

CHIHIRO

Screenplay by

Juno Dante Night

Based on her short story of the same name

20 May, 2020

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EXT. ST. ARLEDGE'S - SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Snow. A bleak concrete schoolyard -- otherwise grey and lifeless if it wasn't for the boisterous CHILDREN, ages 11 to 14 running amok, screaming -- victims of their raging hormones.

We navigate the jungle of middle school chaos and find a girl isolated beneath a bare tree, sketching meticulously in a red spiral school notebook. Not among their ranks, this is CHIHIRO KRITANTA, 11, Japanese, thick dark hair, red school jumper, coat and slacks. Peculiarly, she wears MEN'S BOOTS. While her features are delicate, her expression is both fierce and unreadable.

Her eyes are what catch our attention: her left is normal, though her right is artificial and distinctly colourless. It gives her a particular squint. She speaks with a precocious, arrogant air:

CHIHIRO (V.O.)  
I don't feel fear like they do. I  
was born on the fabled "Witching  
Hour," a Sunday, January the ninth.

She looks up from her work and gazes into us as though she knows we're watching her.

FLASHBACK:

INT. CHIHIRO HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT (ELEVEN YEARS AGO)

Fierce, feverish moans of a WOMAN. The clock among the purple wallpaper strikes exactly 3 a.m. AYUMIME, 40s, curvy and voluptuous, squats squarely on the tiled floor, black hair sticking to her drenched forehead. Septic fluid spills beneath her.

It isn't long and -- out squeezes a LITTLE GIRL, tiny, purple, almost alien -- and the afterbirth. Ayumime lets out a sigh of relief, retrieves the baby, cradles her, doesn't bother with the umbilical cord.

CHIHIRO (V.O.)  
Mother knew when she first saw me.

Ayumime scrutinizes Baby Chihiro. She is unmoving, silent, no sign of tears. Ayumime is unnerved, studies Chihiro's right eye. Slowly, she sets her down on the floor, her gaze firmly kept on her eye. Baby Chihiro doesn't react. Her right retina is all we see and -- *a tumor deep inside, growing.*

(CONTINUED)

CHIIHIRO (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Mother never let me forget the  
cruel affair. Retinoblastoma. Down  
went the surgical knife on my  
second birthday.

BACK TO:

EXT. ST. ARLEDGE'S - SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Chihiro gazes out at the animated children around her. We now notice the faint scar trailing down the right side of her face from her eye.

                  CHIIHIRO (V.O.)  
The cancer was killing me, slowly.  
Maybe it should have.

She wryly looks on. A red rubber ball knocks the back of her head. The tip of her pencil snaps, flies from her lap. Coolly, she rises, turns around. She finds a chubby REDHAired BOY, 11, apprehensive. He dares not approach her. Frozen, he is apparently frightened. The other children around him stop, mortified. She glares.

                  CHIIHIRO  
What's your name again? Starts with  
a "b," does it?

                  REDHAired BOY  
It... it was an accident, Chihiro.  
Honest.

She locates the ball, bends to pick it up, rolls it in her fingers as if distracted.

                  CHIIHIRO  
Billy? Is your name Billy?

He gapes, shakes his head "no." She smirks, amused.

                  CHIIHIRO (CONT'D)  
Benedict? Bram? Something...  
Beggio? Bryce Beggio? Ballard  
Beggio?

He shakes his head again.

                  REDHAired BOY  
It really was an accident.

(CONTINUED)

CHIHIRO

Whatever. I don't care what your name is. You have a morbidly stupid name, whatever it is.

The Redhaired Boy fights his nerves, takes a step, another, reaches for the ball. Chihiro moves back, smiles. This is like a game.

CHIHIRO (CONT'D)

You lie, Billy Beggio. Everyone lies.

REDHAIRED BOY

I wasn't aiming for you.

CHIHIRO

Do you really think I'm as stupid and gullible as you are? Rich.

His face falls, shrinks away. She scowls, holds him in her gaze. He's under her spell. He can't tear away. A deep dread fills his eyes. He rips away, screams.

REDHAIRED BOY

She's eating my soul! Witch! Witch!

Chihiro is emotionless. The other children are stunned. The morning bell rings. Chihiro collects her bag and dives through the crowd, the ball still in her hand. They gasp, whisper, clear her path. A lanky BLONDE GIRL, 13, bravely confronts her.

BLONDE GIRL

What did you do to him, Dead Eyes?

Chihiro studies her and smiles.

CHIHIRO

You all know it. I'm a witch. I can do anything.

Frightened, the Blonde Girl rejoins the group. Unaffected, Chihiro marches to the school building.

STUDENTS

(chant)

*The glass eye of the Witching Hour/  
Born of blood; made of Satan's  
fire/ Chillhiro, even pits of Hell  
won't keep/ Gaze too long, she will  
kill you in your sleep!*

(CONTINUED)

Almost playfully, Chihiro releases the ball from her grip, kicks it across the concrete yard, follows it to the door as the others sharply stare. Only one, MURPHY MADIGAN, 11, freckles, golden-blond curls and a diplomatic demeanor, looks on with pity. Chihiro's eyes become unnatural, excitable.

CHIHIRO (V.O.)

Most children would find such childish antics unbearably cruel, but I am not like them. Any of them -- these miserable, animalistic demons of Achbor Colton the adults of this town have the audacity to call children. I know. Prey. They are all my prey. Animals. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting...

A strange music plays.

INT. ST. ARLEDGE'S - HALLWAYS - DAY

Chihiro strides down the halls with no particular expression. A sea of tense CHILDREN know better and avoid her like a virus. The hardened faces of the TEACHERS is not an improvement. Their looks tell us all. Chihiro is more amused than bothered and she makes her way to...

INT. ST. ARLEDGE'S - CLASSROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

... and finds a cold, empty seat in the back near the window caked with ice. Her CLASSMATES preoccupy themselves with socializing and dare not look back at her.

