

LET'S PLAY

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EXT. CHILD'S PALACE TOY STORE - NIGHT

A MISSING CHILD POSTER is taped to an outdoor light post.

On it, a BLONDE-HAIRED 8-YEAR-OLD BOY with a BIG SMILE. The info underneath displays his name as "TIM KNOX", the date he went missing as "September 27th", and the last place he was seen was "Child's Palace on 2707 Rothington Blvd."

The light post sits in AN EMPTY PARKING LOT before a massive TOY WAREHOUSE STORE.

The words "CHILD'S PALACE" shine brightly in COLORFUL BOLD LETTERS above the building.

Through the front windows, the store appears DARK, with only scattered lights within.

After a moment, the letters TURN OFF, which casts the building and the lot in darkness.

INT. STUFFED TOY AISLE - SAME TIME

NICK (28), a store security guard, STROLLS down an aisle of stuffed toys of various size and design.

As he walks, Nick casually glances at the toys on display. He seems gently amused by his surroundings. Perhaps a bit nostalgic of his own youth.

He reaches the end of the aisle, and rounds the corner to--

INT. MAIN CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

--HE STOPS.

There is a medium-sized RED RUBBER PLAYGROUND BALL that rolls out from another aisle a few feet away from him.

The ball does not stop its trajectory until it hits the opposite wall.

Nick is motionless.

A moment later, he approaches the ball. As he bends down to gather it up--

--THE ENTIRE STORE GOES DARK as every light in the building shuts off simultaneously!

Only Nick's SILHOUETTE can be seen as he quickly rises and glances all about the store.

In the dark, A THIN, RASPY BREATHING can be heard somewhere nearby. It's impossible to detect the source or its direction.

Frantic, Nick turns in every direction to look for the sound. That's when--

--AN EQUALLY THIN AND WHISPERY VOICE IS HEARD FROM BEHIND. The voice is close, up to his ear, as it UTTERS--

VOICE

Let's play--

Nick spins to face the voice, but can see nothing in the darkness of the store.

He grabs his phone from his pocket, and turns on the FLASHLIGHT, which reveals emptiness all around him.

He cautiously aims the light in all directions and looks for any sign of life or movement.

A BANG echoes from somewhere far on the other end of the store.

Nick takes a few HESITANT steps in the direction of the sound, when--

--THE LIGHTS ALL COME BACK ON AT ONCE.

He is briefly BLINDED by the sudden explosion of light that fills the store.

Not only that, but the prerecorded happy MUSIC that normally accompanies shoppers during the day now BLARES from the speakers overhead.

The music sounds WRONG, however. DISTORTED.

After Nick's eyes adjust to the sudden light, he notices that the ball from before is gone.

That's when he happens to look down the aisle before him, and is perplexed by what he sees--

--The entire aisle, top to bottom and from one end to another, is EMPTY.

As he walks down the many aisles of the store, he finds each one identical to the first. - All have seemingly been picked clean of all stock.

As he races down the ends of various aisles with little to show, he stops when he notices something--

One of the aisles has a LONE BROWN NON-DESCRIPT CARDBOARD BOX on a shelf.

He stares at this from a distance, then eventually makes his way toward it.

INT. RANDOM AISLE - CONTINUOUS

Nick steps cautiously down the aisle toward the box, which waits about halfway through.

When he reaches it, Nick grabs the box off the shelf and examines it--

There is a LIFELIKE DOLL OF A YOUNG BOY within the package.

The box oddly does not display a name like a normal toy would. It is simply a brown cardboard box with a plastic sheet used for a "window" to display the doll within.

He looks it over in his hand. Like the front, there is no artwork or description anywhere like you would find on a toy product.

Just then, Nick hears a CHILD CRYING SOFT AND MOURNFULLY. It sounds incredibly close.

He glances all around, but can not find anyone nearby.

A TINY DROP OF WATER falls from the box onto his shoe.

Nick senses this, and looks down at his foot confused. This only confirms his suspicion, as there is a tiny PUDDLE of a water-like substance upon it.

He looks up toward the ceiling, but sees no water damage or leakage.

All the while, the incessant TEARS and SOBS can be heard.

This causes Nick to look at the box in his hand, where the back of the package faces him.

