly.

INT. LUNCHROOM - DAY

Nathan is sitting alone at a table in the busy room. He is eating a bag lunch. Most of the other kids are buying food from the cafeteria.

A chipper Clara approaches Nathan, carrying a tray of food, soup and pizza.

CLARA
Hello, hello.

She sits down across from him.

NATHAN
Hi.

CLARA
You don't look happy.

NATHAN
No?

He picks at his sandwich.

NATHAN
I guess not.

CLARA
What's wrong.

NATHAN
I don't want to talk about it.

CLARA
Why not?

Nathan looks at the table. Clara frowns. Stirs her soup and then smiles.

CLARA
I've got something to cheer you up.
Wanna know what it is?

NATHAN
I'm not in the mood.

CLARA
Come on. The whole school year I think I've only seen you smile twice. The day I met you and the day they served liver.

Nathan shrugs. Clara plays the clown.

CLARA
I could barely keep it down. You just sat there, smiling as you ate your sandwich.

NATHAN
All right. What's the surprise?

CLARA
Well, now I'm not going to tell you.

Clara smiles slyly.

CLARA
I want to show you something. After
school.

NATHAN
Not today.

Clara's face falls.

CLARA
Why not?

NATHAN
I told you. I don't feel well.

CLARA
I've been waiting all week. I
wanted to show you before the
weekend.

NATHAN
Why didn't you show me before?

CLARA
There was so much homework to do.

NATHAN
Well, why not on the weekend?

CLARA
I'm visiting family.

NATHAN
Then next week.

CLARA
Why not today?

NATHAN
Not today.

CLARA
Fine then. Next week.

She stirs her soup, listless.

CLARA
Do you promise?

NATHAN
I promise.

Clara sulks. Nathan watches her play with her food.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Nathan is watching television. Not really paying attention.

Mother approaches. Switches off the machine.

MOTHER

The Sandman is coming.

Nathan looks up at her. Then over at Father, sitting quietly in his chair.

MOTHER

Come on, now. Off to bed.

Nathan stands. Mother tries to take his arm, to lead him away. But he shrugs her off, glides out of the room.

Mother moves to follow.

FATHER

Let him go.

She hangs back. Crossing her arms.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Nathan stalks towards his bedroom. Opens the door.

Then stops. Pauses in the doorway.

He closes the door again, loudly so his parents will hear. Then glides down the hallway, softly, toward the study.

INT. STUDY - SAME

Nathan snakes through the door, closing it behind him quietly.

He ducks into the closet beside the door.

INT. CLOSET - SAME

Nathan squats down, below the suits.

He peers out through the slats in the closet door.

The study door clicks open and shut as Father enters the room.

Father stands before the sword mounted on the wall. He reaches his hand up to caress the flat side of the blade.

Nathan watches as Father crosses the room to sit at the desk.

He opens the drawer. Takes out the small metal box.

Father belts his arm and prepares the syringe.

Nathan watches, confused, as Father plunges the needle into his arm.

Outside, the front door slams.

Father slumps in his chair.

Footsteps signal the approach of the Sandman.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

Mother lies awake in bed. Pulls her pillow over her head.

Pressing shut her eyes, she listens to the heavy tread of the Sandman.

She flinches with every thud.

INT. STUDY - SAME

The study door bursts open. Enter Sandman.

The large man fills the door frame. The Sandman looks not unlike the figure in Nathan's dream, only less monstrous. Ugly in a fundamental way that undercuts the effect of his tasteful attire.

SANDMAN
Arise! To work!

Father is shocked out of his repose. Quickly, he packs up the syringe and shoves it back into the desk.

The Sandman stomps over to the sword hanging on the wall. Father joins him.

Together they reach up to grasp the sword by its handle and pull it to the side. Instead of coming out of its wall mount, sword and mount rotate around until the blade points skyward.

There is a heavy click as the blade completes the half-circle rotation.

Together, Father and the Sandman push on the right side of the wall portion between the bookcases. The wall swings back and to the left, revealing a dark recess.

INT. CLOSET - SAME

Nathan's eyes widen.

He watches as the Sandman steps into the darkness. Father follows, and is lost from sight.

INT. STUDY - SAME

The room is silent, empty.

Suddenly, a blue flame bursts to life in the darkness behind the false wall.

The Sandman stands over the fire.

Father stands off to the side of the flame. He picks some tongs off the floor, and reaches into the darkness with them. He withdraws an odd-shaped chunk of metal, and holds it in the flame.

All manner of odd steel implements line the walls of the hidden room. The Sandman reaches up to remove a particularly cruel-looking device with a blunt hammer on one end.

Before the fire is a flat, metal surface. Father pulls the metal from the flame and places it on the surface.

The Sandman begins to hammer, bend, and mold the metal while Father holds it in place.

INT. CLOSET - SAME

Nathan is frozen with fear.

Eyes glued to the horrid scene.

The Sandman hammers. Carves. Shapes.

The metal takes form. Vaguely human. A face.

Empty, empty eye sockets.

INT. STUDY - SAME

Father bends over the fire. Face contorted in a mask of thrilled pain, a rictus grin of mad anticipation.

FATHER
It's almost ready.

SANDMAN
Eyes. Bring eyes.

INT. CLOSET - SAME

Nathan gasps sharply, recoiling.

He bumps the wall behind him.

Hears the noise. Holds his breath.

INT. STUDY - SAME

The Sandman also hears the noise.

Stops. Turns.

SANDMAN
Who dares--

The Sandman moves toward the closet.

FATHER
No!

Father grabs the Sandman. He's thrown off, easily, slammed into the wall.

Nathan, seeing his chance, bursts from the closet. He runs toward the door.

He is quick, but no match for the Sandman.

Just as Nathan reaches the door, the Sandman grabs him by the neck.

He pulls Nathan in toward him.

The Sandman ducks his head down, rank breath gusting into Nathan's face. Staring the child down.

SANDMAN

Now we have eyes.

He pulls Nathan into the darkness. Toward the flame.

The Sandman reaches one hairy palm into the fire, seemingly unaffected by the blaze. He pulls a handful of glowing red dust out of the fire.

The Sandman raises his hand and the dust toward Nathan's face. Nathan squirms, trying to pull away.

SANDMAN

A lovely pair of children's eyes.

He brings the red dust closer to Nathan's face. Tears spring forth from Nathan's eyes as the hand draws nearer.

Father grabs the Sandman's arm, halting its approach.

FATHER

Master, please! Let my Nathan keep his eyes! Let him keep them!

The Sandman slings Nathan around to knock his body against Father's.

Father loses his grip on the Sandman and falls back against the wall.

The Sandman sneers.

SANDMAN

Weakling.

Father raises his hand imploringly. Desperate.

FATHER

You promised me. That you would give me a new son first.

The Sandman growls, sneer turning into a frown.

SANDMAN

So I did.

He drops Nathan to the ground. Nathan's hand moves to protect his bruised throat, and he sucks in ragged gasps.

SANDMAN

I stand by my promises. I will give you a new son, immortal, better in every way...

Father moves to embrace the Sandman's feet.

FATHER

Thank you, Master. Thank you--

The Sandman kicks Father, knocking him away.

SANDMAN

The boy can keep his eyes, then.
For now.

The Sandman reaches down. He pins Nathan to the ground beneath him.

SANDMAN

But let us observe the mechanism of the hands and feet.

With a sudden movement, the Sandman dislocates Nathan's arm at the elbow.

Nathan screams.

The Sandman twists the arm around. He bends it this way and that, twisting it into unnatural angles.

SANDMAN

Hmm...

Nathan is screaming and screaming.

Father sits on the floor, impotent, sobbing.

Face impassive, studious, the Sandman twists Nathan's arm again and again.

SANDMAN

Better where it was. The Old One knew what he was doing.

With a final snap, the Sandman twists the arm into its original position.

Nathan sucks in a last, painful gulp of air, before collapsing into unconsciousness.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nathan opens his eyes to see Mother bending over him.

MOTHER
Nathan, are you awake?

Nathan tries to look around, but every movement sends ripples of pain throughout his body.

MOTHER
Don't move.

A shadow creeps along the wall, rising behind mother.

Nathan's breath quickens.

MOTHER
It's only the doctor. He's come for more blood...

The shadow engulfs Mother. Nathan's vision goes black.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Nathan gasps awake. Sweating and panicked.

Clara sits by his bedside. Nathan's movement startles her from the book she is reading.

CLARA
You scared me.

NATHAN
Is the Sandman still here?

CLARA
Who?

Nathan collects himself.

NATHAN
Nothing. Where is Father?

CLARA
He's working. Your Mom is cleaning
the house. You weren't in school
today.

Nathan tries to sit up in bed. He winces, pain everywhere.
But does it.

CLARA
I was worried.

NATHAN
I'm sore all over.

CLARA
Your Mom said that you fell down
the stairs last night. She said
that you were sleepwalking.

Clara looks down at her hands.

CLARA
I didn't know you were a
sleepwalker.

NATHAN
Neither did I.

Nathan rubs his tender arms. There are large bruises on his
wrists and elbows.

He slips them under the sheets, out of sight.

NATHAN
What did I miss at school?

CLARA
Not much. I'm the one that missed
out. I had nobody to eat lunch
with.

NATHAN
What did they serve?

CLARA
Hot dogs.

She makes a retching motion.

CLARA

The grossest was that Kevin kid. He sat down at the table beside me, and started peeling the skin off of his hot dogs.

NATHAN

What?

CLARA

I know.

NATHAN

Maybe he was trying to impress you.

CLARA

Eww.

They laugh together.

FATHER

Who is this?

They turn. Father stands in the doorway. Looking at Clara.

NATHAN

Dad. This is Clara.

CLARA

I, uh, we're friends from school.

Father regards her suspiciously for a moment. Looks over to Nathan.

FATHER

When you feel better, we will have dinner.

NATHAN

Okay.

Father returns his iron gaze to Clara.

FATHER

Nice to meet you. Clara.

Then he's gone, as quickly as he appeared.

NATHAN

Sorry about him. He doesn't talk to many people.

CLARA
It's okay.

She smiles.

CLARA
So that's your Dad.

NATHAN
Yeah.

CLARA
You know, you have his eyes.

She laughs again. But nervously now. Twisting her fingers together.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Nathan is helping his Mother set a large, dark, wooden table.

The setting of the table is accomplished in a ritualistic fashion. Each plate and piece of cutlery is set out in order, carefully positioned.

Mother realigns a knife set down by Nathan.

MOTHER
Nathan, go into the cupboard above the sink. There are some brass candle holders there. We'll use them for a change.

NATHAN
Okay.

Nathan moves off toward the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Nathan walks through the spotless kitchen toward the sink. He reaches up and swings open the cupboard above the sink.

The cupboard is large, white, and completely empty except for two ornate brass candle holders. They are dwarfed by the empty white.

Nathan takes up the two candle holders and closes the empty cupboard.

INT. DINING ROOM - SAME

Nathan re-enters the dining room.

Father is there.

Mother is already sitting at the table. Looking down into her empty hands.

FATHER
I'll take those.

He relieves Nathan of the candle holders and positions them carefully around the center of the table. He fiddles with them, as if there were particular places for them to go.

FATHER
Have a seat.

Nathan sits down, across the table from his mother. The two face each other over the thinner part of the table.

Father moves to stand over his place at the table. He sits down. Is still a moment.

The front door slams.

Father rises again.

Footsteps fall.

FATHER
Nathan, set another place at the table.

The footsteps thud closer.

Nathan is frozen.

FATHER
Nathan!

MOTHER
Obey your father.

The footsteps thud. Nathan rises and enters the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Nathan stumbles into the kitchen. He jerks over to the sink.

The footsteps thud closer, then stop. Voices in the dining room.

FATHER

Please, sit.

Nathan lurches forward and vomits into the sink.

He lurches forward a few more times, dry heaving. Holds himself up, weakly, over the sink.

Nathan reaches up and turns on the tap. Takes a drink of water and lets the sink run to rinse out the vomit.

Nathan watches the water pour through the sink. It splashes off the basin and spirals into the drain.

He wipes his mouth with a nearby dish towel. Then goes through the drawers and cupboards, gathering up a plate, a cup, and cutlery.

INT. DINING ROOM - SAME

Nathan re-enters the dining room, carrying the dishes and cutlery.

The Sandman sits at the table, opposite Father.

FATHER

Nathan, this is Coppelius.

MOTHER

Coppelius works with your father.

Nathan trembles in the door frame

COPPELIUS tips his imaginary hat at the young Nathan.

COPPELIUS

Pleased to make your acquaintance.

Coppelius grins, all teeth.

Mother clears her throat. She motions for Nathan to set Coppelius's place.

Nathan moves, slowly, towards the monstrous man.

He sets down the plate, cup, and cutlery before Coppelius.
As he does so, Coppelius reaches out and grabs his forearm.
Nathan is petrified. Coppelius inspects the arm.

COPPELIUS
You have quite the bruise on your
wrist.

FATHER
The boy is clumsy. Always hurting
himself.

COPPELIUS
Is that right?

He releases Nathan. Nathan shrinks away, into his seat.
Father turns towards Nathan.

FATHER
You seem better. You will go back
to school tomorrow.

NATHAN
Okay.

MOTHER
Did Clara bring your homework for
you?

NATHAN
I don't have any.

Coppelius rumbles into the conversation.

COPPELIUS
Who is Clara?

NATHAN
Nobody.

FATHER
Come now. Don't be shy.

MOTHER
Leave the boy alone.

FATHER
You stay out of this.

Mother bites her lip. She seems about to lose her temper, but composes herself.

MOTHER
I'll get the roast.

FATHER
Some wine too, for our guest.

Mother purses her mouth. She rises and steps into the kitchen.

COPPELIUS
This... Clara. Is she pretty?

NATHAN
What do you care?

COPPELIUS
Does she have pretty eyes?

Coppelius chuckles at his own private joke, a dark, rumbling, hacking sound.

NATHAN
Leave her alone.

COPPELIUS
And who are you, that I should listen?

FATHER
The boy means nothing by it.

Coppelius rises, roaring.

COPPELIUS
I am talking to Nathan, not you.

Father sinks into his chair.

FATHER
I'm sorry. Master.

COPPELIUS
Nathan.

