The faint knocking and scratching noises emanating from just beyond his bedroom window prompt Titus Mayweather to lift the needle off of his old RP3 turntable, bringing an abrupt end to Screaming Jay Hawkins' "I Put a Spell on You". He sits and stares at the windowsill, watching the flowing white curtain sway back and forth in the cool, autumn night air. He closes his eyes, allowing his mind to wander. It conjures up an image from his past: him–as a much younger man–relentlessly moving through the moonlit corridors of some type of factory.

He pauses in front of a set of clear, PVC strip curtains. The frigid air reeks of meat and blood. His heart pounds hard against his chest, yet his breathing is well-regulated due to his years of training. He positions himself as far to the left of the frame as he can get, then he takes two quick breaths, and holds, before crossing the threshold.

He leans through the plastic, lowering his body slightly as he clears both sides of the entryway. Once he is sure that he is safe from any would-be attackers, he exhales, then stands back up, repositioning his Glock 17 to the temple index, before beginning to survey the room with the flashlight he holds in his opposite hand. His exhaled breath condenses while he slowly creeps through the room.

He makes his way past the stainless steel table in the center of the room, slowly inching closer and closer to the large freezer at the back. He notices that the door to the freezer is slightly ajar. He aims his gun and flashlight at the freezer door, then pauses, waiting for someone to burst out at him. After nothing happens, he moves fast, yanking the door open, revealing two rows of butchered carcass hanging from meat hooks. He squints his eyes, noticing that one of the hooked carcasses in the middle of the freezer is slowly swaying. He barely has enough time to make out the large, looming shadow behind the carcass before it lunges at him.

His index finger grips the trigger, but before it can add enough force to fire, a blaze of sunlight radiates in a mesmerizing explosion from behind the shadow. Standing in front of him now is a beautiful, beige-skinned goddess. She glides towards him, her curly, honey-colored hair flowing in the cool, summer breeze. She smiles at him, before extending her hand out. His hand–no longer brandishing his service weapon–reaches out, and takes hers. He notices that the scenery itself has changed - no longer is he in the dark, frigid meat-packing plant; instead, he is standing in a scenic, forest grove, surrounded by applauding onlookers all dressed in formal wear. He pulls the woman close, now fully admiring her A-line, satin dress. Her free hand reaches up, and the back of her fingers lovingly caress his cheek, before working their way to the back of his neck.

"Oh Ti," she whispers to him. He leans in and kisses her…

Titus jolts awake, gasping for breath. He vaults forward, sitting up as his hands dart up towards his throat, but before he can reach it, his breathing begins to slowly regulate. He stares around the room, taking a few seconds before he recognizes his surroundings. Suddenly, the door at the opposite end of his room bursts open, and a woman walks in, holding a glass of water. She resembles the woman from his dream–or vision–or whatever it was–but she is older. He stares at her, quickly trying to scan through his memory, trying to come up with her name. "Geor… Georgina? Georgie?" he asks. The woman lets out a deep sigh, her face conveying an expression of sadness.

"No, dad," she responds, as she walks over to him. "It's Charlotte… I heard you rustling around and talking. I brought you your night medicine." Titus continues to stare at her, growing

increasingly anxious by his mistaking her identity. He finally reaches out his hand, accepting the medicine and the water.

"Sorry. I must have dozed off…" He takes the medicine. "Do you hear those knocking and scratching noises outside?" Charlotte cranes her neck towards the window, listening intently for a second, before shaking her head.

"It's probably just the weather. It's October now, you know…" Titus grumbles, not willing to admit to his daughter that he had not remembered. She takes the water from him, and sets it down on the shelf underneath his turntable. "Let's get you into bed, pop. Busy day tomorrow–"

"What's tomorrow?" he interrupts.

"We have your doctor's visit," she responds. Titus grumbles again, remaining stoic as his daughter reaches behind him to fluff his pillow. He lays back, and she covers him up. "I'm going to turn your light off, alright? If you need anything, I'm in the next room." Titus nods, then turns his body to face the wall. Charlotte kisses his cheek, and walks away. She stops at the door, and turns back. "I love you, dad."

"I love you too, Georgie," he mumbles back, already partially asleep.

