

THE DEAD ZONE

Babble On

Rough Outline

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TEASER

SMITH HOUSE / NIGHTMARE - Johnny awakened by the eerie creaking and groaning of stressed metal. Gets out of bed, stepping into a foot of water; scraps of paper floating on the surface. Annoyed, he picks up the phone to call a plumber, but all he gets is a busy signal. More creaking and groaning draws his attention down the stairs. He stops outside a closed door, passing into the old office. A man stands in the corner, staring out a window; wrapped in a straight jacket, his back to us. Johnny calls out to him. The man slowly turns our way, revealing he has no facial features; just a flesh tone blur. The floor suddenly creaks beneath Johnny's feet and collapses inward; swallowing him whole. He splashes into murky depths, pulled deeper. Johnny struggles against the downward force, clamoring to reach the surface; fighting for survival. Finally breaking through, he finds himself bobbing in an expanse of choppy water; encased in a thick fog. He senses something to his left, a body floating face down; then another one to his right. The bodies are everywhere, floating on the surface; a macabre scene. Johnny opens his mouth to scream, unleashing the mechanical whine of a power sander...

SMITH HOUSE / BEDROOM - Johnny wakes, drenched in sweat. Power tools roar nearby. The clock reads 8:00AM. Johnny heads downstairs where the house is being renovated. The FOREMAN apologizes for the noise. The hardwood floors and wood paneling throughout the house are being sanded down and refinished. The foreman leads him to a closed door, the same closed door from his nightmare; *what about this room?* The cobweb crusted office is full of sheet covered furniture and dusty cardboard boxes; clearly not lived in. The foreman comments on the quality and grain of the mahogany wainscoting; *this'll clean up real nice*. Johnny steps to the window from his dream, touching the frame, sending him into a **VISION**: *A loud crash spins him around to find himself wielding a massive sledgehammer, using it to tear through the wall...*

ACT ONE

SMITH HOUSE / HERB'S OFFICE - Bruce helps Johnny sort through and move the stacks of boxes. It's the first time in years that anybody's been in there. Bruce takes note of Johnny's fatigued appearance. Johnny tells him since they started the construction two weeks ago, he hasn't been sleeping well; he's been having some crazy dreams. Bruce suggests he lay off the bean burritos at bed time then opens one of the boxes and finds an old picture album; *look its mini Johnny Smith*. He flips through, pointing out a particular man in one of them; *who's this happy guy?* Johnny looks at the photo – it's HERB SMITH, his face drawn; distance and melancholy in his eyes. Johnny identifies him as his father. Flipping through a series of other family photographs, in every one Herb exhibits the same apparent sadness. Johnny admits he knows very little about his father.

FAITH HERITAGE / PURDY'S OFFICE - Johnny brings Purdy a stack of Vera photographs; thinking he might like to have them. He asks him about his father; *what kind of a man was he?* Purdy indicates that Herb was a complex man, but insists he loved Johnny and Vera very much. It was terrible tragedy to lose him at such a young age. Purdy senses Johnny's discomfort and asks if everything's alright. Johnny tells him about the crazy dreams he's been experiencing. The reverend tells him that dreams are a gateway into our subconscious and suggests Johnny explore their meaning. He retrieves the business card of an old friend and psychiatrist, **EMILE JENNINGS**; a specialist in dream interpretation. Johnny rebukes the notion; *I don't need a shrink*.

SMITH HOUSE / FOYER – Johnny opens the hall closet to hang his coat. Something unusual draws his attention. He rifles through the coats, coming upon a straight jacket. He pulls it out, confused. Feeling the stiff canvas; his fingers dancing across the word **BROCKMORE** stenciled on the front. He looks up and gasps – reveal Johnny's reflection in a hall mirror – his face is blank, facial features gone.

SMITH HOUSE / BEDROOM – Johnny bolts up in bed, violently yanked from yet another harrowing nightmare. Checking the clock; 10:15PM. He grabs the phone and dials Purdy; *I need Jennings number.*

JENNINGS OUTER OFFICE - Johnny sits in an antiquated waiting room across from a young girl (**ALLY**), combing the hair of her doll. Johnny watches her a long beat, then asks her name. She doesn't respond; perhaps she's just shy. Johnny tries again, *what's your doll's name?* Ally slowly looks up; revealing the right side of her face is disfigured; scarred from a severe burn. An inner door opens introducing Jennings to the room. He invites Johnny in. Johnny stands, moving through the door. He pauses, looking back at the girl who remains occupied with her plastic friend. Something isn't right here.

