

THE SEA OF TREES

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FADE IN:

EXT. AIRPORT PARKING GARAGE - MORNING

A cold, wintry wind howls through the concrete structure. The expected array of vehicles. Few spots remain available.

INT. CAR - SAME

ARTHUR BRENNAN, (43), sits behind the wheel of his mid-range sedan. Thousand-yard stare on his face. His hands quiver slightly.

He pulls up to the parking garage entrance. Waits behind another car. The security bar raises, that car proceeds into the parking garage.

A short BEEP from the vehicle behind Arthur breaks him from his contemplation. Alerts him to move forward. The sound echoes through the charmless architecture.

Arthur presses a button on a ticket machine. An AUTOMATED VOICE provides instructions through a speaker.

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)

Please remember to take your ticket with you. Payment should be made at one of our automated machines upon your return.

Arthur takes his ticket. The security arm raises.

EXT. PARKING GARAGE - TOP FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Almost entirely vacant, likely due to its lack of overhead cover.

SEE Arthur's car park in the middle of the lot. No vehicles on all sides of him.

INT. CAR - SAME

He turns off his ignition. Exits the vehicle wearing a long, beige jacket. Does not lock the doors. Walks toward the stairwell, not carrying any luggage whatsoever.

WE SEE he has left behind his parking lot ticket. The car keys dangle from the ignition.

INT. AIRPORT - LATER

Busy with holiday-season travelers. A mosaic of personalities.

Arthur stands in line for international travel. A Japanese family of four in front of him. The young girl, clinging to a tiny backpack, looks at Arthur. He doesn't even notice.

A moment later, Arthur is called over to the ticket counter by a cheery DESK AGENT.

DESK AGENT

Hello.

He places his passport on the ticket counter.

ARTHUR

Arthur Brennan.

His curtness more a sign of his detachment than rudeness.

DESK AGENT

Um, okay. Where will you be traveling to, Mister Brennan?

ARTHUR

Tokyo.

The Desk Agent has trouble locating Arthur's information on the computer.

DESK AGENT

Hmm... When did you book your ticket?

ARTHUR

Last night.

DESK AGENT

That might be why.

(beat)

Here it is. Would you like to book your return flight now?

Arthur barely shakes his head "No."

DESK AGENT (CONT'D)

(re: scale)

All right, I need your bags up here, please.

Arthur does not respond.

DESK AGENT (CONT'D)

Sir?

ARTHUR

Oh... um, no. I don't have any.

DESK AGENT
Just a carry-on. Okay.

No, not even that. But Arthur doesn't bother to correct her.

DESK AGENT (CONT'D)
You are all set. You'll be leaving
out of Gate 43. Boarding begins in
about an hour.

She hands Arthur his boarding pass. He walks off without a reply.

INT. AIRPORT - LATER

Arthur stands in the security line, his shoes in hand.

He removes something from his pocket: a prescription pill bottle. He places it in the bin.

He then removes a small, sealed manila envelope from the inside pocket of his jacket. Places it in the bin as well.

Walks through the metal detector. Collects his belongings. The inconvenience of airport protocol goes completely unnoticed.

INT. AIRPORT - JET BRIDGE - LATER

Arthur stands in the line of passengers waiting to board the aircraft, most of them Japanese.

Colorful advertisements, strategically placed on the otherwise dull walls, fail to entice him.

Soon reaching the plane, he is greeted by a Japanese FLIGHT ATTENDANT.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
(in Japanese)
Welcome.
(then in English)
Welcome.

Arthur continues past her without a word, disappearing into the aircraft.

INT. AIRPLANE - LATER

Night has fallen. Well into the lengthy trip, most passengers sleep.

But not Arthur. His reading light turned on, he holds an unflinching gaze on his left hand. His wedding band. It glimmers under the light of the tiny bulb.

The FLIGHT ATTENDANT pushes a food cart down the aisle. She sees that Arthur is awake.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Care for dinner? Chicken or traditional Japanese.

ARTHUR
I'm not hungry.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Something to drink?

ARTHUR
No.

The Flight Attendant sees that the passengers seated next to Arthur are asleep, so she continues down the aisle.

Arthur's head slumps back into his seat, bathed in the small wash of white light.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOKYO STREET - DAY

Colossal buildings, seemingly built on one another's foundations. Thousands of vehicles and bicycles choke the streets. Horns blare, advertisements flash across JumboTron screens.

Arthur, still wearing his beige jacket and same clothes from the flight, crosses a busy intersection, surrounded by Japanese businesspeople.

A stranger in a strange land.

INT. TRAIN - LATER

Gliding across the tracks, the world speeds by the in-cabin window in flashes of green and grey.

In a private room, Arthur sits across from an older Japanese couple. He stares out the window.

Just then, an arresting, faraway image materializes --

Mt. Fuji.

The majestic mountain appears in the distance, looming over the countryside like a hologram.

And though the rest of the scenery blurs past as an Impressionist painting, the mountain seemingly keeps pace with the speeding train.

EXT. NATIONAL PARK ENTRANCE - PARKING LOT - EVENING - LATER

A handful of cars are parked along a wood barrier. A delicate frost covers windshields, dappled by the setting sun.

Beyond the wood barrier, a lining of trees. Familiar spruce, pine, etc.

An old taxi appears in the distance, lumbering up the road toward the parking lot.

Its brakes squeal, even from such a gradual stop. Seconds later, Arthur exits from the backseat. The taxi putters along.

Arthur takes a beat before proceeding into the small, dirt-covered parking lot. He holds an unopened bottled water.

He reaches the row of parked cars. The window of the vehicle nearest him is partially open. Cold wind whistles through the vehicle. A light frost clings to the torn leather seats.

An old, jaundiced newspaper sits on the seat of a different car.

One thing is for sure: These cars have been here for quite some time.

Undeterred, Arthur continues toward the entrance to the National Park. Down the dirt path, soon passing a large wooden sign. On it are what appear to be park rules, written in Japanese.

Just above the sign, perched atop a wooden pole, is a small CCTV camera.

Arthur steps into the forest, disappearing into what we will soon see is akin to another dimension.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AOKIGAHARA - MOMENTS LATER

Now past the outlying layer of more common-looking flora, Arthur walks amidst tall, thin trees, mostly all of them free of branches, save for their last twenty feet of growth.

A light fog hovers just about the ground, conspiring with the trees to create a disorienting redundancy.

This is Aokigahara. The Sea of Trees.

Sticking to a well-traveled trail, Arthur treks deeper into the forest. His footfalls crunch against the volcanic rock on which the forest was formed.

Eerily free of animal calls, the void is filled with a steady ring of silence, caused by the wind-blocking density of the trees.

Arthur soon comes upon a grouping of other signs posted by park officials. Their inscriptions appear in many languages, including English, offering disturbing pleas to those who pass.

"THINK CALMLY ONCE AGAIN ABOUT YOUR SIBLINGS AND YOUR CHILDREN."

"DO NOT AGONIZE OVER PROBLEMS YOURSELF -- PLEASE SEEK COUNSELING."

"YOUR LIFE IS A PRECIOUS GIFT FROM YOUR PARENTS."

Arthur is unwavering in his journey. Proceeds past the signs.

INT. AOKIGAHARA - LATER

The sun begins to slip from sight, blocked further by the canopy of overhanging trees.

As nightfall approaches, the temperature steadily drops, evidenced by the appearance of frozen coils of vapor spiraling from Arthur's mouth.

He suddenly notices something: a ribbon. It stretches well into the distance, haphazardly tied off on trees. Following its path with his eyes, he sees there are many others like it festooned across the forest.

Despite their variety in color and shape, these ribbons are clearly not decorative. Nevertheless, it's apparent Arthur lacks the interest in learning their true purpose.

His progress brings him deeper into the apocalyptic woods.

INT. AOKIGAHARA - LATER

Arthur's feet traipse across the forest floor, by this point well past the last of the colored ribbons.

His nose and cheeks reddened by the cold, his fingertips tremble.

It's then he encounters a truly macabre sight --

A decomposed human body collapsed upon itself, lying at the base of a tree. Judging by its tattered clothes and decayed state, it has likely been there for quite some time.

Unafraid and seemingly expectant of such imagery, Arthur puts his head down and moves past.

INT. AOKIGAHARA - LATER

Arthur breathes deeply, the cold air burning his lungs.

Around him, the forest floor has taken on a different, more sinister appearance. Vines and roots spread across the volcanic rock and trees like tentacles.

He scans the treetops, but has difficulty seeing past the Gothic archways formed by interlacing branches.

Moving in deeper, no longer on any path, he finally encounters a clearing above.

Through it, an ethereal portrait of Mt. Fuji, presiding over the forest. The moon hovers just beyond the mountaintop like a white balloon in the greying sky.

Arthur finally stops walking. Surveys the immediate area. Everything looks the same in all directions, like an optical illusion.

This is it.

A steady ring of silence. The solemn beauty of it all.

He gently touches the trunk of a tree. Sits down at its base, leans back. His eyes drift upward, toward the sky. Clouds roll in.

He unscrews the cap of the prescription pill bottle. Pours one pill into his palm, then places it into his mouth.

Sighs. Considers. Decides.

He washes it down with a sip from his bottled water, though not with ease.

Sighs again. Makes his decision much faster this time.

A second pill is poured onto his palm, then into his mouth. More difficulty swallowing, even with a sip of water.

The almost ritualistic process continues. This time, he drains almost all the pills onto his hand. Some spill to the ground. He waits before taking the next pill.

As he catches his breath, he removes the small, sealed manila envelope from the inside pocket of his jacket.

Looks at it contemplatively. Starts to tear it open. As he does, he hears what sounds like... like... crying?

Arthur stops. Looks off into the distance, where he sees --

Nothing. No one. Just an unending tableau of trees and their rock-ingesting roots.

Arthur gets back to the envelope.

As he is again about to tear it open --

-- he hears the sound of footsteps, coming from far behind him.

He stops once again. Peers around the tree trunk.

Far in the distance, further obscured by heavy brush, he sees what appears to be a MAN walking aimlessly. Crying.

Looking closer as the Man passes by, Arthur can see that he's quite distressed. The Man stumbles; his footing is unsure, his body trembles from the cold.

It's obvious he is in dire need of help.

But Arthur is not there to help anyone. After watching the Man for a moment longer, Arthur turns his back on him. Closes his eyes, waits for him to walk past.

The sound of the Man's cries become muffled. Turning to see why, Arthur finds the Man has fallen to his knees. Hunches over.

Try as he might, Arthur cannot shut out the sound of this Man's cries. It's simply too much for him to ignore.

Momentarily abandoning his own plans, Arthur puts down the manila envelope. Places the pill bottle into his jacket pocket.

He begins a cautious approach toward the Man, leaving the manila envelope behind.

As he draws closer, Arthur gets a better look at the Man -- who we will learn is named TAKUMI NAKAMRUA.

Japanese, appears to be in his early forties, wearing a disheveled business suit.

Takumi lumbers back to his feet. Mumbles to himself in Japanese. His disorientation is evident. He does not yet see Arthur approaching.

Arthur cautiously calls out to him --

ARTHUR
Excuse me...? Hello...?

Takumi stumbles deeper into the forest.

Arthur picks up his pace. Closes the distance between them.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Hey...? You okay?

Takumi finally stops. Turns to face Arthur. Now in plain sight, Takumi is in worse shape than expected.

His purplish lips hang slack. His trembling, pallid hands outstretched before him.

TAKUMI
(in Japanese)
Please... please help me. I beg
you for your help.

ARTHUR
I don't know what you're saying. I
don't --

Takumi switches to an accented, but easily understood, English.

TAKUMI
Please. I beg you.

Takumi pleadingly grabs onto Arthur's jacket. It's then that Arthur notices Takumi's wrists. Both show deep lacerations. A gruesome mix of dried and fresh blood.

ARTHUR
(startled)
Oh...

Takumi sees the bottled water Arthur holds.

TAKUMI
Water...

ARTHUR

Water -- yeah-yeah. Here.

Takumi drinks it down in big, desperate gulps. Arthur looks on nervously as the bottle drains.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Wait, I need...

Takumi takes one last sip. Hands the bottle back to Arthur.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Are you lost?

TAKUMI

I cannot find way out.

ARTHUR

It's that way.

TAKUMI

Help me. Please.

ARTHUR

I am. Go that way. It will lead you out of here.

Arthur nods. As if to say, "Okay, we're done here."

With little more thought on the matter, Arthur turns and walks away, heading back in the direction from which he came.

Takumi waits for a moment, perhaps hoping for more from Arthur. But all that is offered is additional distance between them.

Takumi takes slow, labored steps in the direction Arthur pointed.

WE STAY ON ARTHUR

as Takumi wanders off in the b.g.

Arthur lets out a long, cold sigh. Begins his short journey back.

He suddenly appears slightly confused. Everything looks the same in all directions.

Looking left, looking right -- the manila envelope, the landmark of his chosen place, is nowhere to be found.

There he stands, alone, neither angry nor frustrated; his emotional storehouse remains bereft of such trivial emotions. He is simply, and in all possible ways, lost.

He resumes his walk. Searches for quite some time. Only to soon realizes he is not alone after all.

In the distance, he again sees Takumi, walking parallel to him. Takumi's cries are bigger, louder than before. Incoherent utterances in Japanese. His hands clutched to his chest.

Arthur stops walking. Watches Takumi. A moment later, Takumi notices Arthur. He also stops walking.

The two men stare at each other from across the forest.

Arthur emits yet another sigh. This time, a hint of frustration does surface.

INT. AOKIGAHARA - MOMENTS LATER

Arthur walks a few steps ahead of Takumi, who cannot keep pace.

Arthur takes a quick peek back at him. Regards his disheveled business suit. His debilitated physical state.

ARTHUR

Are you with anyone?

TAKUMI

Very cold...

Arthur takes off his beige jacket. Wraps it over Takumi's hunched shoulders.

ARTHUR

Okay. Alright. Here.

(beat)

Are you here with anyone?

Takumi shakes his head "No."

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

(re: Takumi's wrists)

You can't stay like that.

Arthur looks around again. Still searching as they walk.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

You need to get back on the trail.

TAKUMI
I cannot find it.

ARTHUR
I told you -- it's somewhere over
there.

Arthur leads Takumi through the maze-like forest. Tantamount to navigating through an Escher drawing.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
It should be right over that hill.

Takumi shakes his head "No".

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Then it has to be this way.

TAKUMI
I walk that direction. I could not
find any trail.

It's then that something finally occurs to Arthur.

ARTHUR
You don't want to leave.

TAKUMI
I do.

ARTHUR
You came here alone.

TAKUMI
Please. I want to go home to my
family.

A beat.

ARTHUR
Then just head this way --

Climbing over the small hill, Arthur sees that Takumi was correct -- there is no trail.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Do you have a cell phone?

TAKUMI
It would not work even if I did.

ARTHUR
Listen... I can't help you.

TAKUMI

Please...

ARTHUR

It's not that I don't want to. I
just can't.

