

THE LAND OF LOST THINGS

by Dan Mazeau

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OVER BLACK:

A MAN'S VOICE, warm and lyrical, whispers to us from the darkness...

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Once upon a time, not long ago, not far away, there was a boy. And he was a very special boy, indeed.

A BIRDIE MOBILE, twirling in a gentle breeze, hangs over a CHILD'S CRIB in a cosy, homey little nursery.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
But "specialness," like beauty, is often in the eye of the beholder.

ANGELA and CHARLES LEAVITT, proud parents, arms entwined, gaze down with limitless adoration at --

THEIR SON, LOWELL A. LEAVITT (AGE 0), eyes bright, tiny hands grasping up toward us.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Others might call him "cursed."

A far off RUMBLE of THUNDER...

INT. LEAVITT LIVING ROOM - DAY

... becomes the JINGLING of a SET OF KEYS. Charles jingles them to distract LOWELL (AGE 2), as Angela struggles to feed their son a spoonful of stewed beets.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
It began small. A missing pacifier. A misplaced toy. But soon, it became clear that certain things -- important things --

Uninterested in the beets, Lowell giddily grasps for the keys. As Charles finally hands them over, we...

DISSOLVE TO:

CHARLES AND ANGELA overturning couch cushions, peeking under rugs, searching the house, high and low.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
-- should never be playthings for this particular little boy.

Lowell watches from his highchair, cheeks wet with tears.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
And as the little boy grew --

DISSOLVE TO:

LOWELL (AGE 4), in a booster-seat, watching while Charles and Angela continue searching. They un-pot potted plants.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
-- So his problem grew too.

DISSOLVE TO:

LOWELL (AGE 6), on the couch, as one side tilts high into the air. Charles holds it up, while Angela sweeps underneath it with a METAL DETECTOR.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
And grew, and grew, until --

EXT. LEAVITT HOME - DAY

Angela VIDEO-TAPES LOWELL (AGE 8), straddling his brand-new BIKE. A red bow on the handlebars.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
-- everything he touched --

Charles gives him a push, and the boy pedals away down the tree-lined street, happily honking the horn.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
-- seemed to vanish into thin air.

DISSOLVE TO:

LOWELL walks back up the street, lugging all that's left of his bike... The HANDLEBARS. Mournfully honking the horn.

EXT. LEAVITT HOME - DAY

Rain pours down. LOWELL (AGE 9) holds a DOG LEASH, hand cupped to his mouth, calling. And calling. And calling.

LOWELL
Buster? Bus-ter!? BUSTER!!!!

NARRATOR (V.O.)
For you see, this special little
boy was one of the few. Those
unlucky, unhappy few --
(sad beat)
-- who was simply born to lose.

Again, a RUMBLING of THUNDER. LIGHTNING FLASHES, and we...

SMASH TO:

A SHEET OF PAPER, AS IT

dances against the gloomy gray clouds of a drizzly morning sky, just beyond the leaping, jumping, desperately grasping fingers of...

LOWELL (O.S.)
Oh come on! Come back! This isn't
fair! It's -- it's --

LOWELL (AGE 10), red rain poncho flapping out behind like Superman's cape, pursues the paper down a suburban street.

LOWELL
It's barely even breezy out today!

The paper flits over a THICK THORNY HEDGE. Lowell hitches up his BACKPACK, fights his way through its branches.

EXT. VACANT LOT

He bursts out on the hedge's far side, BACKPACK GONE. For a brief moment, he considers going back for it, but the paper wafts onward, and he reluctantly runs after it.

EXT. CHAIN-LINK FENCE

The paper floats up and over. Lowell scales it, but as he clears the top and leaps down, the wire SNAGS his SWEATER.

A STRING of YARN UNRAVELS OUT behind him as he hurries on.

EXT. BACK ALLEY

The paper settles into the gutter, stuck in a leafy muck.

Lowell leaps from the curb into what looks like a shallow puddle, but winds up with his LEFT GALOSH stuck ankle-deep in a goop-filled pothole.

HOONNNNNK!!!

A GIGANTIC GARBAGE TRUCK barrels toward him, its BRAKES SCREAMING -- LOCKING UP -- SKIDDING -- NO TIME TO STOP --

Lowell desperately tries to free his foot. At the last second, his sock pops loose, he stumbles clear, just as --

The Ten-Ton Truck ROARS PAST, his ABANDONED GALOSH SUCKED under its screeching tires.

THE PAPER

flutters free on the gust of wind, and with a graceful loop-the-loop and a whoosh...

Vanishes into a STORM DRAIN.

LOWELL

stares after it. Exhausted. Defeated. Not surprised.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

BRRRRRRRIIIINNNNNNGG!

Fourth-graders stampede for the door, piling their homework papers on the desk of MS. MOTT, a harried woman in horn-rimmed glasses.

MS. MOTT
Carefully, children. Carefully
now. Thank you, Kathleen.
Geoffrey, we ask, we don't take.

She scoots out the stragglers, deflating in relief.

Until she notices...

MS. MOTT
Lowell?

Still seated, shaggy brown head buried in his hands.

LOWELL
(muffled)
Present.

MS. MOTT
Class is over, Lowell. Quickly
now, quickly. What have you got
for me today?

He looks up. Hopeful.

LOWELL
Respect and admiration, Ms. Mott?

She looks to the pile of homework papers. Sighs, "Again?".

EXT. AMELIA EARHART ELEMENTARY - DAY

Lowell tails Ms. Mott down the steps, a towering stack of books awkwardly balanced in her arms.

MS. MOTT
You're a bright boy, Lowell. No
one's questioning that. But
twenty-seven lost homeworks?

LOWELL
(glumly)
Twenty-eight.

MS. MOTT
Twenty-eight. And every year it's
gotten worse. Now, you tell me:
How can I pass a student who hasn't
turned in a single assignment?

LOWELL
Wait, now you're not gonna pass me?
You're gonna -- what? Hold me
back? But, that's not fair!

MS. MOTT
You have to learn to accept
responsibility, Lowell. No one
else lost those papers. You did.

LOWELL
So, now I lose a whole year too?!

Ms. Mott opens her Volvo's trunk. Piles her books inside.

LOWELL
It's not my fault. It's my curse.

He kicks a hydrant -- forgetting that his only galosh is on
his other foot. He YELPS in pain. Hopping.

LOWELL
See!?

She looks at his half-unraveled sweater, his sad bare sock.

MS. MOTT

Lowell, you know if there's ever anything you want to talk about? Anything you want to tell me...?

LOWELL

Like what?

MS. MOTT

Like if something's going on with you? Or at home?

He clams up. Stares down at his feet. Ms. Mott studies him, deciding. She shouldn't do this, but --

MS. MOTT

Alright, look. I'll make you a deal. Remember that book report I assigned last week?

LOWELL

That dog really ate it. I swear!

MS. MOTT

Lowell, this is your last, best and only chance to graduate fourth grade, so cut the excuses. I'm giving you one last opportunity. One last assignment. The book report to end all book reports.

LOWELL

Which book?

MS. MOTT

Surprise me. But, by tomorrow, by 3 P.M., that paper must-must-must be in my hands. Do you understand? (kindly)

You can do this. There's no curse.

Lowell looks at her books piled in her trunk. Hopeful.

LOWELL

So, then you think I could maybe... sorta... borrow one of your boo--

-- SLAM. She closes it. Pockets the keys.

MS. MOTT

Isn't that what libraries are for?

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

The LIBRARIAN blocks the way, a linebacker in floral print.

LIBRARIAN
No. No. No. No. No. No. No.

She holds a paper print-out in her hand. On it, a MUG-SHOT PHOTO of Lowell with the words: "DO NOT LEND TO THIS BOY."

LOWELL
But I won't lose this one, honest!

LIBRARIAN
Ha! This isn't a lending library.
Not anymore. Not for Lowell A.
Leavitt.

LOWELL
But I promise. I swear on, on...
(sees a nearby shelf)
On the entire religion section.

Brandishing a hefty book, she backs him toward the doors...

LOWELL
On all the words in that
Dictionary.

Out the doors...

LOWELL
On the Dewey Decimal System itself!

SLAM.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

Lowell hikes home. Passing the vacant lot he ran through this morning, he stops abruptly, puzzled.

LOWELL
Where'd this place come from?

Instead of a chain-link fence, wedged between the two houses, he sees a squat little storefront. The sign reads:

"FAMOUS LOST WORDS, RARE BOOK PURVEYORS."

Through the window, Lowell sees shelves cluttered with BOOKS of every shape and size. He digs in his pocket, but--

CLINK! CLINK! CLINK! A handful of CHANGE tinkles out of his pant leg, bouncing into a sewer grate. He pulls out his pocket to reveal a HOLE in the fabric. Allowance gone.

THUNDER CRACKS. RAIN POURS. Lowell marches glumly uphill.

EXT. LEAVITT HOME - EVENING

Lowell stands in the rain outside the front door. Breathes deep, quietly turns the knob.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Lowell slips off his poncho. Slides off his galosh. Across the room, the PHONE MACHINE blinks RED -- A MESSAGE.

ARGUING VOICES emanate from the kitchen:

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
You know that isn't what I said!

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
It's obviously what you meant!

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Oh that's right, you read minds!

Lowell drags a chair to the phone table. Clammers precariously atop it. Reaches for the ERASE BUTTON and --

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Lowell?

-- CRASH! Loses his balance in spectacular fashion.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Lowell sits on the sofa, his head buried in his hands. A message PLAYS on the answering machine:

MS. MOTT (V.O.)
... and furthermore, Mr. and Mrs.
Leavitt, had you bothered to return
any of the dozen messages I've
left, maybe things wouldn't've
gotten this far out of hand.

REVEAL Charles and Angela, giving their boy their best parental death stares. He buries his head even deeper.

MS. MOTT (V.O.)
As it is, I can't pass your son if he doesn't turn in this report. On a suitable book. Or some kind of book. Or really any boo--

BEEP! Angela jabs the STOP BUTTON.

ANGELA
How long did you think you could keep this from us? Erasing our messages? Lying, Lowell?

CHARLES
Dumb, buddy. Real dumb.

LOWELL
It's not my fault, it's my curs--

ANGELA
-- Don't even start that. Do not.

She turns to the bookshelf, fuming.

ANGELA
I don't know what we have that he could possibly write a report on.

CHARLES
Think he'd like your new Doctor Phil? That's about fourth-grade level, isn't it?

LOWELL
Mom...

ANGELA
I swear, Charles. One more joke.

LOWELL
Dad--

CHARLES
Oh, what then? Slam a few doors?

Lowell squeezes between them.

LOWELL
Mom! Dad! Listen! I can just go to the bookstore down the block.
Really! But I, I...
(sighs)
... I lost my allowance again.

They look down at him, as if remembering he's still there.

ANGELA
"Bookstore?" What bookstore?

CHARLES
No bookstore on our block, pal.

LOWELL
Well unless I'm losing my mind
too, there was ten minutes ago.

INT. FAMOUS LOST WORDS, RARE BOOKS - NIGHT

The door creaks open. Charles and Angela usher Lowell in.

CHARLES
How long's this been here?

Angela steps over some RAT DROPPINGS. DINGS the desk bell.

ANGELA
Long enough for the rats to make
themselves at home. Hello?

A MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
(from the back)
Browse! But, don't touch!

CHARLES
Excuse me?

A MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Browse! Browse! No touching!

Angela scowls at his tone. Charles shrugs at Lowell.

CHARLES
Well, you heard him. Go on.

Lowell eyes the cobwebby shelves, the shadowy aisles.

LOWELL
You sure?

ANGELA
Go. Find something you like.

IN THE SHADOW AISLES

Fluorescent lights flicker overhead. Sputter and crackle. Lowell creeps between the looming shelves, knees knocking.

LOWELL
I don't like this.

A SCUFFLING SOUND. The boy whips around, heart pounding -- But there's nothing there. Just an empty aisle. Lowell relaxes, laughing at his own jumpiness, when --

SUDDENLY, A BOOK

Tips off a shelf, tumbles into his arms. OOMPH!

The boy catches it, engulfed in a cloud of dust. Hacking, choking, he looks it over. Thick. Old. Bound in scraps of leather, stitched together like Frankenstein's monster.

LOWELL
How did this...?

He looks up toward the shelf The Book fell from. There, in the empty book-shaped space, A PAIR OF TWINKLING LIGHTS.

Lowell looks closer, curious. The lights BLINK. EYES.

INT. FRONT DESK, FAMOUS LOST WORDS - NIGHT

Lowell BOLTS out of the stacks, hugging The Book. He runs to his parents, white as an albino ghost.

LOWELL
Mom! Dad! I-- I-- s-s-saw...

In the shadows behind the desk, ANOTHER SET OF TWINKLING EYES regards him, an OLD MAN shambles out.

OLD MAN
Do you know what I see, my boy?

His crooked back tents his jacket like the ridged fin of some prehistoric fish. His tangled beard, which looks as though it's never been cut, sweeps his feet as he stands.

OLD MAN
I see a boy who doesn't do as he's told. Browse, I said.
(leaning in)
But don't touch.

ANGELA

I'm sure he didn't mean any harm.
Did you, Lowell? He just gets
excited whenever he finds, um...

Angela takes The Book from Lowell's numb grasp. She turns it over in her hands. No title, no author.

ANGELA

This one, honey? You're sure?

The Old Man's gaze saps Lowell's power of speech. He nods.

OLD MAN

Quite an eye your boy possesses.

CHARLES

I don't see a price.

OLD MAN

Ah, but that's a very special book.
"A price" would only cheapen it.

CHARLES

Look, you're talking to an
accountant here, alright, pal? Can
we buy the book, or can't we?

The Old Man clicks his tongue as he considers.

OLD MAN

No.

CHARLES

Fine. Let's just go to Barnes and--

OLD MAN

No. But, your son may borrow it.

ANGELA

Borrow it? Oh no. Thank you, but,
that's really not a good idea.

OLD MAN

Nonsense. Perhaps someday you'll
return the favor. But all I ask is
you return the book.

(winks at Lowell)

And what kind of boy couldn't be
trusted with that?

Off the Leavitts' uneasy looks...

INT. UPSTAIRS HALL, LEAVITT HOME - NIGHT

Lowell stands in his socks at his bedroom door. Charles holds out The Book. But, Angela holds him back a moment.

ANGELA

Now Lowell, this is very important.
I need your word. No "curses".

CHARLES

You're not gonna lose this one,
right? You promise? You swear?

LOWELL

(sighs, rote)
I'm not gonna lose it. I swear.

Angela hands him a pencil and paper. He turns to go in --

ANGELA

And no going in that closet either,
Lowell, you hear me? You waste too
much time in there as it is.

He scurries into his room. The lock LOCKS.

CHARLES

"Return the favor?" I swear, if
that weird old guy's knocking on my
door come April 15th...

ANGELA

Charles. Just drop it.

She heads downstairs. He stewes, then follows after her.

INT. LOWELL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lowell FLICKS on the lamp, revealing his desk, his chair, a bed bolted to the hardwood floor. No pictures. No posters. No toys or piles of dirty laundry. Oddly empty.

The sound of ANGRY VOICES seeps up from downstairs. Lowell opens the window a crack, so the PATTER OF RAIN drowns out his arguing parents. He settles down at his desk.

LOWELL

(writes)

Alright. "The book I read for my
report was..."

(MORE)

LOWELL (CONT'D)
(opens it)
The--

A SUDDEN BREEZE flips the pages like a flip-book, blowing his pencil off the edge of his desk --

LOWELL
Hey!

It rolls across the floor and... drops directly into the HEATING VENT. Clatters down the duct as it falls. Gone.

Lowell sighs. Powerless and pencil-less, he turns to --

INT. CLOSET - NIGHT

A dozen locks UNLOCK. The door creaks open. The light flips ON. Now, we see why Lowell's bedroom is so empty.

Everything he owns is in here. We see SHOE-TREES of single sneakers, every right shoe missing its left. Heaps of pants, holey pockets hanging out. And lining the walls, like safe-deposit boxes, stacks of TUPPERWARE CONTAINERS.

Lowell keeps everything he hasn't lost inside his "vault".

He pulls a LEDGER BOOK from a shelf, scans it:

LOWELL
Let's see. "Baseball cards"..."Bubblegum"..."Bubblegum, ABC"..."
(finds it)
There. "Backup Pencils: B314.9".

Runs his finger down the Tupperware stack, until he finds the one labeled "B314.9". Popping it open, he pulls out a pencil... but it's a NUB. Like it's been CHEWED DOWN.

LOWELL
Hey. Who's been eating my --?

He steps in something squishy, looks down... RAT POOP.

EXT. LOWELL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The closet door flies open and Lowell storms out, peeved.

LOWELL
Mom!

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Halfway down the stairs, Lowell stops. Something is wrong. No angry arguing voices emanate from the kitchen. Instead:

CHARLES (O.S.)
... I'm serious, Angela. How do
you tell a ten year-old boy... our
son... *...this?*

Curious, Lowell presses an ear to the door. Eavesdropping.

ANGELA (O.S.)
The truth. We tell him the truth.

CHARLES (O.S.)
Just like that? A divorce?

ANGELA (O.S.)
We tell him we lost our love,
Charles. Somewhere, somehow, we
just lost it.

Lowell stops breathing.

ANGELA (O.S.)
He'll find a way to understand.

INT. LOWELL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

CRASH! In the closet, Tupperware towers topple like dominoes. Shoetrees go timber. A ledger comes flying out the open door. And then out storms Hurricane Lowell.

He tips over his chair. Tears up his homework paper.

Snatches The Book and FLINGS IT -- SMASH! Right into his LAMP, plunging the room into darkness. Oops. Lowell slinks over to where The Book lies. Open. He brushes off bits of lamp, revealing its TITLE:

LOWELL
"The Lann... Land of..."

Too dark. LIGHTNING FLASHES outside, so Lowell carries The Book to the window, holds it up near the glass.

As another FLASH splits the sky, he reads aloud:

LOWELL
"The Land of Lost Things."

Just as that last syllable leaves his mouth -- THE WINDOW BLOWS WIDE OPEN! SNAPPING THE COVER SHUT ON HIS FINGERS!

He drops The Book, it BOUNCES off the windowsill, and --

LOWELL
-- No! --

-- TUMBLES OUTSIDE!

EXT. WINDOW - NIGHT

Lowell leans out in the driving rain, frantic to see where it went. He spots it teetering on the edge of the gutters.

He reaches out for it, but --

It's too far for him to reach. Quickly, he ducks back in. Reemerging moments later, pulling on his poncho, flashlight in his teeth, he steps onto the ledge with his one galosh.