INT. ST. ARLEDGE'S - CLASSROOM - DAY - LATER

SUPER: "DAY 1."

A crowd of STUDENTS eat their lunch in peace in the afternoon sun. Chihiro remains isolated in the back. Disinterested in her food, she has her nose buried in a thick leather-bound library book: *Crimes and Killers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*.

She doesn't register that Murphy Madigan, not engaging with the others, studies her from a few desks up behind a mountain of books.

Chihiro is deeply absorbed. She comes across a particular entry titled "THE DISMEMBERMENT OF SWEET FANNY ADAMS" (and

(CONTINUED)

beneath that, a black-and-white illustration of a man holding a little girl's head). She gingerly takes her scissors and cuts away. Murphy approaches her. Chihiro never looks up from her work.

MURPHY

What's that you're reading,  
Chihiro?

(beat)

Is that from the library?

(beat)

When are you supposed to return it?  
I think I'd might --

CHIHIRO

Do have somewhere else you need to  
be, useless sheep?

Murphy frowns.

MURPHY

If that's the library's, I don't  
think you're allowed to cut out  
pages.

CHIHIRO

Listen to yourself.

The blade slices Chihiro's skin. She doesn't flinch. Instead, she is watchful of the blood that spills onto her desk.

MURPHY

Why aren't you eating? Aren't you  
hungry?

CHIHIRO

I've made a special vow... I will  
no longer eat. Starving is not  
worse than being fat with large  
breasts.

MURPHY

What are you talking about?

CHIHIRO

Do you remember nothing from the  
sex education film we watched some  
weeks ago? Our hormones will  
declare war on our bodies and  
prepare us for childbirth. I am not  
an animal, if you hadn't noticed.

(CONTINUED)

MURPHY

Okay. I don't know what that has to do with gaining weight.

CHIHIRO

Puberty, Miss Madigan, will make you grow up. Understand? We will grow up and become like our parents. You see those other little nasty girls over there?

She raises her head, finds a group of GIRLS at the front of the room. Murphy follows her gaze. Chihiro's eye darkens and she examines closely their developing bodies like an invasive predator.

CHIHIRO (CONT'D)

Moronic, naïve, frightened little women. It disgusts me. Mine haven't grown in yet, however --

She rises and moves in so only Murphy can see. She is not the slightest bit embarrassed. She lifts up her shirt to show Murphy her training bra. Murphy's animated brows move skyward.

MURPHY

Chihiro!

Swiftly, she yanks Chihiro's shirt back in place.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

Jeez, what if the boys saw you?

CHIHIRO

Boys. Boys will become their fathers. Fathers are men. Men love breasts, if Mother teaches me anything. No... not Mother. Ayumime. Her name is Ayumime.

(sucks the blood from her finger)

Ayumime is fat. Oh, yes -- quite. She's at least a solid D. Worse than *minstrating* every month: growing breasts. That's why I'll starve. If I can't get fat, I won't grow large breasts. I don't care about boys. Boys like Clarence Burne.

(CONTINUED)

MURPHY

Do you mean *Clemency Burne*?

Chihiro looks sideways at the EMPTY DESK to her right. A dreadful silence, and:

MURPHY (CONT'D)

I mean, aren't you worried? Just a little bit? He's been gone for...?

CHIHIRO

Almost twenty-four hours.

MURPHY

Yeah, exactly. It's crazy, isn't it? How someone could just, I don't know, vanish? Especially in a town as small as ours? What do you think, you know... happened to him?

CHIHIRO

Clemency... His poor, tormented soul.

MURPHY

Oh, Chihiro! You're bleeding!

Chihiro draws her bloody finger to her face.

CHIHIRO

Yes.

MURPHY

No, Chihiro --

Murphy points to the spot of blood left on Chihiro's chair. She looks on, impassive.

INT. ST. ARLEDGE'S - GIRLS' BATHROOM - DAY

Murphy leans against a stall door and watches Chihiro at the sink. She meticulously removes the blood from her slacks. Murphy digs around her uniform pockets, fishes out a sanitary napkin in an elegant floral wrapping. She leaves it on the counter.

MURPHY

I always keep spares on me for emergencies like this. You know, it happens. I started... six months ago, I think? Mum said it's best to have them on you whenever. When did you start? If that's all right...

(CONTINUED)



Chihiro blankly observes her reflection.

CHIHIRO

I started this morning. It's  
dreadful.

MURPHY

Yeah, it feels kind of gross.  
Especially when the napkin starts  
getting all soggy. And the smell?  
Eew! Have you seen the clumps  
of...?

CHIHIRO

That's not what I meant. You're not  
thinking of the implications.  
Childbirth is primitive.

MURPHY

You have really weird views on  
things, you know that?

CHIHIRO

It's not the blood. That doesn't  
bother me. I don't want it. I hoped  
it wouldn't happen to me.

MURPHY

Yeah, but everyone has to grow up,  
Chihiro.

Chihiro seems to let this thought sink in. The water from the tap endlessly runs down the blackened drain. Another SOUND joins in. Strange and haunting, it is not easy to decipher. A scream? A cry? Whatever it is, it grows louder, more distinct and --

FLASHBACK:

EXT. ABANDONED COTTON MILL - DAY (EARLIER)

The grey afternoon light dims and sets behind billowing clouds of FACTORY SMOKE. A slow breeze penetrates the skeleton of the ghostly, graffitied building no longer in use. A sound escapes -- a moan. Blades of grass on the bank dance to the wailing.

The muddy river gurgles and chokes. It carries along glistening ice and pollution. Where does the river end? We are unsure.

(CONTINUED)

Planted firmly in the grass is a pair of MEN'S BOOTS we've seen before. A short white dress flows around a child's knees. We find Chihiro. She is transfixed by the water, but we don't know why. Revealed at the hem of her skirt: spots of blood, but not quite enough to be alarming; and just beneath her: more blood smeared in the damp grass. She buries it under her shoe.