TAKUMI

I have wife, a child. Please. Let
me see them.

ARTHUR

It's not why I'm here.

TAKUMI

I beg of you...

Arthur thinks on this, long and hard. Looks around the forest, at the darkening sky.

EXT. AOIKIGAHARA - LATER

Nightfall draws nearer. The temperature continues to drop.

Arthur and Takumi negotiate a patch of difficult terrain.

ARTHUR

Careful.

TAKUMI

Hai.

Takumi carefully steps over gangly roots. Arthur studies him as he does.

ARTHUR

Did you drive yourself here?

TAKUMI

No.

ARTHUR

Then how will you get to the hospital?

TAKUMI

I will.

Arthur looks up. Notices dark clouds rolling in.

ARTHUR

Okay.

They continue their trek in silence. Their footfalls crunch across the moon-like surface.

Soon, up ahead, Arthur sees --

ARTHUR
The trail.

TAKUMI
Trail? You see--?

ARTHUR
Right there.

Takumi looks where Arthur points. Sees the trail.

TAKUMI
Oh! Yes, I see!

They pace closer to the trail, soon reaching it. It stretches around a raised portion of earth, out of sight.

ARTHUR
Follow it that way. It'll bring you to the parking lot.

TAKUMI
Thank you. Thank you.

Takumi excitedly grabs onto Arthur's forearms.

ARTHUR
Okay. You need to go.

TAKUMI
Yes, yes. Okay.

Takumi starts to take off Arthur's beige jacket.

ARTHUR
No, no -- keep it. It's still a good walk back.

TAKUMI
But...

ARTHUR
It's the trail. Here it is. Okay?
Go.

Arthur physically guides Takumi in the direction he needs to go. Takumi stumbles down the trail, quietly mumbling joyous reflections to himself in Japanese.

Arthur turns and walks in the opposite direction.

A brief moment later, Arthur stops. Taps at his pants pockets, as if searching for something that he quickly realizes isn't there.

A contemplative beat, followed by what appears to be a decision not easily made.

Arthur turns and walks in Takumi's direction.

Takumi, having followed the trail around the bend, is no longer in sight.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Hold on... Hello?

Arthur rounds the corner. Sees Takumi up ahead. Takumi, quite oddly, has stopped walking, but still stands with his back facing Arthur.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
I, um, I forgot something in my
jack--

He stops speaking upon finally noticing --

-- the trail ends. Both men stare, nonplussed.

After a beat:

TAKUMI
(distraught)
It is not right trail.

CUT TO:

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Dressed for an evening out, Arthur pumps gas into a small SUV.

He gazes wistfully at a YOUNG COUPLE, seemingly in their mid-twenties, as they exit the gas station.

The YOUNG WOMAN does nothing more than drag her hand down the YOUNG MAN's back, yet it clearly bespeaks the current station of their relationship; not new and exciting, but not yet predictable and staid.

ARTHUR
(sotto)
Shit...

Arthur's inattention causes him to overfill the tank. A small amount of gasoline dribbles over his hand.

INT. CAR - MOMENTS LATER - FLASHBACK

Still parked at the gas station, Arthur climbs into the passenger seat, cleaning his hand with a paper towel.

Seated in the driver's seat, finishing her cell phone call, is his wife, JOAN BRENNAN (42). She wears her age well, though streaks of grey and fairly pronounced facial creases prevent her from being mistaken for a younger woman.

JOAN

(into phone)

... Yes, at the seller's residence.

... Eight works for me. ...

Excellent. Thank you.

Joan ends the call. She notices Arthur futilely attempting to rid his hands of the scent of gasoline.

JOAN (CONT'D)

What happened?

ARTHUR

The tank overflowed.

JOAN

I think I have some of those things...

Joan sifts through her handbag.

ARTHUR

What things?

JOAN

Those hand wipes.

(finds them)

Here.

Arthur reaches out his hand for the wipe. To his apparent surprise, Joan instead takes his hand in hers and cleans it for him.

ARTHUR

Thanks.

She smiles thinly. Starts the car. They pull away from the gas station.

INT. CAR - MOMENTS LATER - FLASHBACK

Joan drives. Arthur watches the world roll by outside his window.

JOAN

I have another showing tomorrow.

ARTHUR

(slightly impassive)

Yeah, I heard. That's great.

JOAN

It's not far from the college.

Maybe I can drop by afterwards...?

ARTHUR

Tomorrow's pretty busy.

JOAN

Why, do you have office hours?

ARTHUR

Office hours, two classes, and I'm proctoring an exam for Gil.

JOAN

How about a quick lunch, then? I can pick up something on my way over.

ARTHUR

I don't have time.

JOAN

Okay. Just an idea. Never mind.

Joan steals a saturnine glance at Arthur, who has returned his absent gaze out his window.

She looks back to the road. Silence but for the sound of spinning tires as the highway lines feed into the fender.

The lingering discomfort is finally broken --

JOAN

Can you see if my lipstick is in the glove compartment?

Arthur conducts a cursory search.

ARTHUR

I don't see it.

He closes the glove compartment.

JOAN
Did you look good?

ARTHUR
Yeah. It's not in there.

After a beat, Joan leans over and opens the glove compartment. Not the safest maneuver to perform while driving.

ARTHUR
(mildly frustrated)
Joan...

In short time, she finds the tube of lipstick. Shuts the glove compartment.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
I didn't see it.

JOAN
Because you didn't look.

ARTHUR
You watched me.

JOAN
Forget it.

More silence between them. Until --

JOAN (CONT'D)
You did the same thing with the baking powder.

ARTHUR
Guess we're not forgetting it.

JOAN
It was right there in the pantry.
Right in front of your face.

ARTHUR
Jesus Christ, Joan -- are we really going to fight about this?

JOAN
You don't care.

ARTHUR
About what?

JOAN

Your mind's always somewhere else.

ARTHUR

Okay. And what ground-breaking
thought kept me from finding a tube
of lipstick?

JOAN

Go ahead, mock me.

ARTHUR

When you're being this ridiculous,
you deserve it.

The vehicle again falls quiet, but it is soon disrupted by
Joan mumbling her thoughts aloud --

JOAN

Probably about what you can say...

ARTHUR

What I can say--?

JOAN

You were probably thinking up
things you can say tonight to make
you sound clever. Or *charming*.

Arthur is noticeably put off by this.

ARTHUR

If you didn't want to come, you
shouldn't have.

After a ruminative beat:

JOAN

You're driving home.

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER - FLASHBACK

Laughter coming from a corner table. A party of six, Arthur
and Joan being among them.

Also present:

GABRIELLA LAFORTE, (37), bookishly attractive; GIL CRAMER
(45); MARYANNE WESCOTT (44), and PAUL WESCOTT (48). All are
colleagues of Arthur's.

GIL

And here it was I thought my
calculations were off.

GABRIELLA

It at least explains why they
rejected it.

INSERT -- Joan notices that the back of Arthur's shirt collar
is folded awkwardly. Purposely avoiding his notice, she
fixes this. Smooths it out with a gentle brush of her
fingertips.

GIL (O.S.)

That it does.

GABRIELLA (O.S.)

Are you going to resubmit?

GIL (O.S.)

Maybe. We'll see.

BACK TO SCENE

PAUL

What about you, Arthur?

The other members of the party are much more gregarious;
Arthur is somewhat reticent.

ARTHUR

My article?

PAUL

Yeah.

ARTHUR

I think it has a shot with the
smaller journals.

GABRIELLA

Oh, absolutely.

Joan withdraws, diverting her eyes from her wine glass only
to occasionally size-up the younger and prettier Gabriella.

MARYANNE

Have you read it, Joan?

JOAN

(curtly)

No.

She punctuates her statement with a healthy sip of wine. The
comment creates an awkward silence.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

MARYANNE

No, it's okay.

Paul, attempting to ease the tension --

PAUL

So, you seeing an uptick in home sales?

JOAN

A bit.

She waits a beat before getting back to what she clearly would prefer to be talking about.

JOAN (CONT'D)

(re: Arthur)

I just think he should be pursuing other opportunities instead of wasting time trying to get published.

GABRIELLA

Publication in the right journal can do wonders for an adjunct's career.

JOAN

So can a change of profession.

ARTHUR

(quietly)

Stop it...

JOAN

Stop what?

ARTHUR

Please?

JOAN

You think it's right your wife does all the heavy lifting so you can pretend to be an intellectual?

Under the table, out of sight from the others, Arthur grabs Joan's hand. She discontinues her diatribe and pulls her hand away, jostling the table.

The others look away, discomfited, unsure how to react.

Joan finishes the last sip of her wine. Glares at Arthur.

ARTHUR
(to the others)
Sorry.

INT. BRENNAN RESIDENCE - LATER - FLASHBACK

Arthur and Joan return home. The tension between them is palpable.

Arthur tosses the car keys onto the table. Places his jacket on a hook. Joan grabs it, throws it to the floor and walks off.

ARTHUR
You're unbelievable.

JOAN
Go to hell.

Joan passes by a small white board. Physics equations fill it. She drags her hand across it, smudging everything into incomprehensible streaks.

ARTHUR
Good, good -- ruin my work.

JOAN
Your work. Get a grip, Arthur.
You teach at a God damn community college. Oh, and don't you ever grab my hand like that again.

ARTHUR
I didn't grab your hand.

Joan pours herself a full glass of port wine.

JOAN
I know you wanted to impress your little friend.

ARTHUR
What are you talking about?

JOAN
Show her how in control you are.

Arthur shakes his head. This is a painfully familiar routine.

JOAN (CONT'D)
It makes sense now why you're too busy to meet me for lunch.

ARTHUR

You can't keep doing this.

JOAN

Doing what? Getting older?
Uglier?

Arthur takes a long look at his wife. Her tears. Her sadness. Her inelegance.

A beat.

ARTHUR

You have your showing in the morning. You should go to sleep.

Joan does not respond at first. She suddenly seems aware of her misbehavior.

Arthur walks upstairs. As he does, Joan returns to belligerence.

JOAN

Oh, don't worry, I'll make sure I'm out there bright and early, and work until seven fucking o'clock. As always.

With that, she throws the wine from her glass. The red port stains the carpet runner on the two lower stairs.

Joan walks OFF-SCREEN as Arthur continues up the stairs.

JOAN (O.S.)

Because God forbid you take care of me for once.

He stops momentarily at the top of the stairs. Listens to her. Closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. AOIKIGAHARA - EVENING

Arthur gazes up at the trees, attempting to orient himself. Cold breaths escape his lungs.

ARTHUR

I think it's this way.

He helps Takumi along.

TAKUMI

Not yet.

ARTHUR

What?

Takumi sits down. Out of breath.

TAKUMI

Not yet.

Takumi pulls up the sleeves of Arthur's borrowed jacket.
Examines his wrists.

Arthur takes a good look at Takumi for the first time.

ARTHUR

How long have you been here?

TAKUMI

Two days.

ARTHUR

Like that?

Takumi nods "Yes."

A beat.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Give me your tie.

Takumi unties his tie. Hands it to Arthur, who uses it to
create a tourniquet for one of Takumi's wrists.

Arthur then removes his own dress shirt, leaving him only in
an undershirt. He wraps it around Takumi's other wrist.

TAKUMI

You will freeze.

Arthur finishes tying his tourniquet.

ARTHUR

Come on.

TAKUMI

Take coat.

ARTHUR

No. Come on.

Takumi begins taking off Arthur's jacket.

TAKUMI

Take coat.

ARTHUR

I don't want the coat; I want to
find the trail.

Arthur extends his hand. After a beat, Takumi takes it and is helped back to his feet.

The two men resume their navigation through the forest.

EXT. AOKIGAHARA - LATER

Having successfully climbed atop a small, ten-foot cliff, Arthur leans down to assist Takumi in his climb.

ARTHUR

Put your foot there. There.

Takumi does as Arthur instructed. After slipping once, he gains purchase on a rock outcropping. Even the smallest of movements causes him great pain.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

There's a vine you can grab onto.
See it? No, to your left.

TAKUMI

Yes.

Takumi takes hold of the vine.

ARTHUR

Okay... give me your hand...

Their fingertips flirt before finally making contact. Arthur pulls as Takumi climbs the rock face.

Both men use all their strength to get Takumi up the small cliff. Clenched teeth, veins springing from their necks.

Finally, after colossal effort, Takumi reaches the top.

Both men lay flat on the ground, utterly exhausted. Their freezing, ghostlike breaths float upward and disappear.

After finally getting his wind back --

ARTHUR

Why are you doing this?

TAKUMI

I do not...?

Getting to the point.

ARTHUR

Why do you want to die?

TAKUMI

I do not want that.

ARTHUR

Then why are you here?

TAKUMI

I could ask you same thing.

ARTHUR

I'd prefer you didn't.

Arthur leaves little room for discussion.

TAKUMI

It was not that I wanted to die; it
was I did not want to live.

ARTHUR

What's the difference?

TAKUMI

I lost my job many months ago. I
try to find new job, but cannot.
Not even one that pay me half as
much money.

ARTHUR

A job? That's why you're doing
this?

TAKUMI

It is disgraceful. I have family.
Without job, I cannot support them.

Arthur is noticeably put off by this.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

(off Arthur's look)

You do not understand my culture.

ARTHUR

You're right, I don't.

Arthur climbs to his feet. As he does, he stumbles slightly.

TAKUMI

What is wrong?

ARTHUR

Nothing. Dizzy...

Arthur shakes it off.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Come on.

Arthur helps Takumi to his feet.

EXT. AOKIGAHARA - NIGHT - LATER

Darkness falls. The overlying trees block much of the moonlight.

Arthur rubs at his eyes, struggles to remain sure in his footing. The effects of the prescription pills taking hold.

Both men shiver from the steadily-dropping temperature.

Quite suddenly, Arthur stops walking. Holds up his hand.

ARTHUR

(hushed)

Wait...

He listens. Hears what sounds like footsteps, coming from deep within the forest.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Do you hear that?

Arthur listens closer, attempting to ascertain from where the sound is coming.

Takumi appears unconcerned. He doesn't even look. Uses the moment to instead catch his breath.

Just then --

The NOISE is heard again. Arthur quickly turns in its direction.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Hello? Hello? Is anybody there?

No response. His words vanish into the forest.

He is met only with a continuous ring of silence.

TAKUMI

There is no one.

Arthur pays little attention to Takumi. Calls out again.

ARTHUR

Hello? If you can hear me, we need help.

Again, there is no response.

TAKUMI

Listen to me. There is no one.

ARTHUR

What was that, then?

TAKUMI

Yurei.

Arthur attempts to rub life back into his heavy eyes.

ARTHUR

Who's Yurei?

TAKUMI

Yurei are spirits.

Arthur wants no part of where this conversation is heading.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

They are souls, trapped until it is their time.

ARTHUR

Stop...

TAKUMI

Things are not what they seem here.

ARTHUR

Please, I'm asking you -- stop. If we're going to talk, I'd rather it be about directions.

Takumi seems to get the message.

The two men continue walking, quite aimlessly.

