

INT. OFFICE – DAY

The pristine surface of an executive desk.

Some quick raps and a door opens. Feet shuffle near. A hurried nervous voice.

VOICE (O.S.)

Sadie. Uh. Dr. Karis. I got something.

A Manila folder slides across.

A manicured hand slaps it still and gives pause. With reluctance, the hand squares the folder.

VOICE (O.S.)

I was careful. He doesn't know. It's good. Real good.

Tapping nails debate and decide. Eager, KARIS, 40, slithery and sanguine, flips the folder open and quickly digests the block paragraphs and various intersecting lines on a graph.

KARIS

How did you get it?

VOICE (O.S.)

Apparently he's afraid he may drop his notebook in the toilet. I only had time to copy the last few pages. All new, with the pen I gave him yesterday.

Bothered, she rotates the graph, flips and scans a photocopied page of hasty handwritten notes.

KARIS

No. No. He can't. Couldn't. How? Has it been checked?

In disbelief, she flips the pages and checks some figures.

VOICE (O.S.)

I don't know. He was already in the lab. Practically lives there. Maybe he's working at home?

KARIS

He may keep his notebook with him at all times, but he wouldn't dare work at home. She's there. Not after—

VOICE (O.S.)

Maybe with a private company? Another university?

KARIS

He trusts no one. Nothing else?

VOICE (O.S.)

It was all I could get.

Karis slips the folder into a file safe. Her mood worsens. Worried, she shuts the drawer.

VOICE (O.S.)

He's starting to trust me. Maybe he'll just share his--

KARIS

--You? Never. I need it. Get it. All of it. There's too much at stake. It can't be him. After everything I went through.

VOICE (O.S.)

I sacrificed too.

KARIS

I more than any man. He should have stayed in that backwater hole with their precious little gift from God. Given up.

She remembers something troubling and slides her hand across her stomach.

VOICE (O.S.)

He's a hawk. I was lucky to get this. If I get caught snooping, Dr. Karis, any violation, the university will expel me. Especially after our last --my record.

The Voice lingers and awaits reassurance.

KARIS

Don't. And that little incident was suppressed. Our little secret. Regardless, you'll be taken care of.

VOICE (O.S.)

I have your word.

A slight pause. She focuses, appears serious and looks at him.

KARIS

You have my word.

EXT. LAKE – DAY

An oppressively cold winter day in the Pacific Northwest. The sun peeks through a low ceiling of gray skies. Fresh snow blankets the wavy terrain of an open field. An endless forest of pine trees cast dark shadows upon the edge of an iced lake.

ARNIMUS, 40's, bad haircut, reserved and impulsive, forges ahead as he tugs a sled loaded with ice fishing gear bound with twine. He stops atop a ridge at the lake's edge and chocks the sled's rail. His raspy breath manifests as a dense white cloud which lazily drifts. He raises his goggles and takes it all in.

He scoffs at a knot in the twine and his words race alongside his thoughts.

ARNIMUS

A Bowline is not a bow. Now, we have a knot. I never taught you to tie knots, did I? Lazy relish knots. Funny, it's all you seem to be good at. You're better than this!

He expertly draws a gravity knife from his pocket, flicks the blade open and swipes the twine. A makeshift ramp slides from the sled.

XAVIER, 10, aloof and clumsy, lumbers through the deep snow as his mittens clasps a piece of colored construction paper. He trips and lands face first with a yelp. He climbs to his feet and wipes chunks of wet snow from his scarf.

XAVIER

Sorry, dad. I'll get it right next time. I promise.

ARNIMUS

You promised last time.

XAVIER

Sorry. I'll try harder to not be slow.

Arnimus looks him over and poorly conceals his disgust.

ARNIMUS

You're not sl--.

Hopeful, Xavier saddens as Arnimus coldly avoids encouragement .

ARNIMUS

I checked. A month of sub-freezing temperatures, it's quite thick at center. Still thin along the edges where debris settles. Decomposition generates heat. Creates a disparity in the ice's thickness.

XAVIER

What's a disparity?

ARNIMUS

Sections thicker than others. Not all equal. Remember when the city ran its pumps, the bubbles looked like a fountain? All winter long, spots never froze.

They focus on an area upon the lake along the distant tree line.

The tree line fades and disappears with a pulse of snow flurries.

XAVIER

No.

ARNIMUS

Well it did! That filtration system decimated the ecosystem. I led the petition to shut that wretched thing off. I don't care what those half-witted biologists at county say!

XAVIER

Can I have hot chocolate and Skittles when we get back?

Arnimus give him a sideways look.

ARNIMUS

Disgusting.

Arnimus places the ramp. He stumbles down the steep slope to the lake's edge and kicks snow to make a clearing. He puts weight on the thin ice at the lake's edge and it cracks.

A dead fish protrudes at the surface. Its open mouth and shiny eye make it look surprised.

Xavier scoots down the slope and drops his drawing.

XAVIER

Weeee...

Arnimus studies the fish as Xavier lumbers near.

ARNIMUS

You must of known this was coming.

XAVIER

Did the pump kill him?

ARNIMUS

No, the pump's been off a year. We moved here for the peace and quiet. To experience nature in its state.

XAVIER

Mom said we moved because you like to be alone.

ARNIMUS

Perhaps.

XAVIER

She said you don't like anyone.

ARNIMUS

Some people, for good reason.