LOWELL
(flashlight in mouth)
Othay. Eathy. Don'th lookth down.

He crawls toward the teetering book, gripping the gutter. IT CREAKS under his weight. He reaches out...

He GRABS THE BOOK.

LOWELL
Gotcha! Whew... That wasn't so ba--

A horrifying SCREECH, the gutter's brackets detach from the house, the far end dropping like a stone, CRASHING down into the alley below, transforming it into a SLIDE.

LOWELL
Oh craaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaap!!!

Lowell skids down the slide, losing hold of The Book and -- SPLASH! Lands in a puddle in the alley below. He scrambles to his feet. CLICKS ON his FLASHLIGHT, to see --

THE BOOK, carried by the rainwater, floating closer and closer in toward...

AN OPEN STORM GRATE

It circles the opening like a drain and -- before Lowell can save it -- SPIRALS DOWN into the inky black sewers.

Lowell stares after it. Cold, wet. But not beaten yet. He takes one last look up at his open window. His home.

INT. SEWER - NIGHT

SPLASH! Lowell cannonballs into waist-deep water. He comes up, sputtering, flashlight swiveling. Spots The Book as it floats into the mouth of a shadowy stone tunnel.

He chases after it. Weaving through twists and turns. THE BOOK floating ahead. Always mere inches out of reach.

Racing along a half-submerged service catwalk, he dives for The Book. Seizes its leather jacket. His flashlight finds

A PAIR OF FERAL EYES peering back. A GIGANTIC PACK-RAT. Teeth. Claws. Five feet tall. Lowell recoils, trips --

THE PACK-RAT
(*It talks?*)
Give me your hand!

It reaches for him. But too late --

Lowell falls --

-- and SPLASH! Finds himself suddenly drowning in BLACK WATER. Rushed along by a current. Tossed, turned, and...

EXT. RAINFOREST - NIGHT

Lowell breaks the surface, gasping for air in a FAST RIVER.

He grasps desperately at a passing root. Drags himself into the shallows. Bellies up in the mud at the edge of a JUNGLE. Dead quiet, but for his ragged, gasping breaths.

EXT. CLEARING, RAINFOREST - NIGHT

Squeezing swamp juice from his sweater, Lowell emerges from the overgrown undergrowth. Utterly lost. No idea where to turn, what to do. He sees something YELLOW flicker between the foliage. He pushes through the leaves and discovers...

A LEFT GALOSH among the ferns. Just like the one he lost.

LOWELL
That's... That's...

But, before he can finish, a HUGE HAIR-COVERED CREATURE swings down from the trees, SNATCHING the galosh with its prehensile tail and toting it back up into the treetops.

LOWELL
Hey! That's mine!

The HALF-MAN HALF-APE freezes, mid-climb. Casually turns.

MISSING LINK
Yours?

LOWELL
You talk?

MISSING LINK
I speak. With polite tone and proper manners. Now, "Yours?"

LOWELL
I-- I lost it.

MISSING LINK
And I found it. Finders keepers.

Leaves rustle as the creature climbs higher.

LOWELL
Wait! No! Don't go!

MISSING LINK
(sing-song)
Manners.

LOWELL
Please, just don't go.

MISSING LINK
Give me one reason I shouldn't.

LOWELL
You gotta help me!

MISSING LINK
That's a request, not a reason.

LOWELL
'Cause, 'cause it's dark and wet and I -- I only had a half-day of cub-scouts my whole life. I can't find my flashlight. I practically drowned. There was this humongous rat, and I'm, I'm...

MISSING LINK
I said one reason.

LOWELL
I'm lost, okay!?

It smiles, a Cheshire grin.

MISSING LINK
Eureka. Evolution is not a myth.
Of course you're lost, you silly
little creature. If you weren't,
you wouldn't be here.

A CRASHING SOUND echoes through the jungle. Lowell spins.
Heart beating a bah-zillion times a second.

LOWELL
Wh-what was that!?

MISSING LINK
Like I said, finders keepers. And
losers, well... Losers better dry
their eyes and run!

It cackles like a monkey, swings away into the treetops.

CRASH! DARK SHAPES tear through the tree-line, swarming
into the open. GIANT RATS. Claws. Teeth.

Lowell runs -- splashing through streams, crashing through
bushes, racing -- CRACK! Straight into a low branch.

He blinks, splayed out on his back. The jungle canopy
swims overhead. The rats race closer... closer...

At the last moment, A SHADOW sweeps over him. CLAWED FEET
snatch him by his shoulders, lifting him skyward.

A sound surrounds him -- WHUMP, WHUMP, WHUMP...

Everything goes suddenly...

BLACK

Whispers:

MALE VOICE #1
A boy? Here? But how?

MALE VOICE #2
What kind of ill-fated boy could
find his way here?

MALE VOICE #3
Hold your beaks and be still. He
returns to us...

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

Lowell opens his eyes. Blinks. BOLTS UP into a sitting position, scuttles back against the rock wall, SCREAMING!

THREE GIANT BIRDS

huddled over him, LEAP BACK, just as shocked. They're --

LOWELL
Pigeons?!

At first glance, they might appear to be ordinary pigeons you'd feed see in the park. But from claw to beak, they're OVER SIX FEET TALL, they have opposable wing-tips, and...

PARCIVAL (#3)
Peace, lad. We mean you no harm.

They TALK. PARCIVAL, the largest and the leader, his beak a crisscross of battle scars, approaches. Cooing gently.

PARCIVAL
Are you wounded? Are you well?

LOWELL
Wh-what are you?

PARCIVAL
I am Parcival.

RINALDO (#1)
(chimes in)
Protector of the Pigeon Realms!

ORLANDO (#2)
Champion Knight of the Lost Cause!

RINALDO
First Finder of All That is --

PARCIVAL
Thank you, that'll do. May I
present Squires Rinaldo and
Orlando? Gallant young fledglings
in service of the flock.

The two young birds raise wings in a salute. Lowell gapes.

PARCIVAL

Have you any notion where you are?
Your name, lad? Can you tell me
your name?

LOWELL

L-L-Low--

PARCIVAL

Go on, go on, it's alright.

LOWELL

Lowell A-Armstrong Leavitt.

A pause. The pigeons stare, stunned.

ORLANDO

"Lowell Armstrong Leavitt?"

RINALDO

The "Lowell Armstrong Leavitt?"

Lowell nods, confused. He's instantly SMOTHERED IN WINGS.

INT. UNDERGROUND TUNNEL - NIGHT

Lowell squirms helplessly as the three birds haul him down a shadowy passage, deeper into the earth.

LOWELL

What are you doing? Where are you taking me? Let go!

ORALANDO

Are you certain this is wise, brother? Bringing him here?

PARCIVAL

The boy must be brought before the Elders. They'll know what to do.

Ahead, LIGHT FLICKERS. They round the bend to REVEAL...

A GUARD POST

Torches in wing, TWO PIGEON GUARDS snap to attention, saluting as Parcival approaches. Rinaldo pulls one aside, quietly whispering to him. The bird nods, and with a wide-eyed glance at Lowell, hurries off into the darkness.

LOWELL

Where is he going? What is this place? Hey, are we underground?

The other pulls open the gate -- it looks like a large section of a bird cage -- allowing them in.

LOWELL

Is anyone ever gonna answer me!?

PARCIVAL

Patience, lad. Patience.

As they move onward, the tunnel opens into a large open cavern. Torches cast wavering light across a honeycomb of cramped caves, several stories high.

PIGEONS poke their heads out, emerging from their homes as they boy and the birds march past.

LOWELL

You guys live down here?

"Live" might be too strong a word. This place looks more like a refugee camp. Many of the birds look hungry, weary, wounded, or all three. Missing feathers, wings in slings.

They whisper, point as Lowell is led past.

LOWELL

What kind of pigeons are you?

PARCIVAL

Homing Pigeons, to be precise.

A SQUAB CHICK, newly hatched, shyly toddles toward them. She presses a filthy SOCK into Lowell's hands. Written on it in faded marker: "LOWELL".

LOWELL

This is...

(remembering)

I lost this at the mall. In the escalator. Last June! How'd you get it?

SQUAB CHICK

Found!

She squeals happily and scampers back to her proud pigeon parents. Lowell stares, flabbergasted.

LOWELL
Where am I?

Parcival turns to him, just long enough to break the news.

PARCIVAL
 Somehow, lad. Don't ask me how.
 You have found your way...
 (beat)
 To The Land of Lost Things.

Before Lowell can process that, he's ushered onward into...

INT. PIGEON PARLIAMENT - NIGHT

Hundreds of milling birds fill the cave, some so worked up they're molting. Lowell stands on the plateaued top of a stalagmite, feeling like the lone worm in a nest gone nuts.

An EGGHEAD ELDER tries to quell the chaos from his perch.

EGGHEAD ELDER
 Order! Order, I say! All of your queries can be addressed if we behave in an orderly--

PINT-SIZED ELDER (O.S.)
 Flock orderly! We want answers!

He hovers up to Lowell like a hummingbird, poking at him.

PINT-SIZED ELDER
 Who sent you?
 (poke)
 What do you want here?
 (poke)
 Are you looking down your beak at me? Why, you little...

A BALDING ELDER tears out his own plumage in distress.

BALDING ELDER
 Why you? Why us? Oh, why me?

EGGHEAD ELDER
 Can you be more precise about this "book" you followed? Author?
 Publisher? I.S.B.N.?

LOWELL

I told you. I didn't even get a chance to read it. I couldn't even tell you the plot.

A GRIZZLED ELDER puffs his chest, squints his good eye.

GRIZZLED ELDER

Aye, that's what this is. A plot. Pack-rat plot, sure as eggs. Clear as day. Whole thing reeks of rat.

EGGHEAD ELDER

You think everything reeks of rat.

GRIZZLED ELDER

Everything do. And so do that boy!

Overlapping arguing, squawking. Suddenly, something horrifying occurs to the Balding Elder. He shrills:

BALDING ELDER

Oh, my feathers, the Beacon! What if he's come for the Beacon! Oh, it's the end! The end of the wo--

-- SLAP! A pint-sized wing returns him to his senses.

BALDING ELDER

Ow.

PINT-SIZED ELDER

Have you all lost your bird-brained minds? However, why-ever he's here, this boy brings trouble.

(grave)

Or have you forgotten who'll come looking for him?

Murmurs buzz from pigeon to pigeon: "The Finder-Keeper!" "No, not the Finder-Keeper!" Lowell leans to Rinaldo:

LOWELL

Who's the Finder-Keeper?

The Egghead raises his wings, again quieting the crowd.

EGGHEAD ELDER

Gentlebirds, hens, I think we can all agree, there is but one thing to be done here. The right thing.

(a solemn pause)

Get rid of the kid!

PINT-SIZED ELDER
And quick!

The pigeons erupt in agreement. A multitude of wings reaching up to drag Lowell down off of his stalagmite.

LOWELL
Hey! Wait! It's not my fault!

Carrying him across the cave like a crowd surfer, until --

PARCIVAL
(his voice rings out)
By the Beacon! You're homing pigeons. Or have you all forgotten what that means?

He stands before the pigeon mob, an immovable feathered force. Rinaldo and Orland take up positions beside him.

PARCIVAL
We are supposed to see that lost things are found. It is our duty. Our life! And what could be more important than a little lost boy?

The frenzied flock, cowed, lowers the boy to the ground. Birds look down in shame. Just then, a CRUMB OF DIRT falls from the cave roof, bounces off the Balding Elder's head.

BALDING ELDER
(looks up, mumbling)
The sky is falling...? oh my feathers, the sky is falling...

PARCIVAL
Listen to your hearts, brothers!
The only thing we need fear is--

The cave RUMBLES. The MARCH of a THOUSAND CLAWED PAWS.

GRIZZLED ELDER
RATS!

Pigeons panic. Feathers fly. Parcival turns toward Lowell, but... He's GONE.

INT. PIGEON CAVERN - NIGHT

Flanked by Orlando and Rinaldo, Parcival dashes out of pigeon parliament --

Into absolute chaos. RATS swarm through the entrance, trampling the gate and overwhelming the guards. They wear mismatched suits of armor, wielding HARPOONS and NETS.

PARCIVAL
It's a raid! We must find the boy!

Two RAT SOLDIERS rush towards him. He sends the rodents sprawling with a SWAT of his wing.

ORLANDO
Parcival! There! Look!

He turns, to see the tail end of a RED RAIN PONCHO vanish into a side tunnel. As they fight their way toward it --

INT. SIDE TUNNEL - NIGHT

Lowell stomps along, wiping his sniffly nose on his filthy sock, oblivious to the sounds of battle echoing behind him.

LOWELL
Stupid big birds. Don't want me around? Fine. I'll find my own...

He rounds a corner and -- Instantly DIVES BACK, pressing anxiously against the wall.

LOWELL
Okay, wrong way.

TWO RAT SOLDIERS spin in his direction, sniffing the air.

RAT SOLDIER #1
Do you smell something?

RAT SOLDIER #2
(wrinkles his snout)
Socks?

Realizing he's seconds away from discovery, Lowell BOLTS from his hiding place. Darts across into another tunnel.

RAT SOLDIER #1
The boy! There he goes! He's --

RAT SOLDIER #2
-- Mine!

The rats scurry after. Shoving to be first.

Lowell races through the passageway, looking fearfully over his shoulder. SHADOWS of the TWO RATS LICK at his heels.

LOWELL
Oh crap, oh jeeze, oh man, oh...

He dashes around the next bend and -- Skids to a dead stop.

LOWELL
...Rats.

A DOZEN, to be specific. A beat as Lowell and the rodents, equally surprised, blink at one another. Then...

RAT SOLDIER #12
He's --

ELEVEN RATS IN UNISON
-- MINE!

Lowell backpedals, frantic, but both sides of the tunnel are now blocked. He's trapped like a... Well, you know.

LOWELL
Listen, can't we just talk about...
(He sees the answer in their
beady eyes. It ain't yes.)
Okay. Somebody? Anybody! HELP!

Readyng nets, the rodents creep closer, closer, until...

A BREEZE stirs the hairs on Lowell's head, an unmistakable sound fills the tunnel -- WHUMP! WHUMP! WHUMP! -- WINGS!

PARCIVAL, ORLANDO, RINALDO

SOAR down the tunnel like fighter jets in formation, coming up behind the Rat Duo, who turn, eyes wide as 1, 2...

PARCIVAL
Duck, lad! Duck!

... Orlando and Rinaldo PLUCK the rats off their paws, carrying them past Lowell at breakneck speed, and releasing them like perfectly timed bombs -- AIMED AT THE OTHER RATS.

RINALDO
Incoming, you villainous vermin!

Like frantically squeaking furry cannonballs, the two rats CRASH RIGHT INTO the twelve, scattering them like tenpins.

The birds alight beside Lowell. Seeing the three powerful pigeons, the dazed rats pick themselves up and run for it.

ORLANDO
That's right! You'd best run!

PARCIVAL
They may run now, but they'll be back. Quick, lad. This way.

But Lowell, shaking off his momentary gratitude, shrugs him off. Marches resolutely the opposite direction.

PARCIVAL
Where are you going? Lowell?

LOWELL
I don't know, okay? I'm lost!

His outburst ECHOES: "Lost... lost... lost... lost..."

LOWELL
I don't know how I got to this place -- where there's giant birds, and humongous rats, and, and...
(waves his sock)
My socks? And I don't know why. I don't know anything. All I want to know is how I get home!

PARCIVAL
Lad, home is precisely where we're trying to take you.

A beat. Lowell stares at them, trying to seem tough, but he's so scared, and alone, and truly in need of a friend.

LOWELL
You promise?

PARCIVAL
On my honor. I swear it.

The strength with which this bird speaks, it'd be utterly impossible not to trust him. Lowell softens.

PARCIVAL
Good. Now, have you flown before?

LOWELL
One time I lost my luggage before we even got to the airport.

PARCIVAL
Just don't lose your grip.

As Parcival hunkers down for Lowell to board, we SMASH TO:

THE WALLS OF THE TUNNEL, ZOOMING PAST AT ASTOUNDING SPEED

Parcival rockets along the passageway, Orlando and Rinaldo flanking. A wind-blown Lowell hangs on for his dear life.

LOWELL
This is awesome! This is amazing!
Oh, I think I'm gonna throw up...

The tunnel curves upward into a natural "chimney". The birds pull into a climb, rocketing toward an opening above.

RINALDO
Fret not, lad. We shall have you home sooner than you can say --

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

LOWELL
-- RATS!

The pigeons emerge from underground, right into the midst of an ARMY. RATS everywhere. Crowding the jungle, swarming as far as their eyes can see.

ORLANDO
Look out!

A VOLLEY of HARPOONS crisscrosses all around them. The pigeons bank and weave among the trees.

RINALDO
They're everywhere! They've never come in such numbers before!

Parcival looks back at Lowell, realizing.

PARCIVAL
We've never had something they wanted so badly before!

BOOM! A NET UNFURLS in the air directly in front of them.

The birds take evasive action. Barely avoiding the midair snare. It tangles, falling to the jungle below, where --

A LARGE CANNON cranes around, tracking the pigeons' flight.
Fuse BURNING. The RAT ARTILLERY UNIT plugs its ears...

BOOM! A CANNONBALL screams into the air, EXPLODES into
another NET-BOMB. Again, it misses by a matter of feet.

ORLANDO
They'll snare us before we can
clear the canopy!

RINALDO
We must set down!

PARCIVAL
Here, squires! Take cover here!

Parcival leads them to the branches of a thick tree, where
they alight, finding some momentary cover.

As harpoons riddle the bark around them, they see something
that -- well, that "scrambles their eggs."

ORLANDO
By the Beacon, no...

From the entrance to the caves below, pack-rat guards lead
a string of PIGEON PRISONERS away in chains. The gate
guards. The elders. Even the squab chick and her parents.

RINALDO
This is no ordinary raid. They've
captured every last bird!

A fire lights in Parcival's eyes. Forming a battle plan.

PARCIVAL
We must do something. We must set
them free. Rinaldo, Orlando, we--

He stops, seeing their looks. For a moment, he'd forgotten
the boy still clinging fearfully to his back.

RINALDO
Leave the rodents to us, brother.
You have your duty.

ORLANDO
Hardly be fair, anyway. Three of
us verses so few of them.

It is a suicide mission, and they know it. But we can see
in the brave set of their beaks, they've made their choice.

PARCIVAL
 Squires, wait! There must be
 another way...

Ignoring his order, the birds raise their wings in salute.