As if she senses we are there with her, she turns to us over her shoulder, her face stoic but her eye brimming with excitement.

EXT. CHIHIRO HOUSE - DAY (EARLIER)

Morning. At the end of a workers' terraced row is a semi-detached two-up-and-two-down residence. Chihiro enters from the side door, swerves into the alley beside the house strung with laundry. With more precision than anxiety, she removes the bloody white dress, discards it in the bin.

BACK TO:

INT. ST. ARLEDGE'S - GIRLS' BATHROOM - DAY

Hypnotized, Chihiro narrows in on a spot of dirt on her cheek. It is hardly noticeable, but she is repulsed and fiercely rubs it away.

CHIHIRO

(to herself)

I outgrew that stupid little girl dress anyway and Mother -- Ayumime -- doesn't need to know everything. I slept in it. Then came the blood. She forces me to wear this pitiful brassiere, however -- I can take care of myself.

MURPHY

Pardon?

CHIHIRO

I'm not scared. I'm not pretending. I simply don't feel fear. Not like you. Not like them. Not like the prey of Achbor Colton. I'm not like you. I'm not prey. I don't want to grow up, but it's not fear. Maybe it's... dread. Genetics are devilish.

(CONTINUED)

MURPHY

I didn't say anything, did I?  
You're not making much sense.

CHIHIRO

I don't have to. I know what my  
mind says, Miss Madigan and you're  
not a part of the conversation. As  
for Clemency Burne, well... does he  
have to grow up?

Chihiro gathers her things and rushes out of the bathroom. Murphy, bewildered, takes the forgotten sanitary napkin and follows.

EXT. ACHBOR COLTON - STREETS - DAY

The school bell rings. The girls climb down the dreary industrial mining town crammed with endless back-to-back rows of terraced dwellings (the town is built-up on a steep hill). Though late in the afternoon, the skies are colourless.

A group of uniformed SCHOOLCHILDREN head the other way. Minus the few SOOT-COVERED COAL MINERS, MALE AND FEMALE MILL WORKERS and HOUSEWIVES carrying groceries on their way home from a long day, the cobblestone roads are unusually desolate.

Chihiro looks straight ahead and rarely acknowledges that Murphy, her face obscured by brick-sized books, is there. She is clearly an unwanted companion.

MURPHY

Chihiro, you don't need to keep  
calling me "Miss Madigan" all the  
time, 'kay? It's so formal, like  
you're an adult or something. You  
can call me Murphy. That's fine.

CHIHIRO

Why? We're not friends.

MURPHY

I mean, we both like to read.

CHIHIRO

No, we have nothing in common.

MURPHY

You're being rather...  
stand-offish, don't you think? The

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MURPHY (CONT'D)  
semester's just started and -- It's  
like, if we're going to be in the  
same class all year --

CHIHIRO  
I don't need friends.

Chihiro numbly looks up at the railway bridge above them,  
which extends behind the abandoned cotton mill next to the  
dirty river at the bottom of the hill.

CHIHIRO (CONT'D)  
If they grow too large, I suppose I  
can cut them off. I will slice them  
off with --

MURPHY  
Wait, what are you talking about?!  
Are you mad?! Cut what off?!

CHIHIRO  
Or I can jump. The railway  
bridge...

Murphy, horrified, seizes Chihiro's arm and spins her  
around.

MURPHY  
Chihiro!

CHIHIRO  
(violently jerks)  
Get away from me, filthy animal!

MURPHY  
Why do you talk like that? Can  
I...? I don't know... Do you need  
help?

The first signs of rage flicker in Chihiro's eye.

CHIHIRO  
I don't need anyone. Is that clear?  
I am not like the rodents of this  
bleak breeding ground.

MURPHY  
We're not animals, Chihiro. We're  
people.

(CONTINUED)

CHIHIRO  
People are animals.

                  MURPHY  
What does that make you, then?

Chihiro charges further down the hill and leaves Murphy behind.

                  CHIHIRO  
Don't follow me.

EXT. ACHBOR COLTON - SHORTCUT - DAY

Chihiro drifts downwards through the rubbish-strewn streets; past the old church and graveyard; through a laundry-covered alley; past the neglected grimy sofa sitting against the wall; and heads to the murky river. She glares through the windows of houses and looks disgusted at the sight of FAMILIES sitting before their televisions and eating processed meals.

                  CHIHIRO (V.O.)  
I could never admit it to anyone:  
the sight of blood is terribly  
comforting. The colour. The  
texture. The smell. The taste. The  
immediate warmth. I reject my  
period not for the blood, but for  
what it means for my body. My blood  
is like a friend. Almost. Once upon  
a time when humans were  
less-developed animals yet somehow  
less stupid, we needed blood to  
survive. We needed to hunt prey.  
Evolution is a funny thing. Now,  
the feeble-minded prey of this town  
are cursed with a repulsion for  
killing because it is no longer  
essential for our survival. But I  
disagree. Civilization has  
forgotten how we are meant to live.  
How have we fallen so far from  
predators to sedentary, unthinking  
consumers? Maybe I am an animal,  
too. But I am not prey.

She emerges from the industrial labyrinth and makes her way to...

EXT. ABANDONED COTTON MILL - DAY - CONTINUOUS

... and crosses alongside the river, sodden and guttural. We see part of the railway bridge is hidden behind the abandoned mill. A worker's row at the base of the hill is rooted several feet away (the homes are unable to see behind the building; the hill obstructs the view).

CHIHIRO (V.O.)

I determined this is a shortcut to my house and a route no one else besides myself frequents. Until today.