XAVIER

She said you think you're smarter. Can't get along--

ARNIMUS

Most. Maybe. I get along perfectly fine with--

XAVIER

She said you talk down to people—

ARNIMUS

What? Wait. Enough!

Arnimus beams and Xavier holds back tears. He shakes off his anger and focuses on the fish.

ARNIMUS

This was something else. Evolution taught fish to sense winter. To know survival. To stay deep in the warmer water. Be alive to procreate in the spring when the temperature warms. Maybe his death was just his time.

XAVIER

Can we eat it?

ARNIMUS

We'll catch fresh ones. No telling how long—

XAVIER

It's frozen, like in our freezer?

ARNIMUS

The very moment it past, it's DNA, cellular structure destabilized, atrophy in death. From a genomic standpoint this is no longer considered a fish.

Arnimus realizes Xavier was lost in the dialogue and seeks to playfully connect.

ARNIMUS

Besides, we don't know how he died, right? Would you want to eat him if had diarrhea? Death by doo-doo.

XAVIER

No, gross! Fish don't poop! Do they?

A fun moment between a father and his son.

ARNIMUS

Everything poops! Let's see what we catch. I have a good feeling. And be careful. If the ice cracks, remember.

XAVIER

Fall to my stomach and slide like a penguin.

ARNIMUS

Yes. If it fails, T your arms. Stay low and pull yourself out. Don't panic. I'll get you. Got it, X-man!

XAVIER

A-ok!

Arnimus glances at the drawing.

ARNIMUS

Whoa. I like it. Very nice. What is it? A boat?

XAVIER

No. A man.

ARNIMUS

Oh. Well. A red man! Ok. I see something that could be a man. Or a triangle. Shouldn't he have a head?

XAVIER

I just started. He has a head with triangles and wears a hat. He said he wants to help you. It was gonna be a surprise. He wanted me to go fish with him before you got up.

ARNIMUS

He had the right idea. Fish bite better early. Wouldn't the hat cover the triangles?

XAVIER

I suppose.

Confused, Xavier squints as he tries to recall the image.

Arnimus breaks the thin ice and murky water fills his boot.

ARNIMUS

Damn it!

Arnimus stumbles and stomps and a series of cracks spread.

The creepy echo of ice cracking bounces across the empty valley for entirely too long.

XAVIER

Look at that!

Xavier's eyes track a thick crack as it races and fissures to the lake's distant tree lined shore.

Xavier notices a grayscale FIGURE comingled among the timber. A tattered broad-striped linen suit and Pork Pie hat, the motionless Figure's body squared towards Xavier. Arms fixed at its side, head slightly turned away. Its unblinking oversized and sunken eyes.

XAVIER

Hey. There he is.

A cold breeze whips and Xavier blinks.

A deep and heavy solitary rumble of thick ice settling ends all natural noise. The air calms and flurries pause in perfect silence.

ARNIMUS

There what is?

Xavier scans the empty space along the shore where the Figure had stood.

XAVIER

I thought I saw.

At the treetops, the elevated Figure rises skyward and disappears among the gray skies and a new squall.

INT. HOUSE – DAY

A homely kitchen with frugal and bland decor.

Yellow rubber gloved hands manically scrub a tiny stain on a soapy glass.

RHONESHIA, 35, manic and frail, trembles and wipes her eyes. She reacts to the echo and spots Arnimus and Xavier at the lake's edge.

The glass slips and shatters.

Tears roll down her cheek. In despair, she collapses. She gathers herself and pour a glass of water. She swallows a few prescription pills, stares out the window and wishes away her depression.

Shards of glass and some smeared blood droplets on the floor.

EXT. LAKE – DAY

Arnimus helps Xavier hop over the thin ice.

Xavier starts a rhyme as he swings from Arnimus' hand, clings and nearly falls as he jumps.

XAVIER

Then I—

Xavier lands two-footed and grins.

XAVIER

--stomp it's little head.

ARNIMUS

Stomp that way. I got the sled.

XAVIER

A little bird with a yellow bill. It landed on. My windowsill. I coaxed it in--

In disbelief, Arnimus stares as Xavier and shrugs.

ARNIMUS

Damn Internet. Amazing what passes as a nursery rhymes.

Arnimus notices the wedged chock and yanks the tether sideways. A final tug and the sled accelerates down the slope. He jutes and stumbles backwards as the sled pirouettes and overturns. He curses as his other boot breaks ice and fills with brackish water.

The sound of a breeze muffles Xavier's rhyme and stomps.

ARNIMUS

Damn! So much for warm feet.

Frustrated, Arnimus stands and dusts himself off and examines the spilt supplies.

Xavier dances to his chorus as he nears the lake's center.

XAVIER

--Its little head. And then I--

Arnimus kneels and gathers the supplies as Xavier goes still and lowers his hands to his side.

A breeze whistles and a light flurry falls.

Xavier disappears through the surface, without panic or a splash.

ARNIMUS

No flat edges. A saucer wouldn't do this. I gave your mom simple instructions. She couldn't even do that. Who doesn't know a sled from a saucer? Who? Her. The things I've put up with. What good is genius if no one listens?

Arnimus drags the sled across the lake's edge. He shakes his wet boots and glances at the barren grey landscape and follows Xavier's footprints.

ARNIMUS

Gonna end up with frostbite. This may be our shortest trip ever, X. Let's set lines. Assuming I can break ice.