Neither of them say a word. Until finally --

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

It was probably an animal.

TAKUMI

There are very few animals in Aokigahara.

ARTHUR

Well, it was one of the few.

TAKUMI

No bears, no deer. Not even birds.

ARTHUR

It's a forest; there are animals in it.

TAKUMI

Have you heard any?

Arthur thinks on this before answering.

ARTHUR

No.

TAKUMI

This place is what you call purgatory.

ARTHUR

Why would I call it that?

TAKUMI

Because you are American.

ARTHUR

So?

TAKUMI

You believe in God.

ARTHUR

You don't understand my culture.

TAKUMI

You are right, I don't.

Arthur looks at Takumi, aware he just had his own words used against him.

ARTHUR

I'm a science teacher.

TAKUMI

There are answers for this in science?

ARTHUR

There are answers for everything in science.

TAKUMI
But not in God?

ARTHUR
God's more our creation than we are
His.

TAKUMI
So why end your life?

This question stops Arthur in his tracks.

ARTHUR
Excuse me?

TAKUMI
If God is not waiting for you on
the other side, who is?

Arthur does not respond. Takumi cuts to the chase.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)
Why do you want to die?

ARTHUR
I'm here sightseeing.

Takumi takes the pill bottle from Arthur's jacket pocket,
which Takumi still wears.

TAKUMI
(re: pills)
These are for sightseeing?

ARTHUR
I need them to sleep.

TAKUMI
Sleep for how long?

ARTHUR
Look, I don't know who the hell you
are, but I stopped to help you.

TAKUMI
You did.

ARTHUR
So, I helped.

Frustrated, Arthur snatches the pill bottle from Takumi's
hand. Storms off in the opposite direction.

TAKUMI

I am sorry...

Arthur ignores Takumi. Forges ahead into the darkness.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

Please, I am sorry.

Takumi becomes a black-on-black silhouette in the b.g., getting smaller with each step Arthur takes.

Arthur sighs. Rubs again at his weary eyes. The girding darkness cinches tighter.

Drowsy and cold, his arms strangle each other, folded hard against his chest as he treks up a difficult, moss-covered mound.

He stumbles on an unstable cobble of rocks. Desperately grabs for anything to steady himself against.

Grasps a thin tree branch, but his shifting weight causes the branch to snap, giving way to a sheer cliff. He hollers in the darkness as he CAREENS OVER THE EDGE.

He free-falls about ten feet before landing with great force onto the ground below. His body SNAPS through the undergrowth --

-- and a single branch SPEARS THROUGH HIS SIDE.

Already in a state of shock, Arthur stares at the ghastly sight. A spreading stain of crimson crawls across his abdomen.

ARTHUR

Oh... Oh...

Takumi hobbles to the edge of the small cliff. It is too dark for him to see Arthur clearly, but hears his cries emanating from the darkness below.

TAKUMI

Are you injured?!

ARTHUR

I can't move!

Arthur attempts to dislodge himself from impalement -- but the pain is excruciating.

TAKUMI

I will climb to you.

ARTHUR

No. Get out of here!

TAKUMI

I can climb.

ARTHUR

I don't want you to. Leave me alone!

TAKUMI

You did not leave me.

With great trouble, Takumi slowly lowers himself down the cliff side, until he drops the last foot, landing squarely.

He gets his first clear look at Arthur's injury. He examines it closely, as if attempting to determine the best manner to extricate Arthur's body from the branch.

ARTHUR

Because of a fucking job?!

Takumi does not pay attention to Arthur. He moves aside extraneous branches.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

You have a family to go home to every day, and you decide that's not enough? You son of a bitch!

Takumi moves aside Arthur's shirt, exposing the unsightly injury, seen only in a quick glimpse.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

(afraid)

What -- what are you doing?

Takumi drapes Arthur's arm over his shoulders. Wraps his own weak arms across Arthur's sternum. Leans Arthur slightly upright.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Owwww!!! What the hell are you doing?!

TAKUMI

You did not leave me.

ARTHUR

What...?

TAKUMI

On three...

ARTHUR

No, stop...

TAKUMI

One...

ARTHUR

Let go of me!

TAKUMI

Two...

ARTHUR

No!!!!

TAKUMI

Three!!!

With that, Takumi lifts Arthur's upper-body with all his might, dragging him up the length of the impaling branch. Arthur SCREAMS out in absolute agony as we...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BRENNAN RESIDENCE - EVENING - FLASHBACK

The front door unlocks. Arthur enters, dressed in work attire, carrying his laptop bag.

He begins to remove his familiar beige jacket when he notices Joan splayed out on the living room couch, fully dressed in a pants suit and shoes.

Still wearing his jacket and scarf, he quietly approaches her. Removes her shoes, gently arranges her legs in a more comfortable position.

She barely stirs.

Arthur watches his wife with silent adoration. As if it's a secret.

In the b.g., coming from the kitchen, the WHISTLE of a boiling tea kettle is suddenly heard, its incessant call growing louder. Destroying this moment.

INT. BRENNAN RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - SECONDS LATER - FLASHBACK

The tea kettle's piercing whistle persists. Trace amounts of smoke soon begin to spread from the bottom.

A mug, with a tea bag draped over its rim, sits near the stove.

Arthur enters the kitchen. Swipes the kettle off the burner. Turns off the stove.

INT. BRENNAN RESIDENCE - SECONDS LATER - FLASHBACK

Joan awakens. Rubs the sleep from her eyes as she sits up. Notices her shoes have been removed and placed, with apparent care, next to the couch. A muted smile.

Arthur returns from the kitchen.

JOAN

Hi.

ARTHUR

Are you okay?

The sound of the tea kettle simmering to silence provides the explanation for Arthur's question.

JOAN

Oh... Sorry, I must have dozed off.

Arthur removes his scarf. Hangs it on the coat rack.

JOAN (CONT'D)

You're wearing the jacket I bought you.

ARTHUR

(preoccupied)

Yeah.

JOAN

It looks nice.

ARTHUR

It's comfortable.

JOAN

(off his preoccupation)

Are you okay?

ARTHUR

You could've burned down the house.

JOAN

I said I was sorry.

Arthur finally hangs up his jacket.

ARTHUR

I almost stopped at the store on my way home. If I had,...

JOAN

The house would be in ashes right now. Okay? Is me telling you how right you are enough to keep this from turning into an argument?

ARTHUR

It's not the house I was concerned about.

Joan's increasing exasperation is mollified by his sincerity.

A beat.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

You're home early.

JOAN

Should I feel bad for that?

ARTHUR

It was just an observation, Joan.

JOAN

You see it all, don't you?

Here we go again. Arthur sighs.

ARTHUR

I see you stopped at the bar.

JOAN

I did. Right after I sold my second house this week.

ARTHUR

I would say we should celebrate, but you obviously already have.

JOAN

I'm a grown woman.

ARTHUR

You're a cliche.

JOAN

I'm a grown woman.

ARTHUR

That's an alcoholic.

JOAN

Funny how the so-called alcoholic
is the one who pays the mortgage.
What's your excuse?

ARTHUR

Excuse for what?

JOAN

Get a job.

ARTHUR

I have a job.

JOAN

A real job, not one that pays
twenty grand a year.

ARTHUR

I like what I do.

JOAN

About as much as you like that
jacket.

ARTHUR

I told you, it's--

JOAN

Comfortable, I know. That's my
point.

ARTHUR

What's wrong with that?

JOAN

You don't care anymore.

ARTHUR

About what?

JOAN

About anything. It's like you
settled on some lesser version of
yourself.

ARTHUR

Why can't you just be happy for me?

JOAN

Because I'm too busy feeling bad
for myself.

ARTHUR

At least you admit it.

JOAN

Admit what? That I have a husband
who continuously puts himself
first, and I'm such a fool I just
keep letting him do it? Fine, I
admit it.

ARTHUR

You were the one who said I should
quit NorthLab.

JOAN

Because you hated it there.

ARTHUR

No, because you hated me there.

JOAN

You really want to go down that
road?

ARTHUR

No, but apparently you do. As
usual.

JOAN

You quit three years ago. I
figured you'd find something else
by now.

ARTHUR

I have.

JOAN

Please...

ARTHUR

Don't give me "please." I have.

JOAN

You could be doing a hell of a lot
more, and you know it.

ARTHUR

Stop pretending this has to do with
a job.

JOAN

It has to do with you continuing to
take advantage of me.

ARTHUR
Name one time --

JOAN
There's been plenty.

ARTHUR
Then picking one should be easy.

JOAN
It's what you do -- you take people
for granted.

ARTHUR
Yet you can't give me a single
example of when I've done it.

JOAN
You don't care about anyone but
yourself. When people need you,
when I need you, you always have
something more important to do.
Or someone.

This last remark strikes a nerve.

ARTHUR
I knew you couldn't do it --

JOAN
Well...

ARTHUR
I knew you couldn't keep from
bringing it up.

JOAN
You make it really hard not to
sometimes.

ARTHUR
I'm done trying to make amends,
Joan.

JOAN
You shouldn't be.

ARTHUR
Well, I am.

Arthur marches upstairs.

JOAN
Did you at least get my tea?

ARTHUR

Get your own fucking tea.

INT. BRENNAN RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER - FLASHBACK

Joan enters, visibly upset from her row with Arthur. Her tough veneer dropped, quiet tears stream down her cheeks.

She pours water from the kettle into her mug. Steeps her tea bag as her mind wanders. She is distracted when --

Drip... drip... drip...

Red spots appear in her light-colored tea, dying the liquid.

Blood. Trickling from her nose, landing in the mug.

She nervously pulls her hand to her nose. A small trickle of blood spills over her fingers.

Pinching her nostrils closed, Joan tears off a sheet of paper towel. Covers her nose. Checks the bleeding.

It seems to be stopping, but her concern persists.

CUT TO:

EXT. AOKIGAHARA - NIGHT

Arthur and Takumi hobble through the forest.

Arthur appears somewhat disoriented. His eyes glossy, his gaze unsteady. He momentarily loses his footing, despite the present landscape's relatively easy passage.

TAKUMI

Are you all right?

ARTHUR

Tired.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

Do you need to rest?

Arthur snaps back to the ugly reality of their situation.

ARTHUR

What? Umm... no. We need to keep going.

It's incredibly difficult to see through the curtain of darkness that surrounds them on all sides.

Arthur searches for a gap in the treetops above.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Where is it....?

TAKUMI
Mt. Fuji?

ARTHUR
(nodding)
We can use it to get our bearings.
The parking lot was west of the
mountain...

TAKUMI
East.

ARTHUR
You sure?

A beat.

TAKUMI
No.

ARTHUR
(defeated)
I can't see it anyway.

Arthur shakes his head. Blows into his hands for warmth.

A low rumble of thunder is heard in the distance.

Takumi suddenly begins to walk toward something he struggles to see in the dark.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
(confused)
Where are you going?

Takumi continues walking. Finally stops, kneels down.

Arthur soon catches up. Sees that Takumi stares at the sprouting leaves of a flower yet to bloom. It is just as out of place growing here as it would be in a junk yard.

TAKUMI
It is said a flower grows when a soul has crossed over from this place.

Arthur is perplexed by what seems an impossibility.

ARTHUR
There's hardly any soil...

TAKUMI

Hai.

Takumi takes a beat before standing.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

We should continue.

EXT. AOKIGAHARA - LATER

Arthur sees that Takumi's condition is worsening. The need to keep him alert and awake is paramount.

ARTHUR

Talk to me.

TAKUMI

Talk to you?

ARTHUR

What's your name?

TAKUMI

Takumi.

ARTHUR

That's your whole name?

TAKUMI

Nakamura.

ARTHUR

Takumi Nakamura.

TAKUMI

Hai.

ARTHUR

Tell me about your family.

TAKUMI

My wife is Kiiroi. She is very smart, very beautiful. We have one child -- Fuyu.

Arthur shakes his head. Confusion and contempt in equal measure.

ARTHUR

(re: Takumi's wrists)

And you still did that.

TAKUMI

I regret.

ARTHUR

Doing it?

TAKUMI

Thinking I needed to.

ARTHUR

Isn't it because of a cultural thing? Something I wouldn't understand?

TAKUMI

I think you understand.

ARTHUR

Will they?

TAKUMI

I hope so.

Arthur takes a look back at Takumi. Disarmed by his frailty.

ARTHUR

I'm sorry I yelled at you before.

TAKUMI

Maybe I deserve.

ARTHUR

No... you didn't.

They encounter a broad swath of particularly foreboding terrain. Spindly roots strangle one another. Branches reach down like bony fingers.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

You okay?

TAKUMI

These trees scare me.

ARTHUR

They're just trees.

TAKUMI

Nothing is just anything in this place.

ARTHUR

They're just trees.

TAKUMI

Are you afraid?

ARTHUR

No.

TAKUMI

What are you, then?

Arthur looks around, taking in the labyrinthine surroundings.

ARTHUR

Lost.

The conversation has reached its least logical conclusion.

After several more steps, Arthur realizes Takumi has stopped walking.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

What is it now?

TAKUMI

Water.

Arthur looks around. Does not see any water.

Takumi climbs over a small, vine-encrusted hill, away from the direction in which he and Arthur were currently traveling.

ARTHUR

Hey...?

Arthur follows Takumi up the hill.

INT. AOKIGAHARA - MOMENTS LATER

Takumi and Arthur continue in this new direction. The faint sound of running water is now heard.

They seek out the source of the sound.

TAKUMI

Do you hear it?

ARTHUR

I hear it. This way?

TAKUMI

Yes, that way.

They soon reach a small clearing. A narrow brook meanders through a modest growth of stilt grass. The moon's reflection floats effortlessly on its bubbling surface.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

It is!

Takumi hurries to the brook, his pain and distress supplanted by his sudden elation. He falls to his hands and knees, drinks thirstily from this forest oasis.

ARTHUR

Wait, wait -- how do you know it's safe to drink?

TAKUMI

I do not. But would rather get sick later than die tonight.

ARTHUR

(sotto)
Good point.

With that, Arthur cups a handful of water and drinks. He then cleans his wound.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Fill up the water bottle.

Takumi fills the empty plastic water bottle. Caps it.

Once hydrated, both men take a seat alongside the gently-flowing water. A much-needed reprieve.

Arthur lowers his head. Sighs. His misty exhalation is a reminder of the frigid temperature.

TAKUMI

We should follow river downstream.
It is best way to find help.

ARTHUR

Is that an old, Japanese survival technique?

TAKUMI

No. I learn on Discovery Channel.
"Man Vee Ess Wild." (Man vs. Wild)

Arthur's lips curl into the slightest trace of a smile. A veritable tectonic shift given his emotional intractability.

He looks up at the sky. The vast, dripping-black universe wears a diadem of stars.

Takumi begins singing softly in Japanese.

Arthur keeps his meditative gaze skyward, even after Takumi finishes his short song.

He's broken from his ruminations when his eyes flutter. He shakes his head, rushing blood back into it. Climbs back to his feet, grimacing as he does.

ARTHUR

We need to keep going. Come on.