She curiously eyes the graffiti on the building: "NO EVICTIONS!" She is caught off-guard --

A swarm of PEOPLE loudly gather at one end of the river. They are frenzied, shouting, shoving -- behaving just like wild animals. Whatever the cause for the commotion, Chihiro is numb. She approaches and lingers behind, her gaze watchful.

A group of POLICEMEN appear from around the riverbanks, their uniforms soaked and muddy. They push past Chihiro and charge to a lanky, weasel-like man, MR ERMINE, 30s, dressed in a bloodied butcher's apron. He stands in the middle of the river and distressed, he points to a fixed spot: a peculiar gathering of water lilies, isolated (the rest of the river is devoid of these).

MR ERMINE

He's here! He's here! I found him!  
He's here!

CONSTABLE #1

By God, are you sure, Mr Ermine?

MR ERMINE

Yes! Yes! It's him! It has to be him!

The constables plunge through the river and sweep through the lily pads. They find what they are looking for and exchange sickened glances. The crowd on land crane their necks to see and thrust against each other. CONSTABLE #2 notices this and climbs out of the water, jostling the mob backwards.

CONSTABLE #2

Back, you animals! Get back!

(CONTINUED)

The crowd is restless and attempt to move past the policeman. He snaps and growls at them, forcing them back. Some members loose their footing and slip into the water. They shriek from the cold. A woman, BUNNY BURNE, 28, blonde and wearing a pink faux fur coat, runs down the banks from the terraced row. She sobs. She doesn't regard Chihiro and recklessly darts through the flock of people.

BUNNY

Clemency! Clemency! Is it him?! Is it him?!

CONSTABLE #2

Missus... Ma'am, I strongly advise you -- Missus --

She doesn't listen. She is too desperate to reach the river. She jumps into the water, ruins her coat and dress with mud, and cuts through to the party of policemen. They attempt to hold her back, not wanting her to witness what lies in the lilies. Their efforts are in vain. Bunny lets out a howl.

CONSTABLES #3-5 volunteer to draw her back to land. Bunny is listless. She can only scream and cry. The onlookers see the sight. Disturbed, they gasp, wail, yell.

Bunny is helped onto the bank. She has lost her shoes. She collapses to her knees, inconsolable. Constable #5 retrieves her shoes, his expression pained. Chihiro remains silent like a ghost. She appears more fascinated than concerned.

CHIHIRO (V.O.)

Clemency Burne. Little Clemency Burne. He lives just three miles from me, that terraced row you see there by the river with his single mother, Bunny Burne. It has been exactly twenty-four hours. Cruel irony. He was here the entire time.

Floating among the lilies are the white, frozen hands and feet of CLEMENCY BURNE, 11, a little round, though that no longer matters. He is bruised, burned, bloody around the neck, unclothed. It is better we do not see the full details of how he was mutilated and killed. His empty eyes are a snapshot of terror -- his final moments.

The atmosphere drops. The crowd on the banks are intense, fearful, angry -- except Chihiro. She is placid.

WOMAN

Who could have done this?! What kind of sick being does this to a child?!

(CONTINUED)

CHIHIRO  
I wish they would all die.

EXT. CHIHIRO HOUSE - DAY

SUPER: "DAY 2."

Early morning and chilled. Chihiro emerges from her solitary house in her uniform. She collects the milk bottles, leaves them in the entryway and briefly glances at the paper. She stops and is immediately gripped: "**CLEMENCY BURNE FOUND -- NAKED AND NEARLY HEADLESS!**" She feverishly rips the headline. Her eye swims through the text:

"NO FORCE... CRUDE... AMATEURISHLY... POLICE ARE DISTURBED AND BAFFLED... FACE LOCKED IN A PERPETUAL STATE OF SHOCK... FIRST-DEGREE BURNS... SODOMIZED... FOREIGN OBJECT... SEXUAL ORGANS REMOVED... BURNT REMAINS WERE RETRIEVED FROM THE WATER... MURDER WEAPON -- OR WEAPONS -- HAVE YET TO BE FOUND..."

CHIHIRO (V.O.)  
Poor Clemency. Poor, tormented  
soul.

She studies the two black-and-white photos: firstly of the constables looking grim in the water; and secondly a school photo of Clemency, alive and smiling -- chubby, pointed ears, crooked teeth, upturned nose.

CHIHIRO (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
It's odd. I have gone to school with him for five years, but I could barely place his face. Is that what he looked like? He was rather chubby, wasn't he? His ears stick out like a goat's. His nose is like a pig's. A grotesque human toe. He had too much forehead for such a small, fat face. Not a naked foot -- an ugly toe. You're better off dead, Clemency. You were a coward. Your mother can no longer be burdened by a repulsive child that resembles a toe.

She gingerly stores the article in her notebook, tucks it into her bag and marches onwards.



EXT. ABANDONED COTTON MILL - DAY

Rain and snow impale Chihiro as she glides down. The river is now vacant. This is how it should be. An orange ribbon marks the scene of the crime within the lilies. Nearby, a tormented howl carries in the wind. Chihiro is alert and follows the noise. She roots herself at the end of the mill and gazes ahead.

From the row of houses, Bunny Burne, dressed in a pink nightgown, lies frail in a stretcher. Two ORDERLIES bring her to an ambulance parked at the kerb. Bunny sobs, but does not resist. The ambulance rapidly packs up and drives away. Chihiro is expressionless.

EXT. ACHBOR COLTON - STREETS - DAY

Chihiro climbs the sleek cobblestone, weaves her way through the urban maze. The train shoots across the bridge above her. The streets bustle with activity, though not the kind we would expect. A MAN rushes past her.

CONSTABLE #3

Look out, young one!

Chihiro frowns, moves along and --

-- the next street up, a horde of policemen scrutinize the area, every resident, every business and every home. There is no discrimination here. Chihiro witnesses the chaos. Constable #5 fiercely knocks upon a door.

CONSTABLE #5

Open up there, yes? We can search this property, yes?