Coppelius moves nearer to Nathan.

COPPELIUS
You like this girl, this... Clara.

He places a hairy hand on Nathan's shoulder.

Nathan is shaking.

COPPELIUS
Do you want her?

He bends down to whisper into Nathan's attentive ear.

COPPELIUS
I can give her to you.

A loud crash is heard.

Mother stands in the doorway, stunned. Staring at Nathan and Coppelius. She has dropped a bottle of wine. It lies in pieces all over the floor.

FATHER
You clumsy--

MOTHER
I'm sorry, I--

FATHER
Just get the roast.

Father begins to clean up the glass. Mother rushes off into the kitchen.

Coppelius straightens and returns to his seat, casually.

Mother returns with a plate covered in slices of roast beef.

MOTHER
I'm so sorry.

COPPELIUS
We don't mind. Do we, Nathan?

NATHAN
No.

FATHER
I'll clean the rest of this up
later.

He places the pieces of broken glass on the corner of the table and returns to his seat.

Mother dishes up Nathan, then Father, then herself.

She passes the roast to Coppelius, who loads a tremendous amount of meat onto his plate.

Nathan begins to poke his meat with his fork, playing with it.

MOTHER
Wait for grace.

COPPELIUS
Allow me.

Mother and Father clasp their hands.

Nathan puts the fork down, and begins to pray.

COPPELIUS
Father. Great one.

He clasps his giant hands before him.

COPPELIUS
It is good to have things out in
the open.

He unclasps his hands and holds them up at his sides, looking toward the ceiling.

COPPELIUS
Take our souls. Keep your eyes upon
us.

He balls his fingers into fists.

COPPELIUS
Deliver us into your hands.

ALL
Amen.

Nathan looks around the table.

Mother has bitten her lip hard enough to draw blood. She dabs at it with her napkin.

Father is trembling, barely able to keep food on his fork.

Coppelius rips into the meat like an animal.

Nathan eats quietly.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

The bell is ringing. Children stream outside.

Nathan steps quietly down the hall.

Clara intercepts him as he is about to leave the building.

CLARA
Did you forget?

NATHAN
What?

CLARA
My surprise. I've got something to
show you.

NATHAN
Not today.

Clara is hurt.

CLARA
Yes today. You promised.

Nathan looks at her quietly for a moment.

NATHAN
I'm sorry. Okay. Show me.

EXT. FOREST - SAME

Nathan and Clara are walking through the woods. It's early
spring now, and the forest is beginning to bloom.

Clara gazes about, wide-eyed in wonder. Nathan smiles, glad
to see her happy.

NATHAN
It's a nice day.

CLARA
It's perfect.

She looks off into the distance.

CLARA
It's not much farther.

EXT. RUINED FORT - SAME

Clara and Nathan stand before a large, ruined, mostly wooden building. A small tower rises up from the building.

Though the building is a ruin, it is in surprisingly good shape, evidence of a solid construction.

NATHAN

What is it?

CLARA

Well, I found it about a week ago, and I asked my Dad about it. He says it was probably an old fur trading post that, for whatever reason, hasn't been declared a historical monument.

NATHAN

It's amazing.

CLARA

It must have been built by somebody who really knew what he was doing. It's in great shape, all things considered. A lot is rotten, but the tower is still strong, give or take a few stairs.

NATHAN

You've climbed up it?

CLARA

Sure. Come on, I'll take you.

She bounds off into the building. Nathan follows.

INT. STAIRCASE - SAME

Nathan and Clara climb up a small, cramped, winding staircase. They move in tight circles as they climb up the rectangular tower.

Nathan follows Clara, stealing glances at her as they climb.

INT. TOWER - SAME

Nathan and Clara enter the top of the tower through a hole in the floor.

The tower has a small roof to shelter from the rain. The walls rise like railings, stopping halfway up. The roof is supported by corner posts.

The landscape stretches far and wide beyond the tower.

NATHAN

Be careful. Don't fall.

CLARA

Look.

She gestures outward.

The forest stretches away for miles. The nearby town is visible on its edge. Everything is green, cozy, and warm.

Nathan smiles at Clara.

NATHAN

Thank you for this.

He breathes deep in the warm, fresh air. The world stretches out before him.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The familiar family scene. Mother knits on the couch. Father lies on his recliner. Nathan sits on the floor, watching television.

Mother, preoccupied with her knitting, seems to sense something in the air.

A stench.

She looks up, blankly, dropping her needles.

MOTHER

The Sandman is coming.

Nathan sucks in his breath.

Father is still, brooding in his chair.

FATHER
Yes, he comes.

MOTHER
Must he? Why won't he leave us?

Father sits up, slowly.

FATHER
He is coming for the last time.

He rises. Moves over to Nathan.

Father leans down and kisses the boy tenderly, on the top of his head.

FATHER
Go to bed, Nathan.

Father straightens, but does not move away.

Mother rises. Taking Nathan by the hand, she leads him out of the room.

Father is left standing alone in the middle of the room.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

Mother tucks Nathan into bed.

NATHAN
Does he mean it? Is it really the last time?

Mother looks away, through the far wall.

MOTHER
Your father keeps his promises.

The front door slams.

MOTHER
Lie down in bed. Go to sleep.

Footsteps thud towards the study. Mother rushes from the room.

Nathan picks up a book and begins to read, doing his best to act like nothing is wrong.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Nathan is awoken by a sudden explosion.

Heavy footsteps thud down the hallway.

Nathan rises and runs to the door, throwing it open.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Nathan sees Coppelius running away down the hallway, trying to escape the house.

As Coppelius turns the corner, he spies Nathan.

Coppelius stops. Slowly, he advances toward Nathan.

COPPELIUS

Lovely puppet.

Nathan backs away. Coppelius moves closer.

Another explosion shakes the house. It blows open the door to the study. Black smoke pours from the opening.

Coppelius draws back. He casts a last look at Nathan, then rushes away, out of the house.

Nathan turns back to the study.

Slowly, he moves toward the open door.

As he approaches, he can hear frantic sobbing alongside the crackle of fire.

INT. STUDY - SAME

Pulling his shirt up over his mouth, Nathan enters the study.

The hidden entrance to the dark room is open. Flames burn at its mouth, and black smoke spills from the darkness beyond.

Nathan hears the sobbing again and looks down to see Mother lying on the floor, back against the wall. She is disheveled, crying, her clothes half off her body.

Nathan kneels before her. Still sobbing, she embraces him.

MOTHER

Oh, Nathan! Your father-- your
father--

A spell of violent coughing interrupts her. Nathan turns to see Father, seated, face down on his desk.

Nathan breaks free of his Mother's clinging embrace, and moves toward his Father.

Father is coughing raggedly. His belt is tightened around his arm, and the syringe lies on the floor nearby.

Father looks up at Nathan's approach, still coughing.

He reaches up, putting his hand on Nathan's shoulder.

FATHER

Nathan...

He reaches his other hand up toward the boy.

FATHER

Give me back my eyes.

He begins to paw at Nathan, reaching to claw at his face. Nathan struggles.

FATHER

Give them back--

Mother, still sobbing, grabs Nathan from behind. She pulls him away from Father.

Mother drags Nathan from the burning room.

Coughing, Father fumbles at his desk. He grabs the metal sphere. It digs into his palms, drawing blood.

The smoke curls around Father. Taking him from Nathan's sight. Drawing him into a world of smoke and fire.

INT. CAR - DAY

Nathan sits alone in the back seat. He is dressed in a suit and tie.

In his hands, on his lap, he hold a ceramic urn. The urn is white, patterned with green ivy vines.

Mother sits in the front passenger seat. Nathan's AUNT is driving.

Nathan stares at the urn.

Mother looks blankly at the dashboard. Aunt drives quietly and uncomfortably.

Mother moves suddenly.

MOTHER

It was a nice service, wasn't it?

AUNT

Oh, yes. Very pleasant.

MOTHER

We were lucky, after all.

AUNT

It's a wonder the fire didn't spread further.

MOTHER

Yes. All we have to do is seal up the study door.

Nathan's gaze never leaves the urn.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Closed, the study door still towers over the hallway.

Nathan stands before the door, holding the urn.

He stares at the door.

The door stands untouched.

Nathan holds the urn up before the door, looking at them both.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Nathan is painting the door white with a large brush.

He strokes the paint on carefully, evenly.

With a smaller brush, Nathan overlays a design in green.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

His work done, Nathan stands before the study door.

He has painted it to match the urn. White with green ivy crisscrossing, vines entwining.

Nathan leaves the hallway, returning to his room.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

The door stands.

Years go by.

The vines upon the door move, twist, knot together.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

An older Nathan, now 20, folds clothes into a suitcase.

The suitcase lies open on Nathan's bed, in the process of being packed. Others lie near the door, closed.

There is a knock on the door. Nathan starts.

NATHAN

Come in.

The door opens and an older Clara shines through.

Clara has grown into a stunning woman. She glides over to Nathan and gives him a kiss.

CLARA

Why do all men refuse to begin packing until the last minute?

NATHAN

I'm almost done.

CLARA

You don't seem very excited.

Nathan shrugs.

Clara flops down on the bed, arranging herself around the suitcases.

CLARA

I'd be pretty excited to leave home for the first time, with a full scholarship, to study under my favorite painter.

NATHAN

I guess I'm just nervous.

CLARA

You're never nervous. Or excited. If you looked happy I'd be worried you were sick.

Nathan laughs.

CLARA

Are you coming down with something?

NATHAN

I'm okay.

CLARA

It's too bad the summer is over so soon. It seems like we barely got to see each other. I guess we'll see each other even less now.

NATHAN

You're always busy with classes during the school year anyway.

CLARA

I still miss you.

NATHAN

I didn't mean it like that.

CLARA

I hoped that when you finally went to school you'd go to the same one as me.

NATHAN

I know.

He stops packing. Sits down on the bed beside Clara and puts his arm around her. She huddles into him.

NATHAN
It just didn't work out. Things
will be okay.

CLARA
I guess.

He hugs her.

NATHAN
I have to finish packing.

She nods. He kisses the top of her head and then pulls away
to resume packing.

CLARA
At least you're finally getting out
of here. You're too talented to
keep painting houses.

NATHAN
I like painting houses.

CLARA
Well, then you've got a summer job
lined up already.

Nathan zips up the suitcase and places it by the door. He
opens a duffel bag and starts to pack in various art
supplies.

CLARA
Is the Sandman coming with you?

Nathan freezes.

NATHAN
What?

CLARA
The Sandman.

She points to the bedroom wall.

An abstracted portrait of Coppélius hangs on the wall. Its
eyes burn a vicious green.

NATHAN
Oh. I suppose so. Spalanzani said
it was his favorite piece in my
portfolio application.

CLARA

It's good, but I don't see why you hang it on the wall. I hate it looking at me.

NATHAN

It's just a painting. Take it down.

Clara moves toward the painting, somewhat hesitantly. Nathan opens up a large suitcase that already contains a number of canvases.

Clara takes the painting down and hands it to Nathan, who wraps it up and packs it into the suitcase.

NATHAN

That's almost it.

CLARA

I wish I could drive you.

NATHAN

The bus is fine. It's too far out of your way. You have to get to school too.

CLARA

I know. But still.

NATHAN

Can you take a couple of bags outside and start the car?

CLARA

Okay.

She stands and picks up two of the bags by the door.

Nathan takes her wrist lightly.

NATHAN

Thanks, Clara.

She smiles, a little sad, and he releases her.

She carries the bags out of the room.

Nathan waits until she is gone, then unpacks the painting of the Sandman.

NATHAN

Spalanzani said you amazed him.

He holds it up before him.

NATHAN

You don't look like much to me.

He stretches his fingers out, placing them lightly on the Sandman's face.

Pulls his hand away, curling his fingers into a fist.

His gaze goes hard.

Nathan tosses the painting onto the bed. He picks up a nearby lamp and breaks it against the corner of the bed.

He looks down at the broken lamp in his hand. His face softening.

He places the broken lamp carefully in the garbage.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Nathan carries his remaining bags down the hallway.

The painted study door looms in the background as Nathan walks away.

MOTHER

Nathan.

Nathan stops and turns. Mother stands in her bedroom doorway.

She looks old.

MOTHER

Where are you going?

NATHAN

I'm leaving early. Everything is packed.

MOTHER

You're leaving? Already?

Mother moves toward Nathan and looks at the boy lovingly.

MOTHER

It's going to be lonely in this house. I wish you weren't going.

NATHAN
I have to go.

MOTHER
I wish your Father was still here.

NATHAN
I'm sorry.

MOTHER
You should have seen him before we were married. You wouldn't have recognized him. He used to call me flower. He told everyone we met in a garden.

NATHAN
I have to go. Clara will be waiting.

MOTHER
Clara. She's so pretty.

She lifts a hand to touch Nathan's cheek.

MOTHER
You should have seen me when I was young, Nathan. I was pretty too...

Outside, a car horn honks. Nathan pulls away.

NATHAN
Goodbye.

MOTHER
Don't forget. To write. And be careful. Lock your doors at night.

Nathan leaves.

Mother withdraws, back to her room.

MOTHER
Don't forget.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Nathan leans against the window of the bus. Trying not to fall asleep.

His eyes are heavy. They keep trying to close and he keeps blinking them open.

He glimpses outside the window and sees part of a sign as it passes:

YOU ARE LEAVING

He looks around the bus. The seat beside him is empty, but a large man sits across from him, on the other side of the aisle. He has a dark overcoat pulled up over his head and appears to be asleep.

Nathan is seated around the middle of the bus. Looking ahead of him, he sees the back of a few heads.

He turns around to look behind him.

Inexplicably, everyone is turned away from him, to face the back of the bus. He can only see the backs of their heads.

They seem to be looking at the bathroom in the back of the bus.

The bathroom door is closed. A sign in the metal door with a red background announces that the room is OCCUPIED.

The sign slides away. It is replaced by a sign with a yellow background marked VACANT.

A dark, black smoke begins to seep out from around the closed door.

The other passengers become extremely agitated. They start to cry and pound their seats. Still, nobody turns to face Nathan.

Wherever Nathan looks, someone turns the back of their head toward him.

The man beside him begins coughing and wheezing. As Nathan turns toward him, he begins to convulse wildly. He still holds the overcoat over his body and face.