JENNINGS INNER OFFICE - Jennings is fully aware of Johnny's fame and reported abilities, but remains a steadfast man of science and pragmatist. He does however believe he can be of assistance in solving Johnny's *bigger issues*. Johnny is adamant that he doesn't need a psychiatrist; he just needs help understanding what his dreams mean. Jennings doesn't buy it; *if that's all you wanted you wouldn't be here. You can get a dream dictionary at any library. Why are you really here Mr. Smith?* The question rattles Johnny. He excuses himself, maybe this was a mistake. On the way out, Johnny asks about the little girl in the waiting room; *what happened to her face? How was she burned?* Jennings doesn't know who he's referring to. Johnny opens the door to the waiting room – no girl. Johnny insists she was here. Jennings claims he doesn't have any children patients.

SMITH HOUSE - Johnny sits in his kitchen eating dinner. He drops his fork and crosses into the hallway. The floors have been sanded bare; layers of ancient finishes removed. He kneels down, running his palm along the grain. **VISION:** *We hear the squeal of rubber on wood. A surreal POV of a child on a tricycle bears down on Johnny. He jumps aside, as young Johnny pedals past oblivious; disappearing around a corner. Johnny follows his young self, watching him ride into Herb's office. Johnny follows. Herb stands before an entire wall of clocks, mesmerized by several dozen varieties mounted to the*

wall. He studies them; trance like. A cacophony of ticking. He suddenly turns, looking directly at adult Johnny. He smiles, inviting him in; I've got something to show you. He waves Johnny over to a hole in the floor; the boards have been removed. Herb urges him to reach in; the answer is in there. As if on auto pilot, Johnny drops to his knees and reaches into the hole. Without warning, a chilling shriek precedes a tidal wave of water exploding from the whole in the floor. Johnny is again underwater, sinking fast; passing lifeless bodies. A tuba floats by, then a trumpet. He continues to sink into the darkness. All at once, the clocks chime; an auditory assault. It's noon; twelve chimes. A bright light snaps on – headlights from the abyss. Then the grill, the hood, it's a car – a distorted form behind the wheel; Ally stares back at Johnny.

Johnny wakes, finding himself fetal on the bare floor of his father's office; now empty and under construction. Was it a vision, a dream, or both? He grabs a sledge hammer and drives it into the floor, swinging away; opening it up. He drops to his knees; reaches into the hole and retrieves a dust covered bundle. He tears it open to find a doll – Ally's doll.

ACT TWO

JENNINGS OUTER OFFICE - Johnny enters Jennings empty waiting room. He feels around, looking for a hit. He sits in Ally's chair. **VISION:** *Ally is led towards the exit by her mother. Herb Smith sits in the corner watching them leave. His gaze shifts to Johnny as if he sees him. Johnny involuntarily utters... dad? Herb rises off his seat, crosses to Johnny and reaches out – his hand passing through him to retrieve Ally's doll inadvertently left beneath the chair. He holds it in his hand, cradling it to his chest.*

JENNINGS INNER OFFICE - Jennings is in with a patient when the door flies open. Johnny storms in; *you lied to me about the girl!* Jennings politely excuses his other patient and invites Johnny in. He explains that he never lied; he did treat children, once. He did have a young girl that he saw for post traumatic stress after she was burned in a house fire, but that was thirty years in the past. Johnny asks about his father; *why didn't you tell me that he was your patient?* Jennings cites client privilege. It would have been

unethical for him to do so. Johnny demands the truth; growing increasingly combative. Jennings calmly asks him to leave; *I can't help you Mr. Smith. But I will give you one piece of advice... some skeletons are better left in closet.* Johnny leaves in a huff.

SMITH HOUSE – Johnny is on the phone with Walt; explaining the situation, asking him to subpoena Jennings records. He hangs up angrily, explaining to Bruce that Walt can't help without evidence of a crime. Every time Johnny tries to speak he is drowned out by power tools and hammering; his frayed nerves have had enough. He finds the foreman and dismisses the workers for the rest of the day; *make it the rest of the week.* Bruce expresses concern for Johnny; *what's going on with you, man? I've never seen you like this.* Johnny isn't entirely sure what's going on. It's like his dreams and visions are blending together; his reality skewed ever since he started work on the house. All the dust and debris have somehow connected him with his father and now his Dead Zone seems to be operating on its own terms. He shows Bruce the doll – there is some connection between my father and that little girl, and he needs to find out what it is. Bruce suggests he talk to Purdy, the only guy still around who really knew Herb. Johnny dismisses the notion; *I don't trust him. I don't trust anyone.* With that he asks Bruce to leave; *I want to be alone.* Johnny opens up the picture album again, retrieving a photograph of his 5th birthday party, triggering a **VISION**: *Festivities and merriment abound. Vera sends Johnny to find Herb so they can cut the cake. Little Johnny becomes adult Johnny as he heads upstairs. Water seeps out from under the bathroom door. He opens the door and enters to find the bathtub overflowing. A man lies at the bottom, face distorted by the water; in a sequined band uniform. Suddenly he sits up. It's Herb. He screams!* Johnny comes out.