FABAL (O.S.)

Ay 'here.

Chihiro jerks her head to find FABAL FAIGEL, 40s, thin and untamed curls barely managed in an updo. She is in the doorway of FABAL'S PIE 'N' MASH HOUSE, her scowl sharp.

FABAL

Ay, Spooky Eyes. Yeh shouldn't be wanderin' 'round like yeh are, lass. All 'lone. 'Hat boy's body was 'ound yest'day. Not far, either. In 'he river. Yeh 'eard?

Chihiro is stiff, manages to nod.

(CONTINUED)

FABAL (CONT'D)

All me years of livin' 'ere, I certainly don't recall 'ere ever bein' a murder. Not like 'hat boy's. Got our 'ery own Jack 'he Ripper, lass.

CHIHIRO

Jack the Ripper wasn't so grand. He was a bloody coward -- if he was one man. Might've been two -- or more. Absolute child's play, Miss Faigel.

FABAL

Maybe so, lass.

CHIHIRO

He was like the Walt Disney to far more interesting murders, but he takes all the credit. Have you heard of Frederick Baker? He's not as famous, but my, he was brutal. It happened on a summer day in 1867. He mutilated a little girl named Fanny Adams, shoved her head on a stick or two and planted it in a hop field. She had no eyeballs. They'd been plucked. She was all cut up and scattered everywhere. They never did find the breast bone. He was cemented in the pages of history. Mr Baker. He's dead, but he lives on.

FABAL

Now, yeh best not be fillin' yer head with such rubbish, Spooky Eyes. 'His 'ere is a real thing that 'appened 'ere, not some wild fictitious pulp novel on 'he shelves. Show a bit o' emp'thy, girl.

CHIHIRO

(nonchalant)

I do. That poor, tormented soul.

FABAL

Killer could be an'where, right?

(CONTINUED)

CHIHIRO

Miss Faigel, do you think -- Is the first murder ever committed here in Achbor Colton, to my knowledge -- is it among the greatest?

FABAL

What in the name of 'Ella yeh talkin' 'bout, child?

CHIHIRO

Will people remember Clemency Burne long after we've died?

A dreadful beat.

FABAL

Dang'rous 'hing fer a child to be all 'lone. 'Ould be an'one, right? 'Est be careful, love. Off yeh go, now. Go on. 'Hat school bell be ringin' any moment, now.

Chihiro holds back a smirk and continues up the hill.

INT. ST. ARLEDGE'S - CLASSROOM - DAY

Chihiro eyes her reflection in the frosted window, weary. The concrete playground greets her, deserted. The teacher, MISS SELIMA, 30s, bushy ginger hair and her face severe, drones on. (She always speaks as if she'd rather be anywhere else but here.)

Chihiro directs her attention to her notebook and fiercely sketches: a naked, headless body; a muddy-looking river; a stampede of spectators; and behind them in red pencil, a little girl, unseen by all.

To the class's surprise, enter INSPECTOR CONROY, late 20s (though appears rough as 40), shaggy dirty blonde hair, ungroomed beard, emaciated, towering, disheveled and wearing shabby civilian clothes. His left eye is bruised and his right hand is bandaged.

CONROY

Oh please, pardon my intrusion, Miss.

MISS SELIMA

Miss Selima, sir. Can I help you?

(CONTINUED)

The class is more lively than before and stretch their necks to get a view of the visitor. Excited, they whisper. He is clearly a foreigner to the town. Chihiro carefully closes her notebook and folds her hands over the cover. Conroy seems nervous and wrings his hands constantly.

CONROY

Yes. I'm Inspector Conroy.  
Detective chief inspector for the  
CID. From the northwest. I got the  
call late yesterday, came all the  
way down here by train. I apologise  
for my appearance. I had no time to  
sleep. I understand there's been a  
-- heinous tragedy here. The local  
police force have asked me to help  
them with the grisly... murder. You  
see, I principally specialise in  
these kinds of cases. I solved many  
similar cases all over the country.

MISS SELIMA

I see. That's... stunning, sir.

CONROY

Yes. I understand Clemency Burne  
was a student here?

The room falls silent.

INT. ST. ARLEDGE'S - CLASSROOM - DAY - LATER

Conroy sweeps through the desks. The children twist around in their chairs to keep their eyes on him, minus Chihiro.

CONROY

But by whom? Who would do such a  
terrible, viciously violent thing  
to a poor little boy?

BOY #1

A lunatic.

CONROY

Yes, that may be. Children, all I  
need to know is -- all I want to  
know is who had last seen Clemency  
Burne? And was there anyone with  
him?

He continues to speak; we don't hear him.

(CONTINUED)

CHIHIRO (V.O.)

He is a pitiful man, is he not? For some reason, he doesn't appear bright to me. Nothing about him seems fitting of the image I have of inspectors. He looks as if someone felt sympathy for him and picked him up off the street, assigning him a job he was unqualified for just to humour him. How sad.

Conroy is patient, gives each excited child his full attention and nods. He jots everything down in a small notebook. Amid the chatter:

BOY #2

Would it be helpful to know he went to the sweets shop every day after school?

CONROY

Did he now?

GIRL #1

Yeah, Dr Graves'. Three p.m. Is that important?

CONROY

Yes... Yes that is helpful to know that, dear.

GIRL #2

He'd get some sweets and took the shortcut home.

CONROY

Shortcut?

GIRL #3

Yeah, he lives -- er, lived at the bottom of the hill by the river. He went home the fast way on the railway bridge.

A tall, handsome black boy, OISIN, 11, sits up straighter. His eyes are grim, his breathe heavy.

OISIN

The train doesn't travel from three to seven, so it's vacant. Clemency was my best mate.

Conroy is intrigued.

(CONTINUED)

CONROY

(writes)

What might your name be, child?