ORLANDO
 Huzzah to Parcival, Protector of
 the Pigeon Realms!

RINALDO
 Champion Knight of the Lost Cause!

ORLANDO
 First Finder of All That Is Missed!

RINALDO
 Huzzah to the bravest of us all!

With that, they leap off the branches, dive bombing into the heart of the rat army. We hear RAT SQUEAKS, pained PIGEON SQUAWKS. The sounds of battle. Chaos from below.

Parcival returns their salute, overcome by their courage.

PARCIVAL
 May you find your way through this,
 you gallant young birds. May you
 find your way through in one piece.

And with a beat of his massive wings, he takes to the air. The squires' diversion gives him enough time to weave through the towering trees, soaring up through the canopy.

EXT. SKY - NIGHT

Wind ruffling his hair, Lowell stares, eyes wide as dinner plates, at the indescribable firmament stretching out around him. Every star is a SHOOTING STAR.

For a moment, Lowell sees the entire Land of Lost Things at once. Mountains, marshes, plains, jungles, deserts. Shrinking below as they climb higher and higher and higher.

LOWELL
 Holey moley, this is the way home?

As Parcival flaps across the stars, plotting his course, unbeknownst to him... A SET of CROSSHAIRS trains on him.

Crouched in a clearing below, the RAT we met in the sewer, squinting into the sight of a LONG-BARRELLED HARPOON GUN.

PARCIVAL

Hold onto your sock, Lowell. Soon,
you'll home, warm, safe in your ...

A FAINT POP, far below, and -- PARCIVAL SUDDENLY PLUMMETS OUT OF THE SKY. He's going down. Losing altitude fast.

Lowell holds on for dear life, hollering at the top of his lungs. The jungle rushes past beneath them, giving way to a vast expanse of blue sand. The DESERT. As the dunes race toward them, Lowell covers his eyes, and we SMASH TO:

COMPLETE BLACKNESS

A groan. Breathing. The sound of fingers scooping sand.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Lowell's head pops out. He digs his body free, squinting up at the BLAZING HOT SUN. He's alive. And --

LOWELL

Parcival?

Alone. Behind him, Lowell can just make out the edge of the jungle, a cluster of verdant green on the distant horizon. Before him, a towering dune blocks his view.

LOWELL

Parciva--!

--his cry CHOKES OFF, as he HACKS UP a lungful of sand. Digging grit out of his shorts, Lowell climbs the dune. As he reaches the top, he's perplexed to find --

A FLAG

waving lazily in the breeze. It's black, emblazoned with a LEERING SKULL & CROSSBONES, and most unusually, it's affixed to a WOODEN MAST JUTTING UP OUT OF THE SAND.

LOWELL

What the...?

Then, his eyes -- and ours -- refocus on what lies BEHIND the fluttering flag...

And they go WIIIIIDE.

A NAUTICAL GRAVEYARD

stretches out across the sand in every direction. Ancient wooden sailing vessels, rotting on the sun-drenched sand beside rusted out speed-boats. Smashed schooners and crashed cruise ships. Their wrecked remains strewn across the desert floor like the bottom of some long receded sea.

LOWELL
What is this place?

At the center, reflecting the white-hot sun like glass...

A HUGE OASIS. IN THE SHAPE OF A PERFECT TRIANGULAR POOL.

EXT. FAR SIDE OF THE DUNE - DAY

A FIGURE bursts up from the dune, shaking sand from its feathers. Parcival flexes his wing -- WINCING in instant agony. But his concern is not from himself. It's for:

PARCIVAL
Lowell? Where are you, lad?

Turning, he spots something that -- makes him stop dead.

PARCIVAL
Oh, pluck me... LOOOWELL!!!

As he hurries off, fast as his bird legs can go, REVEAL --

A RUSTED-OUT MOTOR BOAT, partially submerged in the sand. Stenciled across its transom in peeling paint, next to a cartoon of a smiling marlin, the words: "FISH BERMUDA".

EXT. NAUTICAL GRAVEYARD - DAY

Lowell wanders through the valley of wrecked vessels. He peers into a gaping hole in the half-buried hulk of a Spanish Galleon. Inside, rotting barrels, a rusty cannon.

LOWELL
How'd all these boats end up in the middle of a desert? I thought I had a bad sense of direction.

As he moves on...

SOMETHING STIRS in the shadowy corner of the ship's hull.

OUTSIDE, Lowell discovers a long trench cut through the sand, stretching out behind a wrecked speedboat. As if it ran aground from somewhere. He follows the trench to...

THE EDGE OF THE TRIANGULAR OASIS

Where, realizing how thirsty he is, he cups a mouthful of water and -- Immediately SPITS it back out.

LOWELL
Ick. Salty?

Suddenly, a wave carries something onto the beach at Lowell's feet. It looks like a PLASTIC HOCKEY PUCK. He fishes it out. Studies it, eyes lighting up.

LOWELL
A Jr. Explorer's Compass? I used to have one of these, till it got flushed down the...
(realizes)
Hey! This is mine!

Carved in its back: "L-O-W-E-L-L". He pockets the compass, excitedly looking around for more.

LOWELL
Maybe there's more of my stuff around here too...

He trails off, seeing something that makes his MOUTH SAG.

A SHIH TZU

sits at the edge of the beach, tail a-wag. Dangling from its frayed collar, a FILTHY DOG-TAG reads:

LOWELL
"Buster"?

BARK-BARK!

LOWELL
Is IS you! Come'ere boy, come on!

Overjoyed, Lowell races across the sand toward his long lost dog. He reaches to pet the pooch, but --

JERKS his HAND BACK as the dog SNAPS at him.

LOWELL
Hey! Easy, Buster. Why'd you...?

Closer now, Lowell can see the dog's mangy fur, jutting ribs, the feral glint in his eyes. From behind Buster, OTHER ANIMALS emerge from hiding spots inside the ships.

DOGS. Dozens of them. CATS. Meowing and hissing, hungrily licking their chops. A TRIBE OF LOST PETS.

LOWELL
(worried)
Uhh. Buster...?

Buster GROWLS. The others join in. GRRRRRR... They back Lowell against the side of a schooner. From a porthole beside his face, a HAMSTER pokes out its furry little head.

LOWELL
(recognizing it)
Yosemite Ham?

It SNARLS! LEAPS ONTO HIS FACE! As Lowell HOWLS IN PAIN--

CUT TO:

PARCIVAL, who turns at the noise, to see...

PARCIVAL
...Lowell?

The boy sprints out from behind a sailboat, cats clinging to his back, dogs chewing at his pant-legs.

PARCIVAL
Lad, please, we don't have time to play around.

LOWELL
Who's playing around? They're eating me alive here! Help!

Parcival calmly sweeps the animals off of Lowell's body. They hiss and howl angrily. Quickly scurrying away. Buster gives one last growl, scampering after the others.

PARCIVAL
They're just Lost Pets. Strays. Harmless, I assure you. Now come. We've a long walk ahead of us.

LOWELL
"A walk?" Aren't you gonna--

But, then he sees. Pales. Points at...

LOWELL
Parcival, you're -- your wing!

IT BLEEDS. The BROKEN BUTT of A HARPOON JUTTING OUT. The boy gingerly touches it. The pigeon recoils in pain.

LOWELL

You're hurt? But, but -- if you're hurt, how're you gonna get me home?

PARCIVAL

I have a plan, lad. But for now, we must get moving.

LOWELL

I'm not moving another step till--

Parcival whirls on Lowell, grabbing his arm. Intense.

PARCIVAL

Listen to me. If we stop. If we tarry, what's looking for us -- for you -- will find us. And if that happens, we will be lost. Just like every last one of my flock!

(his voice softens)

I gave you my word, lad. And I will get you home. Trust that.

He turns to go, but Lowell's voice stops him. Timid.

LOWELL

Parcival? It's not just rats that are looking for me, is it? It's...

Parcival looks to the horizon, where in a haze of smog in the distance, a SLENDER BLACK SPIRE rises up into the sky.

PARCIVAL

(grim)

The Finder-Keeper.

LOWELL

That's the second time I heard that name. Who is he?

PARCIVAL

Lowell, I will do everything in my power to ensure you never find out.

He leads the boy off into across the sand, but we hold on the spire, as it seems to pulse with malevolent energy...

INT. THE KEEP - DAY? / NIGHT? / NOONISH?

A SHADOWY FIGURE sits in the dark recess of an enormous throne fashioned out of countless glimmering lost keys.

FINDER-KEEPER (O.S.)
 An army at your disposal, yet you
 still can't bring me what I ask?
 Have you anything to say, Milton?

A fingernail, a long yellowed spiral, reaches out of the darkness, tracing the jugular of the RAT from the sewers.

MILTON
 I-I have n-no excuse, K-Keeper.

FINDER-KEEPER (O.S.)
 Course you don't, you lack-wit.
 Even your excuses belong to me!

He waves the rodent away, crooking his fingernail toward the shadows, where a HULKING RAT melts out, flanked by TWO OTHER scarred, saliva dripping BEHEMOTHS. We'll call the leader RATSPUTIN. The others, ONE-EAR and SNAGGLE-TOOTH.

RATSPUTIN
 You sssummoned usss, my Keeper?

FINDER-KEEPER (O.S.)
 Yes, I do so hate losing things.
 Especially my temper.
 (hisses)
 Find the boy!

EXT. DESERT - SUNSET

Lowell and Parcival trek across the sand, the sun sinking low behind them. Lowell wears his sweater like a turban.

PARCIVAL
 Sewer grates, sink drains. Several
 mailboxes lead directly here as
 well. There are many paths to this
 land. But they are all one-way.

LOWELL
 So, the only way home is to fly?

PARCIVAL

Well... There is one other. But, it is unreachable. The only viable way home is via Homing Pigeon.

LOWELL

But if all the other pigeons are prisoners, and you can't... you know. What are we gonna do?

Parcival points toward the horizon, beyond a towering range of mountains. A forest in the far distance.

PARCIVAL

They are not all prisoners. There is a place where pigeons still fly free. Ready, willing, and able to see you home.

(turns to Lowell, serious)

But the way is far and fraught with danger. If we're to make it, you must stay close, touch nothing, and do as I say. No questions asked.

LOWELL

Got it. No problem. One question.

Parcival sighs, marching on. Lowell switches his single galosh to his other foot, hopping to catch up.

LOWELL

Ow, ow! Hot sand. Okay. So, I been thinking. All the stuff I ever lost -- my sock, my book, my Dad's car keys. It ends up here.

PARCIVAL

Other, less tangible things as well. Lost hours, dreams, loves...

LOWELL

Right, right. Cause the pack-rats bring it all here, and you guys --

PARCIVAL

-- The Fraternal Flock of Finding.

LOWELL

Right. You guys try to bring it all back. How do you even know where it's supposed to go?

PARCIVAL

(nods to Lowell's compass)
The same way your compass knows.
We pigeons are the needle. And It
points us in the right direction.

LOWELL

It? You mean like a big magnet?

PARCIVAL

The Beacon. Our Homing Beacon, the
Heart of our land. Without it,
nothing would ever be found again.

Lowell bends to switch his one galosh again.

LOWELL

Okay. But -- ow! -- that wasn't my
question. My question is: What
happens when I lose something here?

Parcival looks as if he doesn't understand.

LOWELL

I can lose stuff here, can't I?

PARCIVAL

There is one place, at the furthest
edge of our world, where a thing
might truly be lost forever. But --

That's all Lowell needed to hear. He races onward,
throwing his compass high up into the air and catching it.

PARCIVAL

Lowell, wait. I said stay close.

LOWELL

Why? I can't lose! I can't lo--

--THUMP! He falls onto his face. Tripped. By a SUITCASE.

LOWELL

Ow. Somebody lose their luggage?

PARCIVAL

You have no idea.

Lowell looks up to see another suitcase. And another. And
dozens more, scattered in the sand, stretching across the
desert to the black fingers of foothills, rising up, up, up
into the MOUNTAIN RANGE we saw before. But from here, we
can see the "mountains" are COLOSSAL HEAPS of LOST LUGGAGE.

PARCIVAL

The Samsonite Mountains. They are what stands between us and our destination. Come, lad.

They appear to stretch up forever. And ever. And EVER...

LOWELL

You mean we're gonna *climb* those?
(swallows)
Hope I can't lose my balance too.

EXT. SAMSONITE MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

At the base of the range, Parcival and Lowell stand swathed in a wardrobe's worth of sweaters, scarves. They root through the luggage. Loading up on layers for the ascent.

PARCIVAL

Wear all you can bear. Once we leave, there will be no returns.

LOWELL

But if it gets too cold, can't we just find something else up there?
The whole peak's packed.

PARCIVAL

You dislodge the wrong luggage, lad, you may cause an avalanche.
Trust me, it's best to be prepared.

With a grunt, Lowell squeezes into one more pair of pants.

LOWELL

Okay, so, we climb to the other side of the mountains. Then what?

PARCIVAL

One challenge at a time.

LOWELL

You said it's best to be prepared.
What if we get separated?

Parcival holds up a COIL OF ROPE. He ties one end to himself, looping the other end around Lowell's waist.

PARCIVAL

Beyond lie the Forgotten Fields.
Home to the world's lost knowledge.
There is a train that runs there.
(MORE)

PARCIVAL (CONT'D)
 We must be on that train. Now, as
 I said, one challenge at a time.

He starts up the mountain, rope unspooling behind him. As Lowell waits, he can't help but glance back at the desert.

LOWELL
 Parcival? You really think they're
 still looking for us? For me?

PARCIVAL
 I don't think it, lad. I know.

Lowell shivers. As the rope pulls him onward, we hold on his footprints, retreating off toward the dark horizon...

EXT. NAUTICAL GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

... Miles away, a SHADOW hunkers over those same prints. Ratsputin breathes in the scent, yellow pupils gleaming.

RATSPUTIN
 The boy...

Huddled over the half-eaten corpse of a CAT, One-Ear and Snaggle-Tooth look up, snouts wet with blood.

ONE-EAR & SNAGGLE-TOOTH
 The boy!

One-Ear slurp-sucks the tail like spaghetti. They lope toward the mountains, a trio of bloodhounds on the hunt.

EXT. THE EDGE OF A CLIFF, SAMSONITE MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

Lowell GRABS a suitcase handle, frosted with snow. He grabs another. Another. Pulling himself up with ease.

LOWELL
 This is way easier than I thought!

PULL BACK to REVEAL -- Parcival, at the top of the cliff, holding the rope, using every ounce of his strength to haul Lowell over the edge. He collapses in an exhausted heap.

Lowell looks back over the side. A vertigo-inducing sprawl of ant-sized suitcases greets him. Bottomless canyons built of book-bags. Peaks of piled purses.

LOWELL
 Holey moley, I think I can see my
 house from here. That was a joke.
 (MORE)

LOWELL (CONT'D)
 (looks over)
 You okay, Parce? You look tired.

Still gasping, Parcival surveys their surroundings. The ledge extends toward a SMALL CAVE set into the mountain.

PARCIVAL
 What say we spell ourselves a bit,
 hmm? Have a peck to eat?

As Lowell perks up at the mention of food, we MOVE TO...

THE CAVE

... where he immediately perks back down upon seeing the wingful of BIRDSEED that Parcival offers him.

PARCIVAL
 Not hungry? There's plenty more.

LOWELL
 You don't actually expect me to eat
 that, do you? I need real food.
 Like Funyuns. Or a pudding cup.

He studies the cave walls around him, clearing away snow
 the reveal the bags buried beneath like bricks in a wall.

PARCIVAL
 Lowell, what are you doing?

LOWELL
 You don't even know how many
 backpacks I've lost over the years.
 Always with my lunch still inside.
 One's gotta be around here somewh--

-- Parcival grabs Lowell's hand, stopping him.

PARCIVAL
 I told you, lad. It's not safe.

LOWELL
 Parcival, come on! My stomach's
 practically talking to --

A VOICE (V.O.)
 (echoing)
 Heeeelllo-o-o...

A beat. Lowell looks down, stunned.

LOWELL
 Was that my...?

PARCIVAL

No lad, that was a Lost Voice.
Ever have a sore throat? Lose your
voice? This is where it goes.

LOST VOICE (V.O.)

Heeeeelllo-o-o-o--

The Voice breaks into a COUGHING FIT, hacks up some phlegm.

LOST VOICE (V.O.)

Uck. This altitude plays havoc
with my sinuses. And the cold?
Don't even get me started. Say...
(brightens)
You don't happen to have a lozenge,
do you? Something with menthol?
(a la the commercial)
Riiiiiicolaaaa?

A beat. Lowell turns back toward Parcival.

LOWELL

You stay here and talk to thin air
if you want to, I'm going this way.

PARCIVAL

Lowell...

LOWELL

I just need to use the little boy's
cave, okay? I won't touch
anything. I promise.

He holds up his end of the rope. Still tied between them.

LOWELL

Any problems, I'll tug.

After a moment, Parcival relents.

INT. AROUND A BEND, CAVE - NIGHT

The second Lowell is out of sight, he resumes his search.

LOWELL

Come on, come on, pudding cup...

The Voice clears its "throat".

LOST VOICE (V.O.)

Um, excuse me, but I thought--

LOWELL
Mind your own business, Voice.

LOST VOICE (V.O.)
I was simply going to ask if--

LOWELL
Why don't you go echo somewhere
else, okay? I'm busy.

He spots something, deeper in the darkness of the shadowy
cave. As he disappears after it...

LOST VOICE (V.O.)
(sulkily)
I was just going to ask if you felt
a draft too. Juh-eeze.

DEEP IN THE SHADOWY CAVE

Wind whistles ominously past as Lowell approaches a swath
of GREEN CANVAS midway up the cave wall. Just like the
backpack he lost in the opening. But as he YANKS it OUT --

He realizes it's not a backpack. It's a GREEN FANNY-PACK.

LOWELL
Wow. Whoever lost this lucked out.

Behind him, SOMEONE CLEARS THEIR THROAT. Lowell almost
turns, till he realizes --

LOWELL
I know it's you, Voice. I thought
I told you to get los--

A CLAWED FINGER TAPS HIS SHOULDER. Lowell turns -- WHITE.

LOWELL
--oh sh-sh-sh-sh-sh...

Inches away from his face, Ratsputin's yellow pupils BURN.
Lowell frantically tugs at the rope, only to find...

... it's CHEWED THROUGH. Ratsputin shows his TEETH.

LOWELL
Parcival! Help! Parcival!!!!

One-Ear and Snaggle-Tooth melt out of the shadows, blocking
the only exit, converging toward him, at the last moment...