A breeze carries flurries which obscure Xavier's trail.

Arnimus flips his scarf and realizes Xavier is not in front.

ARNIMUS

X. Xavier. Xavier? Stay where I can see you.

He spins and scans and sees nothing. He notices traces of footprints lead towards the lake's center and disappear. Some panic creeps into his voice.

ARNIMUS

Xavier? Xavier!

He releases the tether and jogs. He notices a fissured patch. Frantic, he dashes.

ARNIMUS

No. No!

He drops to his knees, wipes the light dusting from the patch and peers through the ice. He repels at a twisted gray scale reflection. He refocuses and bangs his fists. The patch reluctantly cracks.

ARNIMUS

No! Please, no!

In the strangely peaceful and murky world beneath the ice, the current dances Xavier's motionless body just beyond the patch's edge. Angelic and frozen in time, his limbs are spread wide, head tilted down. Tiny air bubbles escape his mouth and roil past his open eyes.

Arnimus glances at the pick axe on the distant sled and decides to grab his pocket knife. Some violent stabs dislodge ice chunks. The errant blade closes on his gloved hand and slices a few fingers to the bone. A brutal slaying. Blood droplets fly and splatter. The patch gives way.

The current shifts and pulls Xavier into the green darkness as Arnimus submerges his head, scans and sees nothing. He repels as shivers and panic sets in.

ARNIMUS

No. This can't be!

At the distant tree line the Figure floats towards the sky.

Desperate, Arnimus dashes in circles and scans the lakes edge and searches snow drifts.

ARNIMUS

Xavier! Xavier!

He refocuses on the ice. He grabs the axe and unleashes a fury of random slashes.

Exhausted and in disbelief, he breaks down and buries his face in his hands.

The ice creaks and moans as a squall begins.

LATER

Arnimus sits upon the steep ridge. His blood smeared face registers exhaustion. A COP waves a thermos in his shivering face.

COP

Mr. Muth, coffee? Dr? You're going to freeze. We'll get you if we find anything. Go inside. The divers said it may be a several hours, perhaps days, depending on the currents. How soon gases accumulate, if it rises—

Arnimus glares the Cop into silence.

COP

Sorry. Where's my head? You're a science guy, you know the situation. You should be with your wife. I'll get you right quick if we learn anything.

Arnimus watches a RESCUE TEAM on the ice as a diver slips into the water and others use power equipment to brush aside snow, cut ice-holes and search.

INT. KITCHEN – NIGHT

Arnimus clenches his stitched and bandaged hand while his wife stares out the window at some distant flashlights panning the lake. The steam from their breath lingers. Some bland tea and salt crackers sit untouched.

ARNIMUS

Sit. You should probably eat something.

Despondent, she ignores him and he gives up. The mood is somber. She notices beyond the window, a pair of flashlights approach the house.

Arnimus alerts to a soft knock with some optimism as a shivering Cop lets himself in. His faces hangs heavy with despair.

COP

We found your son.

ARNIMUS

No!

Distraught, Arnimus pushes past the Cop and Rhoneshia and dashes outside.

Rhoneshia's head hangs. She accepts the moment with lifeless indifference. With strange relief, she watches Arnimus' crazed dash toward the lake.

EXT. LAKE – NIGHT

Arnimus gasps and focuses on a few men waving flashlights. A DIVER puts a heavy jacket and stocking cap over his wetsuit.

Arnimus slows to walk as he realizes the encircled men are studying something. He steps close and sees Xavier and time stops. He notices Xavier's eyes and mouth are open.

Some frost forms on Xavier's hair as his matte blue skin begins to shine.

DIVER

Ready to move him?

Arnimus wanders close.

The Diver notices and realizes who he is and gathers himself.

DIVER

Sir. I'm so sorry. We're going to have to carry him. We can't risk bringing the skidoo out.

The Diver cinches the ridged body and the ice in Xavier's clothing cracks.

DIVER 2

We need to get him inside. He's gonna freeze.

ARNIMUS

He's alive?

Some confused enthusiasm as Arnimus alerts.

Bewildered, the Rescue Team exchanges worried glances directed at Arnimus.

DIVER 2

Sir. Please. There's nothing more--

ARNIMUS

--Wait! He may be alive. His brain—

DIVER

I'm sorry sir. Not this long. No pulse, no dilation, no nothing.

In an unsettling moment, the Diver peels Xavier's body from the ice. The sound of Velcro separating as the frost between the body and the ice rips.

ARNIMIUS

No. Please. I got him. He's my son.

The Rescue Team watches as Arnimus gathers Xavier's body and shuffles away.

Tears stream down Arnimus' face as he whimpers and trudges ahead. He struggles to look at his Xavier's face. Pained, he grimaces and averts his gaze.

The icy film on Xavier's face reflects a shiny blueish light.

INT. BEDROOM – NIGHT

Arnimus alerts and sits up. He scans the room and sees a boy's silhouette at the window. Confused and doubtful, he's hopeful to awaken from a dream.

ARNIMUS

Xavier?

The figure shuffles.

XAVIER

Yeah dad?

Overcome by emotion, Arnimus slides to the edge of the bed, ready to dash and embrace him.

ARNIMUS

It's you! Oh my god, Xavier. I was so worried--

Arnimus recognizes a strange waterlogged gait as the figure shuffles its feet and sloshes. Faint concern registers on his face as he remembers.

ARNIMUS

Son, are you okay?