Arthur helps Takumi up.

EXT. AOKIGAHARA - LATER

Arthur and Takumi follow alongside the watery trail, which by this point has been reduced to little more than a trickle.

As they progress further, the water slows. And slows.

Until it dries out entirely.

A beat.

TAKUMI

What do we--

Arthur suddenly lifts his hand, cutting off Takumi. He stares at something in the distance.

ARTHUR

What is that?

TAKUMI

Where?

ARTHUR

(pointing)

Right there. See?

Arthur and Takumi stare intently into the dark forest, their focus both on the same general area.

TAKUMI

No.

There does not appear to be anything there.

But then --

-- a PERSON peeks out from around a tree, only to quickly duck back behind it.

Both men are startled, but are also relieved to see they are not alone.

ARTHUR

Hey! Hello?

Arthur moves closer to the tree.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

I saw you look out at us. We need help, we're lost.

His words are met with silence.

Arthur edges closer to the tree, his steps growing more hesitant as he draws nearer.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Hello...?

Now less than ten feet from the tree, Arthur cautiously leans to the side, trying to get a look behind it.

As he does --

-- the person peeks out again, then slips back behind the tree. Startled, Arthur reflexively lurches backwards.

It's then he notices a slow, metronomic creaking sound.

Tracing the source of the sound to the other side of the tree, he sees --

-- a decomposed human body hanging from an inexpertly-constructed noose. Its feet dangle less than two feet above the earth.

The body slowly sways back and forth, creating the appearance from afar that it was peeking out from behind the tree in front of it.

Arthur recoils from the gruesome sight, but cannot keep his gaze from it for long.

TAKUMI (O.S.)

I have seen many others like him.

Arthur jumps a little, startled by Takumi, clearly not expecting him to have followed him.

Removing a passport from the dead person's back pocket, Arthur is puzzled by what he sees.

ARTHUR

He's German.

TAKUMI

They come from many different countries. Japan, Germany, Russia, France, ... U.S.A.

ARTHUR

How many?

TAKUMI

Dozens each year. All have lost the will to live. Some are certain of this, others change mind.

Arthur contemplatively examines the person's unsightly face.

ARTHUR

And they all travel this far?

TAKUMI

It is what was meant for them. Distance cannot change that.

Arthur absorbs this. Quietly affected by its resonance.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

People come to this place because they are called here. They think it was their discovery, their idea.

(beat)

It was not.

An uncommon breeze passes through the treetops, pushing aside branches, exposing Mt. Fuji far in the distance.

A momentary flash of beauty.

The wind eases back to a whisper and then vanishes entirely, closing the canopy of trees above and returning Arthur's attention to their ongoing predicament.

ARTHUR

(re: dead person)

Help me with his clothes.

EXT. AOIKIGAHARA - LATER

Arthur assists Takumi through the forest. Both men are freezing, weakened. They wear the dead person's clothing over their own, battling the frigid temperature.

A rumble of thunder is heard, louder than before.

Takumi stumbles. Arthur is quick to grab hold of him.

ARTHUR
Stay with me.

TAKUMI
So cold.

ARTHUR
I know. Me too.

TAKUMI
It has not been this cold.

ARTHUR
The past two nights?

TAKUMI
Hai.

ARTHUR
What did you do to stay warm?

TAKUMI
I did not stay warm.

Takumi clutches his quivering hands to his chest. Arthur notices that Takumi is fading again.

ARTHUR
Hey, hey -- keep talking to me.

TAKUMI
I am trying.

ARTHUR
Tell me something.

TAKUMI
What?

ARTHUR
Anything. Tell me why you're
wearing a suit in the middle of a
forest.

TAKUMI
I had just left job interview.
Only my second in three months. I
did not get either.

ARTHUR
What type of work did you do?

TAKUMI

It was work that caused much of my troubles. I would rather talk about something else.

ARTHUR

Fine. You can count for all I care, just keep talking.

A more intense rumble of thunder is heard.

TAKUMI

I cannot think of anything to say.

ARTHUR

Tell me about that song you were singing.

TAKUMI

I sing song?

ARTHUR

When we were sitting near the water.

TAKUMI

Don't know. Maybe I make up.

ARTHUR

You kept saying the line...
(struggling to recall)
"Umi no... Kai..."

TAKUMI

"Umi no kaidan," hai. I did not make up. It is from old fisherman song.

ARTHUR

What does it mean?

TAKUMI

"A staircase in the sea."

Arthur is only partially tuned-in. His purpose for this idle chit-chat is preventing Takumi's health from declining further.

ARTHUR

Do you fish?

TAKUMI

No. But I am most happy being near the water.

ARTHUR

Then, that's what you should do
when you get out of here -- you
should go to the water.

TAKUMI

I would like that very much.
But... will I?

ARTHUR

Will you...?

TAKUMI

Get out of here.

ARTHUR

Yes.

TAKUMI

Will you?

A beat.

ARTHUR

I don't know.

A light TAPPING is heard, slow at first, then building in speed and intensity. Followed by a loud clap of thunder.

Freezing raindrops fall from the sky.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

(re: raindrops)

No... no-no-no...

The sky opens up, releasing a deluge of ice-cold rain.

Arthur and Takumi desperately search for cover, but there is none to be found. Within seconds, they are drenched, chilled to the core.

The rain falls hard, landing with the cadence of a fast-approaching military brigade. Arthur and Takumi struggle to communicate over the din.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Get some branches!

TAKUMI

What?!

ARTHUR

Branches!

Arthur tears a leaf-covered branch from a tree. Then another and another.

He then places the branches above a crevice between two large rocks, constructing a rudimentary shelter.

Takumi hands Arthur a branch, then searches for another.

The shelter is taking shape, but it's too little too late. The rain is unremitting, powerful; the feeble shelter collapses under its weight.

Arthur splashes through shallow pools of rainwater collected on the near-impermeable forest floor.

ARTHUR

We have... to keep going...

It's at that moment Arthur realizes --

Takumi's gone.

He frantically scans the dark forest, fighting to see through the ribbons of falling rain.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Takumi?!! Takumi?!!

Arthur's screams barely crack the towering wall of rainfall.

Hope for finding Takumi seems to be lost. But then, from OFF-SCREEN --

TAKUMI (O.S.)

Over here!

Arthur struggles to pinpoint where Takumi is located.

ARTHUR

Where?!

TAKUMI

Here! I am here!

Takumi leans from the entrance of a low-lying cave he's discovered, waving Arthur over.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

Hurry! In here!

Arthur hurries to the mouth of the precariously-constructed cave.

INT. CAVE - SECONDS LATER

Near total darkness. Rain drips in through spaces between rocks, but the small cave nevertheless provides life-saving shelter.

Arthur and Takumi shiver uncontrollably. Takumi collapses to the ground.

Arthur wraps his trembling arms around Takumi.

ARTHUR

I... have... you.

Takumi cries. He cannot go on much longer.

TAKUMI

(in Japanese)

Please... I am so cold.

ARTHUR

We're going... to make it... Do you hear me? We're... going to get... you home.

TAKUMI

Kiroi! Fuyu!

ARTHUR

Listen to me!

TAKUMI

I... I...

ARTHUR

I won't let... this happen to you.

Arthur buries his face into Takumi's shoulder. The two men huddle together, bitterly cold. Shaking uncontrollably.

The sound of the rain then becomes overpowered by a more ominous sound. Almost a GROAN, getting louder by the second, as if getting closer.

And closer. And closer...

Arthur slowly raises his head, listens. He stares at the entrance of the cave, fearing what might be approaching.

And then it happens.

A tremendous RUSH of flash-flood rainwater enters into the cave. It nearly fills the tiny area from ground-to-ceiling in a heartbeat.

The gelid water threatens to drown them as its level continues to rise by the second.

Arthur is first to surface; his lungs burning, gasping for air.

Takumi has yet to surface.

Arthur drops back underwater and grabs hold of Takumi, drags him to the surface -- of which even less now remains.

A mere five inches separates the water from the cave ceiling, with that gap closing fast.

ARTHUR
Grab onto something!!

Arthur takes hold of an exposed root. The water continues to rush into the cave.

Takumi reaches for a rock outcropping, but misses. He slips back underwater.

Arthur leans from the root, reaching for Takumi, but cannot lunge far enough.

He stretches farther... farther...

His chattering teeth now bearing down hard on each other, his fingertips finally make contact with Takumi's outstretched hand, when --

-- the root SNAPS. Arthur's head plunges under the frigid water. It's so cold it burns.

Still, he grabs hold of Takumi and pulls him toward the surface; however, only three inches of space remain.

Their purple lips barely have room to break the surface of the water. They futilely push against the surrounding rock walls as a continuous torrent of water floods into the cave.

The water level closes to two inches from the ceiling...

ARTHUR
HELP!! SOMEBODY!!

One inch...

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
PLEASE!!! HEL--

Arthur's words are cut short when the space closes entirely. Fully submerged in the freezing water, Arthur and Takumi flail wildly as their oxygen quickly runs out.

Arthur screams, emitting an unsettling bouquet of bubbles.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. RADIOLOGY OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Joan lies on her back, eyes skyward, prepared to enter the claustrophobic confines of a hulking M.R.I. machine.

Arthur stands next to her, visibly concerned. Joan's lightly trembling hand hangs off the side of the platform, clasped in Arthur's.

The machine HUMS to life. Joan's eyes meet Arthur's. The platform slowly tracks toward the mouth of the machine.

Arthur walks next to her as the platform conveys closer to the opening, still holding her hand. They share a warm, nervous smile.

Her head enters... then her shoulders...

Arthur must finally let go of her hand. He watches as she's swallowed whole by the machine.

INT. DOCTOR'S CONFERENCE AREA - DAY - FLASHBACK

Joan and Arthur sit across from DR. FITZPATRICK, (55), in this small room. His desk creates a definitive doctor/patient demarcation.

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK

The M.R.I. detected a small mass.

Joan's head falls slightly, but she quickly lifts her chin and offers a small nod. Feigned courage.

Arthur places his hand on her back.

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK (CONT'D)

Now, there are certain instances
when the shape of a mass can
provide clues to whether it's
malignant...

ARTHUR

Is this one of those instances?

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK

I'm afraid not.

JOAN

So, the only way to know is a biopsy?

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK

I could run your blood work, but even that can sometimes be inaccurate.

ARTHUR

What about the mass itself?

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK

(to Joan)

Right now it's pressing against your frontal lobe, which, in and of itself, could be problematic.

ARTHUR

So, it needs to be removed, even if it's benign?

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK

I'm always reluctant to use that word.

(to Joan)

There's nothing benign about the surgery you'll undergo to remove the mass. Let's all hope it's non-cancerous, but know that if you choose resection -- which I highly recommend you do -- your recovery will not be swift.

Fearful tears form in the corners of Joan's eyes, though she fights to remain stolid.

Arthur offers comfort. Leans in, speaks quietly to her. Kisses her on the head.

ARTHUR

It's okay... it's okay...

See the traces of doubt on his face, as well.

JOAN

How risky is the surgery?

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK

It's a highly invasive procedure --

Joan, cutting right to it --

JOAN
Can I die during it?

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK
It's possible.

Arthur, providing what he feels the Doctor should say next --

ARTHUR
But unlikely.

Doctor Fitzpatrick cannot concur, so he doesn't.

Joan is terribly distraught, but still fights to keep it together.

JOAN
Okay... um, so, what now? What do I do?

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK
I would take a few days to talk it over. In the meantime, avoid caffeine.

JOAN
Including tea?

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK
Yes. Do you smoke?

JOAN
No.

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK
Good. What about alcohol?

Joan does not answer.

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK (CONT'D)
Do you drink alcohol?

In a moment of difficult self-reflection --

JOAN
Yes.

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK
Eliminate it altogether. These things could all exacerbate the issue.

Joan nods, accepting the directive.

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK (CONT'D)

If you opt to go forward with the procedure, it will be performed at Mass General. We could transport you to a hospital closer to your home once you're in recovery.

Joan nods, though it's obvious her thoughts are elsewhere.

INT. BRENNAN RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Arthur and Joan sit at the table.

It's late. The wall clock tells us so, as do the pajamas and bathrobes they wear.

ARTHUR

You still have time to eat. They said twelve hours before is the cutoff.

JOAN

I'm not hungry.

ARTHUR

What are you?

JOAN

Afraid.

ARTHUR

You should be. Your chair's broken.

Arthur nods toward the leg of the chair. A wooden support brace has dislodged from its fitting.

JOAN

Why not add falling off a chair to the list?

The brief moment of levity is a welcome respite.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I don't want to die there, Arthur.

Arthur takes his wife's hands in his. Looks directly into her eyes.

ARTHUR

Listen to me. You're not going to die.

JOAN

It's not the thought of dying that scares me; it's the thought of dying there. At a hospital. In some cold, empty room, surrounded by people who are only there because it's their job to be.

ARTHUR

I'll see if they'll let me stay in the operating room.

JOAN

I don't think they let people do that.

ARTHUR

I'll try anyway.

Joan nods, probably knowing full well Arthur won't be allowed in the operating room.

She takes another look at the broken chair fitting.

JOAN (CONT'D)

We've had this set for a long time.

ARTHUR

I think since we got married.

JOAN

We had it in our apartment?

ARTHUR

I think so. Wasn't it a gift from your aunt?

Joan truly couldn't care less about the furniture. She can't continue with the small-talk; she says what's really on her mind.

JOAN

Promise me something. Promise me that whenever... it's your time, promise me you won't be in a place like that.

ARTHUR

Okay.

JOAN

I'm serious, Arthur. Please promise me you'll find a perfect place.

ARTHUR

You make it sound like I'll know
when it's going to happen.

JOAN

I think you will. Deep down, I
think we all know.
(beat)
Please...?

ARTHUR

Okay. I promise.

CUT TO:

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

The rushing floodwaters have ceased. The pool of ice-cold water filling the small cave is still, tranquil.

Arthur floats, suspended in nothingness. His cold, pale face shows no sign of life. Takumi floats next to him, similarly lacking animation.

The water pressure affects the integrity of the rocky cave wall. A large rock shifts, then another. And then --

A large portion of the cave wall GIVES WAY under the pressure of the water, sending a deluge gushing out of the cave.

Arthur and Takumi's rag-doll bodies are forced out by the current, which ultimately discards both men's frames on the cold, unforgiving ground.

The storm has subsided. A drizzle of raindrops fall on Arthur and Takumi; however, neither of them react to the icy stings.

Just then, Arthur's closed eyes flutter ever so slightly. A sign of life? Or just the residual effects of a body's systems shutting down?

This question is answered when his fingers curl; their dexterity robbed by the cold. His heavy eyelids yawn open, revealing his impaired awareness.

His body wrenches. His lungs expel copious amounts of water.

It takes little time for his body to understand its current predicament.

Managing to rise to his elbows, as if fighting a thousand forms of gravity, Arthur sees Takumi's still frame draped over a welter of tree roots.

Arthur elbow-crawls to Takumi, his shivering body denying nearly every move he asks of it.