A SHADOW sweeps over them and -- WHOOMMP! Parcival BARRELS through, FLATTENING the rodents like rugs.

LOWELL

Finally! What took you so long?

PARCIVAL

You're not the only one who had to use the wee bird's cave. Now go!

The sprint through the cave, out of its mouth and into...

A violent storm HOWLING across the night sky, blotting out the stars. Parcival and Lowell struggle up the mountainside, groping for baggage handles in the darkness.

PARCIVAL

Quickly, lad. If we can make it over the next ridge, we'll be...

The scramble up and over, skidding to a sudden halt at --

LOWELL

"Rat food?" That what you were gonna say, "We'll be rat food?"

The EDGE of a DEEP RAVINE. A briefcase dislodges beneath their feet and plummets down... down... into mist below.

LOWELL

Man, I really wish you could fly right about now.

They look for salvation either direction. Nothing. Finally, they look up, and --

CUT TO:

A "ROCK BRIDGE"

Well, since it's made of luggage, it should probably be called something different. But, regardless, the formation arches up and over the ravine, attached on either side.

And underneath it, swinging from shoulder-strap to suitcase handle, like rungs on a set of monkey bars, is Lowell.

He glances down as his feet (and one galosh), dangling over the abyss. Quickly looks right back up.

LOWELL

I really really wish you could fly!

PARCIVAL

Keep focused, lad! You can do it,
just a bit further! A few feet!

Parcival dangles from a dufflebag behind him. Swinging himself back and forth like a pendulum, Lowell stretches out for the next handhold -- a purse strap --

LOWELL

I got it!

-- and swings himself to safety on the far side of the ravine. Parcival follows suit shortly after.

LOWELL

We did it! We made it! Think we lost 'em?

They turn to discover -- the salivating TRIO of RATS on their side of the ravine, snarling and surrounding them.

PARCIVAL

Get behind me, lad! I have a plan!

The rats back them toward the mountainside. Nowhere to go.

PARCIVAL

My plan is to come up with a plan!

Ratsputin SNAPS at Lowell, who bumps back against the cliff. As he does, he dislodges snow, exposing -- GREEN CANVAS, scrawled on it: "L-O-W-E-L-L." His BACKPACK!

LOWELL

Parcival, look! I told you one of them had to be up here!

He pulls the strap, struggling to free it. Suitcases shift overhead. Parcival tries to get his attention without taking his eyes off the steadily advancing rats.

PARCIVAL

Lad? What are you doing? Lad!

LOWELL

Calm down, Parce, I have a plan.

PARCIVAL

Wait, you're going to cause a --

Lowell yanks it free. A RUMBLING shakes the mountains.

LOWELL
(proud)
Avalanche! I know!

Parcival ducks, hugging Lowell flat, just as A DELUGE of SUITCASES tumbles down from above. The rats have a split second to look up, confusion clouding their eyes, before --

WHOMMPP! They're swept away by the landslide of luggage, carried off the cliff and into the abyss below. After a moment, the rumbling subsides. The mountains are silent.

Parcival looks up, shocked to be alive. He turns to Lowell, stunned. The boy beams at him.

LOWELL
See? I told you I had a plan!

A SECOND WAVE OF SUITCASES TOPPLES LOOSE. The bird is swept away by a cascade of carry-ons. A TRUNK tumbles toward Lowell. It's lid SWINGS OPEN.

LOWELL
Never said it was a good plan.

It SWALLOWS him. SNAPS SHUT. BOUNCES over the edge...

INT. TRUNK

Lowell ricochets off every wall as the trunk pinballs down the mountain. Eventually, mercifully, it rocks to a stop.

EXT. TRUNK - DAWN

The trunk rests in a drift of snow at the base of the mountains, suitcases scattered all around.

LOWELL (O.S.)
Parcival?

The lid POPS OPEN. Lowell's head pops out.

LOWELL
Parcival? Paaaaaaaaarcivaaaaall!
(to himself)
Okay. Don't panic. Think. He said this is home to the world's --

Climbing out, his sock sinks into the "snow", and he realizes... it's a giant pile of ENVELOPES. TV Guides. Publisher's Clearinghouse. Val-Pak Coupons. JUNK MAIL.

LOWELL
-- lost knowledge? Okay. Well
maybe he was right about the train?

He turns to look, but all he finds are heaps of LOST BOOKS, MISPLACED PAPERS, POST-IT NOTES, as far as the eye can see.

LOWELL
It's best to be prepared my but--

--A SHEET OF PAPER, blown by the wind, plasters itself over his mouth. He peels it off. Reads the top:

LOWELL
"Lowell A. Leavitt. Homework 28."
(realizes)
Hey! This is...

One of his lost homeworks!

LOWELL
And another one?

Homework 27 flutters past. Homework 26. 25.

LOWELL
And another, and a -- holey moley.
My lost homework, it's everywhere!

Lowell races off across the Forgotten Fields, snatching up his lost homework papers, stuffing them into his backpack.

Finally, he climbs a hill of Cliffs' Notes, bursting through a bush covered with lost leaflets to discover --

Homework # 1. He bends down to pick it up, but... it's stuck. Pinched under a STEEL RAIL. As he pulls at it...

LOWELL
Come on. Leggo. It's my homew--

The SHRILL WAIL of a WHISTLE startles him. Lowell looks up, realizing the steel rail is a TRAIN TRACK, just as --

LOWELL
-- Oh crap.

THE TRAIN blasts around a bend, a 19th century STEAM ENGINE. Pistons chugging. Smoke spewing. Papers scattering before it. Barreling right toward Lowell.

At the last moment, SOMETHING HITS Lowell like a linebacker, tackling him to one side. It's Parcival. Covered in baggage stickers. He helps Lowell up.

LOWELL
 Parcival! Hey, I found the train!
 (beat)
 Actually it looks like a bunch of different trains.

It steams past them, its cars an odd hodgepodge of styles. We see a DINING CAR that belongs on the Orient Express. A SUBWAY CAR. A string of FREIGHT CARS from different eras.

PARCIVAL
 Well, lucky for us, they're all going the same way. Now hurry!

Lowell zips the last of his homework into his backpack, running with Parcival beside the train, until, finally...

THE CABOOSE

rushes past. Parcival grabs the rail, pulls himself up.

PARCIVAL
 My wing, lad. Take it!

Hobbling on his one galosh, he makes a desperate dive for Parcival's wing --

LOWELL
 Got it.

Hauled aboard at the last moment. Lowell clings to the back of the train as it steams through the piles of pages, chugging into a PITCH BLACK TUNNEL, its WHISTLE WAILING.

INT. CABOOSE - DAY (MOVING IN THE TUNNEL)

Cramped, dusty and dark. Parcival shuts the door behind them, securing it tight. Lowell breathes a sigh of relief.

LOWELL
 Whew... That was a close one.

He unzips his pack, peeking in at his recovered homework.

LOWELL
 But look, I found my -- Hey!

Suddenly incensed, Parcival has snatched the pack away.

PARCIVAL

"Close one?" Lad, your inability to obey my few, simple instructions is going to get us both killed!

The boy grabs frantically for the bag. With an exasperated sigh, Parcival returns it, voice softening.

PARCIVAL

Lowell, listen...

LOWELL

You! You listen! You don't know what it's like to be a loser your whole life. Some nights I still get lost between my room and the bathroom. I have to pee in Dad's ficus. And Mom can't play Scrabble anymore 'cause I lost all the S's. She has to call it Crabble. I'm ten years old and look. Just look! I'm even losing my hair!

Lowell lowers his voice, earnest.

LOWELL

This is the first time ever, I got a chance to make up for it. I got a chance to bring some things back.

PARCIVAL

It's not your duty to bring things back, Lowell. That's a job for a bird. Not for a boy.

He extends a wing toward Lowell's backpack.

PARCIVAL

At some point, you're going to have to learn to let go of this, and realize what's really important.

(kindly)

Getting you home.

LOWELL

No reason we can't do both. Right? Everything worked out fine. Right?

SUNLIGHT returns to the windows as...

EXT. TRAIN TUNNEL - DAY

The train emerges from the other end, REVEALING a countryside of rolling green hills, stately trees. And...

RATSPUTIN, ONE-EAR AND SNAGGLE-TOOTH CLINGING to the outside of the CABOOSE.

INT. CABOOSE

Parcival SUDDENLY YANKS Lowell away from the window, as --

-- A RAT PAW SMASHES THROUGH THE GLASS! Snaggle-Tooth tries to squeeze his neck through the tiny open portal.

SNAGGLE-TOOTH
The boy! Give ussss the boy!

-- CRASH! One-Ear SMASHES IN through the opposite window.

ONE-EAR
You will never essssscape us!

PARCIVAL
Quick, lad. The door! Run!

As they race forward, One-Ear and Snaggle-Tooth wriggle their way inside like snakes. Parcival throws open the front door, hustling the boy through to --

LOWELL
Holey moley! These guys are...

EXT. CABOOSE - DAY

-- A CLAWED PAW SWIPES DOWN FROM ABOVE. Almost taking Lowell's head off. Ratsputin HISSES on the car's roof.

LOWELL
Everywhere! How do they do that?

PARCIVAL
I don't think we should stop and ask. Keep moving.

The green hills whizzing past behind them, Parcival drags Lowell through the next door, and into --

INT. FREIGHT CAR

Stacked to the ceiling with crates. As Lowell and Parcival hurry toward the front, Lowell sees crates stamped with: "LOST WALLETS", "LOST WATCHES", "LOST TEETH", etc., etc.

LOWELL

Look at all this stuff. Where's it all getting taken to?

PARCIVAL

Forget that for now, lad. There's something I haven't yet told you about this train.

Parcival chances a look back. The rats burst through the back door, half-a-car behind. Parcival urges Lowell on.

PARCIVAL

It isn't any ordinary train. And the longer we're on it, the more we'll start to... we'll start to...

He trails off. Running, Lowell glances over expectantly.

LOWELL

"We'll start to" ... what?

PARCIVAL

(no clue)

What?

LOWELL

You trailed off right in the middle of... I mean, you were gonna...
(blanking)

Weird. Now, I can't remember.

Parcival sighs, shaking out the cobwebs.

PARCIVAL

Not weird, lad. Not for where we are. It isn't called "The Lost Train of Thought" for nothing.

LOWELL

(a beat)

I'm sorry, what were we talking about again?

Parcival ushers Lowell across another gap, racing into...

INT. FRONT-MOST FREIGHT CAR

Crates, crates, more crates. They run to the front door.

LOWELL

We can't just keep running forever.
Eventually, we'll run out of train.

PARCIVAL

If we can make it to the engine, we
can detach the rest of the cars.

LOWELL

And leave the rats in our tracks?

PARCIVAL

Precisely. So, no matter what, we
must-must-must keep moving forwa--

Parcival grabs the front door's knob, but -- IT'S LOCKED.

PARCIVAL

Oh for flock's sake! What else!?

-- The back door BURSTS IN and THE RATS surge toward them.

RATSPUTIN

Where are you fleeing to, bird?
There's no eesscape.

As the rats advance, Parcival looks around frantically...

PARCIVAL

There has to be... Somewhere...
(points)
There, lad. A key!

IT hangs from a hook, on the far wall, BEHIND the TRIO OF RATS. Lowell gulps uneasily.

LOWELL

Think maybe there's another one?

Parcival strides toward the rats, his beak set bravely.

PARCIVAL

You open the door. I'll open up a
box of rat poison.

With a flap of his wings, Parcival propels himself into
the onrushing rats, tackling them back into the crates.

PARCIVAL
Have at you! Ha! Mano-a-mouses!

Feathers, fur flies. Seizing the opportunity, Lowell ducks past. Rushes to the far wall. Pulls the key off its hook.

LOWELL
Parcival, I got it!

The TRAIN hits a BUMP, and Lowell fumbles it. The key skitters across the floor, under the grappling animals.

LOWELL
Oops, scratch that.

Parcival fights to hold clawed paws away from his face.

PARCIVAL
Don't say scratch! Quickly, lad!

Lowell crawls on hands and knees, trying to grab the key, as it's kicked by rodent paws and bird feet.

LOWELL
Almost got it... Almost got it...

Just as he's about to grab it -- Parcival is shoved back into some crates. One falls, SMASHES OPEN and SCATTERS A SHOWER OF KEYS across the floor, camouflaging the DOOR KEY. Only now do we see the stencil on the crate: "LOST KEYS".

LOWELL
Oh come on! That is not fair!

PARCIVAL
Quickly, Lowell... Quickly...

LOWELL
I'm trying! But it's like finding a needle in a pile of things that look very similar to needles. I can't remember what they're called right now. But, this isn't easy!

Finally, Parcival summons his strength and FLAPS FORWARD into Ratsputin. The rat stumbles back into his brethren, dislodging a shelf of crates, which COLLAPSES, burying them under a dozen huge boxes, stenciled with "LOST WEIGHTS".

Rats momentarily dispatched, Parcival digs his wing into the keys, shuts his eyes, and... draws out the door key.

PARCIVAL
Never send a boy to do a bird's
job. Now let's go!

Parcival quickly unlocks the door, hurries Lowell through,
just as the heap of crates begins to stir...

EXT. BETWEEN TRAIN CARS

Tall trees rushing past, Parcival relocks the door. THUD!
It shudders as the rodents hurl their bodies against it.

PARCIVAL
This won't hold long. Quickly, to
the next car. Hurry.

The SUBWAY CAR. Lowell stares dubiously.

LOWELL
People pee in subways.

PARCIVAL
Go! In there! Now!

Lowell slides the door open, and dashes through into --

INT. SUBWAY CAR

-- skidding to an immediate stop, eyes wide as saucers.

The place is packed with RATS, sitting, standing, reading
the newspaper, every last one looks in Lowell's direction.

LOWELL
I...

A beat. He slowly backs out. As the commuters return to
their newspapers --

EXT. BETWEEN CARS

Parcival looks back to see Lowell EASING the subway door
closed, emphatically shaking his head.

LOWELL
We don't wanna go in there.

THUD! THUD! THUD! A hinge pops off the freight car door.

PARCIVAL

Well, we have to go somewhere!

At once, they both look UP. Lowell pales.

LOWELL

No. Not again. You gotta be --

EXT. ROOF OF TRAIN - DAY

LOWELL

(cheeks flapping in the wind)
-- kid-did-did-did-ding me-e-e!!

He clings to the top of the coursing locomotive, the rushing winds buffeting him as he struggles to crawl. Parcival, bent low against the breeze, urges him on.

PARCIVAL

Hurry, lad! We must move faster!

LOWELL

I'm moving as fast as I --

With a CRASH, the freight car door busts open behind them, Ratsputin and his cohorts climbing onto the roof, a murderous gleam in their yellow eyes.

LOWELL

Coming through! Look out!

He sprints past Parcival like the bird is standing still, leaping the gap to the next car without a second thought.

AS THE TRAIN chugs through the countryside, trees whizzing past, white smoke puffing from its engine, Lowell and Parcival run along the roof. Leaping from car to car.

PARCIVAL

You remember the plan, right?

LOWELL

Yeah, yeah, I remember. We get to the engine, then.... A snack?

PARCIVAL

That is not part of the plan.

Suddenly, Snaggle-Tooth surges ahead of the other rats, throwing caution to the wind. As he leaps toward them --

PARCIVAL
Lad! Duck!

Parcival pulls Lowell down as -- WHUMP! -- a low branch whisks past, taking Snaggle-Tooth with it. They look back to see him doubled over it, dwindling behind the train.

LOWELL
Was that part of the plan?

PARCIVAL
Yes. I'm going to say yes.

One Ear and Ratsputin, having ducked in time, stalk onward again. Snarling. Lowell and Parcival scramble up and run.

EXT. ENGINE - DAY

The pair slide down the ladder from the roof.

PARCIVAL
Lad? Listen, quick. You do remember the plan, don't you?

LOWELL
I'm not a moron, okay? You don't gotta remind me every two seconds.

PARCIVAL
(embarrassed)
No, I was hoping you'd remind me?

They reach the coupler between the engine and other cars. Lowell yanks the lever, and it uncouples, detaching them.

PARCIVAL
That's it?

LOWELL
Hey, this was your plan, dude.

As the cars gradually lose their steam, the engine begins drifting away, creating a gap, but not nearly fast enough.

RATSPUTIN AND ONE-EAR scrabble toward edge of the roof...

LOWELL
We've gotta tell the conductor to speed things up!

They hurry to the controls -- startling a TINY MOUSE in an engineer's hat who -- EEEEEEEEEEE! -- LEAPS OFF the train.

LOWELL

Okay. Plan "B".

He randomly pulls a lever. The train lurches. BRAKING!
 As the gap starts to shrink, One-Ear readies to jump --

LOWELL

Oops. "C"? "D"? "E"? "Q"? "X"?

LOWELL finally pulls the right lever, SPEEDING THEM UP!

-- One-Ear leaps, flailing out for a hand-hold, but... He misses, tumbling onto the tracks, swallowed under the train as it drifts further away. No one could jump that gap now.

LOWELL

I did it, Parcival! We lost th--

No one except Ratsputin. He easily clears it, landing on the rear of the engine, growling menacingly.

LOWELL

Oh come on! This guy doesn't quit!

He lunges at Lowell -- but Parcival puts his body between the boy and the rat -- they grapple. The rat overpowers him, RIPPING the HARPOON from his wounded wing. He GASPS.

The rat pins Parcival down, jaws snapping closer, closer. Lowell looks desperately for something, anything, a weapon of some sort. Then realizes, he still wears his backpack.

LOWELL

Hold on, Parcival, I got an idea!

(beat)

Wait, I lost it... No, I got it!

He shrugs off the straps and rushes toward them, unzipping it right in the rat's snout.

LOWELL

Chew on this!

His HOMEWORK PAPERS flutter out in a FLURRY OF WHITE. The rat clutches his face, HOWLS.

RATSPUTIN

PAPER-CUTSSSSSS!!!!

He reels back, blinded, and -- THUMP-THUMP-THUMP-THUMP-THUMP-THUMP-THUMP-thump-thimp... Tumbles off the engine.

Lowell stands, proud, watching him shrink behind them, the papers fluttering away on the wind. Then, he remembers --

LOWELL
Wait, that was my... *Oh man!*
Stupid Lost Train of Thought!

He goes to leap for the last page, but Parcival, holding his wing to staunch the wound, stops him.

PARCIVAL
Let it go, Lowell. Let it go.

Lowell watches it, whisked higher on the wind, as the train chugs away. Exhausted. Disappointed. But, not surprised.

INT. THE KEEP - DAY? / NIGHT? / TEA TIME?