FATHER

Nathan.

Nathan turns away from the convulsing man to see Father standing in front of the bathroom door. He holds his sword in his hand.

FATHER

What are you doing here?

Father moves toward Nathan, carrying the sword.

FATHER
Where are you going? Why isn't your
Mother with you?

Father raises his sword and casually plunges it into the convulsing man.

The convulsing man screams. Blood begins to flow onto the floor beneath him.

Father continues to assault the convulsing man.

FATHER
Boy, I hope you know what you're
doing, because I sure don't.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

Nathan bolts awake.

He looks across the aisle. A BOOKISH MAN sits there, reading by the overhead light.

The man turns toward Nathan.

BOOKISH MAN
Bad dream?

Nathan nods.

NATHAN
I have a lot of them.

BOOKISH MAN
Doesn't everyone?

Nathan smiles weakly and turns to face the window.

EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - DAY

Nathan wanders between buildings.

The campus is bustling. A mad frenzy of bodies.

INT. FINE ARTS BUILDING - SAME

Nathan holds his class schedule in his hand, looking for the correct room number.

People scramble around him. A few knock into him as they pass by and excuse themselves.

Eventually Nathan finds his way over to the correct room.

He opens the door and steps inside.

INT. CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

The noise and bustle of the hallway drop away suddenly in the silence and order of the classroom.

Heads turn to regard Nathan as he enters the room.

Before the class stands Professor SPALANZANI, a man seemingly free from emotion. He is tall, thin, handsome, and about 40. Dark, intelligent eyes regard Nathan coldly from behind stylish glasses.

SPALANZANI

Another latecomer. Your name?

NATHAN

Nathan Ballantyne.

Spalanzani perks up at the name.

SPALANZANI

Ballantyne. The man behind the Sandman.

Spalanzani makes a mark on his attendance sheet.

Nathan spies an empty seat and escapes into the chair.

SPALANZANI

Where was I... James Elkins states that: "No matter how hard we look, we see very little of what we look at." I like that, because I've always thought of sight, in fact of all of the supposed "five senses," as limiting devices. Commonly, people speak of sight as an information-gathering device.

(MORE)

SPALANZANI (cont'd)

I prefer to think of sight as an information filter. Your eyes do more to eliminate possibilities than to explore them. Out of all the endless streams of data presented to your sight, only an infinitesimal amount is "accepted" by the eyes, and even less acknowledged by the mind. The rest is not so much ignored as it is unconsciously unseen.

Spalanzani's dark eyes glitter as he paces and speaks.

SPALANZANI

In addition to the physiological factors limiting your sight, innumerable psychological factors come into play. Both your present circumstances and the circumstances of your childhood interfere with and limit your perceptions. In addition, any number of social, moral, aesthetic, and religious influences alter, shape, and negate your perceptions. The secret to becoming a brilliant artist or viewer of art lies in the retraining of the eyes. The technical skill that you will develop during your time in this program is insignificant compared to the intellectual resources available to you, which will allow you to develop a receptivity to this otherwise imperceptible information. You must learn to see the world that is hidden from you, that you have hidden from yourself. This is a grueling and dangerous process. It involves the rejection of a surface reality in favour of a greater, deeper understanding of the world, one which is realized only at great personal cost. Only then will you be able to create truly meaningful art, art which unnerves the viewer by confronting him or her with blatant representations of this secret world.

Spalanzani turns the full force of his gaze toward his students.

SPALANZANI

That, my friends, is why they call us mad.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

Class has ended and the students are filing out.

Spalanzani is collecting his papers. Nathan approaches him.

NATHAN

Professor Spalanzani.

SPALANZANI

Nathan.

He shakes Nathan's hand.

SPALANZANI

I've been looking forward to meeting you.

NATHAN

Thank you for all of your support. I was told that you were instrumental in getting me this scholarship.

SPALANZANI

I was extremely impressed with some of your work. It's not perfect, but I think it shows a great deal of potential. That's why I put in a special request for you to be housed in the building that the university owns across the street from my own house.

NATHAN

I wasn't aware of that.

SPALANZANI

I work closely with my students, which is why I accept so few. And I want to work particularly closely with you.

NATHAN

I'm honored. I've admired your work for some time.

SPALANZANI

I'd like you to join me for dinner at my house Sunday night. I'm inviting all the students to visit me, separately, to show them around my studio and get a better sense of their interests.

NATHAN

Um, of course.

SPALANZANI

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to get to my next class.

EXT. FINE ARTS BUILDING - SAME

Schedule in hand, Nathan steps outside and attempts to get his bearings.

A small group of smokers is congregated near the doors. One of the smokers is SID, a lively 20-something. Sid is also a student of Spalanzani's.

Sid spies Nathan out of the corner of his eye.

SID

Hey, it's the Sandman.

Nathan turns.

SID

You seem to have made quite the impression on Spalanzani.

NATHAN

I suppose so.

Sid offers a cigarette.

SID

Do you smoke?

NATHAN

No.

SID

Hey, there's a party on Saturday, just a Fine Arts mixer at the campus bar. You going?

NATHAN
I don't know. Maybe.

SID
Well, "maybe" we'll see you there.
Where you headed?

NATHAN
Art History.

SID
Over in that brown building.

NATHAN
Thanks.

Nathan steps away.

SID
Later, Mr. Talkative.

The group chuckles. Nathan ignores them.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Nathan prepares dinner in a small, barren apartment. It is a bachelor's suite consisting of a single open room.

In one corner of the room, a mattress lies on the floor. In the opposite corner of the room is a small kitchen area, where Nathan drains a pot of macaroni.

He mixes in some cheese and other ingredients, and dishes up a plate which he takes over to a chair in the middle of the room.

Sitting on the chair, Nathan faces toward his work area, which consists of the rest of the apartment.

Erected on an easel before him is a canvas upon which Nathan's latest painting is displayed.

Nathan has painted a bus from the perspective of somebody sitting halfway back. A few scattered passengers sit, strangely disembodied, only the backs of their heads visible.

The bus driver is large, his body dwarfing the seat upon which he sits. The driver faces away as well, only the back of his head visible, but he appears monstrous, shabbily dressed and wearing a battered top hat.

There is a window off to the side of the room. Nathan gets up and looks out.

The window faces the street. Across the street sits a large, somewhat Gothic house, the home of Professor Spalanzani.

The lights are on at Spalanzani's house, and there are some signs of activity.

In the upper left window of the house, the blinds are pulled shut, but light leaks from the cracks.

Suddenly, all of the lights in Spalanzani's house go out at once.

Nathan freezes, fork poised in the air.

The house is dark, silent.

In the upper left window, the light begins to flicker sporadically on and off. Then it stops.

For a while, all is silent. Then, as suddenly as the lights went out, they are on again.

Nathan continues to eat, walking away from the window.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

The bar is busy, packed wall to wall. Loud hip-hop pounds. There are some dancers, but most of the people are seated or standing, talking to one another.

Nathan enters the bar without much fanfare. He is not timid as much as he is naturally quiet.

Sid and a small group are standing near the pool table. Nathan starts toward them and is spied by Sid.

SID

Hey!

He waves Nathan over.

SID

It's chatty Cathy.

NATHAN

I didn't mean to be rude, I was just busy.

SID
 No worries. Hey, meet Thomas,
 Sarah, and the real Cathy.

Nathan shakes the hand of THOMAS, a tall, handsome man. He
 nods to SARAH and CATHY, both of whom are rather small,
 slender women. Cathy appears to be Thomas's girlfriend,
 hanging off him.

NATHAN
 Hi.

SID
 I've known Thomas and Cathy since
 high school, and I met Sarah in my
 English class yesterday. You here
 with anyone?

NATHAN
 No, I just moved here for school. I
 don't know anybody.

CATHY
 You seemed pretty friendly with
 Spalanzani.

NATHAN
 I don't really know him. He liked
 my portfolio and got me a
 scholarship.

SARAH
 That must be nice.

SID
 Hey, I'm going to get us some
 drinks.

Sid roams away.

THOMAS
 Are you an artist too?

CATHY
 Thomas is in chemistry. He doesn't
 have much use for us artist-types.

Nathan frowns.

NATHAN
 My father was a chemist.

THOMAS

Yeah? Who did he work with?

Nathan looks away.

NATHAN

No one. I mean, he worked for a lot of places, but then he decided to become independent. But he died before he could establish himself.

SARAH

I'm sorry.

THOMAS

What did he do, exactly?

NATHAN

I'm not sure. He didn't talk about it much, and when he did I couldn't understand him.

Sid returns. He distributes drinks, beer for Thomas and Nathan and gin and tonics for Sarah and Cathy.

SID

What did I miss?

THOMAS

We're talking chemistry.

SID

Dear God, why?

NATHAN

Father told me that chemistry was the key to life. That it was an art like my painting, closer to magic than to science.

SID

Now you even sound like Spalanzani.

CATHY

He's something, isn't he?

SID

Yeah, but I'm not sure what.

THOMAS

I've never thought about chemistry that way. I'm not sure...

NATHAN

It's just something he used to say.

SID

Do you want to play some pool?
Those guys are just finishing up.

Sid heads over toward some nearby pool tables.

THOMAS

Well, I guess we should follow him.

CATHY

Sid can be pretty impulsive.

Thomas and Cathy follow Sid.

SARAH

So, you paint?

NATHAN

Yeah.

SARAH

I tried painting, but I'm not very good. So I mostly just write. And I do a bit of acting.

NATHAN

I always wanted to write. But I can never think of anything to write.

SARAH

Well, everyone has stories. Maybe your paintings tell your stories.

NATHAN

Maybe.

SARAH

I've got to go to the washroom, can you tell Sid I'll be back?

She walks away. Nathan moves toward the pool tables.

SID

Nathan. Glad you could join us.

NATHAN

Sarah just went to the bathroom.

SID
It looks like you two are getting
friendly. I guess I'm out of luck.

NATHAN
Oh, no. No, I'm engaged.

CATHY
Really?

Nathan lifts his hand to display an engagement band.

SID
Where's the lucky lady?

NATHAN
She doesn't live here, she goes to
another school.

SID
You seem pretty young. You decide
to marry the first girl you saw?

CATHY
Sid!

SID
What?

NATHAN
We grew up together.

Sarah returns.

SID
Sarah! Nathan was just telling us
about his fiance.

SARAH
Oh.

NATHAN
There isn't much to tell.

SID
Well, let's play pool then. Are you
any good?

NATHAN
No.

SID

Well then, you can be on Thomas's team.

Sid racks up the balls and Thomas passes out cues.

NATHAN

Hey, did Spalanzani invite any of you to his house?

CATHY

Yeah. I think it's creepy.

SARAH

He's really intense. He scares me a little.

Sid lines up for the break, and they begin to play. Thomas, Cathy, and Nathan teamed against Sid and Sarah. None of them are particularly good.

SID

Go easy on the guy. He just wants to hit on pretty girls.

THOMAS

So you sympathize.

SID

He's just a bit odd. I doubt he means anything by it, really. After all, he's invited all the men too.

NATHAN

I live across the street from him.

SID

Really?

NATHAN

Yeah. Apparently he arranged it that way.

They look at Nathan.

CATHY

Now THAT is weird.

SID

Maybe I've got him figured wrong. Maybe he wants to hit on the pretty boys instead.

NATHAN

Well, I guess we'll see. I'm supposed to go over tomorrow night.

SID

Earlier than me. Let me know how it goes.

CATHY

Yeah. Good luck.

Nathan shoots and misses.

NATHAN

Thanks.

EXT. SPALANZANI HOUSE - NIGHT

Nathan approaches Spalanzani's house.

It is a large building. Though not as large as the apartment complex where Nathan lives, it has far more presence.

Nathan climbs the stairs up the front porch and knocks on the heavy oaken door.

The knock echoes throughout the house.

Nathan waits; he is about to knock again when Spalanzani opens the door.

SPALANZANI

Nathan. Come in.

INT. ENTRYWAY - SAME

Nathan steps inside. The grand house is ornate, tasteful, and slightly archaic. Its atmosphere is warm despite its obvious age.

SPALANZANI

Let me take your coat.

Nathan offers his jacket to Spalanzani, who takes it and hangs it on a row of hooks near the door.

NATHAN

Thank you once again for inviting me.

SPALANZANI

Don't be so formal. Come, I'll show you around. Not around the house-- you haven't travelled halfway across the country to engage in domestic pettiness. Let's go out back, to my studio.

Spalanzani leads Nathan past a staircase and further into the house.

EXT. SPALANZANI HOUSE - SAME

Nathan follows Spalanzani out the back door of the large house. They enter a large, fenced-in yard.

SPALANZANI

The house has been in my family for ages. But this, this is new.

Spalanzani leads the way, eagerly, over to a smaller building. It is plain and unimpressive, though fairly large.

SPALANZANI

This is where I work.

Spalanzani flings open the door of the building.

It opens into a vast darkness. There are no windows in the building, and the moonlight illuminates only a small empty space directly in front of Nathan.

SPALANZANI

Step inside.

Slowly, warily, Nathan moves forward.

INT. STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Nathan steps cautiously into the darkness.

Spalanzani follows; the door closes and Nathan is completely lost.

Nathan attempts to move back toward the door but Spalanzani's voice stops him.

SPALANZANI

Don't move around. You might walk into something. Just wait until I find the generators...

Nathan is still.

He waits, listening. But Spalanzani moves in silence.

Nathan shuffles his feet, hungry for sound.

Finally, he hears a click.

SPALANZANI

There.

There is a quick, bright, flash of light. It is gone as quickly as it appears.

Nothing, then another flash of light.

Then suddenly, white light floods the room.

As Nathan's eyes adjust, he sees that he is in a large, empty warehouse room.

Surrounding him, on all sides, spread throughout the room, are what can only be described as objects of torture.

Some of the objects are vaguely recognizable. A medieval rack, an iron maiden, flails. Each item is modified in some way to make it both more cruel and more seemingly organic.

The devices appear to have been handcrafted. They are built out of a combination of metal and latex, almost fleshy in some parts.

SPALANZANI

Impressive, no?

NATHAN

What are you doing?

SPALANZANI

It's my latest project. A series of mixed media sculptures, re-creations of outdated torture devices.