Cautious, Arnimus stands and studies the lumpy shadow

XAVIER

Can I come home, dad?

In disbelief, Arnimus shakes his head.

ARNIMUS

You are home!

Arnimus freezes as he hears weeping and realizes something is wrong.

XAVIER

Dad, please help me.

ARNIMUS

Of course, of course!

He kneels at the figures feet.

XAVIER

You took me to die. Why?

ARNIMUS

I didn't. I. I'm so sorry, I'm so very sorry.

XAVIER

Do it again.

ARNIMUS

What?

XAVIER

Make me.

Xavier shuffles into the light and Arnimus sees him just as he looked after he drowned. The shimmering moonlight reflects off his shiny blue skin and frosty hair locks.

Arnimus jumps awake from a nightmare and looks around. He sees RHONESHIA'S figure in the window. He decides this moment feels real. Some deep breaths calm him.

ARNIMUS

You should come to bed.

He notices she shuffles with a familiar waterlogged gait.

She stops a foot away from him and whimpers. Desperate for a hug, she raises her arms and sobs.

He considers embracing her but decides to slip beneath his sheets.

Rhoneshia refocuses on the moon hovering over the snowy lake.

EXT. LAKE – DAY

Arnimus hasn't slept and looks horrible. He fastens his pajamas as he steps out the front door and scans. He scans and sees nothing. He senses something and carefully steps into the snow.

He realizes something amiss and feels compelled to head towards the lake. He stumbles and loses his slippers in the snowdrift. Some urgency compels him to continue barefoot.

He jogs and tumbles down the slope at the lake's edge. He sees a snow covered kneeling figure near lake center. He dashes. As he draws near and sees a figure and realizes.

ARNIMUS

No. No. No.

Snowdrift covers her legs. Some flurries pile upon her shoulders. Head angelically canted and hands locked in prayer.

In disbelief, he sees Rhoneshia's frozen face.

ARNIMUS

No. Please.

He reaches to embrace her and slips. He stumbles and knocks her ridged body over. Supine, their eyes meet.

Frozen tears tracks arc her cheek.

The Figure at the distant tree line remains unnoticed.

#### EXT. UNIVERSITY LABORATORY – DAY – ESTABLISHING

Formidable security checkpoint at an hardened entrance. A series of lab coat donning professionals surrender phones and display identification cards to serious looking guards.

#### INT. UNIVERSITY LABORATORY - DAY

A contained laboratory workspace. A wall covered white-board displays a kaleidoscope of shaded dots gently pulsing into each other and bouncing apart.

Enthused, Arnimus twists a dial and pushes a button. He scans a page in a notebook and quickly shuts it.

ARNIMUS

Let's just see.

A squad of blue shaded dots appears. They quickly distribute and bind with the other shaded dots and form an elaborate spiraling tree.

GEORGE, 25, sly and upbeat, takes it in with enthusiasm.

GEORGE

Simply beautiful! Cutting edge genius. Doc, you'll be the one. The first. You did it!

ARNIMUS

The bind won't last a second. Long enough.

George's enthusiasm wanes. A pointed question.

GEORGE

How did you do it?

ARNIMUS

Ice.

George hands Arnimus a bottle of water.

GEORGE

Ice? Water molecules aren't that small. Speaking of which. You got to stay hydrated.

ARNIMUS

An ice-like plasma quality inherent to select genes. Suspended animation. Temporary alters the properties.

George takes some pleasure as Arnimus sips the water.

GEORGE

How exactly does that work?

George notices Arnimus eye twitch as he recalls something unsettling. Impatient and driven, he taps for Arnimus attention.

ARNIMUS

What!

GEORGE

Sorry. I couldn't tell if you were daydreaming or calculating. Didn't want to disturb the latter.

ARNIMUS

Then don't!

GEORGE

Still, the first to genetically remove X chromosome DMD gene mutation. Imagine where this could lead? The end of multiple sclerosis. That'd be something.

ARNIMUS

Toes wet. There are more important things.

GEORGE

More important than curing MS! Shouldn't we tell someone? Alert the dean.

ARNIMUS

No!

GEORGE

I guess that's smart. Keep this quiet until you're sure.

ARNIMUS

I am sure.

GEORGE

Forgive me doc. I still get excited about scientific breakthroughs. Maybe I'll outgrow that. We get DNA Microscopy lab access an hour a month. There's a line around the block of PHDs to get in here. 45 minutes to calibrate. We have 10 minutes left. What else do you care to run? Doc?

George notices Arnimus is oddly detached from the moment and glances at Arnimus' mapping pen.

ARNIMUS

Sorry. Lots on my mind.

Arnimus shakes the cobwebs off and edges close to the computer monitor. George slyly swaps the mapping pen for an artist's pen.

GEORGE

I'm glad you're back, doc. I was worried. You upped and took two months off just as my fellowship was set to begin. I held my breath. Happy I waited. Now back with a vengeance! I get it. Family stuff. None of my business.

George's question is met with a glare.

ARNIMUS

Right, it isn't! I needed some personal time.

GEORGE

Family okay?

ARNIMUS

My wife and son are well.

GEORGE

Not a problem with the research. Did you want me to double-check—

George motions for the notebook and Arnimus jumps and snatches it along with the pen.

ARNIMUS

No!

GEORGE

Research validation has never been more scrutinized.  
 Dr. Fung. Ran out of town. Strung himself in  
 embarrassment. Faked research in China of all places.