Ratsputin, snout covered with band-aids, cowers fearfully.

RATSPUTIN
It wassn't our fault, my Keeper.
When we caught up with the train,
they had already dissembarcked into
the woodsss. The bird and the boy--

FINDER-KEEPER (O.S.)
Made you look like a fool? I
agree. Now get your worthless tail
out of my sight before I lop it off
and beat you to death with it!
(calls out)
Milton!

As Ratsputin backs away, bowing, scraping, Milton appears.

MILTON
They've escaped, Keeper? Again?

FINDER-KEEPER (O.S.)
Oh, wipe that smug look off your
snout. It's of no concern. I know
where they're going. A little
birdie told me.

His nail points up, to where the Balding Elder huddles in a HANGING BIRDCAGE, totally FEATHERLESS, shivering with fear.

FINDER-KEEPER (O.S.)
And we'll have quite a surprised
awaiting them, won't we?

As his reedy, hoarse CHUCKLE echoes from the shadows...

EXT. THE LOST REFUGE - DAY

An ancient REDWOOD FOREST, as old as time. Parcival and Lowell crunch their way across a thick cover of pine needles. Lowell cranes his neck back, staring up amazed.

LOWELL

Wow. It's way nicer here than in the caves. And there's gonna be a pigeon that'll actually be able to fly me home, right?

(beat)

I mean, no offense.

PARCIVAL

Lad, there will be an entire fleet of my kin ready, willing and -- Ah!

His wing. He prods the wound, still bleeding. Seeing it, a thought occurs to Lowell. He digs inside his backpack.

LOWELL

Dad showed me this. The time I lost his watch in the disposal.

He pulls out the sock, using it to tie a BANDAGE around Parcival's wound. Sweet gesture, but it's no magic fix.

LOWELL

That better?

PARCIVAL

Much better. Thank you, Lowell.

LOWELL

You gotta get it taken care of, okay? Once I'm on my way home?

Parcival nods. They walk in silence. As "home" grows closer, Lowell is feeling a little bit uneasy. Unready.

LOWELL

It's weird, you know? I mean, everything I've ever lost is here. Feels wrong to leave empty-handed.

PARCIVAL

Yet so you shall.

Lowell nods, right-right, of course. More silence again.

LOWELL

Mom and dad are never gonna believe this, huh? Hey, you-- you think...
(feels exposed)
You think they even know I'm gone?

PARCIVAL

There's so much Lost Time here, our days could pass as mere minutes in your world. It's difficult to say.

LOWELL

Probably wouldn't care anyways.

Parcival stops him. Wing on his shoulder.

PARCIVAL

Lad, in all my time here, the one thing I have never seen lost is a parent's love for their child. Of course they would care.

(pause)

Are you listening to me?

He isn't. Lowell turns, sniffing.

LOWELL

Do you smell something? Smoke?

A FEATHER floats down from above. Burnt to a blackened crisp. Parcival's eyes widen with alarm.

SMASH CUT TO:

FIRE. IT LICKS UP TOWARD THE SKY. A VILLAGE of nest-like tree houses burns high in the trees. Feathers fall like snowflakes, black with soot, red with blood. Chains and nets litter the ground. The remains of a terrible battle.

The last refuge of the homing pigeons has been destroyed. Not a bird remains. Parcival stares at the sparks floating into the sky. Feathers fluttering down.

LOWELL

(soft, scared)

Parcival? What do we do now?

EXT. IN THE REDWOOD FOREST, ELSEWHERE - DAY

Parcival hustles Lowell through the woods, trying to get as far away as fast away as pigeonly possible.

PARCIVAL

The others he'd captured at the caves. He must've gotten it out of them. Tortured them, I'll wager, the fiend! Now, he's got them all, every last bloody bird. Taken!

LOWELL

But, if they can't fly me? And you can't fly me? How am I gonna--

PARCIVAL

(snaps at him)

Is that all you ever think of?
Yourself!?

Lowell turns away, hurt. Parcival, softens. Contrite.

PARCIVAL

It's not your fault, Lowell. It's not your fault. I swore I'd get you home, and so I shall. I just need some time to figure out how.

LOWELL

You said, in the desert, there was "another way"? You said it was--

PARCIVAL

(instantly dismissive)

No. That way is not open to us.

LOWELL

Why? Maybe we can--

PARCIVAL

We can't. We won't.

LOWELL

But WHY?

PARCIVAL

Because its entrance lies in the very heart of the Finder-Keeper's domain! Inside his inmost keep! To even attempt it would be to deliver ourselves into his hands!

Lowell looks up at him, worry in his eyes.

LOWELL

Then... What are we gonna do?

PARCIVAL

I don't know, lad. I have to
think. A solution isn't just going
to fall out of the bleeding blue--

SOMETHING COMES SCREAMING out of the treetops. Whizzes
overhead and CRASH-LANDS in the brush twenty yards away.

PARCIVAL

-- Heavens?

Parcival and Lowell push aside some ferns to REVEAL...

A CRUMPLED FIGURE lying where she landed, A FEMALE PIGEON.
An iron SHACKLE clasped around her thin leg, chain broken.

Parcival rises to rush to her, when --

LOWELL

Wait, Parcival! Listen...

Through the trees, LAUGHTER. The guttural gayety of RATS.

RAT VOICE #1 (O.S.)
Oy, where'd she get to then?

RAT VOICE #2 (O.S.)
Here, birdie-birdie-birdie...

TWO PACK-RAT LIEUTENANTS amble out of the brush. Armed.

RAT LIEUTENANT #1
Ah, there she is. Where do you
think you're flappin', luv?

She tries to fly, flapping futilely. It's obvious she's
wounded. The bigger rat cocks his harpoon back to strike.

RAT LIEUTENANT #2
Like swatting a big ugly...

The harpoon is SUDDENLY SNATCHED from his paws. He turns,
finding himself snout to beak with --

RAT LIEUTENANT #2
... fly?

Parcival. He SNAPS the harpoon in half.

PARCIVAL
I think that can be arranged.

SMASH CUT TO:

THE RAT LIEUTENANT, hurling through the air, until -- THUD!
He SMASHES into a TREE TRUNK. Slides down in a furry heap.

RAT LIEUTENANT #2
Here, birdie-birdie-birdeeeee...

Behind him, a second HIGH-PITCHED SQUEAK, as Parcival
swings the other around by the tail, letting him go --

EEEEEEEEEE! SMACK into the other rat. Scrambling up, the
rodents run. Weaving, wobbling, fleeing for their lives.

RAT LIEUTENANT #1
This isn't over. We'll -- OW!

A PINE CONE BOUNCES OFF his head. Lowell wings some more.

RAT LIEUTENANT #1
Fine, fine, it's -- ow! -- it's
over. It's over. Quit it!

LOWELL
That's right, you better run!

As the rats bold into the trees, Lowell hurries back toward
where Parcival leans over the pigeon.

LOWELL
Is it -- is it gonna be...?

PARCIVAL
"Her" wing is broken, lad, but
she's going to be fine. Can you
hear me, miss? You're safe now. I
am Parcival. And this is --

Before he can finish, the female pigeon, GERTRUDE, sits up.

GERTRUDE
"Sir Parcival Featherbumm?" The
"Sir Parcival Featherbumm?"

Lowell looks at Parcival. Parcival looks at Lowell. Beat.

LOWELL
(Ha!)
"Feather-Bumm?"

INT. A TREE'S HOLLOW - DUSK

Parcival covers the opening with branches, camouflaging it.

PARCIVAL

That ought to keep us hidden until morning. They likely won't mount much of a search till then anyway. Rats do require their beauty sleep.

In the flickering light of a small fire, Gertrude inhales a wingful of seed, pecking like a woodpecker.

PARCIVAL

Easy, m'lady. Peck what you can.

GERTRUDE

I swear, it's like a dream. First, I manage to escape from *His* keep. Then, I'm rescued by the brave, handsome, tall Sir Parcival!

PARCIVAL

(bashful)

Well, I don't know how tall...

But Lowell, sitting with his backpack, suddenly perks up.

LOWELL

Wait, "His"? "His Keep?" You mean, you were just--?

PARCIVAL

Lad. Gertrude needs quiet rest now. Not questions.

LOWELL

But, if she was there, she could tell us, or show us...

PARCIVAL

No. We cannot ask her to do that. Not in her condition. Not on any condition. And that's fina--

-- Gertude cuts him off with her wing.

GERTRUDE

I'll do it.

PARCIVAL & LOWELL

You'll what?

She shrugs, embarrassed.

GERTRUDE

I don't know. But, you helped me, and I will help you. Whatever it is. I mean, how bad could it be?

CUT TO:

LATER, Gertrude sits slack-beaked with shock.

GERTRUDE

You're out of your flocking minds. You want to go into His Keep? Of your own volition? It's crazy. It's insane.
(a beat)
I'll do it.

PARCIVAL & LOWELL

You'll what?

GERTRUDE

I'll do it. I found my way out, I can find my way back in again.

PARCIVAL

No, this is my promise. Not yours.

GERTRUDE

We're Homing Pigeons, aren't we? We're supposed to see that lost things are found. And what could be more important than a lost boy?

He stares at her, touched by her bravery.

GERTRUDE

Good. It's settled. We leave tonight. How's that sound, Lowell?

(no reply)

Lowell?

He sits with his head buried in his hands. Snores softly.

PARCIVAL

I think he can wait til morning.

GERTRUDE

Oh, how I wish my wing weren't broken. I'd fly him home now.

PARCIVAL

(shows his own lame wing)
Birds of a feather walk together?

INT. HOLLOW - DAWN

Lowell awakens with a start. The fire is ash. He's alone. He shakes his head, trying to clear out the cobwebs, when --

MISSING LINK (O.S.)
Do you know you snore? Like a wild
beast. It's not cute.

Lowell spins around to find -- The MISSING LINK lounging on a root. Waving "hi" with his tail.

LOWELL
You!

MISSING LINK
In the flesh. And fur.

LOWELL
What are you doing here?

MISSING LINK
I see your manners haven't
improved. I just happened to be in
the neighbor-wood. Thought I'd
stop in and tell you how much I was
enjoying your "present".

He puts up his feet. Still sporting Lowell's lost GALOSH.

LOWELL
Present? You stole it!

MISSING LINK
I say potato, you say... well, you
probably just point at it and
grunt. But, irregardless...

He slips off the galosh. Tosses it to Lowell.

LOWELL
You're giving it back to me? Why?

MISSING LINK
One, it's not a gift, it's a loan.
And two, the way you're going,
you're gonna need it.

LOWELL
What do you mean, "the way I'm--"

But, before he can finish, the monkey-man darts through the opening. Lowell pulls on his galosh, hurries after and --

EXT. HOLLOW - DAY

-- Runs right into Parcival and Gertrude, returning with their wings loaded with berries and nuts.

LOWELL

Where is he? Where'd he go?

GERTRUDE

Where'd "who" go?

LOWELL

The -- the half-man, half...
(pantomimes a monkey)
Whatever, he was right here!

Parcival and Gertrude exchange confused looks. No clue.

PARCIVAL

We don't have time for charades.
Soon, these woods will be infested
with rats. Now, we've found
breakfast. Eat. The way we're
going, you'll need your strength.

Lowell looks up from his galoshes, recalling those words.

LOWELL

What way are we going?

EXT. THE EDGE OF THE WOODS - DAY

Here, the majestic redwoods of the deep forest give way to stunted cypress and weeping willows. The air is damp with fog, and the ground is soggy, dotted with stagnant puddles.

GERTRUDE

The roads to His Keep will be
heavily guarded. Impossible to
travel. But, there is one way, a
back way even the rats are
reluctant to patrol.

Coming into view... A forbidding MARSHLAND of shadowy vegetation and waist-deep water, choked in sulfurous fog.

LOWELL

We're going in *that*?

PARCIVAL

The Neverglades. For never has a soul ventured within, and returned with his mind intact.

(beat)

Until now, presumably.

LOWELL

Very reassuring.

EXT. THE NEVERGLADES - DAY

A bloodcurdling WAIL sends SWAMP BATS winging into the sky.

GERTRUDE (O.S.)

Lowell! Can you hear me? Lowell!

A second WAIL. Even more spine-melting than the first.

PARCIVAL (O.S.)

Where are you, lad? We're coming!

Reeds part, Parcival and Gertrude wading through. They stop, looks of abject horror on their faces.

PARCIVAL

By the Beacon, no...

LOWELL (O.S.)

Look, look! No wait, listen!

REVEAL Lowell. He holds a RUSTY BRASS PRETZEL up to his lips -- BLOWS. That HIDEOUS WAIL again.

LOWELL

My French Horn! I lost this!

PARCIVAL

After how many lessons?

Lowell stuffs it in his backpack, it's overloaded with things. He digs inside and pulls out a SOGGY BASEBALL.

LOWELL

And look! My Willie Mays Minor League T-Ball. And there's gotta be more, 'cause I lost like fifteen my first practice.

GERTRUDE

Fifteen? That must be a record.

LOWELL

Coach said I should try another sport. Like tether ball. Oh --

He pulls something GREEN and PLASTIC out of his pocket.

LOWELL

And my Army Guy! M.I.A. 4 years!

PARCIVAL

Now listen, Lowell. You mustn't splash off willy-nilly after everything you see. It's --

LOWELL

Oh look! This swamp rules!

He splashes off willy-nilly. Parcival sighs, irritated.

GERTRUDE

If they're his things, why should we begrudge him them?

PARCIVAL

It's the boy I swore to bring home, not his bloody things. Besides, in this place, the more he finds, the more it feels like...

GERTRUDE

Bait?

Parcival nods. In agreement, the two birds pursue him through the FOG, abruptly coming beak to "bow" with --

LOWELL

Look! From my eighth birthday!

A tattered, moldy BIRTHDAY PRESENT. Lowell holds it up.

LOWELL

That was the year my dad gave me some of his ledger books. So I could learn to keep track of all my stuff. So I wouldn't lose all my birthday presents again, before I even got a chance to open one.

(he shakes it)

I think it's more socks.

GERTRUDE

Lowell. Lowell, look at me a second. We're aren't so sure these things are safe. Are we, Parcival?

She turns to see a circle of RIPPLES spreading across the water. He is GONE.

GERTRUDE

Parcival? That's weird, where'd h--

TWO SLIMY SERPENTINE TENTACLES snake out from the reeds behind them, SNAPPING around their bodies like reticulated pythons. They're spirited through the swamp weeds to...

A SWAMP MONSTER'S GAPING MAW

It looks like a cross between a Venus Flytrap and a flatworm. Its mouth a nightmare of wriggly tongues.

Parcival is here. Struggling with his own tentacle.

PARCIVAL

Next time, when I say don't splash off willy-nilly, lad, don't splash off willy-nilly!

LOWELL

Wh-what is that?! What's it want?!

From the creature, a HIDEOUS HOWL blows back Lowell's hair.

SWAMP THING

BRRAAAAIINS!!!!

LOWELL

(beat)

Did it just say--?

--One of its tongues squiggles at Lowell's face. A HOLLOW SUCKER on the end. It tries to squirm its way UP HIS NOSE.

LOWELL

Ahh! It -- oh my god! It's trying to suck out my--

SWAMP THING

--BRRAAAAIINS!!!!

As Lowell struggles, Gertrude listens, realizes something.

GERTRUDE

Lowell! Parcival! The sound it makes, doesn't it sound just like--

SWAMP THING

BRRR-AAAAAAAINS!!!

PARCIVAL

-- Lowell's horn! Yes! It does!

And it does, actually. A very poorly played French Horn.

LOWELL

Okay. I get it. You don't like my playing. Is now really the best --

GERTRUDE

No! No, no, we want you to play!

PARCIVAL

Play, lad! Sooth the savage beast!

Lowell brightens, getting it. He fends off the tongues, digs out his horn, and... BLOWS. Hearing it, the swamp thing stops writhing, all its eyestalks turning to look.

LOWELL

Am I soothing it yet?

He BLOWS again, louder this time. The monster BELLOWs in agony, plugging its "ears" with a pair of its tentacles.

The swamp thing HAULS BACK -- FLINGING Lowell, Parcival and Gertrude as far as it possibly can. The trio cartwheels through the air, landing in water with a MASSIVE SPLASH!

After a moment, they burst out, spitting swamp water. Mud dribbles out of Lowell's horn. He blows to clear it.

LOWELL

Everybody's a critic. Doesn't sound that bad to me.

Parcival and Gertrude exchange looks.

LOWELL

You guys got any requests?

But, Parcival, head cocked to the side, is listening to something else. He QUICKLY YANKS the horn out of Lowell's mouth. Forcing him and Gertrude down flat into the mud.

LOWELL
I said "requests"--

PARCIVAL
Be quiet and be still! Look...

IN THE FOG AHEAD, A detachment of RATS appears, making its way along a muddy road at the edge of the swamp. One pauses, beady little eyes squinting into the marshes.

RAT GUARD
I swear, it sounded like a dying baboon or something?

Lowell makes a sour face. Parcival holds a wing to his beak. After a moment, the rats give up and march away.

LOWELL
Like I said. Everybody's a critic.

PARCIVAL
We made it, lad. Minds intact, thanks to your "musical talents." But... let's not press things.

Standing at the edge of the road, Gertude waves them onward, pointing to a weathered ROAD SIGN.

GERTRUDE
Come. We'll take this road in.

LOWELL
The sign's blank. How do we even know this road leads to the Keep?

PARCIVAL
In this place, lad, all roads do.

As they set out along the muddy pathway, we DISSOLVE TO:

THE MASSIVE BLACK SPIRE

towering over us, casting the world below in shadow. Thick pipes coil around its perimeter. Sewer pipes, spiraling downward into...

A SQUALID, CROWDED SLUM

clustered around its base, a city of multistory lean-tos and makeshift apartment complexes, spreading out into the surrounding barren waste. Every inch of it teeming, crawling, POSITIVELY PACKED with PACK-RATS.

PULL BACK to REVEAL Lowell and Parcival, hunkered in a ditch at the edge of the city, observing it from afar.

LOWELL

Holey moley! How are we gonna make it through? The place is rat city.

Gertrude plops down next to them, returning from topside. She carries a BUNDLE of RAGS and an old canvas FIRE HOSE.

GERTRUDE

Well, you know what they say. When in rat city, do as the rodents do.

As Lowell and Parcival exchange confused looks, we CUT TO:

THREE RAT TAILS

dragging through the mud. Actually, on closer inspection, they're lengths of a canvas hose. Cut to look like tails.

Trail up to REVEAL THREE FIGURES, two tall and one short, swathed in rags and wearing hoods, making their way through the crowded trash-strewn streets of rat city.