Spalanzani moves toward the iron maiden. Still under construction, it is shaped like a beautiful, terrified young woman, incredibly lifelike, only eyeless.

The "flesh" of the iron maiden is bursting at its seams, vague mechanical forms forcing their way through. Her mouth is frozen in a silent, endless scream.

SPALANZANI

The body, like all things, has perceived limitations. Historically, there have always been those who sought to exploit those limitations. These are their tools, recreated for a new, more brutal world.

NATHAN

But why?

SPALANZANI

Isn't it interesting? Just as there have always been those who have sought to exploit such limitations, there have been those able to transcend and exceed these limitations. Those whose eyes recognized a greater pain, one which dwarfed their physical pain, who found their tortures not only bearable but a pleasant escape.

NATHAN

These are horrid.

SPALANZANI

Oh, come now, Nathan. It's not like I'm using the damn things. The closest anyone will get to these will be three feet away, behind the gallery's velvet rope.

Nathan looks around the room, wide-eyed.

NATHAN

I suppose you're right.

SPALANZANI

You feel it though, don't you? That unrest? Somehow you have been violated, just by looking. By having them look back at you. That's the way I felt when I first saw your painting of the Sandman.

Nathan shifts his attention fully to Spalanzani.

NATHAN

You must never speak his name.

INT. DINING ROOM - SAME

Nathan and Spalanzani sit together at one end of a large wooden table, finishing a meal.

SPALANZANI

... So you see, Nathan, we share a certain sensibility. That's why I am so excited to have you for a student. There are other students that I arranged scholarships for because of technical skill or because of some unique and exciting perspective, set of ideas, or ability. But though you have a lot to learn, you possess an ability to disturb in an intellectually exciting way.

NATHAN

I don't know much about any of that. I'm not really an academic. But you know how you were talking in class, about looking, and seeing a secret world? That's the way I feel a lot of the time. Like the things I'm seeing cannot be real. Only they feel real. My dreams feel more real than my life. It's difficult to know where one ends and the other begins. I'm not sure there is a division like that. It's like you said in class, only more violent. Like the world I'm seeing is there beneath this one, trying to push its way through. Trying to destroy me. Painting helps me to protect myself. That world, those bad dreams, they become smaller, separate from me. I can look at them for a while, then walk away.

SPALANZANI

An exorcism of sorts. You pull the demons out of yourself and put them down on the canvas.

NATHAN

I don't think we're talking about the same thing. I've never felt that these things come from me.

SPALANZANI

But of course they do. Where else would they come from?

Spalanzani drinks, never taking his eyes off Nathan.

SPALANZANI

It's like my art. What horrible things. But what makes them so horrible? Take my recent project, the torture devices. I'm drawing on history, on the darkest yet undeniable instincts of the human animal. In part, that is where the terror comes from. You see these things, and you recognize their origins, that somewhere in you there is the capacity to create such things yourself.

NATHAN

I don't know.

SPALANZANI

Well, that isn't it, of course. They are unnerving for other reasons. You know the history, you find it repellent. But these are not mere historical artifacts. These are new creations, fashioned by the hands of a living artist. You may have the capacity in you to create such horror, but I have taken the extra step, and actually done so, right before your eyes.

Spalanzani smiles, drinking.

SPALANZANI

I am a monster, and I am standing beside you.

All of a sudden the front door opens and slams shut heavily. The sound echoes throughout the house.

Spalanzani starts.

SPALANZANI
What is he doing here?

Heavy footsteps fall. Treading toward the dining room.

SPALANZANI
Excuse me.

He rushes out of the room.

Nathan can hear voices in the hallway.

SPALANZANI
I told you not to come tonight.

VOICE
Our work.

SPALANZANI
Not tonight. I have a guest.

VOICE
We are almost done. It is almost
perfect. All we need is the eyes...

Nathan starts.

NATHAN
Coppelius.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Spalanzani is arguing with someone. He will not let the figure out of the shadows, confining him to the entryway.

Nathan bursts into the hallway.

NATHAN
You monster.

Spalanzani turns away from his visitor.

SPALANZANI
Nathan?

VOICE
So this is Nathan.

The figure forces his way past Spalanzani. The voice belongs to COPPOLA, a squat, shabby, dirty man.

Coppola is a stooped, hairy, ill-mannered man. He bears a striking resemblance to Coppelius, though physically smaller and possessing much less sophisticated an air.

COPPOLA

The painter, right? Spalanzani speaks highly of you.

NATHAN

Murderer. How dare you show your face around me.

SPALANZANI

You must be confused, Nathan. This is Coppola. He's a craftsman, he helps me work on my sculptures.

COPPOLA

Indeed, young sir, Coppola is a clever craftsman.

Coppola wears a tremendous, dingy jacket. He reaches into one of its endless pockets and withdraws a small black pouch.

He empties the contents into his hand. A pair of glittering glass eyes stare up at Nathan.

COPPOLA

You see? Eyes, pretty eyes, for the iron maiden.

NATHAN

Coppelius, you bastard. Who did you take those from?

SPALANZANI

Are you listening, Nathan? This is Coppola. He's worked with me for twenty-some years.

Coppola returns the eyes to his pocket.

COPPOLA

Since before you were born, no doubt, young master.

Nathan calms somewhat, though he is still visibly agitated.

NATHAN

Then it couldn't be... he looks so much like the man who killed my father.

SPALANZANI

Coppola? He's a brute but he's no killer.

NATHAN

I-- excuse me, I-- where is the bathroom?

SPALANZANI

Upstairs, on the left.

COPPOLA

Is the young master sick?

Coppola pulls a cloth roll out of another pocket and unfurls it, revealing all manner of bottles and syringes, fixed to the cloth.

COPPOLA

I have medicines.

SPALANZANI

Pack yourself and your garbage up and get out of here, you stupid beast.

Spalanzani ushers Coppola outside.

Nathan moves away, somewhat dazed.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME

Nathan stumbles up the stairs and into another hallway.

Holding his head as if suffering from a migraine, he opens the door to his left and barges in.

INT. WHITE BEDROOM - SAME

Instead of entering a bathroom, Nathan stumbles into a delicately decorated bedroom.

The entire room is white. The walls are a bright white, the furniture is white, and the large four-poster bed is white. White curtains drape the windows and hang over the bed.

On the bed, almost invisible, sits a BEAUTIFUL WOMAN. She is stunning, a true vision, perfectly groomed.

She wears a long white dress. Red, red lips are the only splash of color in the room.

Startled by Nathan's sudden entry, she withdraws silently into the corner of the room.

NATHAN

Oh, I'm sorry-- I didn't mean to scare you, I was just looking for the bathroom.

She stares at him with wide, frightened doe-eyes.

NATHAN

My name's Nathan, I--

She looks toward the closed window.

NATHAN

I'm sorry, I'll go.

He withdraws from the room.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME

Nathan closes the bedroom door tightly.

He stands before the door a moment, hand on the doorknob, before letting it go.

Nathan turns away. From behind the door, a small, timid voice is heard.

OLYMPIA

I'm Olympia.

Nathan turns back. He listens at the door for another word from OLYMPIA.

When she doesn't speak again, he moves away reluctantly.

INT. DINING ROOM - SAME

Nathan returns to the dining room, where he is greeted by a concerned Spalanzani.

SPALANZANI

Nathan, I'm sorry about the interruption-- the fool can barely remember his name, let alone the things I tell him.

NATHAN

It's okay. I'm sorry I overreacted.

SPALANZANI

If you like we can continue our conversation in class.

NATHAN

That would be best.

SPALANZANI

Let me show you to the door.

Spalanzani rises and ushers Nathan into the hallway.

EXT. SPALANZANI HOUSE - SAME

Spalanzani is seeing Nathan off at the door. Nathan pulls on his jacket.

NATHAN

I wanted to ask you about something else. Last night I noticed the lights in your house go off. Do you often experience power outages here?

SPALANZANI

Oh no, not to worry. It's just those generators I have in the studio-- I run the house and the studio off those generators, but I only run one at a time. Some of my projects require huge amounts of energy, and greater control over the currents, things like that.

NATHAN

Okay. I was getting ready to buy myself a box of surge protectors.

SPALANZANI

Don't bother. Thank you again for coming tonight Nathan. You're always welcome.

NATHAN
See you in class.

Spalanzani closes the door as Nathan walks away.

When he is at the street, Nathan turns back to the house.

He looks up at Olympia's window.

The light is on, and the blind is drawn. However, Nathan can see Olympia, peering out from behind the edge of the blinds.

DREAM

EXT. WINDY FIELD - DAY

Nathan stands before a PREACHER in the middle of the field.

Nathan is dressed as if for a wedding. His head is bowed. The preacher mouths silent prayers.

The preacher motions behind Nathan. Nathan turns.

Clara, radiant in a stunning white wedding dress, trails toward him. The wind causes the long dress to play around her, veil dancing.

Nathan reaches out to offer Clara his hand. All smiles, Clara reaches out to accept it.

Suddenly, a large, hairy hand reaches between the two to grasp Nathan's hand.

It is the Sandman. The preacher is gone, the Sandman in his place.

He squeezes Nathan's hand. Crushes it.

Nathan falls to his knees, face a rictus of pain.

Clara screams soundlessly.

The Sandman releases Nathan. Nathan holds his shattered hand.

The Sandman bends down toward the injured man and speaks.

SANDMAN
What do you want her for?

He motions at Clara. Nathan turns to view his bride-to-be.

It is no longer Clara at all, but Olympia. Only devoid of eyes.

Nathan recoils.

SANDMAN

Look.

He opens his palms before Nathan, revealing a pair of eyeballs.

SANDMAN

You could have anything.

The Sandman stomps his left foot quickly, three times.

The wind picks up, begins to roar.

SANDMAN

Anything at all.

The Sandman stomps his foot again, three times.

A circle of fire springs up around the Sandman and Nathan, cutting them off from his bride, who is Clara once again.

SANDMAN

Let me in.

The Sandman stomps his foot again, three times.

The circle of fire begins to spin, closing in on Nathan with each rotation.

END DREAM

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Nathan awakens suddenly to three loud knocks upon his door.

He struggles into some clothes, calling out.

NATHAN

Who is it?

Sid shouts from the other side of the door.

SID
Come on, we're going to be late.

Nathan unlocks the door and welcomes Sid in.

SID
Christ, every time I look at this
place I get depressed.

Nathan finishes pulling on his clothes and begins to brush
his teeth.

NATHAN
It's not that bad.

SID
It wouldn't be that bad if you
didn't use your paintings as
wallpaper.

He approaches a painting of Nathan's Father, slumped over a
desk with a long sword in his back and hundreds of syringes
piercing the rest of his body.

SID
What's wrong with floral patterns?

Nathan spits and starts combing his hair.

Sid wanders around the apartment, glancing at the walls,
which at this point are covered with furious new work.

He approaches Nathan's easel.

SID
This is new.

On the easel, in progress, is a portrait of Olympia.

SID
A lot more realistic than your
other work. Is this your fiance?

Nathan slips the comb into his pocket.

NATHAN
No.

Sid gives the painting another look.

SID
Hmm.

INT. CORRIDOR - SAME

Sid and Nathan hurry down the apartment corridor.

SID
You know, Sarah and I broke up.

NATHAN
Really?

SID
Yeah, just over the weekend. It's not a big deal. I mean, it just wasn't working out.

NATHAN
I'm sorry.

SID
Yeah, well. Thanks.

INT. CLASSROOM - SAME

Nathan, Sid, and Cathy sit together in Spalanzani's class.

SPALANZANI
... Before our time today is over, I'd like to appropriate a moment, purely for selfish reasons. You may have heard that this weekend is the official opening of my latest solo exhibit. I'll be displaying entirely new works, some of which you may have already seen in progress at my home studio. Everyone is of course welcome but not obligated to attend. Class dismissed.

The students begin packing up their class materials. Nathan leans over to Sid.

NATHAN
Are you planning to go?

SID
Definitely. I can't wait to see the reactions.

CATHY

I suppose I'll go, just to keep up appearances. I'll drag Thomas along.

SID

Why should the poor boy have to suffer? He didn't choose this life.

CATHY

I just want to intimidate him a little. Show him what kind of weapons I have access to. Keep him in line.

They head toward the door.

NATHAN

Well, let's plan to go together then.

SID

Fine by me. Safety in numbers.

As they pass Spalanzani, who is engaged with another student, he flashes a smile at Nathan.

Nathan nods quickly, ducking out of the room.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Nathan arrives home. He rushes to the window to look out.

The light is on in Olympia's room. The curtain is lifted and Nathan can see a form on the bed, only vaguely, that must be hers.

Nathan squints at the figure, frustrated.

There is a sudden knocking at the door, three knocks.

NATHAN

Go away.

Coppola's voice calls from outside the door.

COPPOLA

Please, young master, open the door.

Nathan pulls away from the window.

NATHAN

What do you want? Get out of here.

COPPOLA

Please, young master, just a moment.

Angry, Nathan rushes toward the door.

He throws it open to reveal Coppola.

NATHAN

Leave now, before I throw you down the stairs.

COPPOLA

Please, I beg you, just a look.

Coppola reaches into his gigantic coat and begins to pull out various objects.

COPPOLA

I have books, see-- classics-- and here are some new brushes, a necessity for the young artist.

NATHAN

I'm not interested.

COPPOLA

Are you unwell? I have medicine, lots of medicine. Anything you want.

NATHAN

I'm fine.

COPPOLA

I've got jewelry, gold and silver. A nice gift for the young lady? And watches, of course. The old standby.

NATHAN

No. Go away.

COPPOLA

And then eyes. Hundreds of eyes.

Nathan blanches.

COPPOLA

Ah, so you're interested?

Coppola shoves his way into the apartment and over to the kitchen counter.

He reaches into his jacket and begins to pull out piece after piece of eyewear, laying each piece out onto the counter.

COPPOLA

I have everything, anything you'd ever need.

Quickly, quickly, the counter fills. Sunglasses, eyeglasses, colored lenses, monocles, goggles, binoculars, even a pocket telescope.

The glasses glint in the light. Nathan is transfixed.

He takes a particular interest in the pocket telescope.

NATHAN

What's that?