Impossibly, the sound seems to come from within.

Nick spins the box around in his hand so that the doll faces him once more.

Not only do TEARS now stream down the eyes of the toy, but SMALL DROPLETS OF WATER cover the plastic "window" of the box.

Slowly and hesitantly, he holds the box above his hand.

The water droplets within ROLL down the plastic and SQUEEZE through the corners, which causes them to land on his open palm.

Nick is visibly panicked by this as he stares back at the doll, which continues to CRY from within the box.

He takes his PHONE from his pocket to take a video of this strange event, but no matter how often he presses to activate it, the phone does not respond to his touch.

He tries again. Then again. As Nick tries each time, his presses become more rapid and forceful.

That's when he hears a FAINT CRACKING SOUND. It sounds similar to an egg shell broken open.

He glances at the doll, and happens to see a small HAIRLINE CRACK is now on the doll's face near its left eye.

As the line GROWS in size, the CRACKING sound grows louder. It looks like something is trying to push its way through the plastic face of the doll.

Within the box, BITS OF PLASTIC begin to drop off around the doll's eye, which reveals A HUMAN EYE underneath. It is WIDE AND PANICKED as it stares back at him.

Nick hurriedly TOSSES the box down to the other end of the aisle far from him.

As the box lies still on the ground, he can still hear soft WHIMPERS come from within.

Then, from the box, comes a FAINT VOICE - One which belongs to a YOUNG BOY.

BOY'S VOICE
Can you hear me?

Nick is STUNNED SILENT. After a long beat, he hears it again.

BOY'S VOICE (CONT'D)
My name is Tim. I got lost somehow,
and the Collector found me. Don't
let him get me--

All of a sudden, the lights at the end of the aisle SHUT OFF, which casts part of the aisle into darkness, while the rest of the store remains lit.

Nick stares dumbfounded. All the while, the boy's voice becomes more urgent--

BOY'S VOICE (CONT'D)
He's coming! Please help me! I just
want to go home!--

He is cut off when A PAIR OF INKY BLACK HANDS reach out of the shadows to grab the box, and rapidly pulls it into the darkness of the aisle, which hides it completely from view.

Nick STUMBLES BACK at this, horrified.

The lights of the aisle SHUT OFF one by one, seemingly approaching Nick as he stands helpless at his end of the aisle.

As DARKNESS GROWS, Nick finally finds the strength to run back toward the--

INT. MAIN CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Nick races down the main corridor. He passes one empty aisle after another, as the LIGHTS SHUT DOWN seconds after he passes.

Something in the shadows chases him. That thin and raspy BREATHING is ever just at his back in the darkness.

Nick does not look behind him or slow down as he charges with everything he has for the SECURITY OFFICE at the end of the corridor.

With the darkness ever increasing behind him, he bursts into the open door of the office and SLAMS it shut behind him, locks it.

INT. SECURITY OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Through the large window that looks out onto the store, Nick can see that the entire area outside is now BLACK. His office is the only area where any light shines.

He makes his way to the LANDLINE PHONE on his desk, but when he picks up the receiver, it is silent and unresponsive, like his cellphone earlier.

Frustrated, he SLAMS down the receiver and looks through the window at the dark store beyond. He can see nothing, nor any sign of detectable movement in the shadows.

Despite this, tension does not leave Nick's face. He knows something is out there--

To confirm this, something in the shadows suddenly presses the now SMASHED AND BROKEN REMAINS of the doll from before up against the glass, directly in front of Nick.

STARTLED, Nick trips over himself and tumbles backward to the floor.

Now in a heap, Nick hears the WINDOW SHATTER as the lights in his office SNAP OFF instantaneously.

Over the darkness, that thin, raspy BREATHING can be heard. This is combined with Nick's pathetic and FRIGHTENED whimpers.

Eventually, everything goes quiet, and there is just the dark.

EXT. CHILD'S PALACE TOY STORE - DAY

The same light post as before now has a second "MISSING" POSTER attached. This time, NICK'S FACE has been printed upon it, along with his personal information, and last known whereabouts. It is posted next to Tim's poster from before.

All the while, PARENTS AND EAGER CHILDREN walk toward the doors. Business as usual, with nobody paying any mind to the fliers.