OISIN

Oisin. Mum's Irish... Sir, I went with him to Dr Graves' at three p.m. like always. I swear with all my heart I last saw Clemency leave the shop and climb the bridge home. He always went alone. I swear there was nobody on that bridge. I didn't see anyone, anyway. He said he'd ring me up later. He never did.

CONROY

Are you sure? I mean, you're positive he was alone?

OISIN

I damn well swear, sir.

CONROY

Is it possible that whoever killed poor little Clemency -- do you think it was someone who *knew* -- someone who *knew* he'd be there on that bridge and at that exact time? Sometime past three after school?

(beat)

What does the bridge look like, exactly?

(lights a fag; to Miss Selima)

I hope you don't mind, my dear.

Miss Selima leans against her desk and shakes her head, disinterested. He turns to the children.

CONROY (CONT'D)

Is the bridge concealed in any way?

Murphy shoots her hand in the air.

MURPHY

No, sir. Actually, it's in the open. Above the town. One end of the bridge goes over the river, though.

Conroy steps to the blackboard and draws what Murphy tells him.

(CONTINUED)

MURPHY (CONT'D)

See, it's easy to climb through the rails -- as Clemency did -- and hop down on these grassy mounds without falling into the river. There's the disused mill there. The back of the building faces the bridge. No one ever goes by there, however. You see -- except for Clemency.

BOY #1

It's bleedin' haunted.

CONROY

So, from what I understand: Clemency was the only one who used the bridge that leads to this abandoned mill?

(indicates blackboard)

And is this a close representation of the bridge?

MURPHY

Right.

CONROY

It's possible this murderer at large could be a stranger... though that seems unlikely to me. The killer was there in an abandoned area, knowing I believe that area is deserted... The killer lives here -- in this town... Yes, I think I know all I need to know. Thank you for your time.

Conroy moves for the door when ABITHA DARBY, 11, platinum blonde hair and doe-like eyes, raises her hand.

ABITHA

Mr Inspector, sir? Why do people kill other people? Are people really so evil? Do they not feel anything?

CONROY

Hard to say, love. What's your name?

ABITHA

Abitha Darby.

(CONTINUED)

CONROY

Yes, Abitha. I can't --

MURPHY

Actually, I've read all about something called a *conscious*.

Chihiro rolls her eye.

CONROY

Yes?

MURPHY

Yes, sir. In a book on mental health from the library. Most people share a common psychological makeup -- that is, most have a *conscious*, the ability to recognise love and guilt and shame. But some are disordered. Something called *antisocial* is what it said in the book, I think. They tend to hide themselves, these people. They have no remorse, you know.

CONROY

What may your name be, love?

He shakes her hand.

MURPHY

Murphy Madigan.

CONROY

A clever girl you are, indeed.

CHIHIRO

Some just hate the world.

The children shut up, avoid her gaze, even Miss Selima. Murphy is not bothered. Conroy smiles and approaches her.

CONROY

Why do you think that is, love?

Chihiro smirks, excited.

CHIHIRO

Some just enjoy the suffering of others, the savage torment of it all.

(CONTINUED)



CONROY

But surely people don't just wake up one day and decide they want to hurt someone, do you think?

CHIHIRO

Some people are born awfully sick, sick enough to be in a hospital, am I correct?

CONROY

Yes, love, I suppose you are.

CHIHIRO

That's what my mother told me, anyway -- that some people have a sickness that can't be seen. In the mind.

CONROY

Your mother isn't wrong. Is she, would you say perhaps, wise in that regard?

CHIHIRO

Not really. She's not -- I wouldn't say awfully stupid, but neither is she really clever. You see, she probably only knows that because -- let's say someone she knows very well, someone she knows a little too well, someone she has been close to at one time in her life -- this person she knows is not quite all there. She says he is sick in his mind. He... I can't really explain it, but he has an obsession for things, I guess, that are considered -- abnormal. Whatever that means.

CONROY

I'm terribly sorry to hear that.

CHIHIRO

I'm not sorry. I learned pity is useless. Some people aren't sick. They're just... angry.

CONROY

Angry, you say?

(CONTINUED)

CHIHIRO

Yes. Angry enough to kill someone.  
It happens, doesn't it?

He sits at the edge of her desk.

CONROY

Yes... Yes, I suppose it does.

CHIHIRO

It's not unbelievable, I don't think for someone to live a cruel, unforgivable existence. Let's say they didn't ask to be born, that their mother or their father or someone who is, I think by nature supposed to love them -- but they don't. No. Love is a foreign language, a language that can't be learned by a mother who tells her child she didn't ever want this brat she had. It was an accident, she says. She was just a girl then and she didn't know what she was doing and before long, she was pregnant and absolutely nothing could be done about it. She'd probably be throwing around the F-word, but I'm afraid I can't say it myself. Not here. This is all just fantasy anyway. Or -- what's the word? Hypo...?

CONROY

Hypothetical... It's all right. I'm listening.

CHIHIRO

I mean, I'm not saying *all* people who decide to chop off little boys' heads --

(the class reacts, anxious and horrified)

I don't mean that whoever tried to cut off his head -- Clemency Burne -- that this person had done so because his mother was a bitch who didn't know the meaning of... I don't know what the word is, but the sex ed film we watched called it "virginity." I thought that only the Virgin Mary was a virgin, but I guess not. I don't believe that the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CHIHIRO (CONT'D)  
murderer did this to Clemency  
because his mother was not a  
virgin. That's too simple. For all  
we know, the mother could have  
loved him, but not the father. No,  
the father could have been much  
worse than a -- hypo...?

CONROY  
Hypothetical.