ARTHUR
Wake up... wake up...

Takumi is unresponsive to Arthur's jostling.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Please... wake up.

Arthur's trembling fingers search Takumi's neck for a pulse.

Nothing.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
No... Don't do this. Please...

Arthur tries again. This time he feels something.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Yes...

A few quick breaths into Takumi's mouth causes a subtle rise and fall in his chest. But nothing more.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Come on...

Arthur tries again with two more rescue breaths, but is still unable to resuscitate Takumi.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Don't do this...

Arthur grows desperate, reckless. He vigorously shakes Takumi's body. Bangs closed fists against his chest.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Wake up! Please, wake up!

When all hope appears to be lost, Takumi suddenly regains consciousness. He vomits up rainwater held captive in his stomach and lungs.

Takumi thrusts violently, involuntarily, as he is plunged back into this harsh world.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
It's okay-it's okay. It's me.
You're okay.

Takumi slowly regains his faculties, only to be struck by the resurgent effects of hypothermia. He screams out in pain, shakes uncontrollably.

Arthur huddles close to Takumi. Prevents him from injuring himself further.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

It's okay. We... have to... get out... of here.

Arthur attempts to climb to his feet, but the pain from his wounded abdomen is too much to bear. He falls to his knees, doubles over.

Neither man can survive much longer in their current condition.

Shivering madly, Arthur tries again. As he climbs to one knee, he notices something in the distance. Though difficult to see in the dark, it appears to be --

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

A tent. There's... a tent!

This barely registers for Takumi; he is rapidly succumbing to the frigid temperature. Seeing this, Arthur grabs Takumi under his armpits. Uses what little strength he has left to drag him.

Arthur can't stop shivering, making the short journey incredibly arduous.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Come on!

Takumi's leg becomes ensnared on a vine. Arthur's inertia sends him falling backwards as Takumi's limp frame slips from his grasp.

Arthur lands hard, but soldiers on. He again grabs hold of Takumi, freeing his leg from the vine and continuing on toward the tent.

As they move closer, the tiniest indication of hope flashes across Arthur's blanched face.

The tent is in surprisingly good condition. A small tarp is strung up next to it, providing cover for a fire ring made of a simple collection of stones.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

(to tent)

Hey! Hello?!

Still inching closer to the darkened tent, Arthur gets no reply from inside.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
(to tent)
We need... help.

TAKUMI
(weakly, in Japanese)
Please...

Still no response.

Arthur finally reaches the tent. Its zipper is unzipped, the door flap sways in the slight breeze. Pushing it aside, Arthur sees someone lying asleep in the dark, wrapped up in a flimsy sleeping bag.

ARTHUR
Hey. Hey!

It's then Arthur gets his first clear view of the person, who, judging by his decomposed state, has been dead for quite some time.

Though given pause by the grisly image, that fleeting moment is all Arthur can afford. He drags Takumi into...

INT. TENT - CONTINUOUS

Both men collapse on top of the decomposed body. Arthur yanks the threadbare sleeping bag off the corpse. Drapes it over his and Takumi's shoulders.

The cold is unrelenting. The men's sodden clothing speeds the drop in their core temperature.

Realizing this, Arthur takes off his shirt, laboring through every movement.

ARTHUR
Your clothes...

Takumi struggles to take off the jacket Arthur earlier gave to him.

Both men undress, until totally naked. Their clothing, so wet and cold, sticks to patches of their skin.

They toss their soaked clothing aside. Arthur strips the decomposed body of its clothing. He hands Takumi most of what is collected.

Mixed among the random assortment of items in the tent -- including two paperback novels -- Arthur finds a flashlight. Its bulb is very dim, but still offers some light.

Scavenging through the tent, altogether unconcerned with the dead body lying next to him, Arthur's trembling hands happen upon --

A walkie-talkie.

Turning it on, he is elated to find it works.

ARTHUR
(into walkie-talkie)
Hello?! Hello?! Does... anybody
hear... me?

More static.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Hello?

Arthur holds the walkie-talkie on front of Takumi's quivering lips.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
(to Takumi)
Say we need... help.

Takumi musters up the strength to do so --

TAKUMI
(in Japanese)
Lost in... Aoikigahara. Send help.

Static. There's nobody out there listening.

Arthur places the walkie-talkie down, still powered on. He rummages through some of the deceased person's other belongings.

He finds a pack of cigarettes. A flash of hope -- because he next finds a cigarette lighter.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Oh God... yes...!

His frozen digits struggle to roll the striker.

Spark... spark... spark...

But no flame.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Come on! Please!

Spark... spark...

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Please!!

Spark...

It finally catches, producing a small flame.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Yes!!

He holds the flame in front of Takumi.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Put your... your hands...

Takumi's tremulous hands encompass the small flame. Arthur has trouble holding the lighter steady.

The flame goes out.

TAKUMI
No-no...

The lighter catches on the second try. The flame reappears, but already shows signs of weakness.

ARTHUR
Shit!

Arthur turns off the lighter.

TAKUMI
No, please!

ARTHUR
We need--

TAKUMI
Please!!

ARTHUR
We need to... save it!

Arthur opens the door flap. Sees the rudimentarily-constructed fire ring. Two charred logs rest within its rocky borders.

He grabs the paperback novels, tears pages from them. Exits the tent.

EXT. AOKIGAHARA - SECONDS LATER

Outside the tent, underneath the small tarp, Arthur has arranged the logs and book pages in the fire ring.

Spark... spark... spark...

And then a flame. Arthur touches it to the book pages; they ignite in a glorious, warming glow.

EXTREME WIDE SHOT

of the tent, the fire ablaze in a brilliant ball of orange light, juxtaposed against the stark blackness of the forest.

Arthur's AD-LIBBED sounds of joy are heard in the distance.

INT. AOKIGAHARA - LATER

The rain has stopped, but the bitter cold persists.

Arthur and Takumi sit close to the crackling fire, taking in its warmth. Their sodden clothes hang from a makeshift clothesline to dry.

No longer freezing, the fire offers them new life. Both men remain in various states of undress, wearing only the remnants scavenged from the deceased person in the tent.

The walkie-talkie's volume is kept low, but emits steady white noise.

Arthur suddenly looks around, as if having just heard something. He turns down the volume further on the walkie-talkie.

TAKUMI

What is it?

Arthur peers into the forest -- but sees nothing.

ARTHUR

I thought I heard something.

Takumi does not look. Arthur again calls out.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Hello?

No response.

TAKUMI

You must know by now, this forest --
it is very powerful.

ARTHUR

I know it's very cold.

TAKUMI

Have you tried his compass?

Arthur picks up the deceased person's compass. Its needle spins oddly, never settling on a direction.

ARTHUR

It's broken.

TAKUMI

It is only broken here. Compasses do not work in Aokigahara.

ARTHUR

It's the rock -- it's volcanic. The high iron deposits are throwing it off.

TAKUMI

It is more than that.

ARTHUR

You make it sound like the forest is keeping us here.

TAKUMI

It seems to have a reason. Just as it did for bringing us here.

Arthur considers this for a beat, but dismisses the notion.

ARTHUR

(re: deceased person)

Why do you think he brought all this stuff with him?

TAKUMI

As I said before, some people are sure when they come, others are not.

ARTHUR

You think he was unsure?

TAKUMI

(nodding)

And then I think he get lost. That happen often, too.

ARTHUR

The ribbons...

TAKUMI
Ribbons...?

ARTHUR
The ribbons, the strings on the
trees -- I saw them on the way in.

TAKUMI
Ah, yes. They are to help people
find their way back. Like bread
crumbs.

ARTHUR
I wonder if one of those ribbons
were his.

TAKUMI
I wonder if any are yours.

This catches Arthur slightly off guard.

ARTHUR
I used actual bread crumbs.

TAKUMI
You are Handsome.

ARTHUR
Um... what?

TAKUMI
You use bread crumb, like Handsome
and Gretel.

ARTHUR
Hansel. Hansel and Gretel.

TAKUMI
Ah, yes, yes.

ARTHUR
You made me nervous there for a
second.

Their sullen demeanors slowly give way to unexpected, but
much-needed, laughter, only to then be gradually replaced by
a moment of mutual introspection.

TAKUMI
The sky is darker.

ARTHUR
I thought the opposite.

TAKUMI
Is it morning yet?

Arthur checks his watch. Takumi notices the wedding ring on Arthur's finger.

ARTHUR
It's ten past three.

Takumi remains focused on the ring. The white noise from the walkie-talkie fills the void.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
(off Takumi's look)
What?

TAKUMI
Does she know you are here?

ARTHUR
Who?

Takumi does not respond. Keeps his stare.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Who are you talking about?

Takumi makes a subtle gesture toward Arthur's ring. Arthur's reaction, though small, is quite revealing.

TAKUMI
She is why you are here.

Arthur looks away, battling back a sudden rush of emotion.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)
What is your name?

ARTHUR
You know my name.

Takumi gently shakes his head: "No."

TAKUMI
It is something else you did not say.

ARTHUR
Arthur.

TAKUMI
What was her name?

A beat.

ARTHUR

Joan.

TAKUMI

When did...?

ARTHUR

Two weeks ago.

Arthur sheds his first tear. The numbness, the disbelief -- it is no more. It all becomes painfully real.

TAKUMI

You must have had very nice marriage with her.

ARTHUR

No. No, I didn't.

More tears form. Takumi watches, quietly, listening with distanced compassion.

TAKUMI

Was it always bad?

ARTHUR

No. We had a lot of really great years together. A lot of them.

TAKUMI

What changed?

ARTHUR

We did.

(beat)

She was an alcoholic. Well, a functioning alcoholic; that supposedly made it okay. She was horrible to me sometimes, but I was even worse to her.

Takumi's expression does not change.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

I had an affair a few years ago with a coworker at a research lab. I wanted to tell her, but I didn't. She found out on her own, which made it worse, I think. Things went downhill from there; she started drinking more, we almost got divorced twice. She never trusted me again. I don't blame her, either.

TAKUMI

Did you love her?

ARTHUR

No, it was just a meaningless
fling.

TAKUMI

I meant your wife.

ARTHUR

More than anything on earth.

TAKUMI

Then why did you do that to her?

ARTHUR

I just did. Sometimes you just do
things. And as much as you'd like
to take them back, you can't.

Arthur's mind wanders.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

After that, it was like we kept our
feelings for each other a secret.
I would fix things for her while
she was asleep. Or buy her a new
box of tea, only, I wouldn't tell
her. I'd wait for when the old
package wasn't too full or too
empty; this way she wouldn't notice
I refilled it and have to choose
whether or not to thank me. And
she... well -- I would find my
shirts hung in my closet, washed,
even though I didn't wash them.
She'd purposely put them way in the
back so I wouldn't find them for so
long I'd forget they were ever
dirty in the first place. This way
I wouldn't have to choose whether
or not to tell her I still
appreciated her. It was this
little game we had. It was all we
had.

Arthur falters in his attempt to appear stolid.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Then she got sick. All the years
of fighting and anger -- it all got
put on hold.

(beat)

(MORE)

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

It's always that moment that wakes us up, you know? Some big, life-changing event that reminds us what really matters. The problem is, the only time that moment comes is when that moment comes -- and sometimes it comes too late.

Thick, single tears crawl down his cheek, cling to his clenched jaw.

ARTHUR

I...

(hesitates)

I didn't come here just because she's gone. It wasn't because of the grief. It was because of the guilt. I was wrong to treat my wife the way I treated her, and it was wrong for her to treat me the way she did. And now, neither of us will ever, ever, ever get the chance to say I'm sorry.

TAKUMI

She is listening.

ARTHUR

She's gone.

TAKUMI

It is during our darkest times that our loved ones are closest. Even those who have passed.

ARTHUR

Don't...

TAKUMI

Her spirit--

ARTHUR

Stop--

TAKUMI

She is with you--

ARTHUR

Don't.

TAKUMI

It is true.

ARTHUR

It's not true.

TAKUMI

This forest holds her for you.

ARTHUR

Stop it, stop it!

TAKUMI

(backing off)

I am sorry...

ARTHUR

No --

TAKUMI

I am. Please...

ARTHUR

No, I'm sorry. Okay? I'm sorry!

(to forest)

I'm sorry! Do you hear me? Do you? Do you?!! I'm sorry!! I'm sorry!!

(sobbing, now sincere)

I'm sorry! I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Joan. I'm sorry...

Arthur comes undone. Sobs uncontrollably...

Until catharsis finally pushes its way to the surface.

He breaths a long, restorative sigh. Sniffs the last of his tears away as he removes the pill bottle from his pocket.

Stares at it. Lost in a million memories.

ARTHUR

I don't know how to live without her.

TAKUMI

You will not have to. Not forever.

ARTHUR

I wish it were that simple.

TAKUMI

There are many words to describe death. Simple is not among them.

Arthur silently absorbs this. Offers the smallest nod possible.

He then tosses the pill bottle into the fire. The plastic melts unto itself in unceremonious collapse.

He leans back against a rock. Stares pensively at the nighttime sky.

Takumi quietly watches him. The slightest suggestion of a smile.

ANGLE ON

on the walkie-talkie, still quietly awash with static.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Sunlight gleams off the linoleum floor, split into dusty rays by an outmoded set of venetian blinds.

REVEAL

Joan lying in bed, her head bandaged and partially shaved. She appears to be in relatively good condition.

Arthur sits vigil at her bedside, showing her a few old photographs.

ARTHUR

(re: photo)

I always liked that hat.

JOAN

What happened to it?

ARTHUR

Good question.

JOAN

We should get you a new one.

ARTHUR

I'm not sure it's in style anymore.

JOAN

I'm not sure it was then.

They share a heartfelt laugh. Arthur looks at the next photo.

ARTHUR

Oh yeah, the trip to lake house.
When was this -- ninety-three?

JOAN

Around there. Ninety-three, ninety-four.

Arthur points to the polo shirt he's wearing in the photo --

ARTHUR

Yeah, because that was the old NorthLab logo. They changed it in ninety-five.

Arthur stops for a moment, as if regretting his last statement. Specifically, his mention of NorthLab.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Sorry.

JOAN

It's okay. Really.

Joan looks longingly at the photo.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I loved that lake. Waking up early, picking orchids...

ARTHUR

You used to put them in the windowsill.

JOAN

You remember that?

ARTHUR

Of course I do.

Arthur takes Joan's hand in his.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

We can go back there whenever you want.

She doesn't share Arthur's optimism.

JOAN

Okay.

Speaking earnestly --

ARTHUR

You're going to be all right.

JOAN

I'm nervous, Arthur.

ARTHUR

I know, sweetie, I know.
(gestures at bandages)
But you made it past the first
hurdle. That has to be a good
sign.

JOAN

I hope so.

So does Arthur. In ways he cannot express with words. They share this moment.

When Arthur notices Joan's mind apparently wandering toward a place of distress, he's quick to bring her back.

ARTHUR

How about this: We'll both get
those hats.

JOAN

Can't I get a different hat?