FAITH HERITAGE - Bruce goes to Purdy. Tells him how worried he is about Johnny. He fears that the tremendous pressure and responsibility of his gift may be taking their toll on his mind. *If you know something about his dad, you need to tell him.*

JENNINGS OFFICE – Johnny sits in his car, watching Jennings lock up for the night. Johnny proceeds to break in, searching through old file cabinets until he finds his father's

file. He flips through; certain words pop out: **schizophrenia, paranoid delusions, danger to himself and others.** He then finds Herb's commitment papers, keying in on Vera Smith's signature. **VISION:** *Vera signs the document, fighting emotion as she watches Herb being restrained in a straight jacket; frantic... We have to do something. There's no more time. They're all going to die. Jennings bleeds a syringe and injects Herb with a sedative. He assures Vera he'll do everything he can to help her husband.* Johnny snaps out of the unsettling vision as a bright spot illuminates his face, *Freeze!* It's Jennings, a large revolver drawn. Johnny stares at him blankly; his mind reeling.

ACT THREE

OUTSIDE JENNINGS OFFICE – Johnny leans on Walt's cruiser, while Walt talks to Jennings. He apparently forgot something and came back to the office to discover Johnny had broken in. Walt wonders why a psychiatrist needs a carry permit for a pistol. Jennings replies *for self protection*, as he eyes Johnny; *there are a lot of crazies out there. A lot more than you know.* He suggests Johnny be committed for a 72 hour psychological hold to determine whether he is a threat to himself or anyone else. Walt assures him Johnny is fine and takes personal responsibility. Walt goes to Johnny with questions about his behavior. He tells Walt about his discovery and asks him about a place called **Brockmore**. Walt remembers it as an old hospital in North County. Johnny heads for his car. Walt offers to drive him.

WALT'S CRUISER – Walt drives. Johnny struggles to keep his eyes open, but dozes off in the passenger seat. **DREAM/MEMORY:** *An emotional Vera waking a young Johnny to tell him that Herb is very sick.*

BROCKMORE - Walt wakes Johnny from the dream; *we're here.* Reveal a large two-story brick building. Walt explains that he made some calls while Johnny was asleep; Brockmore used to be a hospital, but was recently converted into a special needs school. He has arranged for a tour. They head in; meeting CARVER, the administrator. He gives them a tour of the facility; children and teachers are everywhere. In a large playroom,

Johnny touches the wall. **VISION:** *The laughter of children morphs into the distant screams and anguished moans of endless mental patients from the past. Brightly painted walls dissolve into sterile tile. Tables full of children, become tables full of over-medicated zombies. The place is chock full of psychic debris.*

Johnny snaps back to reality. Carver stares at him as if he were crazy. Clearly uncomfortable, he invites them to look around on their own and slips away. Johnny watches him go; *he thinks I'm crazy. Maybe I am.* Moments later, they enter an empty classroom, triggering another **VISION:** *it transforms into the shock treatment room. Herb is being strapped down by orderlies; Jennings supervises. Herb mumbles incoherently fighting through the his drug induced haze.. He cranes his neck to address someone unseen. Johnny turns to find a nurse (45) watching from the corner, clearly tormented by what she's watching (her name tag reads EVELYN CROW). There's an apparent connection between the nurse and Herb. He looks right at her. What time is it? We're running out of time. It's almost noon! As the power switch is thrown, we come out... Johnny tells Walt we need to find her.*

SHERIFF STATION - Johnny nurses a cup of coffee. Walt returns; he found a nurse name Evelyn Crowe, but he doesn't think she'll be too much help.

ASSISTED LIVING HOME - Johnny is introduced to Evelyn, now in her late seventies and afflicted with progressive Alzheimer. Evelyn believes Johnny to be her late husband and reminisces with him, a poignant moment for Johnny. He takes her hand... **VISION:** *Johnny walks through a virtual history of Evelyn's life. Flash images of her childhood, her romance with her husband, her children. When we hit her years at Brockmore, the vision slows. Evelyn in a storage room, retrieving a personal articles container; marked SMITH. Flashing ahead... Evelyn slips into Herb's room. She presents him with watch she took from his belongings; explaining he can only hold it for a few moments. Herb takes the watch into his hand. He spins the crown to set it, then smashes it under his foot. Handing it back to with pleading eyes; somebody has to do something before it's too late.*