"Dad, you need to eat faster! We have to go!" Titus snaps out of a daydream, focusing on the plate of food sitting in front of him, uncertain of what he was just thinking about.

"It's oatmeal… I don't like oatmeal…"

"You love oatmeal, pop," a man sitting across the kitchen table says, lowering his newspaper to stare at Titus. Titus recognizes the man instantly - Bill, Charlotte's husband. Titus slowly pushes the plate away.

“Guess I’m just not that hungry this morning.”

Titus stares out the car window at the trees as they drive, admiring the colors of the leaves: brilliant oranges, reds, and yellows. He pays little attention to the conversation his daughter is having with someone on her phone, only catching fragments. “... He’s getting worse, Skye,” she says. “You better come soon so that you can tell him the news…” Titus recognizes the name Charlotte mentioned, but he cannot place it. He closes his eyes, and repeats the name in his head. He opens his eyes again, and as if on cue, he sees a little, red-haired girl peddling her bike alongside them. She turns her head to smile at him, and he smiles back.

“We are about to start the test, Mr. Mayweather,” a static-sounding voice floods the room. “You will hear some loud banging noises. Just do your best to remain calm and still while the test is being carried out.” The patient table Titus now lays on top of begins to slowly slide forward, thrusting Titus into a darkened tunnel. Inside of the tunnel, the MRI machine begins whirring and banging…

… His gun fires, hitting the shadow man center mass, dropping him…

… Another loud **bang**! Titus watches and listens as the screened-in porch door leading up to a dilapidated old house blows closed, crashing awkwardly against the frame, before slowly creaking open again. Off in the distance now, up a long pathway leading down to the house, he sees the outline of the meat packing plant. He slowly inches up the steps to the house, and sneaks past the screen door. He places his hand on the door’s knob, and slowly turns it, pleased to find that it is not locked. He opens the door, then enters.

The house smells strange–like a mixture of chemicals, stale air, and sweat. Titus looks around the first room. He is disturbed by the complete lack of furniture in what *should be* the home's living room. Across the hallway from the empty living room is the kitchen. Titus enters the kitchen, moving towards the old, cigarette-stained refrigerator positioned next to a set of dusty, wooden cabinets. As he approaches the fridge, he hears the humming of electricity running through it. He opens the fridge to find a loaf of bread, a mostly-empty package of Oscar Mayer bologna, two single slices of American cheese, and a large jug full of a light red substance, which looks like homemade Kool-aid. He closes the fridge, then works his way back towards the hallway.

The hallway consists of multiple closed bedroom doors. Titus approaches the first door, and swings it open, revealing another empty bedroom. He closes the door, and works his way to the one across the hall, but when he tries the knob, the door is locked. He begins moving to the next group of doors, when a faint knocking noise catches his attention, only the noise sounds like it is coming from within the wall between the locked door and the next door on that side.

He quickly moves to try the doorknob of the second door, and it opens. Inside he finds a dingy, red loveseat, positioned in front of a large, wooden entertainment center, with a TV positioned in its hollowed-out middle, and a VCR sitting on a shelf directly underneath. He approaches the entertainment center and notices that–on either side of the TV–there are glass doors which open to reveal collections of homemade VHS tapes. He shines his flashlight on the tapes, trying to make out the almost illegible labels. A shiver runs down his spine when he realizes that *all* of the tapes are simply labeled with names and years.

Titus' attention shifts when he hears the knocking sound again–this time much more faint–coming from the other end of the room where there is only an empty wall. He approaches

the wall, presses his ear up to it, and slowly taps the butt of his flashlight on it. His heart drops when, a few seconds later, he hears the tapping sound again, as if someone is trying to respond to him.

He wastes no time moving back down the hallway to the locked door. He has to throw all of his 6'1'', 178-pound frame into the door three times before he bursts through it. This room is just as peculiar as the previous room: completely empty with the exception of a fireplace smack dab in the center of the back wall.