COPPOLA

You like it? See, see, look.

He passes the item to Nathan.

Nathan takes the pocket telescope and turns it over in his hand.

COPPOLA

Out the window.

Nathan moves over to the window and looks out, the telescope held to his eye.

Through the telescope, he can see Olympia, sitting on her bed, in perfect detail.

NATHAN

I'll take it. How much?

COPPOLA

A fine lens like that... I would have to ask for two hundred dollars.

NATHAN

That seems like a bit much.

COPPOLA

I'm sorry, young master. All things have their price...

Coppola reaches to reclaim the telescope. Nathan pulls away, holding it into his body.

NATHAN
No, I'll pay.

He pulls out his wallet and hands the money to Coppola, who pockets it greedily.

NATHAN
There. Now get out.

Coppola packs the eyewear back into his coat.

COPPOLA
Are you sure there's nothing else that you want?

NATHAN
Positive.

He ushers Coppola out the door.

COPPOLA
Well, young master, enjoy your purchase. If you desire anything else, come to Coppola.

Coppola chuckles, a throaty gurgle.

COPPOLA
I am never hard to find. I live in all the alleys, all the shadows in the city.

Nathan shuts the door on Coppola's face.

Heavy footsteps tread away. Nathan is at the window before they have faded down the stairs. Looking out.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

It is dawn. Nathan is sleeping in a chair, by the window.

Three knocks startle him into wakefulness.

Sid calls from outside the door.

SID
Nathan, get up.

Nathan looks out of the window. The curtain is open in the window of Spalanzani's house.

Nathan raises the eyeglass and looks out.

INT. HALL - SAME

Sid stands outside of Nathan's apartment. He listens at the door for sounds of movement. Then knocks again.

SID
Nathan!

INT. APARTMENT - SAME

Nathan stares through the eyeglass. Olympia has risen, bright as the sun. She sits looking into her bedside mirror, carefully combing her hair.

INT. HALL - SAME

Sid is pounding now.

SID
Goddamn it!

He hits the door with both fists. Then stops.

SID
Fine. Go to Hell.

INT. APARTMENT - SAME

Nathan is still ignoring Sid, intent on watching Olympia.

He drinks in the sight of her.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

Nathan is sitting before the window, eating and looking out, as the day drags into evening.

His telephone rings.

He ignores it, and it rings again. Annoyed, he picks it up.

NATHAN
What?

CLARA (PHONE)
Nathan?

Nathan blinks in recognition.

NATHAN
Clara.

CLARA (PHONE)
I haven't heard from you for a while.

NATHAN
I've been busy.

CLARA (PHONE)
How are your classes going?

NATHAN
Good.

CLARA (PHONE)
I talked to your Mother yesterday. She misses you. You should call her sometime.

NATHAN
What are you talking to her for?

CLARA (PHONE)
What?

Nathan looks out the window again.

CLARA (PHONE)
Nathan, is something wrong?

NATHAN
No.

CLARA (PHONE)
You've been acting strange lately.

NATHAN
Have I?

CLARA (PHONE)
You never call... And when I do
talk to you you're quiet, quieter
than usual.

NATHAN
I've never been much for the phone.
You know that.

CLARA (PHONE)
I know, but it's different.

Nathan peers out through the eyeglass at Olympia.

CLARA (PHONE)
I'm worried.

Olympia is standing in the window, looking at the street
below.

CLARA (PHONE)
About us.

Olympia looks up suddenly; directly at Nathan.

NATHAN
I have to go.

CLARA (PHONE)
What? Don't--

Nathan hangs up the phone.

He stares at Olympia. She continues to look at him.

The phone rings.

Nathan ignores it.

Olympia stares up at him.

The phone rings and rings. Then it stops.

Olympia turns suddenly.

Spalanzani enters the room. He shoves Olympia away from the
window, and pulls down the blinds.

Nathan scowls, removing his eye from the scope.

INT. GALLERY - NIGHT

A large, modern building, the art gallery is filled with chattering men and women in semi-formal dress.

The walls of the gallery are lined with Spalanzani's nightmarish contraptions. Audience members regard them suspiciously from a distance and huddle, talking heatedly, in small groups.

There is a stage raised against one wall of the room. On it, a small band plays a selection of forgettable jazzy music. An unattended microphone stands at the front of the stage.

Nathan, Sid, Thomas, and Cathy stand together around the middle of the room.

CATHY

Well, I think it's simply horrible.

THOMAS

You won't get any argument from me.

SID

I like it. There is something sublime about it. Something transcendent in the movement through pain. What do you think, Nathan?

Nathan is busy looking around the room and appears not to have heard.

SID

Nathan.

NATHAN

Huh?

SID

What's with you lately? Are we not interesting enough for you?

NATHAN

I'm just looking for someone.

THOMAS

Must be a woman.

SID

Well, that explains a lot.

CATHY

You're such an ass, Sid.

THOMAS

Well, regardless of your opinion on these... things... you have to admit that it's pretty amazing to have built them all.

NATHAN

This is nothing. He has at least as many more, in his studio.

CATHY

Is that right? I barely paid any attention when I was there.

NATHAN

He didn't bring out his best one, which is this bizarre iron maiden.

SID

Oh, I heard about that. Maybe he's saving it for a bigger show or something.

NATHAN

I don't think it's done yet.

CATHY

The band is stopping.

True to word, the band winds down.

The room quiets somewhat and Spalanzani takes the stage.

A round of applause goes up as Spalanzani approaches the microphone. He smiles and bows quickly, then signals for the applause to stop. It dies away.

SPALANZANI

Thank you all for coming out tonight. I hope you're enjoying the exhibit-- or at least finding it interesting.

A murmur of nervous laughter spreads through the crowd.

SPALANZANI

To officially open this gallery showing, I would like to present my greatest work of art.

(MORE)

SPALANZANI (cont'd)

A thing of sheer, unadulterated beauty, to stand as counterpoint to the remainder of the show. Ladies and Gentlemen, my daughter, Olympia.

A door near the stage opens and Olympia steps through. She is wearing a long dress, black as evening.

Slowly, carefully, and with deliberate movements, she approaches the stage.

Nathan is transfixed.

CATHY

I didn't know Spalanzani had a daughter. She's gorgeous.

SID

(to Nathan)

So that's the mystery girl you've been painting.

Spalanzani takes Olympia's dainty hand, helping her up the stairs onto the stage.

SPALANZANI

Olympia will sing you a song I have written especially for this occasion.

Spalanzani steps away, off the stage. Olympia stands before the microphone.

The room quiets. All eyes are fixed on Olympia.

She is still.

Silent.

She opens her mouth, and begins to sing. Her voice is perfect, silk.

The band comes in just slightly behind Olympia.

OLYMPIA

(singing)

After this time I won't see you again / Earlier heard my gun going off / I don't know if it was accident or design / but the walls came down

There is a dramatic pause as the final note is held. Olympia begins the verse, deepening her voice.

OLYMPIA

(singing)

So, you want forever? / Well,
you're getting never / Would it
damp desire / Knowing which was
better?

The music rises slightly, rises and falls, as the verse continues.

OLYMPIA

(singing)

It's subjective anyway / Hell is
Lucy's treasure / As long as it's
no challenge / I will love whatever

A brief pause, then she moves into the chorus.

OLYMPIA

(singing)

After this time I won't see you
again / Earlier heard my gun going
off / I don't know if I ever knew /
but knowledge eludes me now

A musical interlude. A violin takes over the melody.

Olympia stands still, waiting for her turn to sing again.

Nathan is agitated.

NATHAN

I can barely see with all these
people.

He breaks away from the group and heads toward the back of the room.

THOMAS

Where's he going?

Nathan winds his way to a spot at the back of the room.

Unnoticed, he slips his eyeglass from his pocket.

He peers through it, focusing on the impassive face of Olympia.

She turns toward him.

And begins to sing once more. A final chorus, accompanied by minimal orchestration.

OLYMPIA

(singing)

After this time I won't see you
again / Earlier heard my gun going
off / I don't know if it was waking
or dreams / but the sky caught fire
/ Around me

The melody descends into a dramatic finish.

Olympia lowers her head.

The room is silent. Olympia is still.

SPALANZANI

Take a bow, darling.

She bows. Applause breaks out throughout the room.

Nathan claps madly.

Spalanzani leads Olympia off the stage. They disappear into the crowd.

The applause subsides and the band starts up again.

Those in attendance break into groups again. A few people begin to dance in front of the stage.

The others clear a space for the dancers. Dancing continues in this area throughout the night.

Nathan struggles to see where Olympia and Spalanzani have gone.

Sid approaches Nathan. Nathan quickly pockets the telescope.

SID

There you are.

NATHAN

Wasn't she amazing?

SID

Yeah, she was... Perfect.

NATHAN

So you can see why I want to paint her?

SID
Strangely enough. She seems like a proper subject for one of your paintings.

NATHAN
What do you mean?

SID
I don't know. It's just something about her... it's hard to say. She moves like she's made of ice.

Nathan scowls.

NATHAN
You're jealous.

SID
Jealous of what? Aren't you engaged?

Nathan spies Spalanzani in the distance.

NATHAN
There's Spalanzani. She can't be far.

He moves away, quickly. Sid stops him.

SID
What's wrong with you, Nathan?

Nathan's eyes blaze.

NATHAN
Don't touch me.

Sid lets him go.

SID
I'm sick of this. You can look out for yourself.

He storms away.

Nathan moves across the room. He approaches Spalanzani. The lovely Olympia sits on a bench in the nearby corner. She is being given a wide berth by everyone.

Nathan bursts into Spalanzani's conversation.

NATHAN

Professor Spalanzani, I have to congratulate you on this exhibition.

SPALANZANI

Why, thank you, Nathan. This is Nathan, my star pupil.

Nathan nods greetings curtly.

NATHAN

I wondered if you'd mind if I asked your daughter to dance?

Spalanzani smiles.

SPALANZANI

Not at all. I'm afraid you'll find her a bit dull though. She has... certain intellectual difficulties.

NATHAN

Thank you. I-- what the--?

Nathan spies a shape out of the corner of his eye.

Nearby, on display under glass, is the twisted metal orb from Father's study.

Nathan moves toward the orb, stunned.

SPALANZANI

You like that one? It's an old piece that I thought fit the theme of this exhibit. I never gave it a name.

NATHAN

My Father. It was in my Father's study.

SPALANZANI

It was strangely popular. We produced many of those. Does he still have it?

NATHAN

No. It was destroyed in a fire.

SPALANZANI

Doubtful. Those orbs could survive almost anything. Certainly fire.

Nathan pulls away from the glass case and the metal orb, still dazed.

NATHAN

Excuse me.

SPALANZANI

If you like, you can have that piece when the exhibit closes. There are others.

NATHAN

Thank you. Excuse me.

INT. GALLERY - LATER

Olympia sits on a small bench, quiet and still.

Nathan approaches her. He sits down next to Olympia.

NATHAN

Hello.

Olympia turns doe-eyes toward Nathan.

NATHAN

I'm Nathan, remember?

She smiles.

OLYMPIA

I'm Olympia.

NATHAN

Would you care to dance?

She looks at him, a little puzzled.

Nathan stands up. He reaches for her hand and she offers it to him.

Nathan leads Olympia to the dance floor. She follows, somewhat puzzled, but letting Nathan guide her.

Nathan takes her into his arms for a slower dance.

He is in bliss. He sighs against her shoulder, eyes closed. And they dance.

At one point, Nathan pulls away slightly to look at her, enraptured.

NATHAN

Poor thing. You're so cold. Maybe
you are ice.

She furrows her brow.

OLYMPIA

I'm Olympia.

Spalanzani breaks in, interrupting their dancing.

SPALANZANI

I'm sorry Nathan, but I have to get
Olympia home.

NATHAN

But the night is just beginning.

SPALANZANI

I know, but I have things to do.
And she has had more excitement
today than she's ever had.

Nathan reluctantly surrenders Olympia to Spalanzani.

NATHAN

Could I come by later?

SPALANZANI

Not tonight. We have to go.

He pulls Olympia away.

NATHAN

But--

SPALANZANI

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have let her
dance to begin with.

Spalanzani leads Olympia out of the building.

Nathan stands in the middle of the dance floor, dejected.

Olympia looks back at him, briefly.

EXT. STREET - SAME

Nathan strolls home, hands in pockets, looking at his feet.

The night is cold. He huddles into himself, against the wind.

Walking through the shadows, under street light.

There is motion near the mouth of a nearby alley. Nathan turns at the sound of metal striking metal.

He peers into the darkness of the alley for a moment, before continuing onward.

EXT. SPALANZANI HOUSE - SAME

Nathan is almost home. He stops before Spalanzani's house, looking up into Olympia's window.

The light is out. All of the house lights are out.

A sudden, piercing scream rings out.

NATHAN
Olympia?

There is another scream. It seems to come from behind the house.

Nathan runs up the porch to Spalanzani's front door.

He tries the door, finds it unlocked, and opens it.

INT. SPALANZANI HOUSE - SAME

Nathan steps inside the darkened house.

He tries a light switch.

The lights flicker on, then off. On, then off again, slow bursts, erratic.

Nathan can hear noises faintly, coming from the professor's studio in back of the house.

Nathan blindly stumbles through the house.

The darkness is absolute. He gropes forward, moving along the walls.

Eventually, Nathan finds the back door and flings it open.

EXT. SPALANZANI HOUSE - SAME

Nathan steps into the backyard. Loud noises, the sounds of a struggle, can be heard from inside the studio.

Nathan rushes forward, throwing open the door.

INT. STUDIO - SAME

Nathan stands in the doorway, frozen by the horrific scene.

Coppola and Spalanzani are fighting for possession of Olympia. Spalanzani has hold of her arms and Coppola has hold of her feet. She sags limply between them.

Nathan stares. Olympia has no eyes. Behind the empty sockets he can see gears turning inside her head, like the inside of a clock.

NATHAN

No.

Coppola and Spalanzani struggle.

SPALANZANI

I built her.

COPPOLA

I gave her life.

Olympia's mouth falls open. She emits a sharp, soulless screech, the sound of metal scraping metal.

NATHAN

You're hurting her!

He rushes forward to rescue Olympia.

SPALANZANI

Nathan, don't!