ARNIMUS

My research is rock solid! Enough!

A long pause and Arnimus makes eye contact.

GEORGE

Sorry about questioning you. I'm just worried about my  
 prospects. I'd feel a little better if I had a better  
 understanding of--

George gulps and his face registers some concern as Arnimus pats his shoulder as a father would.

ARNIMUS

--Soon every sequencing company on the map will be  
 make you offers too good to be true.

He feigns envisioning riches as Arnimus studies him. As Arnimus refocuses on his notes, the George's  
 face registers some worry.

GEORGE

First, gotta discover an elusive cure for the most  
 debilitating disease in history. We need to be judicious  
 with our lab time. You could go to Theresa and change  
 our slot to piggyback Dr. Karis? Her configuration is  
 nearly identical. It would get us an extra 15 minutes—

ARNIMUS

How do know about her project?

GEORGE

Sorry. It's not my business, the history between you.  
 Her work on DNA systemic mutation is compelling. The  
 fellows grab drinks. Talk a little shop.

ARNIMUS

It's not her work, it was mine! You signed an NDA!

George pleads as Arnimus become incensed.

GEORGE

I shared nothing specific, of course. It's just a thought.

ARNIMUS

For the final time, no! No! I despise that woman. You  
 studied under her. Not an original idea in her skull. Lazy  
 hack thief masquerading for brilliance. An unethical

farce. You bring the idea up again, I'll have you thrown out!

Arnimus stops himself.

GEORGE

I'm sorry doc. I won't. Remember I chose your fellowship. I'm here to help you succeed. We're both cut from destiny's cloth.

George nods to the half empty water bottle.

GEORGE

You should finish that up.

Arnimus gulps the rest.

Two jittery men hide their true intentions.

EXT. LAKE – DAY

A miserable day, gusty wind and sleet. Arnimus walks the lake's edge. He stops and remembers his son and wife and focuses on the lake's center.

A Velcro like-noise of leaves crunching beneath the snow as he shuffles his weight.

A blurry grayscale Figure at the distant lake's edge catches his eye.

He refocuses, slips in mud and stumbles. He scans the lake's edge and decides it was nothing.

He looks at some exposed leaves and remembers the Velcro noise. He considers something and squints. An idea resonates and surfaces. He alerts and jumps to his feet.

INT. HOUSE – DAY

Arnimus paces while on the phone. Nervous, he clutches his notebook, a page depicting a fresh diagram of a fuzzy shell around some genes. He focuses on the call, slows his speech, as he commits to making a good impression.

ARNIMUS

I know. It's not about the money. I'm fine with the pay. Like I said, I'm specifically looking for nights and weekends.

A squeaky voice reluctantly agrees.

ARNIMUS

I can start immediately. My references? I'll get those together if they are truly necessary.

Arnimus looks worried and gulps.

INT. UNIVERSITY LABORATORY – DAY

Focused, Arnimus hovers over George's shoulder.

Cautious and optimistic, George studies something under the microscope.

GEORGE

I can't tell. It could be. Success today seems to be more about access than genius. You need genetic materials for CRISPR. tech Labs have tech but not material, or the material but no tech. I guess we're fortunate to have a little bit of both? Huge cost and the burden of regulation. But how are we going to change the world?

ARNIMUS

Maybe its not the world we intend to change?

GEORGE

Everyone has their motive. Fame. Prestige. Glory.

ARNIMUS

All for you, my young friend.

GEORGE

If not those, why go down this path?

ARNIMUS

There are other reasons.

GEORGE

Such as?

Arnimus ignores him and refocuses on some notes.

George glances at the notebook long enough to recognize the artists pen was used.

GEORGE

From a religious perspective. Do you think God would approve of this?

ARNIMUS

Rather would an absence of God's dissuade me? At the end of the day, I am in fact playing God. Never in history has someone been closer to making the existence of God irrelevant.

George gulps and some concern sets in. He's heard enough and changes the topic.

GEORGE

Where'd you source the sample?

Arnimus changes the topic.

ARNIMUS

When's are next go at the DNA Microscopy?

GEORGE

Two weeks. Sooner if Theresa signs off. It's not fair. The way she holds access as a hostage. If we merge projects with Karis' group we'd more access.

ARNIMUS

That half-witted hack! Stand on my shoulders. Wild accusations to hijack my work. I'm too close. Not another word. We'll get access. What's the next test on schedule?

They eye a security door as an lab employee taps a code and enters.

GEORGE

The spectrum array. We need—

ARNIMUS

I know. I'll get it.

GEORGE

Theresa. What are going to tell her? You want me to come with you?

ARNIMUS

No thank you. I'll be fine.

GEORGE

I should review your notes.

ARNIMUS

No, that's not necessary.

GEORGE

We need more material too. This was the last of it. I didn't see requisition. Where did you get it?

ARNIMUS

Do you job! That all you need to do--

Arnimus glares and reconsiders.

He snatches his notebook and sets off.

Eyes abuzz with suspicion, George trails his hasty departure.

INT. GROCERY STORE – DAY

A stressed and frantic WOMAN carries a CHILD and scans. She sees the Red Cross of a Minute-Clinic and hurries onward.

INT. CLINIC – DAY

The child vomits on her shoulder as she tugs the door. BERTA, 30, loud mouthed and lazy, scoffs and peers over her shoulder.

BERTA

Doctor?

