

Benz

## THE VERY THOUGHT OF YOU

From ancient Buddhist thought to cutting-edge quantum physics, scientists and philosophers have pondered the role the mind plays in the creation of reality. If, as the 18th century philosopher George Berkeley posited, *esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived), what would happen to a man nobody ever knew? If he sits alone in his house with nobody to perceive him, might he just disappear...?

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The teaser opens with Johnny sitting alone on a park bench on a beautiful day. But if he went to the park to raise his spirits, the trip is having the opposite effect. For a lonely person like Johnny, a trip to the park means basically watching others enjoy themselves. A father runs along with his hand holding on to his son's bike seat and then lets go. After rolling on for a few yards, the boy realizes he's just learned to ride: "When did you let go? I thought you were there the whole time!" A young couple plays hide and seek with their toddler. "Well, honey, we might as well go home!" jokes the mom. "Tommy isn't here anymore."

To Johnny, he's watching real life and he can never be a part of it.

Johnny takes these feelings of isolation home with him. He calls Bruce who has a date. He calls Sarah who has Parents' Night at

little Johnny's school. And that's it. He has no one left to call.  
Purdy? Please.

Salvation comes in the form of a grocery delivery boy. Johnny is happy to have this visitor and he keeps the kid around, jaws with him as he unloads the groceries. The kid unloads a jar Johnny doesn't recognize. "Did I order this?" he asks. The kid blushes and says, "Yes, you did order it, but last week," and explains how he accidentally put the jar in the wrong grocery bag and delivered it to a shut-in old man who just gave it back to him when he delivered this week's groceries. The boy says that the old man is obviously very lonely; he kept him there talking about that jar *forever* because apparently he doesn't have anyone else to talk to...

Johnny, suddenly self-conscious that he's doing the same thing, tips the kid and lets him go.

Then as Johnny touches the jar he has a strange vision. He finds himself in the home of the frail, elderly man watching him discovering the jar in his groceries. The man stares at it, confused, then sets it off to the side until he can return it to the grocery boy. A tea kettle whistles on the stove, and as the man makes himself a cup of tea, he talks to himself aloud, "Now, I'll have my tea. In a moment, I'll think, 'I'm the man who's drinking this tea; I'm the man who's making this tea, that's here in this cup, disappear.'" The old man speaks the words seriously and slowly, a kind of "to do is to be" mantra... and then he does a curious thing, he goes to a mirror and stands before it... we can't see the glass in the mirror, so we don't know what he sees... but he reaches out and touches the glass with his fingers... a sadness in his eyes... and says, "Where have I gone...?"

The vision ends and Johnny shakes it off... passes by his own mirror and happens to glance at his own reflection which is perfectly normal... he starts putting the groceries away...

And that's when he starts disappearing.

Just a thumb at first, then another finger is gone, and another... in a panic, he tries to pick up the phone but it falls through his hand as it disappears... and now his arms are gone... and he can hear the 911 operator at the other end of the phone on the floor... and he bends down and tells her that he needs help, that he's disappearing... and then there's a flash and the vision ends and he's at the freezer holding a frozen pizza... very confused...

End of teaser.

I've never had a vision anything like it, Johnny tells attractive Dr. Sharon Weizak, the brain specialist he consults on his condition. As she takes tests and looks at his brain waves, he expresses fears that his synaptic paths are deteriorating - he's done some research and has a half dozen serious, technical explanations for his condition, he fears - and this is a very real fear - going insane, losing control. She interrupts with a question: John, how's your sex life?

He reacts. Is that a medical question or do you have tickets to the symphony? he asks. The doc smiles, says all the usual readings are normal, can't see that anything has changed. She thinks it's more likely that his vision of the old man looking in the mirror triggered some anxiety in his mind and this is how it expressed itself. It's not healthy to be isolated, Johnny. Get out of the house, have some fun, be with people; it's hard to disappear when you're around people.

Got plans for tonight, he asks her?

I'm sorry, she says, I do.

Loathe to go home alone again, Johnny remembers the one person who could probably use company as much as he can.

Cut to: a door opening and the old man looking out, Yes, he asks and we move to reveal Johnny, standing there. Mr. Osborne, my name is John Smith. We're almost neighbors. The kid from the grocery gave me your address.

What's his name? Osborne asks suspiciously, catching Johnny off guard. Pablo, Johnny replies and then explains the jar incident, whereupon the old man immediately lightens up and invites Johnny in.