Titus sizes up the room, feeling like something is wrong - like the distance between this room and the last is much larger than the actual square footage inside suggests. He approaches the fireplace, finding it odd that it is *just* a hollowed-out fireplace frame, with nothing that can actually be used *inside* of the firebox to light a fire. He dips his body down, and instinctually reaches his arm inside of the fireplace, feeling around atop the frame for any deformities. His fingers run across an awkward latch along the far right side. He pulls it, and the firebox pops out, revealing a hidden door. He uses the tip of his shoe to further pop open the firebox door, before getting down on one knee, and shining his flashlight into the hidden chamber.

Titus is startled when his flashlight beam catches a tiny, tied-up, blonde body laying atop a stained mattress at the opposite end of the chamber.

Acting on pure adrenaline, Titus maneuvers his way through the hidden firebox door, and rushes to the tied-up child. As he unties the little girl, his head swivels around the room, the set-up of which makes his skin crawl. Off to the side of the bed stands a tripod with a large video camera attached to it. It is only then that Titus gets a better look at the walls of the hidden chamber, and notices that they all contain custom insulation, as well as shackled chains mounted

into the wall near the tripod. Titus looks down at the small girl in his arms, noticing that the back of her blonde hair is stained with dark, reddish-brown blood.

"You're okay now, sweetie," he whispers to the girl. She barely has the strength to lift her tiny head, but she slowly raises her little arms and hands up towards him. Titus notices that her small fingers are bloodied as well, as if she clawed at the wall before beginning to knock on it with her head. She reaches around his neck and shoulders, hugging him with every remaining ounce of energy she has before she passes out in his arms…

… "Okay, Mr. Mayweather. You're all finished" the static voice stirs Titus back into the moment. "You can go ahead and get dressed now."

Days pass without Titus noticing the knocking and scratching noises at his window.

One night though, a knock at the front door startles him as he sits in his living room with Charlotte and Bill watching TV. Charlotte gets up and answers the door. Titus watches as she hugs a red-haired woman. As the pair walk in, Titus notices that the red-haired woman appears to be younger than Charlotte. "Hey, Bill," the red-head says, as Bill gets up to hug her. She stops in front of Titus, leans down, and wraps his hands in hers. He looks up into her eyes, and instantly recognizes her. He greets her with a warm smile.

"Skylar," he whispers, struggling to get up from his chair while still gripping her hands. Once he's upright, he hugs her.

Titus, Charlotte, Bill, and Skylar all head into the kitchen. As the other three sit down at the kitchen table, Charlotte goes to pour Skylar a cup of their leftover coffee from a few hours ago. Skylar waves the coffee off, asking if they have "anything stronger". Charlotte laughs, then dips into a cupboard, producing a bottle of Jack Daniels, along with four glasses. Titus eyeballs the square-shaped bottle, having totally forgotten that the stuff exists, but being instantly reminded of its sticky, sweet taste, and the burn that accompanies it. Titus stares back at Skylar, eyeballing her; despite recognizing her, and *still* knowing her name, Titus feels like it's been forever since he's actually *seen* her.

"When was the last time we saw one another?" Titus summons up the strength to ask, embarrassed that he even has to.

"It's been a handful of years Ti," Skylar responds, her tone affectionate, but underlined with sorrow or guilt. "Mom's funeral." Titus tries to conjure up an image of Skylar's mother, but is unable to, just like he is unable to remember how he first met Skylar. Skylar studies his face, noticing the blankness there. "Do you remember my mother?"

"Somewhat," Titus lies, ashamed by the fact that he doesn't.

"Do you remember my sister, Zoe?" Titus closes his eyes, trying to picture Zoe in his head, but once again failing. Suddenly, a thought enters his mind.

"Was she blonde? 1990? Did I *find* her?" Titus asks, hopeful that the answer is yes to all of his questions. Skylar's face turns down in disappointment.

"She was blonde, yes, but you never found her…" Titus lowers his head, again embarrassed, but Skylar doesn't give him time to wallow. "We met one another in 1995. I was 13 years old. You were the agent assigned to investigate my sister's abduction…"

“I’m… Sorry I couldn’t find her,” Titus responds, still upset with himself. Skylar shakes her head, and a smile forms across her face.

“But that’s one of the reasons I am here, Ti. Three days ago I got a call from a woman claiming to be my sister! She’s coming to our hometown next weekend, and I would love for you to accompany me so that you can *finally* meet her!”