Deep in thought, Arnimus lifts his head from a laptop and too many stacks of papers and notes. He pulls the pencil from his teeth and snaps back.

BERTA

Yes, you. I'll get the folder started if you want to do your thing.

Arnimus looks offended with the request. He marks the folder where he left off, puts on his lab coat and makes his way to the lobby.

A dusty snow globe upon a rickety shelf. A farmer, his wife and son, stand alongside a tractor and a barn in an open field encircled by fir trees. Their somber faces devoid expression.

Arnimus slams the office door. Some white power in the globe jumps.

The Woman cleans the bile from the crying Child. Some relief washes over her face as Arnimus shuffles in. She puzzles as she recognizes he's doctor.

WOMAN

Hi. Uh. Doctor. He just started throwing up. Everything.

ARNIMUS

What other symptoms?

WOMAN

Throwing up. I don't know.

ARNIMUS

Have you checked his temperature?

WOMAN

No.

ARNIMUS

Pupil dilation?

WOMAN

What? No! Isn't that what you—

Arnimus scoffs and glares at her. She sneers at his callous manner.

ARNIMUS

Uh. Yeah.

Arnimus examines the Child as he would troubleshoot a dishwasher.

WOMAN

Usually there's a nurse here.

ARNIMUS

I'm a doctor.

The way he says it sounds strange to the both of them.

ARNIMUS

Pardon my bedside manner. I mean I usually don't deal directly with patients. I've spent most of my studies in research. I'm a MD. But this is something I just do—

WOMAN

To give back?

He was searching the ceiling for what to say but her answer resounds well with him.

ARNIMUS

Yes, to give back.

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY

Arnimus and Karis make opposing pitches to a panel for resources. Theresa and a panel. Ok. But only you. He selects Karis. Why? Two approved projects, two approvals. They exit. She nods to Arnimus, we'll swap out. DNA microscopy, uses simple chemical reactions essentially to map a cell's interior, highlighting the contents and indicating exactly where everything can be found. Reveals a wealth of genetic information not accessible with traditional microscopy tools – which receptor genes are turned on or off and if the cells are healthy or full of disease-causing mutations.

Excited and animated, Arnimus pitches his project as Karis dismay as Theresa takes it all in.

THERESA

The allocation of DNA Microscopy is always contentious. University funding and its reputation are always at risk. We need to take back the lead. I will not sit by while another institution blazes ahead.

A tiny grin breaks upon Arnimus' face as Karis sadly studies the desk.

THERESA

That being said. Scrutiny grazes a sterling reputation and camps elsewhere.

Hopeful, Karis refocuses on Theresa.

THERESA

We go through this every quarter.

Arnimus and Karis deflate.

THERESA

There are too many similarities to ignore. I'm well aware of your past. Everyone has one. You should merge—

ARNIMUS

No!

THERESA

I don't know what to say. I really don't understand. I have two PHD/MDs who keep wanting different things at different times. For the short period of time you worked together, you made miracles happen. Maybe we got a little ahead of ourselves. But that's all behind us. In spite of what happened, the board was very excited to have you both back. We don't want to be pushy. But there's too much at stake. You're good judgement should handle forefront issues.

Karis studies Arnimus as he crosses his arms and looks for a distraction.

THERESA

I can't force you work together.

ARNIMUS

You're right. You can't. So don't. So do I get the additional lab time? Yes or no?

THERESA

Dr. Karis' team.

ARNIMUS

To do what with it? My process has the best potential. She has nothing. Better off letting the janitor test mop water. She'll squander--

THERESA

The only person here squandering resources is you! I'm seeing it for the first time. You're stubborn, Dr. Muth. That quality does not fit well in this establishment.

FLASHBACK

INT. FOREST - DAY

A grainy grayscale pine tree forest on a warm spring day.

Dry and brittle pine needles crunch under footsteps.

Arnimus looks towards the brilliant sky and shields his eyes as he steps around a tree. He follows as Xavier lumbers ahead.

XAVIER

In every show, the coyote is back, dad.

ARNIMUS

It's a cartoon. Like roadrunners--

XAVIER

--It's doesn't have to be. You know that dad.

Arnimus realizes Xavier is right.

XAVIER

I can be someone different too. Anyone.

Confused, Arnimus scans the forest as he wonders if this is a dream. He glances past the Figure comingled among the trunks.

ARNIMUS

This is very difficult for me. I know your dead.

Xavier stops walking. His waterlogged shuffle.

XAVIER

I'm not dead.

ARNIMUS

I'm dreaming.

Distraught, Arnimus wipes a tear and studies the ground. He shuffles his feet and some pine needles crack. An unnatural noise in the distance alerts Arnimus and he scans. He sees nothing and dismisses it.

XAVIER

You're not dreaming dad. I'm still alive.

ARNIMUS

You are not! You drowned. I was there! And I will live with that every single moment for the rest of my life!

Frustrated, Arnimus turns and stomps away between rows of trees.

XAVIER (O.S.)

Don't go! Don't leave me here to die!

ARNIMUS

You're dead.

A growl.

Arnimus freezes. He scans and notices a flash of movement.

More growls.

Arnimus sees a coyote quickly disappear behind a tree.

XAVIER (O.S.)

Dad, help!

Arnimus hears Xavier's primal scream and he dashes.

ARNIMUS

Xavier, I'm coming!

A pack of coyotes growl.