Osborne lives in a squat, unassuming little house right in the middle of the neighborhood – the kind of house you'd pass a million times and hardly even notice... As Johnny enters, he hears Nancy Wilson singing "The Very Thought of You" on the old vinyl record player...

JEFFREY OSBORNE (80) is delighted to have company... offers Johnny some of his favorite tea, Chamomile... his mother used to give him Chamomile for a tummy ache when he was a little boy... I grew up in Maine, he tells Johnny, showing him an old photo of a charming old house and a little boy standing in front of it... he had hoped to go looking for the house, if it even still exists, but now that his health has failed he hasn't the strength to make the search. He hasn't been there since he was six years old, over seventy years ago. He talks a blizzard, like someone who rarely has the chance to talk.

Johnny is profoundly affected by Osborne's shut-in state. He doesn't even have a phone, just a device to signal his assisted-care nurse if he needs her, and when Johnny notices his own cane leaning against the wall next to Osborne's, he ponders his own future -- if this is a glimpse of his own life to come.

As Johnny takes his tea from Osborne he has a disturbing vision – *of Osborne, in terror, disappearing just as Johnny had in his prior vision...* completely, utterly gone... but the vision doesn't end there...

Because Johnny now finds himself on a quiet street in Paris, the Eiffel Tower and the Seine in view behind him (we can do this!) standing outside an intimate jazz club on the Left Bank... and we can hear a female vocalist singing “The Very Thought of You” inside the club... the song draws Johnny inside... and there’s Jeffrey Osborne, as he appears today, sitting at a table alone amid the suave young Parisians with their Gallic faces and filter-less cigarettes, listening to the female singer whose face we never see...

The vision ends as the song does and we come back to the old record player and the needle stuck in a groove at the end of the vinyl...

Are you all right? Osborne asks Johnny concerned. Johnny explains that he was in an accident and ever since, he just sometimes ‘goes away’ for a few moments...

I know exactly what you mean, says Osborne curiously. He goes to rescue his record, picks up the arm of the player and offers his very firm opinions that recordings haven’t been the same since the demise of vinyl. He’ll die before he ever has a CD player. He has good ears, he says. He’s famous for his ears.

He’s a spunky old guy and Johnny is enjoying himself but the visit is just getting started when it is interrupted as a nurse enters. We’ll call her MARTA, from the Ratchet School of Nursing. Osborne is not happy to see her, calls her “the enema lady”. Marta recognizes Johnny and explains to Osborne that he’s the man on TV, the one who sees things. Osborne thinks she’s identifying him as John Edward, the medium from the television show, Crossing Over. No, says Johnny, I’m not doing nearly as well as John Edward. She chides Osborne: you know you’re not supposed to have company, Jeffrey. It’s just too much stress for him, she explains. Doctor’s orders. She courteously but firmly tells Johnny he’ll have to leave immediately.

Johnny does but on his way out accidentally picks up the wrong cane -- grabs Osborne’s cane -- and when he does he gets a wild series of flashes – of himself on a TV monitor... then four monitors... then twelve... then a bank of monitors too many to count. It ends. What the hell was that? Johnny wonders as he leaves.

I saw the man disappear, Johnny tells Bruce the next day, during their work-out. Yeah, well, you saw yourself disappear and it's not going to get you out of doing abs. But Johnny won't let it go, and when Bruce sees how important it is to him, he explains the Zen notion of the primacy of consciousness, as opposed to the western view of the primacy of matter, as a possible explanation for the strange phenomena. He talks about the subject/object problem: you know, the "If a tree falls in a forest and nobody's around to hear it" thing. Bruce suggests that maybe Osborne and Johnny are disappearing due to their lack of being perceived by others... which, he adds, is the best argument I've heard for why you should get out more.

Johnny can't buy it. Then give me a better explanation, says Bruce with mock insult. Johnny can't. But people don't just disappear. Do they?

Johnny returns to see Osborne but he doesn't answer the door... it's unlocked... he goes inside and calls Jeffrey's name, no answer... has he literally disappeared? Johnny yells his name again. A toilet flushes. A voice: you don't have to holler.