ARTHUR

Fine, but I'm going to get the same
different hat.

JOAN

What if it's frilly?

ARTHUR

Are you saying I can't do frilly?

Arthur's greatest success, perhaps in his entire life, is making his wife smile at this moment.

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK enters, carrying Joan's chart.

Arthur and Joan's smiles evaporate from their faces.

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK

We finally received the results
from the test. The mass was non-
malignant.

Unequivocal relief. Joan falls into Arthur's embrace.

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK (CONT'D)

How are you feeling?

JOAN

After hearing that, I feel great.

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK
Dealing with the pain okay?

JOAN
It's manageable.

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK
Good. So, the plan is still to
transport you over to the recovery
unit at Saint Mary's.

JOAN
Okay. Thank you.

ARTHUR
Yes, thank you.

DOCTOR FITZPATRICK
You're welcome.

Doctor Fitzpatrick exits.

Arthur holds his wife close to him as relieved tears stream down her face.

EXT. HOSPITAL - LATER - FLASHBACK

Joan lies on a stretcher, at the back of an ambulance, still beaming from the recent good news. Arthur stands next to her, sharing similar sentiments of relief and joy.

AMBULANCE TECH #1 and #2 open the ambulance doors. Prepare to place Joan's stretcher inside.

Arthur hands Joan her cell phone.

JOAN
What's this for?

ARTHUR
I figured you wouldn't want to be alone.
(to Ambulance Tech #1)
It's okay if she uses her phone in there, right?

AMBULANCE TECH #1
Yeah, sure.

ARTHUR
(to Joan)
Or I can just ride with you.

JOAN

What about the car?

ARTHUR

I could come back here for it.

JOAN

No, no -- it's too far. I'll be fine.

ARTHUR

You sure?

Joan playfully holds up her cell phone.

JOAN

Call me.

Arthur smirks.

EMERGENCY TECH #2

All set.

EMERGENCY TECH #1

Go ahead.

The Emergency Techs lift Joan's stretcher into the back of the ambulance.

Arthur watches as the doors are closed.

INT. CAR - MOMENTS LATER - FLASHBACK

Arthur drives behind the ambulance; both vehicles travel at a normal speed down a well-traveled surface street.

His face expresses a look of unparalleled happiness. He talks to Joan on his cell phone.

ARTHUR

...We should do something fun.

JOAN (V.O.)

It's going to be a while before I can do much of anything.

ARTHUR

I know, but once you can, we should do something crazy.

JOAN (V.O.)

Like what?

ARTHUR

I don't know. Go skydiving... or
get a tatoo.

INT. AMBULANCE - SAME - FLASHBACK

Joan lies atop the gurney, talking to Arthur on her cell phone.

INTERCUT - Arthur and Joan having a phone conversation.

JOAN

What happened to frilly hats?

ARTHUR

We can get them, too. Right after
the tattoos.

JOAN

I'm getting one as we speak.

ARTHUR

Oh yeah? Of what?

JOAN

Of you skydiving.

ARTHUR

You stole my idea.

The ambulance continues down the busy street. Arthur follows right behind it.

JOAN

It's weird riding in here.

ARTHUR

You've never been in an ambulance before?

JOAN

No, actually.

ARTHUR

Really?

JOAN

Really.

ARTHUR

Not even as a kid?

JOAN

No. Why is that so hard to believe?

ARTHUR

It's not the fact that you've never been in an ambulance that's hard to believe, it's that, after all these years, I never knew you've never been in ambulance.

JOAN

I'm sure there are things about you I don't know.

ARTHUR

I doubt it.

JOAN

What's your favorite color?

ARTHUR

You don't know my favorite color?

JOAN

What's mine?

Arthur is stymied. Impacted by the realization of how little he and his wife truly know each other.

ARTHUR

Hi, my name's Arthur. It's nice to meet you.

INT. CAR - SAME - FLASHBACK

A traffic light up ahead turns yellow. The ambulance continues through it; Arthur stops when the light turns red, watching the distance spread between him and his wife.

JOAN (V.O.)

It's nice to meet you, too, Arthur--

SMASH!!!!

A speeding TRUCK jumps the intersection from the opposite side and CRASHES INTO THE SIDE OF THE AMBULANCE WITH THUNDEROUS FORCE.

The impact tips the ambulance onto its side. Dark smoke climbs from the front end of the mangled truck and underside of the ambulance. Glass shards litter the street.

Arthur is thrown into a panic. He leaps out of his car. Races toward the accident, recklessly jumps over debris.

ARTHUR
Joan!! Joan!!

Pedestrians on the sidewalk stop and stare. The driver of the truck falls out of the open door, covered in blood.

Arthur cuts through the black smoke. Reaches the back doors of the toppled-over ambulance. Tears them open. Climbs in.

Heard OFF-SCREEN, inside the ambulance:

ARTHUR (O.S.)
No!! No!! Oh God, no!!!

CUT TO:

INT. AOKIGAHARA - DAWN

An uninterrupted hum of silence. The rainfall has stopped, stars fill the cloudless sky.

Mt. Fuji sits silently in the distance, backlit by the faintest hues of an impending sunrise.

CLOSE ON

Arthur's face. Asleep. The quiet sound of walkie-talkie static in the b.g.

Arthur awakens slowly. His confused state quickly supplanted by grave concern.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

the fire, left unattended, has extinguished.

ARTHUR
Shit! Shit-shit!

Arthur leaps to his feet, aided by surge of adrenaline.

He attempts to reignite the fire by frantically sifting through the ash with his bare hands.

But nothing remains. Not a single glowing ember.

Arthur takes the cigarette lighter in hand. Looks to light something -- anything. But there is nothing to light; the fire has consumed all its fuel.

The lighter never catches. Only spark after spark.

The crippling cold seeps back into Arthur's core as his adrenaline diminishes.

Takumi lies asleep. His face wan, his blueish fingers clasping the tattered sleeping bag.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Oh God...
(beat)
Get up! Get up!!

Takumi does not stir.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Come on! Get up...

Takumi moves ever so slightly.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

We have to go!

Takumi's eyes crack open.

Arthur puts the walkie-talkie to his own mouth.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Hello? Anybody?! Hello?

No response. Static.

Arthur yanks the mostly dry clothes off the makeshift clothesline.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

(re: clothes)
Put these on. Quick!

He helps Takumi into the clothes. Not a single movement is completed with ease. Takumi fades in and out of consciousness.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

No-no. Stay with me.

Arthur manages to cover most of Takumi. He then dresses himself.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Come on.

Arthur tries to help Takumi to his feet, but Takumi's body falls limp.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Takumi? Takumi?!

He reaches around Takumi's waist, barely lifts him, and drags his lower body across the forest floor. A woefully ineffective endeavor.

They distance themselves from the tent. Arthur traverses the forest, bearing the weight of a human life in his enfeebled arms.

Takumi has a moment of clarity, notices they are moving further from the tent. He extends his hand toward it.

TAKUMI
No...

ARTHUR
We have to go.

TAKUMI
The fire...

ARTHUR
There's no more fire.

TAKUMI
The fire...

ARTHUR
There's no fire.

EXT. AOKIGAHARA - MOMENTS LATER

The sun peeks over the horizon, bringing faint light but little warmth.

Arthur continues to drag Takumi across the forest.

He stops momentarily to blow into his quivering hands -- an insufficient effort at warming them.

He doesn't have the strength to continue in this fashion. His own body has begun to shut down.

He falls. Drops Takumi. Both men land hard onto the frigid ground.

Arthur climbs back to his feet. Grabs Takumi. Drags him another few steps before collapsing again.

He gets back up. Grabs Takumi. Drags him further. And further. Arthur's exertion draws fresh blood from his abdomen.

He fights unbearable pain. Impossible terrain. Significant blood loss.

Moving forward, inch by inch, something suddenly stops him in his tracks.

A sound. No, a VOICE!!

-- Coming from the walkie-talkie. He rips through his jacket pocket, removes the walkie-talkie.

ARTHUR
Hello?! Hello?!

The Voice responds in Japanese-accented broken English. The signal is weak, disrupted by intermittent static.

VOICE (V.O.)
Hello?

ARTHUR
Yes! Hello! We need help, please send help!

VOICE (V.O.)
What... wro...

ARTHUR
Send help! We are in the forest.
Aoikigahara. We need an ambulance!

VOICE (V.O.)
Where... you?

ARTHUR
Aoikigahara. We're lost. I'm with someone -- he's dying. Please!

VOICE (V.O.)
Th... nea.... er... lin.

ARTHUR
What? I can't understand you.
What did you say? Hello?

The static worsens.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
I couldn't hear you. What did you say?!

The voice on the other end is totally overcome by static.

Arthur stuffs the walkie-talkie back into his pocket. A restored hope fuels him.

He grabs Takumi under the arm and helps lift him to his feet. Arthur bends down and lifts Takumi in a fireman's carry.

Arthur barely takes a step before stumbling. He's incredibly weak.

He stabilizes. Adjusts Takumi's rag-doll frame across his narrow, scientist shoulders. Each step requires colossal effort. Strength he simply does not possess.

Still, Arthur endures. His determination worthy of comparison to Fitzcarraldo dragging his steamship over a mountain.

His steps become slower. Shortness of breath, lactic acid buildup in his legs. Each new step requires a longer period of recovery.

As Arthur takes another labored step forward --

His foot becomes entangled in a root and he stumbles. His ankle rolls, emitting an audible SNAP.

He screams out in pain as he collapses. Clasps his injured ankle.

Takumi falls from Arthur's shoulders.

TAKUMI

Go...

ARTHUR

No!

TAKUMI

You can... save yourself.

Arthur rolls over, clutching his injury. Bears the pain with clenched teeth.

TAKUMI (CONT'D)

Go!

ARTHUR

I have to... help you.

Takumi places a gentle hand on Arthur's back.

TAKUMI

You have, Arthur.

The sudden clarity of this statement gets Arthur's attention. He looks at Takumi, who reaffirms his directive with a nod.

Arthur climbs to his feet. He is barely able to stand.

ARTHUR
I'll come back here for you.

Takumi nods again. Barely.

Arthur removes his long, beige jacket. Drapes it over Takumi's shoulders.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
I swear, I won't leave you. I'll
find help... and come back here for
you.

Takumi weakly places his hand on top of Arthur's.

TAKUMI
Thank you for... taking care of me.

Arthur takes his first hobbled step. Then another and another. Takumi watches as Arthur drifts further and further away.

INT. PARK RANGER STATION - MORNING

A small outpost, no bigger than a little league concession stand. Two CCTV screens show black and white images of different locations, one of which is recognizable as the Entrance/Parking Lot of Aokigahara.

PARK RANGER #1 sips on tea as he completes paperwork. He pays little attention to the CCTV screens.

The station telephone rings a few times before he decides to pick it up. He speaks in Japanese.

PARK RANGER #1
Hello?

Park Ranger #1 listens the caller as he looks at the CCTV screen. Nothing appears out of the ordinary.

PARK RANGER #1 (CONT'D)
Did they know where in the forest
they are?
(listens)
How did he contact you?
(listens)
What channel was it set to?

Park Ranger #1 sets his walkie-talkie to the appropriate channel.

PARK RANGER #2 enters the Ranger Station. Notices Park Ranger #1's concern. Quietly gestures: "What's going on?"

PARK RANGER #1 (CONT'D)

I see. Okay.

(to Park Ranger #2)

Contact Station Three and Five.

Have them meet us at Aokigahara.

(to caller)

Yes. Thank you for informing us.

Park Ranger #1 hangs up the phone. Swipes a set of car keys from the desk and grabs his heavy parka.

INT. AOKIGAHARA - MORNING

The sun has almost fully risen, but its rays struggle to penetrate the thick canopy of trees.

Arthur's condition has worsened. His body begins to betray him. His feet, his hands -- nothing works as it's designed to. His chances of survival are vanishingly small.

He manages to place the walkie-talkie to his mouth.

ARTHUR

Hello? Anybody?

Static.

Shivering uncontrollably, he limps to the base of a rocky hill. With no observable way around it, his only choice is to climb.

He loses his footing on the third step of his climb, dropping him to cold, hard ground. He lacks the dexterity to protect his face.

The impact jars him. He lies still, his face pressed against the ground, as heavy breaths spiral from his mouth.

A single tear crawls across his cheek.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - EVENING - FLASHBACK

Hundreds of vehicles lined up in perfect symmetry. A cold wind courses through the shallow valleys they create.

EXTREME WIDE SHOT

of Arthur walking in between a long row of parked cars. His gait slow, mechanical. What algebra would look like if in human form.

He climbs inside his mid-range sedan. Shuts the door. Does not start the ignition. HOLD on this moment.

INT. BRENNAN RESIDENCE - LATER - FLASHBACK

Night has fallen. True darkness. Arthur slowly enters his handsome home through the front door, still wearing a catatonic visage.

The home seems so empty. Museum-like. Lifeless.

Without removing his jacket, he spiritlessly makes his way up the staircase. The carpet runner on the bottom two steps are slightly discolored by the faint red stain caused by Joan's port wine.

Each step creaks under his burden. The climb seems to take forever.

In this moment, he is a tourist in his own home.

INT. BRENNAN RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - SECONDS LATER - FLASHBACK

Meticulously kept. The queen-size bed perfectly made.

Arthur enters the room. His troubled mind adrift, still fully clothed, he lowers himself onto the left side of the bed. His side.

Partial fetal position. Too shaken to sleep.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A traditional Catholic wake. MOURNERS pay their last respects.

An easel displays a photo collage of Joan. Flowers adorn a closed casket.

Arthur stands in the receiving line, next to Joan's family members. Mourners offer condolences; Arthur barely registers any of this.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - LATER - FLASHBACK

An empty room except for Joan's casket. Even the photo collage has been taken down.

The overhead lights have been dimmed, the flowers have been removed. Cost-cutting and practicality dismantle the illusion that death is in any way glorious.

Rows of unoccupied chairs. Only one is taken -- by Arthur.

He sits in silence. Numb.

The FUNERAL DIRECTOR, (68), enters.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR
Mister Brennan?

Arthur does not respond.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
Sir...?

Arthur finally acknowledges the Funeral Director's presence.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
We're locking up for the evening.
I'm sorry.

ARTHUR
Can I have another minute?

FUNERAL DIRECTOR
Of course.

The Funeral Director watches Arthur for a beat.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
It was very well-attended. She
obviously was very loved.

Arthur responds with a small nod.

The Funeral Director starts to walk away --

ARTHUR
I didn't know her.

The statement, made abruptly, catches the Funeral Director by surprise.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR
I'm sorry?

ARTHUR
My wife -- I didn't know anything
about her.
(MORE)

ARTHUR (cont'd)

I mean, I knew some things -- like, the date her car insurance needed to be renewed, her Social Security number... Things that seemed important but really meant nothing.

(beat)

But I didn't know... her favorite color... her favorite season. Or even her favorite book.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

It was a children's story.

Arthur looks incredulously at the Funeral Director.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

I overheard her sisters talking about it earlier. Apparently one of them ordered it for her recently.