Arnimus reaches the clearing and sees Xavier cower as coyotes encircle him.

XAVIER

Dad, save me. Save me!

ARNIMUS

I got you.

Arnimus carries Xavier and dashes as a pack of coyotes pursue.

He stumbles and they fall. He wildly swings a branch as the pack surrounds him.

Xavier crawls behind a shrub near a boulder.

XAVIER

Don't let them get me!

ARNIMUS

I won't. Stay back!

XAVIER

Save me, daddy!

Xavier yelps and Arnimus alerts. Growls and the sounds of tearing flesh from inside the bush.

ARNIMUS

No! Xavier.

He pulls back branches and sees torn flesh and blood.

ARNIMUS

No.

Silence.

Arnimus sniffles. He falls to his knees and weeps.

A growl behind him.

He turns as a coyote leaps airborne towards him. Fangs and slit eyes bear down.

END FLASHBACK

INT. HOME – DAY

Arnimus alerts and jumps from bed.

He checks his forearms for injury and sees nothing.

With haste he dresses for work. He grabs his notebook and an imperial pen and jots down a few notes. He grabs his keys and dashes.

INT. UNIVERSITY LABORATORY – DAY

George and a RESEARCHER, 40, curt and studious, sip coffee and debate.

RESEARCHER

You don't see a problem with what you're doing?

GEORGE

I'm not saying that—

RESEARCHER

Hey. If Muth wants to bring back the Northern White Rhino or the Dodo. He may get someone's blessing, but not mine. God's creations man destroyed. But if he's gets caught playing Frankenstein again. He's done. And you my friend, would be too. I wouldn't want any part. Fellowship or no. Didn't you learn anything working for her? Like watching the movie Titanic and being surprised at the ending, twice! Even worse, watching it while on board!

GEORGE

I'm didn't say put ethics aside.

RESEARCHER

Religion. Ethics. For Christ sake, some moral compass. Don't you realize they are the same?

Research scoffs and wanders away.

GEORGE

I do. More than you know.

Crazes and disheveled, Arnimus clings his notebook as he strides past and glances at the Researcher.

ARNIMUS

Stay away from him. He's trouble.

GEORGE

You say that about everyone. Water?

George hands him a water bottle and falls in behind Arnimus as they negotiate some hallways.

ARNIMUS

What's he want. Never mind. It doesn't matter.

GEORGE

Religion.

ARNIMUS

I heard there's no place for it in the workplace.

GEORGE

Ethics.

Arnimus glares and walks faster.

ARNIMUS

Those are just group opinions. Barriers created to protect a dying dynasty.

George stumbles and considers. He jogs to catch up.

GEORGE

I'm sure there's some gray. If you were a little more forthcoming with your work. Our work. I'd feel better about—

ARNIMUS

Getting your name attached to some big fancy paper? Passed around the chambers at Yale. This isn't Yale. No one cares about you. Only results. Keeping this place open. As long as they think I'm going to accomplish that. Well—

GEORGE

What you're doing is creating a person. There's no mom or dad. A soul in a petri dish. Some would say this is immoral. Just plain wrong

Arnimus stops short and glares at George. A serious moment.

ARNIMUS

If you're so bothered to see what happens, leave.

Arnimus forges ahead.

George deliberates and follows him.

GEORGE

You saw what they did to that idiot in China. Not what the University, this country, or the scientific body in its entirety would wish for.

ARNIMUS

This second tier university didn't become a top ranked genetic facility because we drag feet. What you'll do here. People will talk about forever. You should think about a seven figure salary and leave your religious rubbish where it belongs.

GEORGE

Doc. I'm only saying if what you're doing really works. I mean. It would be ground breaking. People will question its authenticity. If I can go over your notes, I can stand by your side.

ARNIMUS

Faked research, preposterous!

Arnimus hands George the half-empty bottle. He accelerates as he reaches the boardroom doors.

No knock.

He slams them open.

A table of executives stop mid-meeting.

ARNIMUS

I get more access or I will take my research and leave!

INT. CLINIC – DAY

A private examination room.

Arnimus sees a slew of patients with routine ailments. He makes odd inquiries as he screens patients.

ARNIMUS

Are you sexually active?

Multiple partners?

What are your thoughts on abortion? Adoption?

PATIENT

What gives? It's an ear infection, right?

Exhausted, he wanes and has a cold sweats, and excuses himself.

He strides past the Aide and a lobby of waiting patients.

INT. GROCERY STORE – DAY

Arnimus wipes his sweaty brow as he searches the candy shelves.

XAVIER (V.O.)

I love these! I add them to my hot chocolate to make it  
fruity.

He grabs Skittles and queues in the only register line behind a slew of customers.

The slowest cashier ever. He grows impatient.

Berta pops her head out.

BERTA

Doctor? You have patients waiting.

He opens the Skittles and pops a few in his mouth.

ARNIMUS

Miss. Can I just pay for these later?

Ignored, he projects.

ARNIMUS

Miss!

CASHIER

If you want 'em, you gonna need to pay for them.

Arnimus starts to put the Skittles back on the shelf.

CASHIER

You can't do that. They open now. Kirt!

She looks for KIRT, the loss prevention associate.

KIRT

Yep?

CASHIER

This here gentleman opened them already. He don't  
want to pay for it.

ARNIMUS

I want to pay for them. Here.

KIRT

Sir. I can't be takin your money. You need to pay the  
appropriate cashier.