CHIHIRO  
Yes -- a hypothetical terrible  
mother. Or he's just as bad as an  
unloving mother, it's hard to say.  
Maybe like most men, the father  
didn't receive an education in, as  
the mother said, "self-control."  
Whatever that means. Of course, he  
blamed the woman for his sins and  
told his child: "Do you think I  
wanted you? Do you think I honestly  
wanted you? No, God! I never wanted  
kids! I had sex -- the gospel  
truth! I had unprotected sex and  
out popped a kid!" I learned all  
about sex and puberty and  
childbirth and such from the film  
we watched, by the way; I perfectly  
understand all that, I believe.

(beat)

So, the father said: "Look, take my  
advice, kid: use a bloody condom;  
otherwise, you're going to end up  
like me!" And maybe the child said:  
"You're a terrible father.  
Should've had your balls snipped."  
And this child later grew up to be  
a murderer because he was sick of  
-- say she was awful -- his mother  
and he was sick of his father and  
he was sick of the world. He was  
sick and tired of the world's  
absolute bloody bull. Just a -- an  
example, of course.

CONROY  
This is all quite fascinating and  
tragically reflective of our modern  
times, but do you think, child  
irresponsible parents are enough to  
drive someone to murder? That

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONROY (CONT'D)

neglectful parents are the sole blame of corrupt behaviour? Plenty of people come from awful homes and don't end up killers. Certainly not murderers of defenseless, helpless children like Clemency.

CHIHIRO

Unless they've been hurt very badly. That can easily change a mind. If their method of murder is somehow, I guess sexual in a way, I think that speaks for itself. I read in the paper this morning that aside from his nearly headless head, his privates were cut up --

(some kids laugh)

Chopped off with... I don't know. Nobody knows. You know, it could have been a carving knife. Then, it was burned. Is that true?

CONROY

Yes.

CHIHIRO

That poor, tormented soul... A mother or a father that is terrible to a child could unknowingly create a monster. These things are not hard ingredients that make a killer. It's all just a... a thought, but anger is a strong emotion. Relentless anger -- I found "relentless" in the dictionary and quite like it. Anger that lasts, I don't know, years. Anger can morph into something very intense. You can't simply underestimate what years of anger can do to a person. Makes the world go 'round.

CONROY

There really is no clear answer, is there, love? Humans are quite complex creatures. There is still a many thing we don't understand about what goes on inside our minds.

(CONTINUED)

CHIHIRO

(sarcastic)

Afraid I missed the national headline on that. Can I look it up at the library?

CONROY

Some people who savagely murder probably did have bleak childhoods. Others may be deeply ill. It's hard to say. No two killers are alike.

CHIHIRO

But people aren't born killers. Like you said, people don't just suddenly wake up wanting to kill. Is that right?

CONROY

I do believe that -- to an extent.

CHIHIRO

It's possible, isn't it?

The class bell rings and the students squeeze out of the door. Murphy hangs by, looks back. She considers and exits. Chihiro remains.

CONROY

May I inquire what your name might be, young lady?

(beat)

Just want to know your name, child.

The room is empty.

CHIHIRO

Chihiro Kritanta.

CONROY

(extends hand)

It's a remarkable pleasure, Chihiro.

Chihiro gapes, uncertain. She hesitates and shakes his hand.

CONROY (CONT'D)

For your age, you are very perceptive. I'm impressed, love.

CHIHIRO

That's news to me... You know, the library is an awfully wonderful place.

(CONTINUED)

We notice for the first time faint scars along his face.

CONROY

(strokes her cheek)

Your parents are lucky to have a child like you... You mentioned earlier something about a... a carving knife, was it? What makes you think the murder weapon could be a carving knife?

FLASHBACK:

INT. CHIHIRO HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Chihiro stands at the counter and viciously runs a carving knife through a steaming plate of pork. She smiles at her gruesome work.

BACK TO:

INT. ST. ARLEDGE'S - CLASSROOM - DAY

Chihiro squints up at Conroy.

CHIHIRO

Maybe I saw the body. Yesterday. When I was walking home. I live near there. I saw them drag the body from the water.

CONROY

You got a good look at him?

CHIHIRO

Not really. Only slightly. It just makes sense, doesn't it? That he was cut up with a carving knife?

CONROY

(writes)

Yes... Yes, I suppose it does.

EXT. ST. ARLEDGE'S - SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Chihiro crashes through the front doors and strides down the concrete. A swarm of SCHOOLCHILDREN taunt her from behind.

(CONTINUED)

## STUDENTS

(chant)

*The glass eye of the Witching Hour/  
Born of blood; made of Satan's  
fire/ Chihhiro, even pits of Hell  
won't keep/ Gaze too long, she will  
kill you in your sleep!*

MISS SELIMA (O.S.)

Chihhiro! Chihhiro, wait!

Chihhiro spins around to face her teacher on the other side of the playground.

MISS SELIMA

We're required to escort you home  
in groups! For your safety!

Chihhiro glowers at the prospect.

EXT. ST. ARLEDGE'S - FRONT GATES - DAY - SAME TIME

Conroy approaches a police vehicle parked at the kerb. He climbs into the passenger seat, delicately looks over his notebook. A burly man, SERGEANT ARTAIR, 50, sits behind the wheel.

CONROY

I have a better idea of where we're  
headed, Sergeant Artair.

ARTAIR

Oh yeah?

CONROY

Yes... The children were  
perceptive. I usually find children  
in these cases to be more observant  
than adults. I have what I need to  
work with. For now. However, I  
spoke to one in particular, a  
girl...

Conroy scans a line of STUDENTS being led from the school and down the street by Miss Selima. At the very back is Chihhiro, deliberately keeping her distance. He locks his eyes firmly on her.

CONROY (CONT'D)

It was like speaking to a  
forty-year-old. I was unaware an  
eleven-year-old could understand so

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONROY (CONT'D)

much. Said her name was... Chihiro  
Kritanta.

ARTAIR

Oh yeah, that's Ayumime's an'  
Fuzen's kid. Fuzen's not a native  
'ere, 'fraid to say. Ayumime comes  
back one day wiv a belly an' all.  
They lives up on that Mausekopf  
Road. Number thirty-three.