Arthur takes this into account, but does not respond.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

No mention of a favorite color... or season. I'm sorry.

Arthur offers a small, detached nod.

A beat.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Take your time, sir.

The Funeral Director leaves him to his thoughts.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY - FLASHBACK

The visual equivalent of a fireworks display. Colors, brands, slogans -- all haloed by the overhead fluorescent lights.

Arthur walks down an aisle, carrying a basket filled with a random assortment of items. He stops. Stares blankly at the unending rows of matching items. Like a man with a permanent head cold.

People mill about around him, including a YOUNG MOTHER; yet Arthur just stands and stares. He's in her way.

YOUNG MOTHER

Excuse me...?

(re: box of cereal)

I'm sorry, I need to grab that.

A beat.

YOUNG MOTHER (CONT'D)

Sir?

Arthur places his basket on the ground and exits the store.

INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE CLASSROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Underfunded. Outdated desk/chair combinations.

The old-fashion radiator HISSES and POPS. Disinterested students. Among them is ERIC, (18), probably the least interested of all.

Arthur sits across from the students, his forearms resting on a Formica-top table. He is there in body, but not in mind.

Behind him is a large whiteboard. Several basic physics equations fill its space.

A young FEMALE STUDENT reads her homework aloud.

FEMALE STUDENT

For twenty-four, I chose C, 2400
Jouls per Kilogram. Umm... I
couldn't figure out twenty-five.

An iPod-wearing Eric chimes in --

ERIC

I couldn't figure out any of them.

MALE STUDENT

It's B, potential energy.

FEMALE STUDENT

For number twenty-five?

MALE STUDENT

Yeah.

The students look to Arthur to clear things up.

FEMALE STUDENT

Um... Professor?

Arthur finally snaps out of it. At least enough to muster up a response.

ARTHUR

Velocity... yeah, that's right.

The students exchange glances. A few in the back hold back laughter.

INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE - OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Arthur sits in his small, well-appointed space. Pride taken in its arrangement, despite its claustrophobic dimensions. A view of the campus seen through its lone window.

And a small framed photograph. Arthur and Joan -- both younger, happier.

Arthur's full attention is paid to the photo. There is no office, no world -- there is just this image. This woman.

An unexpected KNOCK on his door. Standing there is Gabriella.

Arthur barely acknowledges her.

GABRIELLA

You're trying. But you don't have to.

ARTHUR

I don't know what else to do.

GABRIELLA

The department will approve a leave. I can talk to Gil.

ARTHUR

Maybe.

GABRIELLA

Have you eaten anything?

ARTHUR

I'm not hungry.

GABRIELLA

Still, you should.

No response.

Gabriella removes a Power Bar from her work bag, puts it on Arthur's desk.

GABRIELLA (CONT'D)

(re: Power Bar)

Here.

Arthur ekes out a gesture of thanks.

GABRIELLA (CONT'D)

Listen... if you need anything, I'm
here for you. We all are.

ARTHUR

Okay.

He returns his wilted perception to the photo of his wife.

EXT. BRENNAN RESIDENCE - DAY - FLASHBACK

A frigid wind spins a smattering of fallen leaves across the front lawn.

Arthur rakes them into sloppy piles. Going through the motions. His expression frozen in a permanent state of detachment.

A Post Office JEEP pulls up in front of the house. Arthur pays it no mind. Continues raking.

The MAILMAN approaches, holding a small collection of mail.

MAILMAN

Been on vacation?

Arthur's eyes acknowledge the Mailman well before his brain catches up.

ARTHUR

No.

MAILMAN

Your box has been full all week.

Arthur notices his mailbox is overflowing with mail.

ARTHUR

I... um, I haven't emptied it.

MAILMAN

Right. That's what I'm saying.

This conversation is going nowhere.

MAILMAN (CONT'D)

Anyway...

The Mailman hands Arthur his mail and returns to his jeep. Drives off.

Arthur absentmindedly thumbs through the mail he holds. Bills and flyers. And then a small manila envelope package, sent from: "MINERAL SPRING BOOKSELLERS."

Addressed to: "JOAN BRENNAN."

Arthur stares searchingly at her name as it appears on the envelope. She will never get this package. In his hand is proof that she really is gone.

INT. BRENNAN RESIDENCE - GARAGE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Haphazardly filled with the expected welter of little-used items. Dusty artifacts of this couple's past.

Arthur sits behind the wheel of his car, his countenance betraying emptiness.

He inserts his key. Turns on the ignition. Then shuts his windows.

There he waits. Moment by moment.

His muffler, begging for repair with each choke and stutter, spills a dark cloud from its tailpipe.

In time, Arthur begins to register the ugliness of his surroundings.

He turns off his ignition.

INT. BRENNAN RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER - FLASHBACK

Dark, save for the monochromatic blue glow of an open laptop screen. Arthur enters. Absently places his car keys on the kitchen table, where his laptop is placed near a pile of uncorrected exams.

He stares at nothing in particular. The refrigerator fills the room with a steady HUM.

The other chairs surrounding the kitchen table are perfectly situated, except one: The broken chair on which Joan previously sat.

Arthur places his hand on this chair. It wobbles, even under his minimal pressure. He purposely wobbles it one more time while lost in a long, deliberative moment.

His eyes close.

But then -- they open. A thought. A memory, perhaps.

Acting on it, he sits down. Opens his laptop. Types:

"A PERFECT PLACE"

into a search bar. He's about to press ENTER, but stops. After a ruminative beat he adds the words --

"TO DIE"

-- to his search. Finally presses ENTER.

The entry that catches Arthur's full attention:

"AOIKIGAHARA - THE SEA OF TREES. THE PERFECT PLACE TO DIE."

Followed by a brief description:

"LOCATED AT THE BASE OF JAPAN'S MT. FUJI IS AOIKIGAHARA, A DENSE FOREST ALSO KNOWN AS 'THE SEA OF TREES.' MANY HAVE DESCRIBED IT AS THE PERFECT PLACE TO DIE, PERHAPS EXPLAINING THE HUNDREDS OF SUICIDES THAT OCCUR IN THE FOREST EACH YEAR."

He clicks to read on.

CUT TO:

EXT. AOIKIGAHARA - MORNING

Arthur remains exactly where we last saw him. Face-down on the rocky hill. Weak. Pale. Bleeding.

Dying.

Sun rays finally breach the cluster of treetops, transforming the forest into something beautiful.

This is where Arthur Brennan's life will end. In a perfect place.

But, that is no longer what he wants. Which is why --

PARK RANGER #1 (V.O.)
(in Japanese)
Hello? Do you read me?

-- the sound of the Park Ranger on the walkie-talkie lifts Arthur's head from the ground.

In Arthur's languished state, the Park Ranger's voice at first sounds muddled, as if submerged underwater.

PARK RANGER #1 (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Hello? Does anybody read me?

Arthur's senses sharpen. The Park Ranger's becomes clearer.

Arthur removes the walkie-talkie from his jacket pocket.

ARTHUR

Hello? Please, hello...?

PARK RANGER #1 (V.O.)

(in broken English)

This Ranger Services. Do you copy?

Hearing this message resuscitates Arthur.

ARTHUR

Yes, yes -- I copy! I hear you!

PARK RANGER #1 (V.O.)

We are here -- we are in forest.

Look for you.

ARTHUR

Where?! Where are you?!

PARK RANGER #1 (V.O.)

(over static)

...er ...near th... ot. Can you
m...

ARTHUR

What? I couldn't understand you.

Hello?!

The Park Ranger's voice is totally overcome by static.

Arthur yells aloud --

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

I'm here-I'm here! Help!!

He musters up the strength to reach for a protruding rock. His fingertips scratch at it before finally gaining purchase. He inches his way up the rocky hill.

Higher... and higher. Dragging his attenuated frame over the difficult terrain.

His knees join in the climb. Then his feet. His speed increases. The top of the small hill comes within reach.

PARK RANGER #1 (V.O.)

What... se... ...near?

Forcing his frame into a locked position, Arthur feverishly observes his surroundings. Searches for a landmark.

ARTHUR

I'm on a hill -- somewhere...

Ah...

Everything looks the same in all directions.

He loses some footing on the hill, but catches himself.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

I don't know...

A stunned expression suddenly takes shape on his face when his eyes hook on something --

An abnormally straight collection of stones, ascending up the side of the nearby hill from which they protrude, forming --

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

A staircase! I'm near a staircase!

PARK RANGER #1 (V.O.)

(mixed English/Japanese)

Do not understand. I do not--

ARTHUR

A staircase! Umm...

His panic momentarily ebbs, allowing a critical memory to surface --

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Umi no Kaidan! Umi no Kaidan!

EXT. AOKIGAHARA - SAME

Park Ranger #1 listens to his walkie-talkie. Next to him is Park Ranger #2, who carries a small medical bag.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

I'm near an Umi! Or-or a-a kaidan, a kaidan! Please!!

PARK RANGER #2

(confused, in Japanese)

A staircase...?

Park Ranger #1 is equally confused, but then --

PARK RANGER #1

(in Japanese)

Ah -- "Winding Steps."

They are joined in their search by several more PARK RANGERS.

Park Ranger #1, speaking Japanese to the others:

PARK RANGER #1 (CONT'D)
He is near "Winding Steps." You
two head that way. I'll go through
the north passage!

He puts the walkie-talkie back to his mouth.

PARK RANGER #1 (CONT'D)
(in broken English)
Hello? Are you there?

EXT. AOIKIGAHARA - MOMENTS LATER

By sheer will, Arthur has reached the top of the rocky hill.
He now begins the more dangerous descent.

The walkie-talkie crackles with static and the Park Ranger's
indecipherable speech.

Slithering on his stomach, Arthur inches his way down the
small hillside, carefully avoiding jagged rocks. He grabs
hold of a tree root.

The static breaks. The Park Ranger is clearly heard.

PARK RANGER #1 (V.O.)
Hello? Are you there?

In haste, Arthur lets go of the root to speak into the walkie-
talkie. He tumbles down the rocky hill. The walkie-talkie
flies from his hand, bounces down the hill.

He comes to a hard stop at the bottom. Grabs the walkie-
talkie.

ARTHUR
I can hear you! I'm here -- I came
in from the parking lot. There was
a trail... some signs...
(beat)
Hello? Hello?!

Radio silence. Not even static.

Arthur looks at the back of the walkie-talkie. The battery
compartment is exposed.

One battery is now missing.

ARTHUR
Shit...

Arthur frenziedly runs his hands through the leaves covering
the forest floor. Where the hell is it?!!

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Come on...

Just then, he hears the very distant sound of an AIR HORN.

He stops. Listens intently.

Seconds later, he hears it again.

EXT. AOKIGAHARA - CONTINUOUS

Park Ranger #1 holds down the button of an air horn cannister. Its ear-piercing burst echoes through the forest.

PARK RANGER #1
(into walkie-talkie)
Do you read me? Follow sound of
horn.

No response. Only static.

Park Ranger #1 sounds the air horn again.

EXT. AOKIGAHARA - MOMENTS LATER

Arthur takes invigorated steps through the forest, stumbling toward the audible beacon like a dog hunting a scent.

His legs give from under him, but he climbs back to his feet -- only to fall again.

His body simply cannot support his hope.

But it must. He gets back up.

ARTHUR
(out loud)
I'm here! Hello! I'm here!!

The air horn sounds every ten seconds or so.

Tears stream down his ashen face.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
(sotto)
I'm here. I'm coming...

He struggles to determine the direction the air horn seems to be coming from.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Where...? No...

Suddenly, a tidal wave of relief breaks through Arthur's pained expression.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

a single ribbon, tied off on a nearby branch, stretching ahead through the forest.

Arthur grabs hold of the ribbon. Traces his hand along it as he follows its extension.

Soon, a second ribbon appears, not far from the one he traces.

And then a third and fourth. This is a well-traveled path. More importantly, it's a way out.

Arthur's painful tears transform into tears of hope. His feet, though encumbered by injury, move fleetly.

The air horn sounds louder. Closer.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
(yelling aloud)
Over here! I'm over here!

They're close -- but where are they?!!

Arthur's adrenaline soon begins to abate. His pace slows, his voice weakens.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Please...

Slower and weaker. Slower... and weaker...

Arthur's enervated hand lets go of the ribbon. He tries to follow the trail, but his vision becomes blurry.

His feet take him on an unintended journey away from the ribbon.

He wanders further. His senses dull. The air horn suddenly sounds so soft, so distant.

His feet begin a process of deceleration. Time increases between each lumbering step.

Until his feet stop completely. He falls to his knees.

The world begins to lose all its sharp edges as Arthur fights to remain conscious.

EXT. AOIKIGAHARA - MOMENTS LATER

Park Ranger #2 notices something up ahead. Racing forward, he sees --

-- Arthur, doubled over.

He immediately calls this in over his walkie-talkie.

PARK RANGER #2
(in Japanese)
I see him! Near South trail!

Park Ranger #2 runs toward Arthur.

Moments later, other Park Rangers appear in the distance, approaching from various directions.

Park Ranger #2 finally reaches Arthur. Takes hold of him.

PARK RANGER #2 (CONT'D)
(broken English)
Sir, are you okay?! Sir?

Arthur slowly opens his eyes. Stares blankly.

The other Park Rangers arrive. One wraps Arthur in an emergency blanket. Another compresses his wound with a gauze pad.

PARK RANGER #2
(Japanese)
We have to hurry. Get emergency units on the radio.
(to Park Ranger #1)
Grab his legs.

The Park Rangers carefully pick up Arthur, carry him.

He attempts to speak as the Park Rangers move swiftly through the forest.

ARTHUR
He's still in there... No... you have to get him...

He fades in and out of consciousness.

EXT. NATIONAL PARK ENTRANCE - PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

A group of EMTs await the Park Rangers' arrival. The Rangers soon emerge from the forest, carrying Arthur.

The EMTs place Arthur atop a gurney. Waste no time putting him inside the ambulance.

ARTHUR
You have to find h...

Arthur's nearly incoherent pleas are silenced by the oxygen mask placed over his face.

The ambulance doors are shut. The ambulance speeds off, leaving the Park Rangers behind.

Park Ranger #1 regards the row of empty cars. Shakes his head. It's impossible to understand this level of grief.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Bright sunlight fills the room. You can almost feel the warmth.

Lying comfortably in bed is Arthur. Color has been restored to his face, his health has returned.

He scribbles on a small note pad of hospital stationery.

A ridiculous Japanese TV game show plays in the b.g.

DR. TAKAHASHI enters. His English is perfect.

DR. TAKAHASHI
(re: game show)
We do play baseball, you know.

ARTHUR
This is more fun to watch.

DR. TAKAHASHI
If you say so. Let me take a look.

Dr. Takahashi pulls aside the small bandage covering Arthur's abdomen, revealing a well-healed, sutured wound.

DR. TAKAHASHI (CONT'D)
It's healing nicely. How are you
feeling?

ARTHUR
Better.

DR. TAKAHASHI
Better's good. Better's very good.