LOWELL

I don't know how much longer I can hold my breath. This place reeks.

PARCIVAL

They're rats, lad. They're not big on public sanitation.

The buildings are a patchwork of wood, cardboard, plastic, standing simply because they have no space to fall. Even the sky is crowded, crisscrossed with sagging clotheslines.

GERTRUDE

It's just ahead. In this alley.

Gertrude leads, Parcival and Lowell follow, weaving through a labyrinth of narrow, crowded passageways.

Lowell's overloaded backpack causes him to lag behind. He struggles to keep up, but as Parcival and Gertrude round a corner ahead, he has to stop for a breather.

LOWELL

Hey... guys, wait up a... whew.

Hitching up his pack to press onward -- he suddenly catches SOMETHING out of the corner of his eye, whirls around as --

A PAW withdraws from his pack, swipes one of his BASEBALLS.

LOWELL
Hey, that's--

He GRABS the pick-pocket, A BOY RAT, who HISSES:

BOY RAT
-- Mine!

Hugging the ball greedily as he wriggles free, scurrying off. Lowell watches him go, transfixed, until --

PARCIVAL (O.S.)
-- Lowell? Is something amiss?

Parcival pokes his hooded beak around the corner. Lowell snaps out of it, hitching up his backpack.

LOWELL
No. It's nothing. I'm coming.

EXT. SEWER TUNNEL - DAY

A grated outlet at the end of an alley, nestled under the shadow of the spire. Gertrude pulls off an access grate.

PARCIVAL
Still unguarded?

GERTRUDE
And still open. They must've not discovered it yet. Quick, inside.

LOWELL
We're going up there? In that?

He squints at the tangled sewer pipes, spiraling up around the spire, disappearing into the clouds.

LOWELL
There's not a giant toiled at the top, is there?

EXT. DARK CORNER - DAY

TWO RAT SENTRYIES squat, engrossed in their game of marbles.

RAT SENTRY #1
Miss it... Miss it... Miss it!

Rat Sentry #2 shoots. Misses it.

RAT SENTRY #2
Rats!

The marble skitters away. As they scurry after it -- A GRATE POPS up and SLIDES open. Gertrude's head appears.

GERTRUDE
Quick. It's clear.

Parcival climbs out after her. Lowell's overloaded backpack can barely squeeze through. As he emerges...

LOWELL
Holey... Moley.

He gets his first look at what they've climbed up into. A FINEPUN CITADEL in the sky, set atop the spire like a tremendous GOTHIC BIRDHOUSE. It overlooks the entirety of The Land of Lost Things, towering even over the clouds.

Once, it was a magnificent place. Now, its white marble has been stained with paw prints. Strewn with droppings.

LOWELL
You guys should live someplace like this, instead of those caves.

PARCIVAL
Once upon a time, lad, we did.

They steal quietly across the courtyard. Utterly empty.

PARCIVAL
I don't like it. It's too easy.

GERTRUDE
It's meant to be.

LOWELL
What do you mean?

GERTRUDE
The Keep isn't meant to keep things out. It's meant to keep things in.

She nods to the parapets above, where PIGEON SKULLS leer down at them. Speared atop barbarous spikes.

INT. THE KEEP, HALL OF LOST TREASURES - DAY

A great set of doors CREAKS OPEN. Gertrude leads Lowell and Parcival into the deserted corridor, their footfalls deadened by a carpet stitched from lost socks.

PARCIVAL

Remember. Don't stray. Don't make a sound. And don't touch anything.

Lining the walls, in alcoves lit by sourceless light, they see a shark-skin MAP labeled "ATLANTIS". A chest of Blackbeard's DOUBLOONS. Amelia Earhart's PLANE, the "Electra". The ARK of the COVENANT. Venus De Milo's ARMS.

LOWELL

What happened to that lady's body?

(off Parcival's glare)

Right. No sounds. Starting now.

They pass a STUFFED DODO BIRD, its empty eyes seeming to follow them, and creep into...

THE INMOST CHAMBER

Dripping with shadows. A ceiling so tall it disappears into darkness. On one wall, we see an ornate ARCHWAY, carved with pigeon pictograms. It's pitch black inside.

PARCIVAL

This is it. The entrance. Now, lad, I haven't yet told you what lies inside, but before we enter--

(looks)

Lad! What are you doing?!

He's hurrying resolutely in the opposite direction, where the Finder-Keeper's throne of lost keys sits empty. On its armrest, old and moldy as ever, lies... HIS MISSING BOOK.

LOWELL

Look. It's here! The book I lost. I know you said don't touch, but my parents are gonna be P.O.'ed if I can't bring something back. This is the last thing, I swear.

GERTRUDE

Wait! Lowell, you don't know what you're doing--

But, he doesn't listen. He reaches up for the book. The birds run. Lowell reaches. Run. Reach. Run. Reach...

PARCIVAL
Lad! Don't!

Lowell takes The Book, and as he does... Nothing happens.

LOWELL
See? I told you it was totally--

Parcival YANKS Lowell back, as a HUGE IRON CAGE falls from above, landing to encircle the THRONE with a massive CLANG!

LOWELL
Safe?

PARCIVAL
Run!

From the shadows overhead, a deluge of CAGES RAINS DOWN all around, spiderwebbing the marble floor with cracks.

Parcival grabs Lowell, and he and Gertrude race across the chamber, bobbing and weaving and running. A cage falls...

CAPTURING Gertrude.

LOWELL
Gertrude!

PARCIVAL
Go, lad! I'll get her! Go!

Just then, the chamber shakes with the MARCH OF CLAWED PAWS. Rats surge from every opening, swarming at them.

PARCIVAL
Hold tight. Don't lose your grip.

Lowell grabs Parcival's neck. Parcival leaps into the air. He flaps his wounded wing for everything he's worth, but --

The rats form a RODENT-PYRAMID. Pull them out of the air. They CRASH-LAND back to earth beside the open sewer grate.

PARCIVAL
Go. Be quick. Through the arch!

Parcival turns to confront the rat horde.

PARCIVAL
Go.

He swats rats with both wings.

PARCIVAL
Go!

Lowell takes a last look, then sprints for the archway and freedom. Halfway in -- he's JERKED to a halt. CLICK! Something clamps around his waist. It's a HARNESS. A KIDDIE LEASH attached to it WHIZZES -- REELS him back out.

The last thing he sees before he's overwhelmed by the rats are feathers floating down from above. Tinged with blood.

LOWELL
Parcival!

INT. INMOST CHAMBER, THE KEEP - NIGHT

Rats strip Lowell of his backpack, wrest The Book from his hands, and leave him heaped in a puddle of light. Alone.

FINDER-KEEPER (O.S.)
You look lost, my boy...

A FIGURE melts out of the shadows. His long yellow fingernails grip The Book in one hand, Lowell's leash in the other. A tug, and he draws Lowell to his feet.

FINDER-KEEPER (O.S.)
But, you've felt that way your entire life, haven't you?
(relishing it)
Lowell Armstrong Leavitt? The Lowell Armstrong Leavitt?

He emerges. The OLD MAN from the bookstore.

LOWELL
You? You're The Finder-Keeper!

FINDER-KEEPER
I've been called worse. Right about now, you must be wondering, "Why?" Why give you this book? Why bring you here? It's quite simple really. I had to test you.

LOWELL
T-test me? For w-what?

The Old Man smiles. Twists a nail in the lock of Lowell's leash. The harness CLICKS OPEN and clatters to the floor.

FINDER-KEEPER

I've much to show you, Lowell. But first, you've had quite an adventure, hmm? Are you hungry?

Lowell doesn't answer. Doesn't even move.

FINDER-KEEPER

Yes, you are. But that's good. Smart. Give nothing away, my boy.

He clicks his nails at the shadows. Milton slinks out.

FINDER-KEEPER

Ah, Milton. We've decided to postpone the meal. Move straight to the tour. Apprise our other guests, please?

LOWELL

Other guests? You mean Gertrude? Parcival? What'd you do to them?

FINDER-KEEPER

Oh don't worry, they're perfectly well. In fact, they'll be joining us later. For dinner. But now...

He starts to shuffle off. Crooks a finger back at Lowell.

FINDER-KEEPER

Trust me, my boy. This, you will not want to miss.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

The Old Man's long toenails scuff the stones as he strides. Lowell follows him, fearful.

LOWELL

M-mister? Mister, uh... Finder?

FINDER-KEEPER

Please, my friends call me by my given name. Waldemar.

LOWELL

Can I ask where you're taking me? Mister Wuh-- Waldah-- Waldahmu--

At the top of the stairs, a TEAM OF RATS waits, hitched to a train-like PULL-CART. The Finder-Keeper helps Lowell in.

FINDER-KEEPER

Hold all questions until the end of the tour. Keep your fingers and toes inside the tram at all times.

(a thin smile)

And please, call me Walt.

The rats hop to, pulling the cart through a door, into...

PACK-RAT MISSION CONTROL. Rodents in lab coats monitor a fiber-optic map of the seven continents. Computers hum.

FINDER-KEEPER

First stop, the Dispatch Room. For every corner of the globe, every country and county, this is the nexus of all neglected things.

A LAB RAT scurries past the cart, jotting on a clipboard.

FINDER-KEEPER

If it's larger than an eyelash, smaller than an ocean liner, we know the moment it's misplaced. Rat retrievers can be dispatched in less than twelve-point-two seconds.

The clipboard passes to a waiting rat, who straps on a dented crash-helmet. Artillery rats turn cranks as a "RAT-A-PULT" cranes about to aim at a hole in the roof.

FINDER-KEEPER

Target acquisition, a minute flat.

SPROING! The rat dwindles into the stratosphere.

INT. RETRIEVAL ROOM - NIGHT

The cart emerges from another door, arriving amid a tangle of sewer pipes, spewing water and waterlogged rats, returning loaded with lost things.

FINDER-KEEPER

Once the item has been acquired, it is brought here, to Retrieval, for classification. And disinfection.

(aside)

Rats aren't the cleanest creatures.

LOWELL

Why are you showing me all this?

FINDER-KEEPER

The suspense is delicious, isn't it? Don't worry. Almost there.

INT. SORTING - NIGHT

The tram-cart stops at the hub of a labyrinth of corridors, lined with doors, branching off in every conceivable direction. The Old Man climbs out, Lowell following after.

They pass rats with ledger books, directing others where to haul their various lost payloads, keeping careful records.

LOWELL

Like the ledgers I got at home?

FINDER-KEEPER

Slightly larger scale, I'd say.

He nods to a door -- limitless shelves of ledgers inside. They weave through the crowd of overloaded rats, the old man cheerfully ruffling fur, nodding hello. All smiles.

FINDER-KEEPER

Now, this is my favorite. Sorting. Here everything is catalogued, shelved, stored. Everything with a place. Everything in its place. It warms my heart just to think--

A passing RAT fumbles a sack, spilling pennies at their feet. The Old Man's sunny disposition shifts on a dime.

FINDER-KEEPER

Careful with my change, you plague-ridden piece of vermin trash!

He twists the rat's ear painfully. It scurries off after the coins. In an instant, The Old Man is all smiles again.

FINDER-KEEPER

Good help, etcetera. What can you do? Come, come. This way.

But, he sees Lowell is not following.

FINDER-KEEPER

Oh, don't tell me you've lost your nerve? Not when we're this close?

LOWELL

I'm not going one step further till
you tell me what you want from me.

FINDER-KEEPER

Want from you? My dear, dear boy,
I already have more from you than
anyone could ever want.

A rat totters by, bent under Lowell's stuffed backpack. It approaches a huge vault door, which Hisses OPEN to REVEAL--

INT. THE LOWELL A. LEAVITT COMMEMORATIVE VAULT - NIGHT

Crammed to the ceiling, this room contains the lion's share of everything Lowell's ever lost. He gawks.

FINDER-KEEPER

A metric ton of mismatched socks.
Enough Legos to build a bridge to
the moon. Enough mittens to keep
you warm there. Remote controls.
In-line skates. All here, Lowell.
Every last thing you've ever lost.

The rat dumps his backpack onto the world's biggest pile.

LOWELL

My backpacks! Hey, and my shoes!

Trees and trees of lost left shoes, not a right in sight.

LOWELL

It's always the lefts.

The Old Man nods sympathetically.

LOWELL

Are those... Oh no way!

PUDDING-CUPS stacked in a towering pyramid. Lowell opens one, licks the top. Starts stuffing them in his pockets, but -- he spots something. An aisle of picture frames. One LOPSIDED FRAME in particular. He pulls it down.

LOWELL

I made this. I tried so hard not to lose it. Even locked it in its own special box.

FINDER-KEEPER

What happened?

LOWELL
Lost the box.

A photo of him, Charles and Angela. An exceedingly happy family. Lowell stares at the picture, lost in nostalgia.

FINDER-KEEPER
(sing-song)
Lowell? Oh, Lowell? Lowell!

The Old Man suddenly snatches the frame out of Lowell's hands, eyes aflame. He reshelves it. Composes himself.

FINDER-KEEPER
Now, do I have your undivided attention? You're a very special boy, Lowell. That's quite lost on you, isn't it?

LOWELL
Most stuff is.

FINDER-KEEPER
In your ten short years, you've misplaced more than anybody. Ever. Anywhere. Almost as if you're...

LOWELL
Cursed.

FINDER-KEEPER
Back there, perhaps. But not here. I had to bring you here, Lowell. I had to test you, because I had to make sure. I had to be certain.

LOWELL
Of what?

FINDER-KEEPER
Of you. Now, you're quite right, there is something I want from you. A teeny, tiny, insignificant favor. But, once that's taken care of...

He takes in the massive vault with a sweep of his nails.

FINDER-KEEPER
This can all be yours. Everything you've ever lost is here. And here it can never be lost again. Isn't that what you've always wanted?

Lowell steals a glance at the photograph of him and his parents, knows exactly what he wants more than anything.

LOWELL
I... I think I kinda just wanna go home. I mean, if that's okay?

For a moment, the Old Man simply stares. Then, a smile.

FINDER-KEEPER
Of course. I won't say I'm not disappointed, but it's your decision. I'll even tell you what. Curse my giving heart, but you may have one item, from the length and breadth of my realm, to take with you. Only one. Choose carefu--

He stops noticing Lowell's eyes on The Book in his hand.

FINDER-KEEPER
-- You're sure? You want this?

LOWELL
I promised I wouldn't lose it. I swore. And I never even got a chance to read it yet.

FINDER-KEEPER
Neither have I, truth be told.
You'll have to tell me how it ends.

He hands Lowell The Book. Claps his hands, finishing up.

FINDER-KEEPER
The rest of your things I shall have to keep for you, I suppose. And, of course, your parents too. What they've lost along the way.
(all smiles)
Wonderful to have finally met you, Lowell. Pleasure's been all mine.

He turns, Lowell, remembering those words, grabs his robe.

LOWELL
Wait. What my Mom and Dad "lost along the way"? What do you mean?

The Man grins his ugly grin. Crooks his crooked finger.

INT. TROPHY ROOM - NIGHT

Trophy cases, cluttered with 'LOVING CUPS' -- two-handled cups of crystal. All shapes. All sizes. All shimmering.

FINDER-KEEPER

You know, Lowell, socks and books and books on socks -- they're not the only things a person can lose.

LOWELL

Parcival told me. You can lose hours, and balance, and... hair?

FINDER-KEEPER

I don't usually give hints. But, "it" makes the world go round.

LOWELL

Gravity?

The Old Man reaches up onto a shelf, where a small gold plaque reads: "Charles and Angela Leavitt." He takes down the CRYSTAL CUP. Removes the lid. Inside, a fine DUST.

FINDER-KEEPER

What do they say? Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have... Oh, all I care for is the first part. This is it, Lowell. This is what your parents lost along the way. Their love.

LOWELL

Love? Like love-love? Come on.

But, he looks closer, unable to resist. His breath, or a breeze, stirs the surface of the dust, causing it to sparkle and swirl in a rainbow of coruscating colors, and for a moment, the briefest flash, he can see his parents.

A TINKLING BELL shocks Lowell out of his reverie, and the vision vanishes. Milton stands at the door. Bell in paw.

FINDER-KEEPER

Ah, Milton. Is dinner ready already? They say all you need is love, but every now and again, a good meal doesn't hurt.

He replaces the cup's lid, returning it back to its shelf.

FINDER-KEEPER

Come. Can't send you back home
with an empty belly, now can we?

Lowell blinks at him. Unable to even speak, he just nods.

INT. DINING ROOM, THE KEEP - NIGHT

A table, cobbled from wood scraps, lit with candle nubs.
Lowell sits, the Book held like a life-preserver.

LOWELL

You said Parcival and Gertrude,
were gonna come, didn't you? And
there's birdseed for them, right?
I don't think they eat, uh...
What're we having?

FINDER-KEEPER

Oh, don't worry over them, Lowell.
I'll bet they're already stuffed.

Milton arrives with a team of rats, carrying a huge covered
SERVING DISH like a sedan chair. It CLANGS onto the table.

LOWELL

I forgot how hungry I was. Is it
chicken? Smells like chicken.

FINDER-KEEPER

Oh, I assure you, it's fowl.

LOWELL

Pizza's the best. Chicken's okay.

FINDER-KEEPER

Ah, but have you ever tried squab?
No? I could've sworn you were
already well acquainted with it.
(motions to Milton)
Which reminds me. Is this yours?

A SOCK, slightly singed, is placed on his plate. Written
on it in marker: "Lowell". As he picks it up...

A FEATHER flutters out. Lowell looks from it to the huge
serving dish, mind racing. The Old Man ties on a napkin.

FINDER-KEEPER

There's nothing more enjoyable, I
always say, than having a friend
for dinner. Unless, of course...
(MORE)

FINDER-KEEPER (CONT'D)
 (pure evil)
 It's having someone else's friend.

INT. THE DUNGEON - NIGHT

Cages hang, HOMING PIGEONS imprisoned within them. At the sound of an indescribable CRY OF SORROW, every head turns.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

LOWELL
 Parcival... No, please Parcival...

FINDER-KEEPER
 Why, my dear, dear boy. You look
 as if you've lost your appetite.

Lowell hugs the Book and the sock to his heaving chest. Rats haul him from the table. He struggles. The last thing he sees as he's hauled outside and the doors close...

... The lid of the dish is lifted off in a puff of steam.

LOWELL
 PARCIVAL!

INT. THE DUNGEON - NIGHT

Milton drags a sobbing Lowell by his leash underneath the hanging birdcages of the pigeon prisoners.