SMITH HOUSE – Johnny runs in, tearing through the old boxes, emptying the contents onto the floor; frantically searching, until he finds a velvet pouch... opening it to reveal the broken pocket watch. It's frozen on **12:00PM**. Johnny holds it. **VISION:** *Herb breaks a pane of glass, slipping his hand in to unlock a door. (Same move Johnny made to get into Jennings office). We fast forward... Johnny watches him enter a bedroom, clearly that of a little girl. He looks through her stuff, touching things; finally laying down on her bed. Closing his eyes. The door knob turns and in walks Ally. She screams at the sight of Herb and runs out. Herb rises and steps to the window. Johnny sees past him... Young Purdy waits behind the wheel of an idling car.*

ACT FOUR

FAITH HERITAGE / BOARDROOM – Purdy holds court with a conference room of people. Johnny burst in, enraged; accusing Purdy of lying. Confronting him. He bangs on the desk. *What did he want with her? Tell me!* Purdy takes him to a private office. He apologizes for lying, citing his promise to Vera as an excuse. *She didn't want you to know the truth. She didn't want you to think any less of him.* He explains that Herb was a tormented man; he was stressed and delusional. He was aware of his descent into madness and he tried desperately to fight it. He was convinced the girl was the answer, the key to solving his disease. Herb begged him to take him there, but he never hurt her. He only wanted answers; *just like you Johnny.* Purdy arranged for him to be hospitalized instead of jailed and covered up the whole thing to spare the family reputation. Johnny demands to know her name.

PARKING GARAGE – **Allison Carter** (Ally all grown up) exits her sedan; the side of her face still scarred from the childhood fire. She boards an elevator. As the doors close, Johnny slips in. He introduces himself. She is immediately frightened; *What do you want?* Jennings called her about him. Johnny assures her he doesn't want to hurt her. He just wants answers. She keeps her distance until Johnny shows her the doll. Her edge softens, the sight of the toy flooding her with memories. She reaches out for it; for a beat both of their hands are on it. **VISION:** *a clearer picture of the tragedy; people and*

vehicles falling through the air, people floundering in the water, band instruments raining down, confetti streamers everywhere, large pieces of steel and asphalt. Allison is there, in the water; dressed as she is now. She will be a victim too. Johnny snaps out of the vision; *you're in danger. I saw it, you're going to drown.* She stares at him, again frightened. The doors mercifully slide open and she runs out in the posh lobby of an office. Johnny follows, but is stopped by a security guard; *no pass, no entry.* Johnny watches Allison disappear around a corner. He spots a placard over the reception desk; CARTER, JOHNSON, & WEBSTER. He asks the guard what they do here as he's escorted out. The answer sends chills up his spine... they build bridges.

JOHNNY'S CAR – Johnny drives with Bruce. He explains that there is a dedication of a new suspension bridge today at noon. Allison was the architect. It all makes sense now, something terrible is going to happen to that bridge and they're running out of time.

SUSPENSION BRIDGE – The dedication ceremony is gearing up; a full marching band and caravan of vintage cars and fire engines poised to cross it. Johnny and Bruce pull up, running towards the assembly, but they're too late.... Allison cuts the ribbon, officially opening the bridge. The procession starts across. The roadway suddenly shudders. Johnny checks his watch: **12:00PM.** Suspension cables snap. People scream as a chunk of roadway falls away, sending bodies and vehicles into the depths below. Johnny sees Allison running for safety – a cable swings loose, knocking her into the water. The bridge gives way, a horrific tragedy unfolding before his eyes. WOOSH... it was only a **VISION.** The ribbon has yet to be cut. His watch reads **11:55AM.**

Johnny tries to warn Allison, but she immediately points him out to security. Johnny evades capture and slips onto the bridge way. He climbs a ladder, ascending into the steel skeleton. People scream as the ceremony is halted for the *crazy man.* A news helicopter roars into frame. NEWS ANCHOR VO explains that the unidentified man was safely removed from the bridge. A subsequent safety inspection revealed significant structural defects.

MATCH CUT TO TV NEWS COVERAGE - Johnny and Bruce in his kitchen, watching the television; the ANCHOR continues to explain that the weight of the traffic would have compromised it's rigidity with tragic consequences. Bruce commits that Johnny has a knack for drama. We learn that Johnny has been sleeping soundly again. The construction foreman enters, inviting Johnny into the study. The room has been completed. Bruce comments that it looks exactly the way it did... Johnny nods; *exactly*. He checks his watch and excuses himself. Outside, a limousine is waiting for him.

WOODS: The limousine bumps along a dirt road, arriving at a dilapidated hunting cabin. Johnny and Purdy emerge. Purdy explains that this is where Herb came after his release from the hospital. Johnny heads in alone...

CABIN – Time, vandals, and weather have taken their toll on the place. He clears some debris to reveal a leg shackle chained to the floor. Johnny hesitates a long beat before touching the chains. We hear a Whoosh... then FADE TO BLACK.