ARNIMUS

That's what I'm trying to do!

CASHIER

Sir. Please don't raise your voice. I'm just tryin to do my job. You may be a fancy doctor but you need to wait your turn like everyone does.

BERTA (O.S.)

Doc! They are waiting. Do I need to call corporate?

ARNIMUS

No! Can you stand in line and pay for these?

BERTA

I answer phones, doc. That's it. We've covered this before.

Arnimus flails and Skittles bounce across the floor. He shoves people in in line and pushes past Kirt as he marches toward the clinic.

KIRT

If you don't pay for these, doc, I'm gonna notify the authorities!

INT. CLINIC – DAY

Lyla, 25, dim and pitiful, sits up on the examination table and rubs her lower back.

Preoccupied with his syringe and test tube, Arnimus fidgets as he slyly slips the tube into his satchel. He's upbeat as he scribbles down some notes with the imperial pen.

ARNIMUS

Thank you for answering all the questions. This is great. You've been really great.

LYLA

So, how soon before the results come in?

ARNIMUS

Uh. Yeah. Maybe a week or so.

LYLA

Should I just stop by or call?

Arnimus snaps.

ARNIMUS

No. Don't!

He realizes he's bizarre and calms himself. He notices Berta peek through the ajar door and shoves it shut.

ARNIMUS

I mean. I'll call you with the results and schedule follow up. Go ahead and get dressed.

She reaches for some small bills in her pocketbook.

LYLA

Alright. Do I pay the lady at the counter?

ARNIMUS

Uh. There's no charge.

LYLA

Are you sure? I don't have much but I know medical care is expensive. Seeing a doctor. I know without insurance—

Arnimus picks up a Clinic pen and taps some forms. Distracted, he pockets the Clinic pen.

ARNIMUS

Like I said, it's a new state funded program. You may be eligible. I'll call and reschedule when the test results come in.

LYLA

With this new program, can I see a gynecologist?

ARNIMUS

Uh, no. The funding is only for clinics. You'll need to come here and I'll be the only person who can treat you. Best of all. It will be free!

Arnimus offers a fake grin to settle Lyla's nerves.

He escorts Lyla past Berta's watchful eye out the clinic.

The snow globe and its settled white powder.

INT. GROCERY STORE – DAY

A single open register and a line of grumbling customers.

Arnimus waits with a basket of groceries. In a trance, he stares at the bags of Skittles and remembers Xavier and recalls his laughter.

The Clerk glares as Arnimus reaches for the Skittles.

CLERK

Hey! We don't want to repeat of earlier mister!

Arnimus retracts his hand.

Unseen by everyone, against a far wall, the Figure silently lowers from the ceiling and softly lands. Body squared towards Arnimus, head twisted to the right.

Arnimus looks toward the clerk as the unnoticed Figure rises up through the ceiling.

Something catches Arnimus' eye. Unsure, he looks to the space just occupied by the Figure. He sees nothing and shakes an uneasy feeling off.

INT. UNIVERSITY LAB – DAY

George reviews some papers as a CLERK peeks in and waves a paper sack.

CLERK

Is Dr. Muth in?

GEORGE

I'm his assistant. I'll make sure he gets it.

As the Clerk leaves, George opens the sack and sees a bottle of bills.

GEORGE

Prenatal?

He hears Arnimus' voice and slyly sets the bag upon Arnimus' desk.

Arnimus sees the sack. He notices it's been opened and wonders if George looked. He studies George as he busily read papers. He decides and slips the sack inside his desk. He studies George and wonders.

ARNIMUS

Let's wrap up early.

GEORGE

I'd love to Doc but there's lots to do.

ARNIMUS

I, for one, could use a little rest. Go ahead, cut out. Maybe hit a happy hour or something. See what your fellows are up to.

George hands Arnimus a bottle of water, opens one for himself and toasts.

GEORGE

The only drink for me. It's important, you need to—

ARNIMUS

Stay hydrated. Got it. I've never met someone so fixated on water consumption.

GEORGE

Bottoms up!

George watches Arnimus suck down the bottle.

GEORGE

Want another before you go? You should probably use the restroom. It's a long ride.

Arnimus gathers his personal effects. He retrieves the notebook and the pill bottle from his desk and slips them into his duffel.

ARNIMUS

Any more water and I may spring a leak! Probably should use the bathroom before.

A sly smile breaks upon George's face as Arnimus reconsiders and puts the notebook back inside the desk drawer.

George slyly observes as Arnimus walks out of sight.

He grabs the notebook and skims a few pages as he scampers to an adjacent room. He recognizes the new notes by the change in the font's thickness.

GEORGE

Just one page, doc. Getting lazy.

A Clinic Pen holds an early page in the notebook. He notices the early page margins have newly added notes.

GEORGE

Crap!

He stands over the copier and ensures no one watches. He makes two copies of the final page. Nervous, he scans the room. He struggles to find the newly made notes.

ARNIMUS (O.S.)

Watch it!

Frantic, places a copy in a Manilla folder and the other he tucks into his pants under his shirt. He dashes to the office. He slips the notebook into the duffel as Arnimus reaches the doorway.

ARNIMUS

What are you doing?

George waves a bottle of water.

GEORGE

Just packing an extra bottle for the road!

LATER

George delivers a Manilla folder to Karis.

The second copy is tucked into his pants. The Clinic pen dangles from his pocket.