ORLANDO (O.S.)
 Lowell Armstrong Leavitt?

RINALDO (O.S.)
The Lowell Armstrong Leavitt?

LOWELL
 Orlando! Rinaldo! That you?

The birds poke their beaks between the bars.

ORLANDO
 Why aren't you on your way home?

LOWELL
 Listen! Please. Have you seen
 Gertrude? Where is she!

RINALDO
 Do we know a Gertrude?

Lowell's leash tugs, and he's pulled toward a dark tunnel.

LOWELL
Wait, please, I don't wanna go!

RINALDO
Don't give in, lad. Don't give up.

ORLANDO
Don't give them the satisfaction.

INT. THE CELL OF LOST HOURS - NIGHT

Milton shuts the door on Lowell, leaves him in DARKNESS.

CLICK. A TV SCREEN glows on the wall. Home Shopping.
CLICK. Another on the ceiling. Fast-food commercial.
CLICK, CLICK, CLICK. They pop up on every surface, like
scintillating tiles. He curls up in the flickering glow.

INT. THE CELL OF LOST HOURS - NIGHT

TVs blare snow. Lowell jolts awake. A SHADOW LOOMS over
him, hairy paws fumble at his galosh. The Missing Link.

LOWELL
Hey! That's mine, let go!

MISSING LINK
I told you, it was a loan.

The Missing Link steals Lowell's left galosh, trailing its
prehensile tail out the cell door. Lowell scrambles up --

LOWELL
Wait. Don't go. I didn't mean it!

SLAM. The TVs FLIP back to their regularly scheduled
commercials. Lowell loses it, FLINGS The Book. Its
binding EXPLODES. Pages flutter like snowflakes. One page
plasters itself to a TV screen. The TEXT GLOWS:

LOWELL
"The Cell of Lost Hours?"

And below, an ILLUSTRATION of the CELL that imprisons him.

LOWELL
Holey moley... That's here.
This whole place is in these!

The mountain, desert, jungle. Lowell settles down to read.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The Finder-Keeper dabs his mouth with a napkin. Milton watches from the shadows, silent. Finally:

FINDER-KEEPER
Don't you have somewhere to be?
The plan? That ring any bells?

Milton bows, withdraws.

FINDER-KEEPER
I swear. Sometimes, I'm at a loss.

INT. THE CELL OF LOST HOURS - NIGHT

The door CREAKS open. The SHADOW OF A HEAD pokes inside.

LOWELL
What, you come back for the other
one? Go ahead. Take it!

He FLINGS his galosh at the shadow -- THUMP! -- It SQUAWKS in pain, rubbing its feathery head.

LOWELL
Gertrude?

GERTRUDE
Ow. Lowell?

It IS her. He leaps into her wings, overjoyed to see her.

LOWELL
Gertrude! I knew you'd find me, I
knew you'd come! Oh, Gertrude!

GERTRUDE
What do these bird-brained rats
expect? No cage can contain me.

Lowell slips past her, peeking excited out into the hall.

LOWELL
So, where is he? He's waiting for
us, right? Where?

She freezes. Quiet. She knows exactly who the boy means.

LOWELL

Come on, Parcival! He's kicking
some rat-butt, right? Or, or...

GERTRUDE

("No.")
... Lowell.

He turns away, hiding his tears. He pulls on his galosh.

LOWELL

This is my fault. All my fault.

GERTRUDE

Lowell, listen to me. You know
Parcival would want you to be
strong. To carry on. Not to ever
give up. Not ever, Lowell.

LOWELL

(swallows, eyes raw)
Gertrude? I wanna go home now.

She eases the cell door open, ushering the boy outside.

GERTRUDE

I know you do, Lowell. I know.
And together, we'll find a way.

INT. KEEP, DUNGEON - NIGHT

Gertrude sneaks, silent as a ... pigeon. Lowell follows.

LOWELL

Gertrude? What about the Orlando
and Rinaldo? The other pigeons?
Can't we try and break them ou--

-- AWOOGAA!! AWOOGAA!! The ALARM KLAXONS start BLARING.
She yanks him into an doorway, as a phalanx of RATS GUARDS
RACE PAST, shouting excitedly.

GERTRUDE

I'll come back for them, Lowell.
But first we've got to get you
where you need to be.
(she peers out, it's clear)
Alright. Are you ready to go?

She prepares to move, but he won't budge. Not yet.

INT. LOWELL A. LEAVITT COMMEMORATIVE VAULT - NIGHT

Lowell hurries through the aisles of everything he's ever lost, Gertrude following anxiously behind. He grabs a pudding cup off the pyramid. Stuffs it into his pocket.

GERTRUDE

That's what you came back for?
Lowell, pudding's not worth--

LOWELL

It's just a snack, Gertrude. He took everything from me. And I'm gonna need my strength for what I'm taking back...

INT. TROPHY ROOM - NIGHT

Lowell's parents' lost crystal loving cup sits sparkling in sourceless light. He reaches up for it, shaking nervously.

LOWELL

What if I drop it? What if I-- I--

GERTRUDE

We don't have much time before they find us. If you're going to do it, you must take it now, Lowell. Now!

He lifts it off its pedestal, holds it like the Holy Grail.

LOWELL

I took it. I got it.
(beat)
It's heavier than I--

Oops. The cup squeaks out of his hands. Tumbles to the floor and -- SHATTERS -- spilling out its sparkling dust.

LOWELL

Oh crap, oh man, oh no no no no...
I told you! I told you I'd lose my grip! You gotta help scrape it up!

From the door, the MARCH OF CLAWED PAWS. Gertrude spins.

GERTRUDE

They've found us! We have to go!

Desperate to help, Gertrude yanks Lowell's sock, Parcival's old bandage, out of the boy's back pocket. She scoops the powder into it. Lowell joins in. Helping fill it, until --

THE DOOR BURSTS OPEN. RAT GUARDS FLOOD IN.

Gertrude yanks Lowell to his feet. Hauls him out the back.

LOWELL
No! Wait! I didn't get it all--!

INT. INMOST CHAMBER - NIGHT

The cages still lie where they fell. Lowell and Gertrude sprint their way through. A swarm of rats on their heels. The arch lies dead ahead. As they run, Lowell pants out:

LOWELL
Gertrude? Parcival, he never...
I mean, I know this is the way
home, but... What's down there?

GERTRUDE
The Labyrinth of Lost Ways.
There's no time to explain. You
have to trust me, can you do that?

LOWELL
You're the only friend I got left.

A look comes over Gertrude, she opens her beak to speak -- but before she can, the massive arch swallows them into...

TOTAL BLACKNESS

In the dark, we hear the deafening sound of RUSHING WATER -- labored BREATHING -- our heart POUNDS -- then LIGHT --

And we realize we're inside the wildest stone WATER SLIDE ever conceived. The tunnel curves and drops like a roller-coaster, a torrent of current rocketing Lowell down.

LOWELL
This is awesome! Amazing! Oh I'm
really gonna throw up this time...

The slide reaches a roaring crescendo, he shoots out the --

END OF THE PIPE

SPLASH! Landing in a stone chamber filled with waist-deep water and peasoup fog. He struggles to stand, sopping wet.

LOWELL
Hey, can I go again? Gertrude?

SPLASH! She lands beside him. Ruffling her feathers, shaking off the water. She grabs Lowell. Hustles him on.

GERTRUDE
Come on! They're right behind!

SPLASH! SPLASH! SPLASH! Rodents spurting out rapid-fire.

INT. THE LABYRINTH OF LOST WAYS - NIGHT

Lowell and Gertrude race through a doorway, arriving at the end of a looong stone corridor. Lowell stops. Bewildered.

LOWELL
This is the "lab-y-rinth"? Doesn't that mean maze?

Countless corridors branch off to either side, but there's no discernible need to take any turns. For straight ahead lies their destination, a GOLDEN DOOR.

LOWELL
Even I could find my way through this. It's the lamest maze ever.

As he looks, Gertrude pinches the bottom of his sock. Her touch leaves a TINY TEAR in the fabric. He doesn't notice.

LOWELL
Well, what're we waiting for? Come on, Gertrude, I know the way!

SAND SIFTS from the sock as he hurries on, leaving a TRAIL.

GERTRUDE
I'll follow your lead.

LATER

Lowell and Gertrude jog. The door looks as far as before.

LOWELL
Won't be long now, huh?

LATER

The door actually looks to be receding. It's further away.

LOWELL
You tired yet? I'm not.

LATER

Door? What door?

LOWELL
Gertrude, what the heck? We keep going, but we don't get anywhere?

GERTRUDE
You have to lead us through the labyrinth, Lowell. It's as simple as that. You, and you alone, are the only one capable of doing it.

LOWELL
I'm doing it. And it isn't doing any good.

Steamed, he hauls back to throw the broken Book in some direction, then stops. Blinks at the pages.

LOWELL
Woah, wait a sec. It's all in here. I forgot to tell you. This whole place. And pictures! This maze has gotta be in here too.

He fans the pages, finding the right one, starts to read when -- WHOOSH! -- A GUST OF WIND rips it out of his hands. It flits off into a side corridor.

LOWELL
Hey! Come back! That's not fair!

Lowell pursues it through a series of random turns. Left. Right. Right. Losing the other pages as he goes.

LOWELL
There isn't even any wind in here!

INT. MAIN CORRIDOR - VARIOUS

The paper and Lowell sprint across. Gertrude jogs behind.

Then, the paper, the boy, and the pigeon reappear from a different corridor, further down. They race across, emerging from and entering various corridors. First near, then far, then the left side, then the right. Until the trail of sparkling sand crisscrosses the whole labyrinth.

INT. MAIN CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Lowell makes a flying leap, and snatches the fleeing page.

LOWELL
Gotcha!

As Gertrude catches up, he begins to read:

LOWELL
The... Lab-y-rinth of Lost Ways.
Not a ordinary lab-y-rinth, blah
blah. But, "a backwards maze."
Backwards maze, what's that mean?

GERTRUDE
Um. Lowell?

LOWELL
Wait, listen. The only way to find
your way through it, is to...

GERTRUDE
Lowell.

LOWELL
I'm reading. Is to tho-rough-ly...

GERTRUDE
Lowell, look up.

He does. The GIANT GOLDEN DOOR hangs inches from his face.

LOWELL
"Is to thoroughly lose your way."
(pause)
I did that?

GERTRUDE
You did it, Lowell. I've never
seen anyone lose his way as
thoroughly as you.

She touches the great golden door and it creaks wide open.

GERTRUDE
Does your book say anything else?

LOWELL
Uhm. Yeah, here. Beware of the...
Og-re? Og-re of Lost Appetites?
(MORE)

LOWELL (CONT'D)
 (looks up)
 What's a Og-re?

ROOOAAAARRRRGH!

A HUGE OGRE lumbers out of the shadows -- MAW GAPING WIDE.

Lowell stands frozen. Gertrude yanks him to safety as the monster chugs past them like a famished freight train. They hide behind one of the pillars that flanks the portal.

LOWELL
 Let me guess! That's a Og-re?!

GERTRUDE
 Ogre. You know how sometimes when you're hungry, something disgusting can make you lose your appetite?

LOWELL
 Like that thing's breath! So?

GERTRUDE
 So take one guess where it goes.

The OGRE OF LOST APPETITES peeks around the pillar. ROOARGH! Gertrude pulls Lowell back as its MAW SNAPS DOWN, BITING off his poncho. Swallowing it with a SLURP.

LOWELL
 It just ate Gortex!

It chases after them as they flee from pillar to pillar.

LOWELL
 This is -- just -- helping him -- work up even more of a appetite!

GERTRUDE
 Don't worry. You're small. He'll probably save you for dessert.

LOWELL
 That's it! Dessert! I got a plan!

As the Ogre lumbers closer, snorting like a mad bull, he digs into his pocket, proudly pulls out the PUDDING-CUP.

GERTRUDE
 Pudding? Pudding's your plan?!

LOWELL
 Look at all the teeth he's got. One of them's gotta be a sweet one.

Lowell turns to face the Ogre. Peels the lid. The beast instantly stops, sniffing the sweet aroma, saliva pouring.

LOWELL
Hey you! You want this? Go fetch!

He heaves the cup. The Ogre backpedals. Stumbles backward through the doorway and -- ROOOAAAAAAARRrrrrrrrrghhh...

Its howl peters out, as if it just plummeted into an abyss. Lowell and Gertrude wait and listen. It never hits bottom.

INT. CHAMBER OF THE BOTTOMLESS PIT - NIGHT

Beyond the golden door, Lowell and Gertrude discover a deep chasm. It seems to go down, down, down forever. And ever.

LOWELL
This is the way home? *This?*

GERTRUDE
No. This is the one place where something might truly be lost forever. *That is the way home.*
Over "The Bridge of Lost Balance."

A STONE BRIDGE stretches out from the cliff into the void. No railings, no visible means of support, three feet wide.

LOWELL
Holey moley.

His words echo. They turn into something that sounds ominously like: 'Lowell'... 'Lowell'... 'Lowell'...

Lowell squeezes the sock. It feels strangely light.

Puzzled, he stretches it open, seeing the last grain of sparkling sand about to sift through a hole in the toe.

LOWELL
Oh no... Gertrude! Look!

He sees the trail leading out the door. Scrambles on all fours. Desperate to scrape it back up.

LOWELL
Why're you just standing there?
Mom and Dad's dust probably spilled out over the whole lab-y-rinth!

FINDER-KEEPER (O.S.)
Merely the way through it, my boy.

The Finder-Keeper stands in the golden doorway, looming over him, flanked by Ratsputin, One-Ear, Snaggle-Tooth.

FINDER-KEEPER
The better to follow your lead.

Lowell scurries back -- OOMPH! -- right into Gertrude.

LOWELL
Gertrude, go! You've gotta fly!

GERTRUDE
I can't, Lowell. I never could.

FINDER-KEEPER
Can't even give you his apologies.
For sadly those aren't his to give.

LOWELL
"He"? Why do you keep calling her
"he"? Gertrude's not a "he"!

CLICK! A HARNESS SNAPS around his body. He looks back, shocked to see that Gertrude holds the end of his leash.

FINDER-KEEPER
I think you'll find Gertrude's not
a lot of things you took for
granted.

Gertrude's feathered shoulders writhe as something BULGES out of them. Her skin sloughs off like a suit of clothes. SHE'S MILTON THE RAT. Gertrude has been Milton all along.

FINDER-KEEPER
What's a pigeon after all, Milton?

MILTON
(ashamed)
A rat with wings.

Lowell looks at the rat, utterly betrayed. He understands.

LOWELL
You were using me? And you're
never gonna let me go, are you?

FINDER-KEEPER

My dear, dear boy. If I let you go, I'd have to let everything else go too. That's for the birds.

The Old Man points a nail. The rats overwhelm the boy.

INT. CHAMBER OF THE BOTTOMLESS PIT - NIGHT

Lowell sits hugging himself, nursing his scratches. The Finder-Keeper holds his leash, and runs a HAND-VAC. Vacuums up Lowell's parents' lost love dust.

FINDER-KEEPER

You know, there was a time I was a lot like you. I lost everything. Lost my way here. But then I made a promise to myself. I swore I'd never lose anything. Ever again. So, you can imagine, it was quite vexing to learn the only way to claim my prize was to do just that.

(calls out)

Move your tails, you twits, I don't have all day!

Out on the Bridge of Lost Balance, Ratsputin and his two cohorts nervously traverse the pit. A few awkward shoves, the three rats move out of eyeshot.

FINDER-KEEPER

Unfortunately, I'd forgotten how. That's why I needed you. A boy I could trick into leading me through that blasted backwards labyrinth.

He sucks up the last of Lowell's parents' dust, and pulls the crystal loving cup from the folds of his robes. It's been glued back in one piece. He empties the Vac into it.

FINDER-KEEPER

A loser. It's nothing personal.

Milton sighs. The Old Man looks at Milton.

FINDER-KEEPER

You have something to contribute?

MILTON

No, Keeper.

FINDER-KEEPER
 Then, keep your sighs to yourself.
 (calls out to the void)
 If you three are lollygagging out
 there, so help me, I'll --

Suddenly, a SQUEAK ECHOES. Then... Silence.

FINDER-KEEPER
 Chucky? Jerry? Mickey?

No reply. Finally, The Finder-Keeper turns toward Milton.

FINDER-KEEPER
 You. Shimmy your tail across that
 bridge and bring back what's mine!

A beat. Milton turns tail and BOLTS out the golden door.

FINDER-KEEPER
 Come back here! Oh, you craven,
 cowardly -- I should've got you a
 chicken costume instead! Blast!

He's alone. Desperate. And he isn't about to go himself.

FINDER-KEEPER
 (sing-song)
 Oh, Looow-well?

As Lowell looks up, fear in his eyes, we... SMASH CUT TO:

INT. THE BRIDGE OF LOST BALANCE - LATER

Lowell inches slowly out onto the bridge. Behind him, the Old Man lets out the leash, WHIRRING as it un-spoools.

FINDER-KEEPER
 Now, I'm going to give you some
 slack, but I want every bit of it
 back. When it's safe, tug the
 leash. Do that and I'll -- Give
 you some hard candy. Off you go.

Lowell strides further out over the pit, until the cliff vanishes behind. Bridge growing thinner with every step.

LOWELL
 Stupid bridge. Stupid pit.
 Stupid... Gravity. Stupid Lowell.

It goes thinner. Thinner. Tight-rope thick.

LOWELL
Stupid. Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.

From the shadows ahead, he sees Ratsputin clinging to the bridge by his claws. Snaggle-Tooth clings to his legs, and One-Ear's clings to his. As Lowell inches closer, they lose their grips, tumbling into the abyss below.
EEEEEEEEEEeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeiii...

LOWELL
Okay, new rule. No looking down.
Who needs to look down? I don't.

As the bridge shrinks, something keeps throwing off his equilibrium. He teeters. Takes a step. Teeters. SLIPS --

LOWELL
Aw nuts!

LANDS HUGGING the bridge. He tries to get back up, but...

LOWELL
Okay. It's... NOT OKAY!

He SLIPS AGAIN. Looks at his feet. One bare. One galosh.

LOWELL
I think I see what the problem is.

With a tinge of regret, Lowell kicks off the galosh. It drops out of sight. Now, he stands -- balance improved.

LOWELL
Hey, that's better. Maybe if I...

He digs his Jr. Explorer's compass out of his pocket. Tosses it. Takes a step. Drops his pencil. Another step. A Tee-Ball ball. An army-man. Birdseed. Bye-bye. As he sheds everything he can, every step becomes easier.