Distracted for a moment, Spalanzani loses the battle to Coppola. The brute wrenches Olympia from Spalanzani's grasp.

Coppola hits Nathan, hard, sending him flying against the wall. He falls to the ground, the breath knocked from him.

SPALANZANI

No!

Coppola drops Olympia to the ground. With both hands, he takes hold of Spalanzani, and forces him into the iron maiden.

Spalanzani screams as he is impaled upon the maiden's cruel daggers.

His glasses fall off, onto the floor, one lens shattering.

Coppola leaves Spalanzani dangling in the maiden, held up by the long spikes. He picks up Olympia, slings her over his shoulder like a rag doll, and rushes out of the building.

On the way out the door, Olympia hits the wall with a metallic thunk.

Nathan rises, slowly, dazed. He begins to stumble after Coppola.

SPALANZANI

Nathan... don't go...

Nathan turns to Spalanzani. The professor is bleeding profusely, coughing up blood.

NATHAN

What have you done?

SPALANZANI

She was perfect... eyes stolen from you...

NATHAN

My eyes?

SPALANZANI

My eyes... where are they?

Spalanzani is feverish, dying. Nathan reaches down to pick up his glasses.

Spalanzani reaches toward the glasses, weakly.

SPALANZANI

My eyes...

Nathan spies his own reflection in the intact lens.

The reflected image of Nathan's face has black, hollow sockets where the eyes should be.

Nathan begins to shake.

He drops the glasses, and falls to the ground. Foams at the mouth, spasms violently in an epileptic fit.

SPALANZANI

My eyes...

Nathan's spasms subside a little. Still shaking, he tries to rise from the floor.

SPALANZANI

Don't go. I'm sorry.

Another set of spasms seizes Nathan. He claws the floor.

SPALANZANI

Please...

Nathan's hands come across a long, sharp, metal shard.

His spasms subside again. He raises the shard, turning toward Spalanzani.

Spalanzani notices Nathan's slow approach. Slow, he tries to speak, but can barely whisper.

SPALANZANI

I'm sorry...

Nathan begins to hammer the shard into the floor, as if trying to dig.

The metal has no effect on the concrete floor. Nathan's hands begin to bleed. He stops, and tosses the shard away.

Nathan lowers himself onto the floor. He begins to shake again.

He curls up into himself as if trying to sleep, shaking violently.

DREAM

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nathan lies on his childhood bed. Lapsing in and out of consciousness. Assaulted by visions.

Mother appears before him, smiling.

MOTHER
How are you feeling Nathan? Are you
feeling better?

FATHER
Nathan?

Father steps through the bedroom door. He puts his arm around
Mother and smiles down at Nathan.

FATHER
We're proud of you son. You
graduated at the top of your class.

MOTHER
I always knew you could do it,
Nathan.

FATHER
That she did. Many a time she would
tell me, "Father, you don't have to
worry about that boy."

MOTHER
I was always so proud.

FATHER
We both were.

MOTHER
Such a good boy.

FATHER
Smart.

MOTHER
Kind.

FATHER
Loyal.

MOTHER
Handsome.

FATHER
Perfect.

Nathan sinks back into unconsciousness.

He wakes again, and this time Sid, Thomas, and Cathy are
standing before him.

SID
Nathan! You're awake!

THOMAS
Finally!

SID
Nathan, we just wanted to say that
we're sorry.

THOMAS
We took you for granted.

SID
That's right. And we want to make
it up to you.

THOMAS
Of course.

SID
So you just lay back, and Cathy
here will suck you off.

THOMAS
She's good, Nathan.

Cathy smiles. She leans over and begins to crawl toward
Nathan's lap.

SID
And Thomas doesn't mind.

THOMAS
Not at all.

SID
What are friends for?

THOMAS
Indeed.

Nathan passes out again.

He wakes again. Clara bends over him, a concerned angel.

CLARA
Thank God you're okay.

An eyeless Olympia steps into view behind her. She mouths
soundlessly alongside Clara.

CLARA
I was so worried.

Coppola joins Olympia.

CLARA
Is there anything you want, Nathan?

Coppelius towers over them.

CLARA
Anything at all?

END DREAM

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Nathan wakes, in his childhood bedroom.

Startled by his surroundings, he raises himself on the bed and looks around.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

Mother and Clara sit in the living room, on the couch, watching television. Mother knits.

Nathan steps into the room.

Clara leaps up.

CLARA
Nathan!

Mother turns off the television.

MOTHER
Are you feeling better, dear?

Clara runs to embrace Nathan.

NATHAN
What happened to me? How did I get here?

MOTHER
You had a nasty spill.

CLARA

You hit your head. Sid found you on the floor in Spalanzani's studio. You were delirious, sick with fever, for almost a week.

NATHAN

Sid? Where did he come from?

CLARA

He said that you had an argument, and he went to your house to apologize. But then he saw somebody running from Spalanzani's place carrying something. He thought it was a burglar and went to see if the professor was all right. That's when he found you.

NATHAN

Spalanzani. Is he okay?

Clara bites her lip.

MOTHER

Sid brought you home before he called the police. He said you were in no shape to answer questions.

Nathan drops down on the couch, wearily. Holding his head.

NATHAN

I have to call them. They have to catch him.

CLARA

Can't it wait, Nathan? A few days? You're just now acting like yourself again.

NATHAN

It wasn't any burglar. It was Coppelius.

MOTHER

Who?

Nathan starts.

NATHAN

You know who he is.

MOTHER
I'm afraid I don't.

NATHAN
The man that murdered Father.

Mother stops knitting. She closes her eyes for a moment. Then opens them, and begins to knit again.

MOTHER
Father died in the fire.

NATHAN
No he didn't. Coppelius killed him.
You know that.

CLARA
Maybe you need more rest, Nathan.

MOTHER
Everybody knows that Father died in
the fire.

Nathan screams at her.

NATHAN
He was murdered!

CLARA
Please, Nathan!

He calms a little.

CLARA
Let's talk about this later. Go
back to sleep.

NATHAN
I don't want to go back to sleep.
Never again.

Clara creases her brow.

CLARA
Well...

She's confused, concerned, a little bit scared.

CLARA
Why don't we go for a walk, then?
The fresh air will do you good.

Nathan watches Mother knit. She knits slowly, carefully, with single-minded purpose.

Nathan gives in to Clara, exhausted.

NATHAN

Okay.

CLARA

I'll get your coat. It snowed while you were sleeping. First snowfall of the year.

Nathan nods. Clara fetches their coats from the hallway closet.

Nathan begins to warm to the idea of the walk. He smiles.

NATHAN

I know just the place to go.

EXT. FOREST - SAME

Clara and Nathan walk through the woods, enjoying themselves on a bright, brisk winter day.

Clara holds Nathan's gloved hand in her own. She smiles constantly at him.

Nathan's spirits are high. It's as though he's forgotten all about the recent spate of gruesome events.

CLARA

Where are we going?

NATHAN

You mean you don't remember?

They trudge through the light snowfall until they come to a rise in the land.

NATHAN

Look.

He points. In the distance sits the old, ruined fur trader fort.

CLARA

Oh!

NATHAN

Remember how we used to come here
all the time, when we were kids?

CLARA

It's been so long.

NATHAN

Come on. I'll race you.

He starts off toward the fort, laughing. Clara giggles and
rushes after him.

EXT. RUINED FORT - SAME

Nathan and Clara stand before the ruined fortress, looking
up.

NATHAN

It's taller than I remember. I
thought things would seem smaller
when I grew up. But everything is
bigger than I ever imagined it
would be.

CLARA

What do you want to do now?

NATHAN

Let's go up into the tower. Like we
used to.

CLARA

I don't think that's a good idea.
It's probably rotted out
completely. What if we get hurt?

NATHAN

It looks as sturdy as it ever was.
Come on.

He moves forward. Clara freezes to her spot.

CLARA

I don't want to.

Nathan stops and looks back at her.

NATHAN

Then I'll go without you.

He continues onward.

Clara frowns, but follows him.

INT. STAIRCASE - SAME

Nathan and Clara climb, moving in circles, up the long staircase.

NATHAN

When we were kids, and we walked up the stairs this way, I loved the sound our feet made on the steps.

Clara smiles at him.

NATHAN

I used to think to myself, "With each step we are moving closer to each other, and farther and farther away from everyone else." I always wished that the tower was taller, that we could climb forever.

CLARA

You never said anything to me about that.

NATHAN

I was afraid to. I thought you would laugh.

CLARA

I thought you liked my laugh.

NATHAN

I love your laugh. But I thought that it would kill me.

INT. TOWER - SAME

Nathan and Clara reach the summit, stepping into the tower.

The roof has collapsed, rotting off the roof. A few shards from the roof litter the floor, along with dead leaves and a mist of snow.

Nathan looks out over the wide expanse of the forest.

NATHAN
Isn't it beautiful?

A thin layer of snow blankets the woods. The air is crisp, the sky is clear. It is a stunning sight.

CLARA
Can we go back down now?

NATHAN
What's the rush?

He puts his arm around Clara. They stand together and look out over the forest.

CLARA
I'm so glad you're back. I don't want you to go away again.

Clara smiles, and sighs happily.

CLARA
I'm so happy with you. It's so good to have you back. Everything is perfect now.

She leans up to kiss Nathan tenderly.

Nathan smiles. He breathes deeply, breathing in her scent, the fresh air, the smells of the forest.

Below, a little ways off, Nathan spies some movement in the woods.

NATHAN
Looks like there's some sort of animal running around down there.

Instinctively, he reaches into his pocket.

He pulls out the telescope that he bought from Coppola.

Nathan looks at it for a moment, confused, as if trying to remember what it is.

CLARA
Don't look.

Nathan stares at her for a moment, then raises the lens to his eyes.

Looking through the telescope, he sees the back of a large man, bending over something.

The man turns. It is Coppelius.

NATHAN

No.

Coppelius looks directly at Nathan. He begins to lumber through the woods, toward the tower.

NATHAN

It can't be.

CLARA

Close your eyes.

Nathan looks back to where he first spied Coppelius.

Lying prostrate in the a heap of bloodied snow is the murdered Clara. Father's long sword is thrust into her heart, pinning her to the earth.

Nathan drops the telescope. It shatters on the floor.

CLARA

Close. Your. Eyes.

Nathan begins to shake violently.

Clara chatters, panicked, moving her hands to comfort Nathan.

CLARA

Close your eyes close your eyes
close your eyes close your eyes
close your eyes close your eyes
close your eyes close your eyes --

Nathan shoves her away. His shaking subsides.

NATHAN

You. You're part of it.

CLARA

What?

NATHAN

Why you?

CLARA

You're scaring me.

NATHAN

Leave me alone. Why won't you?
Leave me alone.

He turns away from her.

CLARA
Nathan, let's go--

She moves to take his hand, but Nathan hits her.

Clara pulls back, shrinking into the corner.

She stares at Nathan, wide-eyed.

NATHAN
Leave me alone. He's coming.

Clara quietly steps away, down the staircase.

Nathan begins to sob.

NATHAN
Leave me alone.

He slumps to the floor.

NATHAN
My eyes. They're mine. Leave me
alone.

He scrambles on the floor, in the debris. He finds two pointed pieces of wood.

NATHAN
Go away.

Quickly, he brings the wood up into his eyes, goring them out.

Nathan screams.

He stands, staggering backward, screaming.

He falls backward, over the edge of the tower.

EXT. RUINED FORT - SAME

Nathan falls from the tower.

He lands against the trunk of a fallen tree, hard.

It breaks him completely.

He lies, bleeding profusely from his eyes and back, slumped unnaturally over the log.

Coppelius approaches Nathan.

COPPELIUS
What have you done?

He bends down before the broken man.

COPPELIUS
You could have had anything. The sun from the sky. The rivers, to drink. The finest world.

NATHAN
My eyes.

COPPELIUS
It's too late.

NATHAN
Please. My eyes. Please. You promised me. Anything.

Coppelius bows his head.

COPPELIUS
Very well, then.

He places a large hand over Nathan's bleeding eye sockets and holds it there for a moment.

He takes his hand away. Nathan's eyes glimmer once more, whole.

NATHAN
Thank you.

He cries large, bloody tears.

NATHAN
Thank you.

COPPELIUS
But now. Now that you are fat with pain.

With a single, sudden movement, he plunges his hand into Nathan's chest.

Nathan screams.

Coppelius withdraws his fist.

He opens his palm. In it lies the small metal orb.

The bloodied orb looks small in Coppelius's huge hands. Its jagged metal seems fragile.

It is almost beautiful.

Kneeling, Coppelius presents the orb to Nathan's view.

Nathan's eyes widen.

FADE TO BLACK.

“I Have New Eyes for You”: Re/writing E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “Der Sandmann”

I would like to take this space to discuss, rather informally, what drew me to adapt E. T. A. Hoffmann’s short story “Der Sandmann” (“The Sandman”) into a screenplay, and some of the major choices that I made during this process of adaptation. In the course of this afterword, I will speak at length on the circumstances and ideas which drew me to adapt Hoffmann’s text. I will then discuss in brief the nature of the “uncanny” as defined by Sigmund Freud and Adam Bresnick. I will also state my own conception of the uncanny, and how my ideas differ from those of both Freud and Bresnick. I will go on to identify some of the ways that I have applied these conceptions of the uncanny to the production of my text, touching on the image system which I created and some of the uses to which I put this system.

When I first read “The Sandman,” it struck me as a visual text, appearing before my mind’s eye in a series of photographs. In those photographs, one detail stood out for me, not unlike Barthes’s stubborn *punctum*, insisting upon acknowledgement. This detail was, like the *punctum*, not something that Hoffmann placed into the text as any central theme or idea, but a concept that was nonetheless present and to which I, at the time of reading, found myself vulnerable (in which I, in a manner of speaking, found myself). In short, what intrigued me most about Hoffmann’s text was the disparity between Nathaniel’s initial childhood conception of the world and the nature of the world as it came to be realized by the adult Nathaniel.