Jeffrey is delighted to see Johnny again... they clasp hands and suddenly Johnny finds himself back in the vision of Paris... Jeffrey is sitting there listening to the girl sing "The Very Thought of You" only this time Johnny explores the club: it is one of those quaint, small, French jazz clubs, posh without being pretentious, with white table cloths and professional waiters, all very, very French. Johnny sees a calendar on the wall that says 1963. The men wear smart dark suits and narrow ties, the women wear long false eyelashes... Johnny turns back to the scene: Jeffrey is now a young man at the table, and Johnny notices a detail he didn't see before -- the young Osborne has carefully set a briefcase down by his chair...

Back in the house, Johnny notices that there is something strange in the way Osborne communicates -- he speaks softly and seems a bit paranoid, *as if he were afraid somebody was listening in...* **he wants to hear more about Johnny's psychic abilities. Maybe you can help me find my house, he says, showing**

Johnny the same picture as before. But nothing happens when Johnny touches it.

Again, they're interrupted by the arrival of Marta the nurse. This time she's angry at Johnny and tells him he must never return. As she escorts him out, she grabs his arm and he has a flash of monitors again... but this time we pull back to see Marta and some shadowy figures looking at the monitors in the vision.

When Johnny gets home, he finds his house has been ransacked. It appears to be a routine burglary. But as he touches something, he gets a vision of the break-in itself... it's not thieves, it's a pair of very professional men looking at his personal papers, downloading his computer and then making it look like a burglary...

He explains this to Walt who says there have been some daylight burglaries in the county... Johnny says these guys were trying to make it look like a burglary but it wasn't. Did they take anything of value? asks Walt. A few things, Johnny starts to say. Then it's a burglary, says Walt. He can take a report and keep a look out for the things that were stolen. Johnny can't shake the feeling that this has something to do with old Jeffrey Osborne. Walt tells Johnny that he can't open a case file every time Johnny has a *feeling*, okay? You've got to stop coming to me like this, he says.

But you're my sheriff, Johnny says dryly.

With his curiosity way up, Johnny and Bruce tail Marta's car after she leaves Osborne's house. She leads them into a remote area of Penobscot County down a dirt road... there are twists in the road and they lose sight of her from time to time as they lay back to avoid being detected... and then after one turn, she disappears into thin air. Disappears. No side roads, nowhere to turn -- her car was just there one moment and gone the next. Johnny is getting tired of people disappearing.

When Johnny gets home this time, a man and his sister in his forties are there looking for him. They identify themselves as Osborne's children. They ask Johnny to please stop visiting their

father who has become quite agitated by Johnny's visits and his health has taken a turn for the worse. These seem like reasonable, compassionate people. They have all the details right. They talk about how their dad came back to Maine to be close to the house he grew up in... but he never could find it... the Chamomile tea he made them drink as kids... he doesn't have long to live, they admit... and we're trying to make him as comfortable as we can. They are extremely believable and most of us would buy their story but Johnny Smith isn't like most of us.

While they're talking Johnny finds the bottle from the groceries and as he picks it up, he begins to share realities -- while they're talking to him at his house, he's revisiting Jeffrey's living room and sees that there are no pictures of the children on the entire display of old pictures on the mantle... and then confronts them with that curious fact... and they say that their father is angry with them the way a lot of older people get angry at their children. Johnny is unconvinced now and they know it and when he, deliberately, shakes hands when they leave... he sees they are the shadowy figures in front of the bank of monitors that he's been seeing his visions...

Johnny goes to see Walt at home and says he's convinced that Osborne is being held incommunicado in this house against his will. Walt, ever the cop asks for some kind, any kind of evidence and when Johnny tries to explain about the mysterious "disappearances", Walt tells Johnny Jr. to go to his room. But Sarah takes Johnny more seriously -- she can see how much empathy Johnny has developed for the old man, offers to check historical records to see if she can find the old house he grew up in... and with one look, convinces Walt to go with Johnny to talk to Osborne.



We break the POV as Johnny and Walt arrive at the house... watching on a bank of monitors in a surveillance room, Osborne's "son" calls his "sister" and Marta in, saying: "He's back and this time he's brought company." In the background, out the window, we can see an awesome array of huge satellite tracking devices, some revolving, at this top secret installation searching the skies for any sign of an enemy attack.

The woman groans as she sees Osborne letting in Johnny and Walt. "The old man is getting to be more trouble than he's worth," says Marta. But the son finds some comfort in the fact that Johnny has brought the sheriff. "At least we know the psychic guy is not working for the other side," he says enigmatically.