LOWELL
It's working. It's working! I may be buck-naked by the time I make it, but... it's really working!

But sooner than he realizes, he runs out of bridge, and steps safely onto...

THE PIGEON PANTHEON

A spectacular facade carved into the sheer rock wall. Enormous statues of pigeon heroes, their stone eyes stern, but compassionate. At the far end of the platform --

An ARCHWAY carved to resemble a PIGEON'S GAPING BEAK.

It's forboding. Frightening. Yet he is drawn to it. He strides closer. At its threshold, he takes one last look up at the pigeon statues, standing silent vigil, and...

LOWELL
Guess I got nothing left to lose.

He steps inside...

INT. SANCTUM - NIGHT

Lowell finds himself in a clean well-lit room with a dome ceiling. Steps lead toward a pedestal of polished marble.

There, in this most hallowed of places, rests a nest. And nestled in the nest, big as a melon... An EGG.

MISSING LINK (O.S.)
Eggceptionally big for an egg, hmm?

Lowell looks up, startled to find the half-man, half-ape.

LOWELL
You? What are you doing here? You
stole my galosh! Twice!

MISSING LINK
No, you lost your galosh. Twice.

It wiggles a foot around the pedestal, models the galosh.

LOWELL
Give it back, that's mi--!

Lowell was about to say 'mine'. But something makes him stop mid-word. He looks at his feet -- both galosh-less.

LOWELL
You know what? Keep it. I already
lost the other one anyway.

The Missing Link's Cheshire grin softens. His voice warm.

MISSING LINK
No, Lowell. I saw what you did.
You didn't lose it. You let it go.
(nods toward the egg)
Do you know what this is?

Lowell shakes his head, uncertain. Link waves him closer.

MISSING LINK
Come. Come. Don't be afraid.

Lowell tries to move toward it, but his leash keeps him at a distance. The Missing Link simply snaps his fingers, and the lock CLICKS OPEN, the harness clattering to the floor.

MISSING LINK
Now, tell me. What do you see?

Lowell approaches, seeing SHADOWS FLICKERING inside its translucent shell. At first, a silhouette, but then --

IT BECOMES REAL. A HOMING PIGEON soars majestically amid puffy white clouds. In its talons, a PINK ROLLER-SKATE.

LOWELL (V.O.)
I see... A pigeon? It's carrying
something? Where?

EXT. A SUBURBAN HOUSE - DAY (IN THE VISION)

A 9 YEAR-OLD GIRL stumbles teary-eyed down the steps, a pink roller-skate on one foot, a pink sock on the other.

A WHOOSH OF AIR stirs her pigtails -- A SHADOW flashes overhead -- the PINK ROLLER-SKATE tumbles off the roof and lands on the lawn in front of her. Her face lights up.

GIRL
Mommy! Daddy! Look, I found it!

As Lowell and the Missing Link watch, a brief series of vignettes plays out in the egg-shell -- sullen kids made grateful by the unexpected return of treasured possessions. A yo-yo. A border collie missing his tags. A retainer.

LOWELL
This is "It", isn't it? What
Parcival told me about. How the
pigeons know where all the lost
stuff's supposed to go?
(realizes)
This is what the Finder-Keeper
wants? The... Homing Beacon?

MISSING LINK
He wants the world. And should
this fall into his hands, he will
have it. All will be lost.
Nothing will ever be found again.
Finders keepers. Losers weepers.

Now the surface of the eggshell blossoms with tiny fissures. The visions inside turn sinister, frightening. The roller-skate, the retainer, the border collie -- -- YELLOW FINGERNAILS snatch them all away. Children cry.

MISSING LINK

Everyday. Everywhere. Everyone loses things. They slip between our fingers. Fly away on the wind. But there has always been the hope that these things might be found. Now that hope lies in your hands.

The Missing Link hands the nest, egg inside, to Lowell.

LOWELL

What am I supposed to do with it?

He looks up... But the Missing Link's gone.

LOWELL

Hey! What am I supposed to do?

FINDER-KEEPER (O.S.)

You'll do as you're told, my boy.

The old man stands in the doorway, looping up the slack in the unattached leash. He bares his yellow crooked smile.

FINDER-KEEPER

You'll do as you're told, and all you've ever dreamed comes true. Give me my prize and I promise it.

LOWELL

But... You wanna destroy it. You wanna make it so nothing will ever be found again.

FINDER-KEEPER

Oh who told you that rubbish? That filthy man-ape? Give it here!

Lowell shields the egg, backing away from him.

FINDER-KEEPER

Oh fine. Drive a hard bargain.

He produces the CRYSTAL LOVING CUP from a fold of his robe.

FINDER-KEEPER
 Forget about that silly old beacon.
 This is what really makes your
 world go round.

LOWELL
 (wavering)
 But... How do I know you're gonna
 let me keep it? How do I know
 you're even gonna let me go home?

The Old Man sighs, annoyed. Motions toward the Beacon.

FINDER-KEEPER
 My boy, you already have the power
 to go home in your hands. Merely
 think of it, and you shall find it.

Confused, Lowell looks down at the egg. He concentrates -- it seems to GLOW -- and when he looks up...

He SEES Angela and Charles, standing five feet away from him. A PORTAL, bordered by scintillating light, has formed on the wall. He can see RIGHT INTO his KITCHEN at home.

FINDER-KEEPER
 There now. We have a deal. Take
 the blasted dust! Take it and go!

He thrusts the cup into Lowell's hands. Seizes the egg.

Lowell stares at the cup. Gently removes the lid. The sand inside sparkles like only love can. No doubting it. But for some reason, he can't keep his eyes off the egg.

LOWELL
 But, what're you gonna do with it?

But The Old Man's too busy admiring his prize to answer. Cackling maniacally, he hobble out the chamber archway.

Lowell watches him go, then turns back to the shimmering portal. To his parents. He's so close. He could go back. He could fix everything. Yet for some reason, he can't.

EXT. BOTTOMLESS PIT - NIGHT

Lowell emerges from the sanctum to find The Finder-Keeper poised at the edge of the precipice, the leash dropped in a coil beside him. The egg held over the bottomless abyss.

FINDER-KEEPER
 Somehow, I had assumed omnipotence
 would be harder to attain?
 (he shrugs)
 Ah well. Beacon, be gone.

Lowell looks from the cup. To the beacon. And chooses.

LOWELL
 No!

He SWINGS the crystal cup like a blunt instrument, right
 into the Old Man's back. The egg FALLS from his fingers.

FINDER-KEEPER
 What the devil do you think you're
 doing? My boy, we had a deal!

LOWELL
 I'm not your boy. And I never gave
 you my promise. That's something
 you can't take!

They grapple, high above the bottomless pit. Razor-sharp
 nails rake Lowell's cheeks. He swings his cup. THUMP!

FINDER-KEEPER
 (spits)
 Ack! Was that a tooth?

WHAM! That was. The old man stumbles over the leash
 coiled at his feet, and falls toward the edge. At the last
 second, he grabs out --

-- SEIZES the other handle of Lowell's crystal cup. He
 pulls Lowell toward the edge. Lowell digs in his heels.

FINDER-KEEPER
 You won't let go of that! You
 can't. And I never let go. Ever!

The boy's weight, and the cup between them, are the only
 things keeping the old man from an endless bottomless fall.

FINDER-KEEPER
 I go, and your parents' love goes
 with me! What do you say to that?

Lowell struggles to keep from falling, every muscle
 bulging. He sees the Homing Beacon teetering on the brink,
 about to fall. He must make a decision. An impossible
 choice. He looks the Old Man in his malignant face.

LOWELL
 Somebody once told me, sometimes
 you just gotta let go.

And he does.

The Finder-Keeper falls backward, scrawny arms pinwheeling.
 He makes a last desperate grab at Lowell's ankle...

Then tumbles into the abyss, SHRIEKING.

He never lets go of the cup.

Lowell dives for the beacon, saves it just before it falls.

LOWELL
 Gotcha!

He carefully cradles it. Makes a nest out of his sweater.

LOWELL
 Now, no one's ever gonna have to
 think they're cursed, like...

He hears a strange noise, turns.

LOWELL
 ... me.

The LEASH. Its coil quickly uncoiling OVER THE EDGE.
 Lowell has just enough time to trace it back to where the
 Finder-Keeper looped it around his ankle before it YANKS
 him off his feet... Over the brink... And into...

THE BOTTOMLESS PIT

Lowell falls in space, cheeks flapping in the wind.

FINDER-KEEPER
 Ha-ha! I told you I never let go!

The old man falls below him, the leash clutched in his
 withered hand. His other hand squeezes the crystal cup so
 tightly that it SHATTERS -- love dust explodes everywhere.
 He reels in the leash, pulling Lowell toward his clutches.

FINDER-KEEPER
 If I'm going to lose...
 (closer)
 Then first, you lose...
 (closer)
 Your pathetic little life!

At the last second --

A VOICE FROM ABOVE (O.S.)
Lowell!

WINGS. From above -- the SILHOUETTE of a SOARING PIGEON.

LOWELL
Parcival?

It IS HIM! And not just him, but Rinaldo! And Orlando!

PARCIVAL
I have you, lad! Hold tight to me!

Parcival snatches Lowell in his clawed feet.

LOWELL
But -- how -- how is it possible?

Then, he notices a FIGURE carried between Orlando and Rinaldo. A fat, furry rat. It's... Milton?

LOWELL
You! What are you doing here!?

MILTON
What I should've done long ago.

Orlando and Rinaldo hover lower, allowing Milton to grab the leash in his teeth. He chews furiously.

FINDER-KEEPER
What're you -- Milton, stop that!

The leash frays.

FINDER-KEEPER
After all I've given you!?

It breaks.

FINDER-KEEPER
No! I can't lose! I won't lose!

With a beat of their wings, the pigeons lift Lowell and Milton. The Finder-Keeper falls. Far, far, far below.

FINDER-KEEPER
I never loooooooooooooooooooooose!

INT. CHAMBER OF THE BOTTOMLESS PIT - NIGHT

Lowell's feet touch solid ground. The birds and the rat alight beside. He throws himself into Parcival's wings.

LOWELL

How-- I -- I thought you were...

PARCIVAL

Eaten? It was all for show. So that he could trick you into doing what he needed. I was imprisoned. And just moments ago, freed.

Lowell looks to Milton, who stares at his paws bashfully.

MILTON

"He" would rather have his cake than eat it. Besides, he's vegan. A couple pounds was the only thing he ever actually wanted to lose.
(looks up, eyes moist)
Can you ever forgive me, Lowel--

Lowell cuts the rat off by leaping into his arms. After a moment of surprise, Milton happily hugs him back.

RINALDO

We hate to interrupt, lad, but...

ORLANDO

... There's still another matter.

INT. KEEP, INMOST CHAMBER

Assembled on one side, HUNDREDS OF FRESHLY FREED PIGEONS square off with an ARMY OF RATS mustered on the other. The place is about three seconds away from an all-out war.

GRIZZLED ELDER

Give 'em the beak! The beak, I say! Only good rat's a dead rat!

EQUALLY GRIZZLED RAT

What're you, chickens? Come on!

The situation is about to explode, when --

LOWELL (O.S.)

Enough! That's enough! Stop it!

Lowell emerges from the archway, followed by his friends.

LOWELL

There's not gonna be anymore
fighting. Or name calling. Or
anything. Starting now, you guys
are calling a truce.

EGGHEAD ELDER

But that's just not feasible. Not
as long as *they* want what *we* want
to return!

BRAINY RAT

He's right. It's inconceivable!

LOWELL

(confident)

I've got a plan.

EXT. THE RAINFOREST - DAWN

The sun bathes the edge of the jungle in a soft pink hue.
For a moment, all is serenity, and silence. Then...

A RAT tramps through the foliage marching toward us. And
ANOTHER behind him. And behind him, THOUSANDS MORE. The
first rat carries SOMETHING INSIDIOUS and GLEAMING in its
paws, it's a... a... A FRENCH HORN?

Carrying it, he heads into the caves. The others follow
the first rat's lead. Each carries SOMETHING (a ball, a
shoe, an armoire) back down below. And the NAME that was
on each item has been crossed-out: "~~Lowell A. Leavitt~~".

EXT. TOWER WINDOW, THE KEEP - DAWN

Lowell looks out over a long line of rats stretching from
the courtyard beneath him, carrying away his lost things.

ORLANDO

You're certain this is a good idea?
Divvying your things among rodents?

LOWELL

It's just stuff, Lando. Junk.
Besides, nobody's ever given them
anything before. Maybe now they
wouldn't need to take so much.

INSIDE THE RETRIEVAL ROOM, it's chaos. A line of pigeons, loaded with lost things, wait for their turn to take off. Everything that the Finder-Keeper kept is being returned.

Lowell crosses the room, looking at all the good he's done. But, it doesn't make what he sacrificed any easier to bear. Orlando and Rinaldo follow, aware of his melancholy state.

RINALDO

You know, you could stay. Here.
With us. Pack-rats and pigeons all
respect you. They'd follow you.

LOWELL

Thanks, guys, but the only place I
wanna go is home.

They know the feeling. Lowell crosses to where Parcival stands beside Milton, waiting to say goodbye.

LOWELL

You like the gift I gave you, Milt?

Milton smiles, showing his teeth. Pudding stained.

MILTON

I'd never had such a tasty treat.

PARCIVAL

You're certain I can't fly you,
lad? I'm ready, willing and --

LOWELL

That's okay, Parcival. I've had
enough adventure for... Ever?

Lowell buries himself into the bird's wings. Finally...

PARCIVAL

Ready to go home now, Lowell?

Lowell nods, steeling himself. Parcival and Milton step aside, revealing The Beacon, sitting serenely in its nest. Lowell touches it, concentrating. Again, the egg GLOWS --

In a flash of light, the portal reappears. His BEDROOM.

LOWELL

Alright. I guess this is it.

MILTON

Lowell? There's just one um...

He has something for the boy. It's brown. And beaten up.
Leather stitched together. The empty binding of The Book.

MILTON

I know you promised you'd bring it
back. I just wish I could've found
the pages for you.

LOWELL

(touched)

Thanks, Milton.

MILTON

It's from all of us.

He turns to regard to others. Pigeons and rats, everyone.
Wings raise in salute. And not just wings. Rat paws too.

PARCIVAL

Huzzah to Lowell Armstrong Leavitt!

EVERYONE

Huzzah to the bravest boy of all!

And with that, he steps through the portal, vanishing...

PARCIVAL

Goodbye, Lowell. We owe you one.

INT. LOWELL'S BEDROOM - DAY

FOOSH! In a CRACK OF LIGHTNING, Lowell lands on his bed.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Lowell bursts in, Angela and Charles set down coffee cups.

ANGELA

Lowell, what're you doing up there?

CHARLES

We heard a --

They notice how he's dressed. His poncho is in ribbons.
His sweater's half there. His feet are bare and blistered.

LOWELL

Mom! Dad! I had it, but I... I
had to let it go. It's all my
fault. I lost it. I lost it.

ANGELA

Hon, slow down. What'd you lose?

LOWELL

Your love! I lost your love!

Angela and Charles exchange looks. Dumbfounded. He shows the battered, page-less binding. What's left of The Book.

LOWELL

I lost The Book. And I lost your love. And I tried, I did, but I couldn't bring either of them back.

CHARLES

Pal, you had a bad dream...

LOWELL

(tears welling)

It wasn't a dream! I... I heard you. I heard you say you're getting a divorce. I heard you say... You don't love me anymore.

Silence. Charles and Angela regard one another, rocked.

ANGELA

Lowell, of course we love you.

CHARLES

We've loved you every second since the moment you were born.

ANGELA

No matter what problems we have, or what happens, that will never change. We will always love you, Lowell. No matter what.

CHARLES

There's one thing even someone as good at losing stuff as you could never, ever lose. Us.

Lowell stares at them, eyes raw. Trying to understand.

LOWELL

You promise?

CHARLES & ANGELA

We swear.

As they hug their son, holding him as tight as they can, we notice something hanging out of Lowell's back pocket. A dirty sock with a hole in the toe.

And there... a TINY GRAIN of SPARKLING, TWINKLING DUST.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

BRRRRRRRIIIIIINNNNG!

Fourth-graders flee for the exits, piling their homeworks on the desk of Ms. Mott. After they've gone, she sees one boy still standing at the door. She sighs.

MS. MOTT
Lowell? Empty-handed again, are we? And what's the excuse today?

LOWELL
No excuse, Ms. Mott.

MS. MOTT
And no report? And no hope of passing the fourth grade? Lowell, why? And don't tell me it's that curse again, I...

Something FLAPS at the window. Ms. Mott spins, alarmed.

MS. MOTT
... What was that?

Something SCUTTLES in the heating duct. She spins again.

MS. MOTT
What's going on here? Lowell?

She turns back toward him. But he's gone.

MS. MOTT
This is totally, utterly un--

Suddenly, a SHEET OF PAPER floats in the open window and settles onto her desk. "Lowell A. Leavitt, Homework 28."

MS. MOTT
-- acceptable?

WHOOSH! From the window, the door, the heating duct, from every crevice of the room, HOMEWORK PAPERS flood out, EVERY LAST LOST HOMEWORK, covering her in paper from head to toe.

MS. MOTT
(muffled)
Holey. Moley.

EXT. AMELIA EARHART ELEMENTARY - DAY

Lowell races down the steps, eyes on the sky. He kicks off his galoshes and shimmies up a stop sign, as...

PIGEONS soar through the skies above. Homing Pigeons, to be precise. As they pass, tiny bundles drop from their talons, parachutes popping open as the bundles descend.

Floating down into view, we see a ROLLER-SKATE. A SET of KEYS. A SUITCASE. A very frightened looking TABBY CAT.

On the streets below, PEOPLE emerge from their homes, from their business, staring up with wonder as all the world's lost things are returned by a squadron of soaring pigeons.

As as the purses and retainers and winning lottery tickets find their way back to their rightful owners, a VOICE whispers to us, warm and lyrical. The same voice we heard at the beginning. And we realize it's --

MISSING LINK (V.O.)
And so it was, that a boy who was
born to lose found happiness in the
knowledge that certain things --
the important things -- could never
truly be lost...

Lowell smiles, waving up at the passing birds.

MISSING LINK (V.O.)
And no matter where life took him,
someone would always be watching
over him. From above.

It's hard to be sure, but maybe, just maybe, we can make out Parcival. Waving back as he flaps past.

MISSING LINK (V.O.)
The...
(He trails off. The sound
of pages flipping)
I'm sorry, I seem to have lost my
pla-- Ah. Here we go.
(clears his throat)
... End.

FADE OUT.