Barthes speaks of the *punctum* as a point which wounds, a “prick” (Barthes 47) that shocks the viewer of the photograph into a state of heightened attention. In my mind,

this is perfect in its expression of how the best art acts on the individual in a personal and uncomfortable way. What wounded me about this particular disparity was its parallel in my own psychological development. As I have grown, recently entering my 25th year, I have come to realize that for most of my life I have taken for granted things which seem to me now to be beyond belief. For most of my life, I believed in a number of absolutes that have been revealed to me, over the course of my life and my university education, to have, at best, an illusory existence. In particular, notions of authority and adulthood have been tremendous disappointments.

Authority seems to be parcelled out, if not arbitrarily, then with little attention to the recipient's worth as an agent of any sort of justice (itself a disappointing, illusory concept in the wake of my Catholicism-turned-atheism). "Adulthood" has been revealed as a concept devoid of any and all actual definition, other than perhaps a crass, physiological one. When I was a child, I had a strong sense of "being" a child, and a strong sense of who qualified as "adult." Now, my hair is graying, and my younger cousins consider me an adult, but I feel that there is a complete disconnection between their sense of my status and my own sense of status as their "elder" (a position which has also vested me with an unearned, arbitrary authority).

Notions of childhood and adulthood have left me. They have taken with them assurance, a sense that I had as a child that one day I would grow into knowledge, that I would be granted wisdom and self-possession as I advanced in my life. I could not have been more mistaken. With each passing year, I feel less and less certain of the world and my place within it, my semi-divine (and, at one time, divine) notions of self and purpose

are either fading or have faded completely. The loss is a terrible one, felt and mourned.

As a child, you are promised things by the world. You are promised candy if you are quiet, promised a good job if you get good marks, promised Heaven if you are faithful. As you grow, you ask questions, but none of them are answered to your satisfaction. *Why must I always be quiet?* you ask. *Why are you so terrified of noise?* *Why does my friend, my friend who has lower grades but a better smile, get both higher paying jobs and prettier women?* *What happens to the women who are not pretty? Who loves them? Why don't I? Where did my ideas come from, my notions of beauty? Where did my faith go? Why did it leave, why was it so hard for me, why is it so easy for other people? Are you listening? What have I done wrong? Why is this fruit forbidden to me?*

Like Oedipa Maas in Thomas Pynchon's novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, I wander through the world, stumbling into new knowledge that I can neither confirm nor deny. Each new thing I learn, it seems, invalidates three things I thought I already knew should this new knowledge prove true. It is as if there was another world, a secret, hidden world below this one, pressing against it, which I am unable to access but which I can glimpse in fragments at periodic intervals. Far from revelation, these glimpses have the effect of obfuscating or, to use a more vague but somehow more suitable word, complicating my vision. Each new lived experience calls various tenants of my personal belief system, my assumptions about the world, into question. These fragments of new thought and experience are, like Oedipa's clues to the mysterious nature of the Tristero, "miracle[s ...] another world's intrusion into this one" (Pynchon 97). Instead of gaining a holistic, more sharply defined sense of the world as I grew, lived, and learned, my assumptions

unravelling and were replaced by an uncertainty that is at times unnerving and depressing, but which most times (perhaps more disturbingly) I find myself completely able to ignore.

In talking to my friends, I've discovered that I am not alone in this experience. It is not so much a distressing state, this uncertainty, most of the time. Often, it is more intellectually interesting than emotionally disconcerting. More than anything, it is disappointing. One expects things, and they are not given. Rewards for good behaviour. Answers that make sense. It is, I think, a very human reaction to crave simplistic, believable explanations to complex, disconcerting phenomena. Gods to order chaos. Laws to govern behaviour. Parents to demand mowed lawns. Doubt, however, is almost inevitable in all cases, emotional pain often serving as a catalyst. Your friends die, your parents divorce, your girlfriend is raped, your heart is broken. *Why God, why?* You are fined for riding your bicycle on the sidewalk when the busy street spells certain injury. *Is this just?* You are punished for neglecting your landscaping duties, grounded, miss the big party. *The grass grows and is cut, grows and is cut—to what end?*

You go to university. You read books. You begin to learn how much you do not know. That Hollywood has lied to you. You read Plato's *Euthyphro*, you begin to think about this disparity between what you expected and what you received from the world. There are better books, but this one is interesting in strange ways, not so much for its arguments as for its audaciousness, its rejection of conventions. Maybe you, too, maybe you can reject convention. You are inspired, embarrassed to admit this later, when you are more "sophisticated" a reader and more capable a writer, but inspired nonetheless:

When we were young, it was so simple.
You find the bad guys and they die.
There was nothing in between them,
only black antithesis white.

Now it has grown so complicated.
We want to know who is in charge.
Are they more or less guilty
than underlings who just need money?

Money.

I brought a case against my father,
a charge of murdering my friend.
He was drunk and slew a servant
and so my father locked him in

a cage from which he found no exit,
save to die and let earth swallow.

I was at peace with my piety
until it was proved hollow.

I only want simple answers
to the questions plaguing me.
I only wish that I knew something,
anything. Absolutely anything.
Absolutely. Anything absolutely.

Perhaps I too can be a “poet or maker of gods” (Plato 2). (Or devils. There is something distinctly Mephistophelian about the figure of the Sandman, if not in Hoffmann’s text then certainly in my own. Consciously or unconsciously, promises are made, broken, kept, and misunderstood throughout the text.)

In many respects this disparity between the expected world and the apprehended world is similar to a state of psychosis. What is psychosis, at its heart, but an inability to apprehend one’s surrounding reality? The key difference is a question of functionality. I am able to operate in the world, to accept if not reconcile myself wholly with the fact that my so-called “adulthood” is a disappointment in terms of the knowledge I hoped to gain. I am not only able to function in the world, I am rather happy, most of the time, accepting and even interested in and sometimes delighted by this disparity. Most people seem capable of this acceptance, of overcoming this disappointment, at worst suffering a period of depression following the initial upset. However, I am curious. I wonder. What if I wasn’t able to adjust? What if this disparity was greater, more disturbing, more significant? What would it take for me to go mad?

Freud, unsurprisingly, claims sex as the potential culprit. Adam Bresnick does a good job of condensing Freud’s argument to a manageable phrase while offering a

possible alternative to Freud's conception of the uncanny:

Freud famously claims that the uncanny affect of 'The Sandman' arises from the return of the repressed paternal threat of castration [...] I argue that the uncanny affect of Hoffmann's "Sandman" arises from the return of the literal sense of words and phrases, which the reader initially represses as a result of what I call the *prosopoetic compulsion*, or the compulsion to enliven the dead letter of fiction by reading figuratively (Bresnick 114)

Bresnick and Freud also disagree on what exactly is uncanny in Hoffmann's narrative. Freud claims the supernatural figure of the Sandman himself as the uncanny figure, a threatening surrogate father created to preserve Nathaniel's sense of his father as benevolent while struggling against his Sandman doppelganger for some sense of self-definition and autonomy, a way to work through the Oedipal Complex while keeping his filial affections intact. The return of the repressed castration threat in the reader's mind, through imaginative identification with Nathaniel, produces the uncanny effect. Bresnick is more interested in the literary configuration of Hoffmann's text than its psychological implications, claiming Olympia as the uncanny figure, a character who is described by Hoffmann's narrator as a "beautiful statue" (Hoffmann 109), among similarly inhuman comparisons. Bresnick claims that Hoffmann describes the mechanical Olympia in quite literal terms, but that the reader accepts these terms not literally but figuratively. Later, when the figurative meanings are collapsed into the literal with the revelation of Olympia as an automaton, the uncanny effect is produced through the return of these repressed literal meanings.

I find both theories interesting, and have drawn upon each in my text. However, I have my own thoughts on the uncanny. For me, the uncanny effect is produced by a recognition without comprehension, coupled with the possibility of a threat resulting from this uncertainty. When Nathaniel's mother states, "The sandman is coming" (86) I recognize as a reader the phrase from my childhood, and with this recollection I also cull from my unconscious a set of associations, foremost a pleasant fantasy of a benevolent spirit who brings good children good dreams. However, Hoffmann goes on to produce the Sandman as a monstrous being with a decidedly physical dimension, presiding over the realm of nightmares. My expectations are both met and preyed upon in this manner. I recognize the Sandman (as does Clara) as an easily explained result of Nathaniel's diseased mind. At the same time, I recognize in Nathaniel something which I already recognize within myself, this aforementioned perceptive disparity. This blend of the familiar, the strange, and the possibly threatening produces in me the feeling of the uncanny.

The events in Hoffmann's story should make sense to me, they seem familiar, but I cannot collapse them into a manageable, stable form. The story, the phenomenon it presents to my intellectual senses, is recognizable enough to avoid dismissal but ultimately confusing, and worrisome and troubling at the same time. The story has produced in me, among other things, the recognition that my removal from the psychopath is a matter of degree and circumstance. In fact, Nathaniel's madness arises from an inability to simultaneously hold two or more world-views which are at odds with and even intolerant of one another, a rather understandable condition and in many ways,

sane behaviour. I, on the other hand, seem to have little difficulty accomplishing this apparently schizophrenic feat, and despite (or, perhaps, due to) my increasingly insane behaviour I manage to avoid madness. It is an emotionally incomprehensible situation, one which disturbs me in an uncanny fashion.

I present these speculations less as a codified theory of the uncanny than as an articulation of the emotional draw of “The Sandman” upon me, and as a guiding principle which I utilized in my adaptation of Hoffmann’s story. Wanting to reproduce the sense of the uncanny within the reader or viewer, I set myself up to produce a series of scenes drawing upon various cliches and conventions of narrative horror film. In each of these oft-reproduced scenes, I tried to fulfill and then defy audience expectations, moving the scenes in uncanny directions. I attempted to do the best job possible to predict reader reactions and expectations, then frustrate them by beginning to fulfill these unwritten contracts of convention but failing to complete the transaction.

Perhaps my most conscious movement in this regard is an attempt at a consistent denial of catharsis. Larry A. Brown comments:

Endless debates have centered on the term “catharsis” which Aristotle unfortunately does not define. Some critics interpret catharsis as the purging or cleansing of pity and fear from the spectators as they observe the action on stage [...] However, it is uncharacteristic of Aristotle to define tragedy in terms of audience psychology; throughout the *Poetics* he focuses on dramatic form, not its effects on viewers. Therefore, commentators such as Else and Hardison prefer to think of catharsis [...] as the resolution of dramatic tension within the plot. The

dramatist depicts incidents which arouse pity and fear for the protagonist, then during the course of the action, he resolves the major conflicts, bringing the plot to a logical and foreseeable conclusion. (Brown)

Though I have tried not to “cheat” the audience by avoiding unmotivated or illogical motion wherever possible, I have also tried to avoid offering easily understandable cause-and-effect relationships. Instead, I’ve opted to privilege an emotional logic over a dramatic logic, utilizing recurrent images and events as a replacement for a conventional, dramatic narrative drive. Images pile upon each other, and image systems develop into more complex forms, as the narrative moves forward. Otherwise confusing turns in the plot are brought a certain degree of emotional comprehensibility through the use of this image system. This semi-surreal approach is, I think, best expressed in the work of filmmakers David Lynch and Andrey Tarkovsky. (In particular, I think of Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive* and Tarkovsky’s *Mirror*. It may be noted that I studied the first section of Lynch’s *Lost Highway* as a model for the first section of my screenplay, when Nathan is a young child, attempting to emulate in some respects the insular, claustrophobic tone of *Lost Highway*’s beginning.)

I have also turned to these filmmakers, Tarkovsky in particular, in the development of my image system. In his book *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky goes to great lengths to deride “symbols, allegories, and other such figures [...] things that have nothing to do with the imagery natural to cinema” (Tarkovsky 66). I took great pains in the writing of *The Sandman* to try not to make anything, least of all the figure of the Sandman himself, into a metaphor for any single thing. Instead, I adopted a tactic of

symbolic over-use, attaching many different possible meanings to the images and figures in the hope that the constituent parts of my image system would be impossible to quantify in any simple fashion, thus avoiding an easily identifiable allegory. My symbols do not consistently “mean” the same thing each time they arise in the text. Each occurrence is meant to be similar enough to be recognized though not fully reconciled with its preceding occurrence, in an attempt to produce an uncanny effect.

The Sandman in particular stands as a multivalent figure. I attempted to retain a sense of mystery to the Sandman that I saw present in Hoffmann’s text, so that the reader may attach multiple, variant meanings to his character. This is, in some respects, a conscious reaction to Freud’s single-minded reduction of Hoffmann’s text. I have placed emphasis on the Sandman’s *character*; nothing offends me more, intellectually, than a character in literature or film who is little more than a cardboard stand-in for some usually anaemic concept. As a personal bias, I gravitate away from works whose narrator or author is continually interjecting in order to tell me what to think; I am perfectly capable of thinking for myself, and I extend this assumption of intelligence and analytical skill to my potential readers as well. I am much more interested in providing sites for readerly construction than I am in dictating theories or moral censure.

Following this line of thought, I made an early decision to preserve the ambiguities which I saw present in Hoffmann’s text. There are two major questions which the reader must attempt to answer if s/he is going to attempt any sort of definitive analysis of the text (though this is exactly the kind of readerly act which I would discourage). These questions are certainly interesting, if nothing else, and ones which I

think would arise in the minds of most perceptive readers.

The first is the question of the Sandman's reality. Freud has come down rather hard on the side of the Sandman as phantasm, an expression of Nathaniel's psyche rather than a physical, real-world figure. Bresnick seems to come down on the other end of the scale (though it is difficult to be certain), seeing the Sandman as a literal figure, a supernatural monster that is mistakenly taken by the reader to be a mere phantasm due to the prosopoetic compulsion to read figuratively instead of literally. I have written both possibilities into my text. With the exception of a few extremely short scenes, the character Nathan appears in every scene, and the script is written, perhaps not from Nathan's own perspective, but looking over his shoulder, as if Nathan was our own resident unreliable narrator. At times, most notably in the dream sequences, it is suggested that the camera adopts Nathan's perspective entirely. Even when Nathan appears in the dream scenes, Nathan's position as dreamer means that these scenes can be considered point-of-view sequences, in a manner of speaking. Nathan's Mother and Father also seem to have a conception of the Sandman, and in fact Nathan seems to inherit the Sandman's persecuting gaze as he might a family curse. This can be explained away easily as Nathan's psychosis, but a more Biblical interpretation would see the Sandman as a supernatural visiting of the sins of the Father upon the son. Various possibilities running the gamut between the Sandman as imagined result of psychosis or the Sandman as supernatural reality are available to the reader.