CONROY

Is that right?

ARTAIR

You don' 'ere it from me. Nuffink  
right wiv those people.

CONROY

How do you mean?

ARTAIR

Likes I say, you don' 'ere it from  
me. Ayumime's in the habit o'  
runnin' off to damn knows where.  
She'd never been o' clean one, that  
one. Fuzen -- well, 'e's none  
better. We like to keep this town  
clean. Funny fing, inee? 'Een  
downtown more than anyone else  
'ere.

CONROY

For what?

ARTAIR

The worse 'e'd done: 'e'd been  
doin' stuff wiv 'ese little girls,  
mainly. In private. Damn knows fer  
how long. Unnatural stuff, right?  
One lass 'e'd done in pretty bad --

FLASHBACK:

EXT. ACHBOR COLTON - VACANT LOT - DAY

A YOUNG GIRL, 9, lies unconscious in the tall grass. Her  
knees locked in place, her skirt is pulled up.

BACK TO:



EXT. ST. ARLEDGE'S - FRONT GATES - DAY

Conroy is horrified.

ARTAIR

'Em charges were dropped last moment. 'Orrible, eh? 'E'd always been this oddball from someplace else. City folk, I fink. 'Spose Ayumime found 'erself in 'im. She never fit in 'ere.

CONROY

Wait, and his daughter still lives with him?

ARTAIR

Ay, I don' fink he live there anymore. 'E's scum, all right. Sleeps in pubs 'ese days. Not allowed within twenty feet o' children no mores. Feels awfully sorry for that girl. But you 'ave to know: Chihiro ain't exactly an angel 'erself. The way she gives you this... mad stare. Nuff to keep you up at night.

Conroy looks grimly at Chihiro until she is out of sight.

EXT. ACHBOR COLTON - STREETS - DAY

Miss Selima leads the queue of students and drops them off at their residences. The constables feverishly comb the town, visibly worn. Murphy walks in front of Chihiro and glances over her shoulder. She slows and strolls by Chihiro's side. The other children briefly take notice and create a wider distance, afraid to eye Chihiro.

CHIHIRO

What do you want?

MURPHY

Those things you said in class --

CHIHIRO

(mumbles)

Please, get yourself run over by a coach.

(CONTINUED)

MURPHY

They were... Are you all right?

CHIHIRO

(sarcastic)

Yes, my dear. My Prince Charming found me by way of a bloody glass slipper and whisked me away to his magical kingdom. Happily ever after.

MURPHY

I mean, you don't sound like you're fine.

CHIHIRO

Why do you care?

MURPHY

If you ever need someone to talk to...

No more games. Chihiro is livid. She shoves Murphy into a brick wall. The children ahead do not turn around and continue advancing away. Chihiro towers over Murphy, bores into her. Murphy is anxious, though is not afraid and looks directly into Chihiro's eyes -- her right and her left glass one.

CHIHIRO

This whole town is made of cowards! You're all cowards! You're so full of rubbish, you bloody coward! Wouldn't it have been hilarious, Miss Madigan if Clemency Burne, the human toe -- wouldn't it be funny if his little penis stood straight up, greeting the Heavens as the bastard cut it clean off? Wouldn't it be funny if they were able to piece the burned remains back together and sew it onto his body as they bury him? Wouldn't it be just hilarious if it was still erect through his clothes as he lies in an open casket for the whole town to see? Haha, I could pee myself! You're an idiot, Murphy Madigan! Piss off!

Chihiro laughs, spits and sharply turns around. She runs down the hill to the river.

(CONTINUED)

MURPHY

Chihiro, where are you going?!

CHIHIRO

Why are you not afraid of me like they are, Murphy Madigan?! What makes you so special?! You're not special, all right?! You're a stupid girl! You're not brave! You only think you are, you stupid, arrogant know-it-all! I'll get you! I will! Haha, you'll see, you bloody bitch! You'll see!

MURPHY

Chihiro, come back!

Murphy stands helplessly at the top and watches Chihiro descened.

EXT. ABANDONED COTTON MILL - DAY

Chihiro slices madly through the grass to the river.

CHIHIRO

You're all cowards! You will all die!

She reaches a familiar spot and stands at the edge of the bank. The breeze whips her hair as her eye rests on the lily pads in the water. We find her boots in the wet earth and --

FLASHBACK:

EXT. ABANDONED COTTON MILL - DAY (EARLIER)

-- the white dress sways around her legs. The day darkens. A gasping penetrates the air -- hollow, constricted breath. A white paper bag of sweets lies nearby, the contents spilled. A comic sits next to it, its pages flapping in the wind. Chihiro's school bag is there too. Loose blades of grass drift away.

Chihiro gazes down and -- Clemency Burne in his school uniform twists around in the grass, his face purple. A fresh red burn mark is on his cheek. His blue fingers claspe around his neck and claw the dirt. His jaw gapes. Something is lodged inside his throat. A gobstopper. He rolls on his side, looks helplessly at Chihiro. She is placid.

(CONTINUED)

CHIIHIRO

Some people want to make things dead, Clemency. I doubt ordinary people can understand that. Some just want to watch the world burn. Some just hate the world and hate what lives in the world. Do you know what it's like to want to make something dead? If I wanted to, I can make you dead.

She kneels. In her hand is a box of matches. She reveals one and lights it.

BACK TO:

EXT. ABANDONED COTTON MILL - DAY

Chihiro is rooted in the same location, alone. The water whispers.

CHIIHIRO (V.O.)

I didn't do anything. I started bleeding. That's why there was blood on my dress. Ayumime would have buried me. I didn't do anything... They will all die. Everyone dies. I am their God. They wait for me. Animals. Prey. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting...

She knows we are there and raises her gaze over her shoulder. She absorbs us deeply in her eyes.

THE END