As Walt asks him a few questions, Johnny is not surprised as Osborne insists that he has no children. Never got married, never had a family, he tells Walt. *Nobody ever knew me* and that's what makes you exist, you know. Johnny reacts to the strange comment.

As Walt talks to Osborne, Johnny touches something and flashes into the Paris jazz club again where we see the slim attaché case on the floor next to the young Jeffrey's chair. A man sits down at the next table, right next to Jeffrey, and sets down another identical attaché by his own chair. Johnny watches curiously as the other man leaves after picking up Jeffrey's attaché. It's a drop and an exchange. They never acknowledge one another and if Johnny weren't watching Jeffrey closely, in this crowded club he never would have noticed it. The girl sings "The Very Thought Of You"... **Johnny reacts as he comes out of the vision... and with the continuing diversion of Walt chatting up old Jeffrey who is having a fine time, asking him if he can see his gun... Johnny moves to the mantle where the pictures are and finds one of Jeffrey in Paris as he looked in the vision. He picks up the picture and in a flash it changes to a passport and voice in French says, "Passport, sil vous plait" and as the passport exchanges hands with an arm in a uniform, we see the face**

of Jeffrey Osborne but with a different name... and now we run through a rapid series of similar flashes, as we intercut with a different photograph of Osborne in different countries from the mantle -- with close-ups of his hand giving a different passport with a different photo and a different name to a different set of hands (arms in uniform sleeves of varying kinds) for inspection (the inspector's voice asks for the passport in a different language each time). All fake passports.

Johnny moves away from the mantle and interrupts Walt's conversation. Did you work for the government, Jeffrey?, Johnny asks. Osborne's smile fades. Uh oh, he says, you're not supposed to know that.

A large car can be heard pulling up outside. The doors slam. Walt looks out the window and sees a large black sedan and three people in officious-looking suits getting out -- the people posing as Osborne's son and daughter and Marta.

The "daughter" tells the sheriff that they're CIA and that Johnny just exposed a covert op, threatening national security and they're now here to shut it down.

Jeffrey Osborne, it turns out, was our top spy during the cold war. In his retirement, he has become a security risk, hence his being kept under surveillance and his being cared for by a military nurse.

Osborne's history: after his parents died when he was six, he was sent to an orphanage, and then when he was 16 in 1941, he lied about his age and joined the army. When he was given the army's standard tests, the Government discovered he had an incredible facility for learning new languages, etc., so they put him in the OSS and began molding him into their super spook for the coming cold

war. Osborne's entire adult life consisted of running around the other side of the iron curtain, never staying in one place for long, constantly switching from one assumed identity to the next, until the wall came down in '89 and it was time for him to retire. He chose Maine to be close to the memories of his childhood home.

Osborne, in short, is the man nobody ever knew, a man of a thousand identities who can no longer hold on to even one.

When you've been alone as long as I have, he says sadly to Johnny, you begin to *disappear*. You can actually feel everything you are begin to fade away. The face in the mirror isn't the 'you' you know in your mind... the thoughts, the memories get less clear by the hour, the minute... you can feel them slipping away. I'm not afraid of dying, he confesses, but I am terrified of disappearing... of existing without anyone knowing I'm here.

The Very Thought of You is not a love song for Jeffrey Osborne. *It is a definition of existence.*

An old spy's paranoia, perhaps? Maybe, but anyone who has grown old or has a parent or grandparent who has faced the isolation of old age will recognize Jeffrey Osborne's fear of disappearing.

The agents were counting on the anonymity of elderly shut-ins in this country to keep Osborne secure, and it was working fine for them until Johnny messed it up. Now, they'll have to move him. Osborne doesn't want to leave.

The agents are prepared to take him out this very moment but Walt steps in and says, this man is a resident of this county and he says he doesn't want to go with you. The agents bristle: Sheriff,

you're dealing with agents of the federal government of the United States. Walt nods and says, Welcome to Maine.

They leave, telling Walt they'll be back with a court order... but as they go, they brush past Johnny and he gets a short, disturbing vision: Osborne is dead and the agent is saying "We wouldn't have gone to all this fuss if we knew he was going to die in a week anyway..."

As Johnny reacts, Walt admits privately that he won't be able to hold them off for long. We won't have to, says Johnny and looks at the old man who is gloomily studying the photograph of his boyhood home. It's the only place where he was himself, before he began his life of false identities; *the only place he truly existed as himself*, Johnny tells Walt. And we have to find it for him now.