The second major question is that of Nathan's humanity. There are a number of things in the script to suggest that Nathan himself is an automaton, or that he has at some

point been replaced by an automaton. If this is the case, he is certainly a more advanced model than the apparently witless Olympia. Olympia does not appear at first glance to possess either emotional or physical feeling. By comparison, Nathan seems possessed of a very real capacity for emotional pain, evidence for his humanity. However, Olympia seems through her singing capable of expressing true emotional depth. She also seems to have an attraction to Nathan, however confused and inarticulate. Nathan feels a similarly odd, irrational attraction to Olympia, possibly a result of his affinity to her as fellow automata. It is of course possible that Olympia's presentation in the script is a result of perceptive distortion due to Nathan's deteriorating mental state. Olympia's revelation as a mechanical device may be explained as grim fantasy or taken at face value. Likewise, Nathan's apparently metallic heart, purloined from Father's study, may be a similar death-mirage. Little is certain. Nathan may have been replaced by an automaton (as his Father seems to be attempting) or may be going mad. By refusing to confirm one of these options at the expense of the other, I am not only preserving an ambiguity which I love in Hoffmann's original text, but offering the reader both agency and possibility, which in my opinion is endlessly more interesting than clear-cut, reductionist allegory.

It is in this spirit of proliferating possibility that I have taken such a loose approach to adapting Hoffmann's text. I have preserved the basic skeletal structure of Hoffmann's story, and various plot points. Other plot points I have transfigured into new but recognizable forms. Still others I have disposed of or altered beyond recognition. I have held myself beholden only to those things in Hoffmann's text which seemed to me most interesting and worth preserving, what resonated with me and seemed not only

gripping but which spoke to my own emotional experience. Foremost is the perhaps indefinable “spirit” of the text, its tone, uncanny ambiguity, and tragic, complicated romanticism. To simply transcribe the dialogue and translate the situations of the plot seemed to me not only a pointless and boring task, but an unforgivably pedestrian approach to such a rich and complex work of art. Ultimately, for me, *The Sandman* (both Hoffmann’s tale and my own adaptation) is a story about the tragic condition of existing in a world which you are unable to apprehend or comprehend in any functional capacity, a condition resulting in identity confusion, psychological instability, and, above all, boundless emotional pain.

On Fear, Damnation, and the Father¹

It was brought to my attention while preparing this presentation that *The Sandman* (were it an already filmed work) might find itself a comfortable space among the “Cinema of Damnation,” a term I had never heard of previously. It is apparently a phrase used by critic Tony McKibbin to describe the works of those directors he sees as the inheritors of filmmakers like Paradjanov, Angelopoulos, and (the name I recognized best and with glee) Tarkovsky. Amongst the damned, Tarkovsky and company’s hopeless inheritors, he lists Sharunas Bartas, Fred Kelemen, and Bela Tarr. One of the problems posed by these “damnation films” is the following, quoted from McKibbin’s article in *Senses of Cinema*:

How, so many characters of damnation might ask, does one remain sane? Surely the priority is to remain resolutely in this world when those who look as if they’ve gone beyond it are so obviously mad. Sanity thus becomes something one can’t necessarily take for granted; it instead needs to be pursued. (McKibbin)

If nothing else is clear about my adaptation of Hoffmann’s “The Sandman,” this much is obvious: Nathan does not do a good enough job of pursuing his own sanity. His is an inherited madness, and though its cause is debatable, possibly chemical (that is to say, physical), or possibly supernatural, its source is nevertheless genetic. It is passed down, father to son, like some original sin. In the afterword that I submitted to this committee along with the text of *The Sandman*, I avoided speaking about Nathan’s father at any length. I did this for a number of reasons. One of which is the simple fact that I wanted to

¹ Presented orally from notes as part of a thesis defence on 1 March 2005.

speaking about his father now, but feared that were I to simply rehash ideas which I previously discussed in the text of my submission, I would gradually tire of myself and fall asleep in this chair. (A similar motivation played no small part in my loose approach to adapting Hoffmann's text, writing as I did mostly late at night in a semi-darkened room, with the exception of the child Nathan's extreme physical abuse at the rough hands of the Sandman in Father's study, which for some reason I decided to write on a cheerful Christmas morning.) The main reason, however, that I have refused to speak of Nathan's father at any length, even casually with my friends, until now, is that I was afraid to do so.

Ever since I was a child, I have suffered from a paranoia that I was not and would never be understood. I don't mean this in the same way that sixteen year old poets do. I mean that I am, and have always been, terrified that I would be misinterpreted, that I would hurt the people I love, by accident, that they would misunderstand either my words or my lack of words, of the right words, that they would think I did not love them. Expression, whether direct (when speaking one's mind) or indirect (when writing a poem), has never satisfied me, never fully. My words are constant disappointments. I endlessly wish I had said something, said something else, said then what I thought of now, or just kept my mouth shut. Sometimes I blame myself for this failing, for not being smart enough or perceptive enough to know what I should say or write or how my words would be received. Sometimes I blame the words themselves, for pre-existing, for having meanings that I must always anticipate and work against if I want to avoid or at least minimize the reduction of what I mean into what I am saying or writing. Sometimes I

blame my audience, the reader, the listener. I have often stated my opinion to other writers that, when writing, they should perceive the reader as their enemy, somebody who is bringing to the page preconceived ideas which they expect you to confirm, and for the affirmation of which they are willing to distort and misinterpret your text in any way possible. I have never been interested in didacticism, nor have I ever been interested in giving a reader what she or he wants. I am interested, selfishly, only in communicating whatever it is I want to communicate. I don't even care, in many respects, whether it is communicated. I often confuse, obscure, and deny my intentions. But there are times when I want to let others know what I care about, that I care about them. And I am afraid. They will misunderstand me. They will be hurt. I will hurt them.

Words also have a way of fixing meaning, reducing thought or concept into something mundane and alien to intention. *The Alphabet*, an early short film by David Lynch, examines this reductive quality of language by expressing anxiety concerning language as a childhood fear, part of the developmental process of learning. Learning, for Lynch, does not equip an individual with new tools with which to apprehend the world, but rather is a process of successive possibility deletion or denial. We learn what a "cat" is at the expense of our childhood notions of the endless possibilities seemingly inherent in the figure of the cat. Our beloved pet does not love us. It possesses no magic, it will die. It seems that the more I talk about Hoffmann's "Sandman," the more I discuss Nathan's father, the less magical these things are, and the less interesting they seem to me.

If I am discussing these things for longer than is necessary to introduce a brief

talk on the Father character in my *Sandman* script, it is partly to delay the inevitable, but mostly because these issues all have bearing upon the process of adaptation that I adopted when translating Hoffmann's "Sandman" into feature script form, wanting to create something that was not Hoffmann's but *mine*, to express those things which in this work I felt compelled to express in some form, while still wanting to preserve what resonated within me about Hoffmann's text, what drew me to consider the work at length, and not wanting to reduce my rewriting of Hoffmann to the level of mere reductive interpretation.

Freud has something, I think, when he suggests that we all want to murder our fathers, that it is against the father that most men work in order to define themselves. What is our father, precisely, if not our own doppelganger, endowed with seemingly absolute power, the source of which we do not understand? The doppelganger, a figure much utilized by the Romantics, and no less by the German Romantics, seems to make obvious appearances in "The Sandman," both Hoffmann's and my own. It is tempting to read Coppola and Coppelius as each other's doppelgangers, but is it not more precise to state that they are but distinct aspects of a whole being, that of the Sandman? Earthly avatars, if you will, shadows of that monstrous inhabitant and master of dreams.

If the Sandman is anybody's doppelganger, it seems to me that he is Father's. Freud considers the Sandman to be an unreal figure that Nathaniel has fashioned in his childish imagination out of the raw materials of his Father's threatening qualities. This allows, in Freud's view, for the simultaneous war against the Father (against his Sandman persona) and for the preservation of the Father as a loved one, toward whom filial affection and loyalty can still be felt, thus preserving the family structure. But

Father himself, in my view, is Nathan's doppelganger. Growing up, do we not consider our parents to compose integral parts of our own selves? Or, rather, do we not consider ourselves (and are we not considered by others) as aspects of our parents? We are said to belong to our parents, we are "their child," we might even possess "their features." We live in "their house," we eat "their food," we obey "their rules." We fight against them for autonomy, for separation. We love them, but we also want to kill them, in the Freudian sense if not in a literal one. They are both our providers and our oppressors, and it is precisely because they are one that we cannot tolerate their being the other. The distinction between a child and its parents is blurry, and it is the interconnectedness of the family structure that, I think, allows for the doppelganger connection to arise. Most of us bear family resemblances to our parents, and often as we flip through family albums we are confronted with childhood pictures of our parents that we confuse, if only momentarily, with ourselves (we look so much alike). We might even share family mannerisms or figures of speech. Additionally, we are not clearly autonomous from our parents. The decisions they make affect us as if we ourselves had made them. They decide to move, and the decision to move is made for us. They decide that the grass must be cut, and we find ourselves outside on a sweltering Sunday, pushing mower across lawn. It is only as we grow, as we resist our parents, that we develop any degree of autonomy. For the greater part of our childhood, unless we are problem children, we are little more than shadows, our fate subject to the movements of those strange, tall beings to whom we find ourselves attached. In *The Sandman*, Nathan, his Father, and the Sandman all have doppelganger relationships to one another (as does Spalanzani, who

becomes a surrogate Father figure for Nathan, and who occupies as similar position). The son Nathan, the Father, and the holy spirit figure of the Sandman constitute an unholy trinity of sorts, doppelgangers all, vying against one another for control of and release from the other, making deals and staking claims.

An ancillary concern arises, an idea that has obsessed me for some time and which also comes into play when the figure of the doppelganger is discussed. What do you do, as a child, if you discover that your Father is evil? Commonly, in doppelganger stories, the double is a wicked figure, an inversion of the main character or an embodiment of the main character's darker aspects. It is commonly a murderer, and its murderous rage is rarely directed against random figures, usually against some people to whom the main character wishes secret pain (the doppelganger as a tool for wish-fulfilment). The most famous example of this evil double probably occurs in Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, though Frankenstein's Monster is also often considered to be Dr. Frankenstein's monstrous double. But what if the doppelganger has an identity that is connected with your own, but is also undeniably separate, not a phantom, not some supernatural imp, but a mortal being, flesh and blood? Worse, what if this evil figure has direct and absolute control over your own self? What if you depend upon this evil figure, for food, for lodging, for love? What does your dependent nature mean, in terms of your own identity? Are you evil by association? Are the sins of the Father really visited on the son, and if so, which of these sins can be forgiven? All this talk of killing fathers is just another way of saying that one must resist the father in order to forge one's own, separate, identity. But what if your father is a thief, a liar, and perhaps even a murderer?

How is one to separate one's self? Are you not guilty by association, if not in fact then in the social realm, in the eyes of those who know your father? Does it become necessary to kill an evil father? Is one obligated to do so, obligated to God, country, or one's abused mother?

Worse, what if your father's evil is *not consistent*? What if your love for your father is not irrational, not a merely a genetic byproduct? What if your father both torments and takes care of you? What if he torments others, in a fashion abhorrent to you, but has never shown you anything but the greatest, most sincere love and affection? How is one to deny the father then, to separate oneself? How can one say, "I am not my father," when one loves and wants to be their father, in part if not entirely? Is any display of goodness sufficient to redeem evil? How is the son, who looks up to, who learns from the father, going to be able to resist his evil influence? Is it possible to kill any father, evil or not?

Even worse: what if your father is not evil, but *weak*? Easy to kill? Evil, at least, can be respected as an enemy, feared. One can pray for conversion, can undergo a tragic but holy quest to destroy the father, whom one loves but recognizes must be killed. Weakness in a father can never be forgiven, not by a son. A weak father can be resisted too easily. He is an inadequate figure against which to forge an identity. He fails in his greatest responsibility, that of being an enemy to his son.

Nathan's father is a weak man. He is weaker than his son. He makes rules — "don't go in the study" — and Nathan disobeys him. He does not punish Nathan for disobeying him. He threatens him, but the threat is not from the Father, it is from the

Sandman. Without the Sandman, Father has no presence, no stature. He is either gone from the house completely, or dormant in a chair, or locked within his study, removed from the family he cannot endure. He has, with the Sandman's help, subdued Mother, and is hard at work fashioning a puppet replacement for his son. Nathan is unable to resist his father, who offers no resistance, and instead looks toward the Sandman for a proper enemy. However, the Sandman is truly monstrous, a devil whose power and whose temptations cannot be resisted. He cowers Nathan, forces his withdrawal from the world, interferes in all of his relationships, drives him to madness and suicide. Nathan resists in a passive fashion, becoming an artist, attempting to reduce the Sandman (embodiment of all of his childhood fears, anxieties, and desires) to something manageable, to understand the Sandman's nature and relationship to himself. Nathan wants the Sandman to fit into a painting, to become a thing apart from himself, a necessary first step to resisting, subduing, and internalizing the Sandman and forging an identity for himself. It proves impossible. The Sandman is too strong, refuses to give up his autonomy and authority. Ultimately, it is Nathan and his Father who are the Sandman's doppelgangers, the shadows. They cannot internalize the fears and desires which are embodied by the Sandman, cannot admit them, cannot accept them, and therefore cannot progress to refutation and denial of them. The Sandman even goads them on — "Let me in," he says to Nathan in a dream, promising him that all his desires will be fulfilled if he does — but to internalize the Sandman would be first to resist him, to break him down into something manageable, small enough to be eaten.

Eventually Nathan gives up. In Freudian fashion, he desires release from a world

which, solipsistically, has grown mad as his own madness has progressed. “Leave me alone,” becomes Nathan’s mantra, as he moves closer and closer to the quiet of the non-existent state, death-driven to suicide. McKibbin states that the essential question posed by the Cinema of Damnation is this: “What’s the best option available in what is already the worst of all possible worlds?” (McKibbin). For Nathan, it is withdrawal from the world, first into passive movement through the world, then into the world of art, and finally into madness and suicide.

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