Dr. Takahashi shines a pen light into Arthur's eyes, checking his pupils.

ARTHUR
That's bright.

DR. TAKAHASHI
It's a light shining right in your eyeball. It should be.

Dr. Takahashi completes his check-up. He notices Arthur's scribbled notes on the stationary.

DR. TAKAHASHI
(re: game show/scribbling)
Don't tell me you're playing along?

ARTHUR
No, this is... no.

Arthur puts the paper aside. Dr. Takahashi does not pry.

As he leaves, he throws Arthur the remote control. It lands on the bed.

DR. TAKAHASHI
Channel five. It's the seventh inning.

On that suggestion, Dr. Takahashi exits.

INT. HOSPITAL - OFFICE - DAY

Arthur, now dressed in his own clothes, sits on a small couch across from a female MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST. Her English is nearly perfect.

She jots down notes on a clipboard.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST
Why did you go to Aokigahara?

ARTHUR
Because it wasn't working.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST
What wasn't?

ARTHUR
Moving on.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST
Did you go there to end your life?

ARTHUR

Yes.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

Do you still want to end your life?

ARTHUR

No.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

That is the truth?

ARTHUR

I have no reason to lie.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

We need to know you will not harm
yourself. We cannot release you
otherwise.

ARTHUR

I'm telling you the truth.

The Mental Health Specialist looks at him searchingly.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

Do you miss your wife?

ARTHUR

What kind of question is that?

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

An important one.

ARTHUR

I miss her tremendously.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

Do you feel depressed?

ARTHUR

Of course I do.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

Were you depressed before?

ARTHUR

I was numb. Depressed oddly seems
like a step in the right direction.

The Mental Health Specialist takes note.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST
What do you plan to do after you
leave hospital?

ARTHUR
Go back to the forest.

Her pen stops moving. Her eyes lift from the clipboard.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
I made a promise to someone. I'm
going to keep it.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST
You're speaking of the other person
who was with you?

ARTHUR
I have to find him.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST
As I understand it, the Park
Rangers already tried.

ARTHUR
It's a big forest. Trust me.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST
There's a video camera in the
parking lot --

ARTHUR
I know, I saw it.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST
And it saw you on the day you
entered the forest. The Rangers
reviewed the footage from the day
you said he entered. No one
entered Aokigahara that day.

ARTHUR
That can't be the only way in.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST
It's the most convenient way.

ARTHUR
I doubt he cared much about
convenience at that point.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST
You entered through the parking
lot, so apparently you did.

ARTHUR

Look, I was there with someone, okay? I don't know which way he walked in or even what day he actually got there, but when I left him, the guy was dying.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

The fact remains, without any visual confirmation, we have no way of identifying him, and therefore no way of notifying his family.

ARTHUR

Takumi Nakamura.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

There are thousands with that name.

Arthur removes a small note pad from his pocket -- the hospital stationary. Reads his scrawled notes.

ARTHUR

He's about my height. He said he worked in an office, but he lost his job. He's married to a woman named Kiiori, has a child -- Fuya... or Fuyu.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

(confused, skeptical)
Kiiori and Fuyu?

ARTHUR

Something like that.

This information clearly helps little, if at all.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

(slightly exasperated)
Mister Brennan...

Arthur realizes he's reached an impasse.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

I'm telling you, he's in there somewhere.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

I don't doubt that.

ARTHUR

Do you know if the Rangers found a tent? I left him near a tent.

(MORE)

ARTHUR (cont'd)
He could've even crawled back
inside it.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST
It's been two weeks...

ARTHUR
Twelve days.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST
Still. The cold alone would have
been too much, never mind the
condition you said he was in.

ARTHUR
Just answer me. Did they find a
tent?

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST
Yes.
(beat)
There was no sign of the person you
described.

This hits Arthur quite hard. It takes a moment for him to
recover.

ARTHUR
So, that's it? I should just...
what?

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST
I think you should go back home,
begin taking steps to improve your
life, and forget about Aokigahara.

ARTHUR
The reason I'm still here, the
reason I want to be here, is
because of what happened in that
forest. I told him I would go back
there for him; that's what I'm
going to do.

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST
Mister Brennan...

ARTHUR
It's what I'm going to do.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON

a thin line of ribbon, unfurling foot by foot across tree branches.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

Arthur, holding the spool of ribbon, marking his trail as he traverses deeper into...

INT. AOKIGAHARA - DAY

He scans the forest as he limps slightly -- his injured ankle not fully healed.

ARTHUR
(calling out)
Takumi...? Hello...?

After several more steps, the spool is emptied. Undaunted, Arthur removes a new spool from his jacket pocket, ties off the ribbon's end to a branch and resumes his walk.

EXT. AOKIGAHARA - LATER

The sun will soon be setting. The temperature drops accordingly.

Arthur's gait has slowed slightly. His breaths are deeper, require more effort.

His ribbon is the only one that remains; gone are the intersecting pathways marked by grief-stricken travelers.

He stops to catch his breath. Looks around. His isolation is frighteningly apparent. It's then he sees something far off to his left that gives him pause --

A familiar clearing. Its area distinct from the surrounding woods.

Moving toward it, Arthur sees --

The manila envelope he left behind, addressed to Joan. It's still at the base of the tree at which he formerly sat.

Next to the envelope are chalky remnants of the prescription pills he had previously dropped.

This landmark proves he's on the right track.

He slips the manila envelope into his pocket. Continues his search.

EXT. AOKIGAHARA - LATER

The sun has almost completely set behind Mt. Fuji. A narrow strip of red sunlight is all that remains of the day.

Arthur carries on, still marking his pathway with ribbon.

Until --

The spool reaches its end. He searches his coat pocket for a new spool, then the other. Both are empty.

He stares ahead into the vast expanse of forest before him.

A beat.

He forges ahead, abandoning his lifeline.

EXT. AOKIGAHARA - MOMENTS LATER

A breeze undulates the treetops, exposing the inauspicious presence of storm clouds.

Arthur peers over his shoulder, watching as his ribbon falls deeper and deeper into the background with each step.

He removes the hospital stationary pad from his pocket. Tears off a blank page, crumbles it, drops it to the ground. Once further ahead, he does the same again.

EXT. AOKIGAHARA - MOMENTS LATER

Arthur's pace has slowed considerably.

Storm clouds saturate the sky. Block out much of what little sunlight remains.

His stationary pad is running low on sheets of paper.

His eyes suddenly widen. He sees the fire ring that was once situated next to the now-removed tent.

He scans the forest.

ARTHUR

(aloud)

Takumi?! Takumi?!

He looks left, right. No sign of Takumi.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Takumi?! Tak...

Arthur's words are cut short at the sight of an arresting, distant image --

An amorphous, beige shape.

He hurries closer. Begins to make it out.

A body -- someone awkwardly splayed across a raised portion of earth, wearing a beige jacket. Arthur's jacket. The one he left behind with Takumi.

ARTHUR

(sotto)

No...

But when Arthur reaches the top of the small hill, he finds --

-- an empty jacket. Looking around, able to see for great distance in all directions, Arthur does not see any trace of Takumi. It is as if he simply vanished.

Arthur's chin falls to his chest. Defeated, the last balled-up sheet of stationary slips from his fingers.

Aware of his failure, and equally exhausted from his effort, Arthur pulls his discarded beige jacket from the ground.

Just then --

His expression changes to one of utter astonishment. As Arthur stands, thunderstruck, staring at something on the ground, WE HEAR --

VOICE-OVER AUDIO FLASHBACKS:

TAKUMI (V.O.)

...Things are not as they seem
here.

TAKUMI (V.O.)

...This forest is what you would
call purgatory.

Arthur's mind begins to race...

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST (V.O.)

...The Rangers reviewed the footage
from the day you said he entered.
No one entered Aokigahara that day.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Look, I was there with someone,
okay?

TAKUMI (V.O.)

...It is during our darkest times
that our loved ones are closest.
Even those who have passed.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Don't...

TAKUMI (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She is with you. ... The forest
holds her for you.

His face slowly falls slack...

TAKUMI (V.O.)

...What was her name?

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Joan.

TAKUMI (V.O.)

...I am most happy being near the
water.

JOAN (V.O.)

...I loved that lake. Waking up
early, picking orchids.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

...We had a lot of really great
years together. A lot of them.

TAKUMI (V.O.)

What changed?

ARTHUR (V.O.)

We did.

JOAN (V.O.)

...Because God forbid you take care
of me for once.

Tears form in the corners of his eyes as a startling
revelation takes shape.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

...I didn't know her favorite
color. Her favorite season. Or
even her favorite book.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (V.O.)

It was a children's story.

TAKUMI (V.O.)

...You use bread crumb, like
Handsome and Gretel.

Arthur's eyes drift to the crumbled sheet of stationary on
the ground. His "bread crumb" trail.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Hansel. Hansel and Gretel.

Arthur removes the manila envelope from his jacket pocket.
Tears it open. Inside, he finds --

A book. "HANSEL AND GRETEL".

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (V.O.)

...I guess one of them ordered it
for her recently.

Arthur stares at the book. Astounded.

TAKUMI (V.O.)

...Did you love her?

ARTHUR (V.O.)

More than anything on earth.

TAKUMI (V.O.)

...Thank you... for taking care of
me.

The clouds above exhale. But not with rain. With snow.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

...I don't know how to live without
her.

TAKUMI (V.O.)

...You will not have to.

(turns into Joan's voice)
Not forever.

Tears cascade down Arthur's face as snow falls gently on The
Sea of Trees.

REVEAL

what Arthur saw when he lifted the beige jacket from the
ground, and what he still stares at now --

A fully bloomed ORCHID, sprouting through the unfavorable
soil. Tiny flakes of snow land on its fragile petals.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Arthur alone in his row, peering out the window.

The "Hansel & Gretel" book open, resting on his lap.

A Japanese FLIGHT ATTENDANT approaches with the food service cart.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Would you like breakfast, sir?

Arthur registers the question right away. The fog has lifted.

ARTHUR

Yes. Thank you.

He closes his book, but first marks his page with a small slip of paper -- specifically, the sheet of hospital stationary on which he previously scrawled notes.

The Flight Attendant hands him a tray of food.

EXT. AIRPORT PARKING LOT - EVENING

Arthur crosses the open-air level where he abandoned his car. A light dusting of snow covers other vehicles.

He soon finds his car. Partly surprised it's still there.

The door is unlocked, just as he left it. He climbs inside. The keys still hang from the ignition.

He starts the car. A few strokes of the windshield wipers clears away the collected snow.

INT. BRENNAN RESIDENCE - NIGHT

The front door opens, Arthur enters. Hangs his coat. Takes in his familiar surroundings.

He turns up the thermostat.

INT. BRENNAN RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - LATER

Dressed for bed, Arthur sleeps soundly under the covers.

INT. BRENNAN RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - MORNING

Arthur dresses for work. Buttons up his shirt. Notices a small stain on the sleeve.

INT. BRENNAN RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The closet door opens. Arthur stands in an undershirt. His hand glides across his small inventory of clothes, but then reaches toward the back of the closet.

He pulls a crisp, clean Oxford shirt from the rack.

INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE - OFFICE - LATER

Arthur stands by his one window, wearing the same Oxford shirt. He transplants the orchid into a small pot. Places the framed photo of him and Joan next to it.

The copy of "Hansel & Gretel" sits on his desk. The scribbled-on sheet of hospital stationary still serves as its bookmark.

Gabriella walks by. She stops, surprised to see Arthur's door partially open.

GABRIELLA

Arthur.

ARTHUR

Hi.

GABRIELLA

How are you?

ARTHUR

I'm doing better.

GABRIELLA

That's good.

ARTHUR

Yeah.

GABRIELLA

We tried calling you...

ARTHUR

I was away for a little while.

Not wanting to pry, Gabriella delicately changes the subject.

GABRIELLA

(re: orchid)

It's pretty.

ARTHUR

Yeah. I think so, too.

Arthur smiles thinly.

GABRIELLA

Listen... I might not be able to teach my intro course next semester. I'm sure Gil would be fine with you teaching it.

ARTHUR

I, um... I think this might be it for me.

GABRIELLA

Oh.

ARTHUR

I talked to some people I know at Piedmont. They have openings in their lab.

GABRIELLA

That's great. Good for you.

Arthur's gratitude is evinced with small smile.

A KNOCK at the door. Eric, Arthur's student, pokes his head in the office.

ERIC

Professor?

ARTHUR

Yes, Eric?

ERIC

I have a question about the homework from a few weeks ago.

ARTHUR

You're just getting to it now?

ERIC

Um, yeah.

(re: Gabriella)

I'll come back...

GABRIELLA

No, no stay. I have to get to class.

(to Arthur)

Welcome back.

ARTHUR

Thanks.

Arthur pulls up a chair for Eric. They both sit.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
What can I help you with?

ERIC
I didn't understand the section on
Colin's Law.

ARTHUR
Coulomb's Law. That's a good
one...

ERIC
None of them are good.

ARTHUR
It is, I'm telling you. Let's take
a look. When you have an electro-
static force of attraction or
repulsion, it's directly
proportional to what?

Eric, not fully paying attention --

ERIC
Yellow winter.

ARTHUR
Yellow winter?

Eric points to the copy of "Hansel & Gretel".

ERIC
The paper -- it says yellow winter.

Arthur looks at the slip of hospital stationary protruding
from the book. Some of his scribbling is visible.

Eric removes the sheet of stationary from the book. Points
to what's written on it.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Right here. Yellow winter. Well,
you wrote yellow and winter.

Arthur sees that Eric is pointing to Kiiroi and Fuyu.

ARTHUR
You speak Japanese?

ERIC
My dad was stationed in Okinawa. I
went to grade school there.

ARTHUR

Wait -- those aren't names?

ERIC

Not really. They're a color and a season.

The significance of this is not lost on Arthur. A small, knowing smile forms as he considers the possibility of this serendipitous discovery.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Um, Professor...?

ARTHUR

Hmmmm? Oh, right -- so, it's directly proportional to the electrical charges...

As Arthur continues with his instruction --

ANGLE ON

the photo of Joan and Arthur resting on the windowsill, next to the orchid.

Outside the frosty window, a light snow falls over yellow rays of sunlight.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LAKE - DAY

The sights and sounds of springtime. The placid water offers a mirrored perspective of the surrounding beauty.

In the distance, a small LAKE HOUSE. A narrow trail runs from it to the water's edge, unwinding through a striking field of orchids.

Arthur walks down the trail, carrying an object covered with a plastic shopping bag.

Time has been good to him. He looks healthy, happy. He wears a polo shirt, emblazoned discreetly with the company name and logo for "PIEDMONT SCIENTIFIC".

He finds what he apparently deems a suitable patch of soil. Kneels down, unveils what was covered with the plastic shopping bag --

The orchid. Like him, it has grown stronger. More alive.

Arthur transplants the flower, placing it among the thousands of others like it, forever making it part of this perfect place.

FADE OUT:

THE END