But Sarah has some disappointing news. All she could find was a record of Jeffrey Osborne's admittance to an orphanage which listed only his town of origin: Lisbon Falls. Like everything else in this story, his birth certificate has disappeared...

At least, they say, we can take the old guy to his old neighborhood... maybe something there still exists that will mean something to him... but how do we get him out of here... out from under the nose of the CIA? This is not exactly their area of expertise.

The answer comes from America's master spy himself, Jeffrey Osborne, who gets to do his thing one last time. A light appears in the old man's eyes -- this is what he was born to do, what he did so expertly for so many years -- and in moments, he has formulated a plan for outwitting the much younger agents outside. He quickly informs Johnny, who then, with the help of Walt, Sarah and Bruce, executes the plan which springs them free.

Osborne is having the time of his life. I used to move a little quicker in the old days, of course, he tells Johnny as he grabs his hat and cane. In the car, Osborne reacts as he sees the world for the first time in years.

When they arrive at the charming hamlet of Lisbon Falls, Osborne begins to recognize streets and he gives Johnny tentative directions... until they reach a wooded dead end...

They get out of the car. There's supposed to be another road, Osborne insists... but there is none... it does not exist... but a train horn sounds in the distance... I've heard that before, he says... I've heard that sound before... and I'm famous for my ears... the road was near some tracks... and he moves toward the sound of the train... pushing a bush aside to reveal an old dirt drive... it does exist; they just couldn't perceive it.

As they come around a rise, they see the remains of the old house... dilapidated, abandoned...

As they enter... Johnny checking to make sure it's safe, Osborne puts his arm on Johnny's for support and as he does...

We FLASH into the reverse angle, where we now see a five year old Osborne coming in the doorway to his warm and welcoming childhood home. His father sits at the kitchen table, his mother stands at the stove.

And then his mother says something – just a completely common and ordinary phrase -- but in this story we understand her words in all their profound significance...

*"There you are."*

Switch the angle back as the five-year-old Jeffrey looks at Johnny with eyes that say thank-you for this and then turns and runs to the loving arms of his mother and father.

Time cut to Sarah and Johnny taking a walk in Johnny's neighborhood, Johnny filling Sara in on the parts of the Osborne story she doesn't know, including how Osborne died peacefully a few minutes after they reached his childhood home... They stop in front

of Johnny's house, begin to take their leave of one another. Johnny looks at his house, at the looming isolation it symbolizes...

When he worries aloud whether or not he's doomed to suffer Osborne's fate, Sarah says to him: Well, that could just never happen to you, could it? Johnny asks why and she tells him, You know why.

She kisses him lightly on the cheek and leaves to return to her husband and son. A full time job to be sure. But it has nothing to do with how important Johnny is to her.

Johnny is nevertheless alone again in his house as our episode draws to a close, pattering around, worrying us a bit. He puts a CD in his stereo. We ANGLE ON the just-opened CD, its wrapper still kicking around on the floor, and see it is a collection of old standards, including a recording of "The Very Thought of You."

Johnny sits down in a chair to listen. He picks up Osborne's antique cane that he's kept as a memento and flashes again into the Paris nightclub. But now, when the CAMERA FINDS Osborne at his table, we see it is not Osborne at all, but Johnny. From behind her, we see the nightclub singer take the stage in a sequined dress. CAMERA MOVES around to the front of the singer and we see it is Sarah. She sings the song to Johnny:

*I don't need your photograph to keep by my bed.  
Your picture is always in my head.  
I don't need your portrait dear to call you to mind.  
For sleeping or waking, dear I find...*

*The very thought of you...*

As the song nears its conclusion, we dissolve back to Johnny in his chair, and we realize what Sarah meant:

For Osborne, his facless nightclub singer represented a forlorn memory – a sentimental longing for someone who really knew him, someone who could hold in her heart *the very thought of him* and make him real. He had no one and nothing but a sentimental song to hold onto. But unlike Osborne, Johnny has that person in Sarah. Although Sarah is married to someone else and can't physically spend her life with Johnny,

he remains the constant object of her affections – she *knows* him, as he truly is, through and through. And as Johnny looks placidly out a window, we realize we don't need to worry about him; even in his house, all by himself, his existence is very much secure.

*It's just the thought of you,  
The very thought of you, my love...*

THE END