

ABANDONED

ACT 1

Erin stands on a chair in front of the bathroom mirror, brushing her teeth. She's the kind of six year old you'd see on an American commercial - blonde curly hair, big blue eyes, porcelain skin. The morning light that illuminates her face, combined with the soft silence, gives the scene a dreamy quality. Erin shares a moment with her reflection, today doesn't feel like any other day.

An unidentifiable voice cuts through the silence from the other side of the door:

"Time to go."

Sitting in the back of the car alone, Erin watches the typical suburban houses fly by. In front, **Mother** drives, her face only partially visible in the rear view mirror. She is talking to someone on her cell phone in a whispered tone, as if keeping the contents of the conversation from her daughter. She finishes the call, and rests the phone down on the front passenger seat, and warns Erin that the mall will be quite busy today. Erin recoils at this, she doesn't deal well with crowded areas. Mother reminds her that, if she is scared, she simply needs to find a quiet space, close her eyes, and count backwards from 10, and when she opens her eyes again, everything will be fine.

The mall ruptures the horizon, jutting out higher than the surrounding buildings, and as they approach, it looms over the car, like a predator observing its prey. They drive into the underground car park.

Car parked, Mother turns the ignition off, and rather than turn to face Erin, she pauses, staring straight ahead. An uncomfortable silence, is she preparing for something? She gets out, and practically drags Erin from the car. She drops her glove on the car park floor as Mother marches on toward the elevator.

They head up in the elevator, Erin cowering in the corner as the two strangers in front watch the floors tick by.

The mall is packed with frenzied consumers filling the corridors, already busy with bright lights and garish advertisements. Erin huddles by Mothers side as the hundreds of shoppers scurry around her.

In a clothes store, and Mother is flicking through the jumpers on a rack, Erin sitting on a shelf, knees tucked up into her chest, hugging her legs for comfort. Mother holds a woollen jumper in front of Erin. "What do you think?" Erin can only conjure up a meek nod in response. Mother pulls her out of the shelf and tells her she's going to try it on, and promises a treat for Erin afterwards.

As Mother tries on her prospective purchase, Erin sits on a stool in the corner of the changing room. She breathes a sigh of relief, being away from the hustle and bustle of the mall corridors, and enjoys the silent haven.

Mother takes her purchase to the till, and as the till assistant rings it through, Erin stares at a cartoonish puppy keyring on the nearby display. The till assistant notices this, and gently asks Erin if she likes it. Terrified of the unwanted interaction, Erin hides behind Mother, who lacks the sympathy a mother should give her six year old child. She forces Erin to speak to the till assistant, offering to buy it for her if she'll have some manners and respond. Erin plucks up all her courage to address the assistant's question - Yes. With a nod from Mother, the assistant hands Erin the keyring, and Erin cracks a smile for the first time as she examines her new toy.

The two are now sitting in a food hall, Mother hesitantly picking at a small box of fries, Erin playing with her toy amidst the remains of her burger meal. Erin's attention is drawn to a dreary poster of a farmhouse beside a cliff edge, rain pouring down on the muted landscape. Mother appears agitated, there's something on her mind making her fidgety, with a hint of sadness. She tells Erin that she needs to leave the table for a moment, and to stay here. She tells her everything will be fine, as if there was concern to be worried. Erin watches as she walks away from the food court, and approaches a **Skinny Man**. Mid-forties, his messy greying hair, yellow teeth and horrific skin clash with his rather sharp white-shirt-and-grey-slacks attire. The two talk, the man's enthusiastic gestures are at odds with Mothers sombre tone. Eventually, he leans in, whispering something into her ear, and discreetly passes Mother something blue and plastic. She grabs it, and immediately walks in the other direction of the food court, clearly distressed. The skinny man's glance moves to Erin.

Erin gets off her seat, and starts to head in the direction of Mother. Her walk becomes a run, and panic sets in as she has lost sight of her. She starts shouting out for her.

The shoppers don't seem to notice her as she darts between them, hurriedly pacing towards the corridor Mother was heading towards. She turns the corner, expecting to see Mothers back in the crowd. No one.

"MOMMY!"

She falls into a pile on the floor in tears, the shoppers simply manoeuvring around her as if she was just an object. She pulls herself back up, and looks around. She sees the clothing store that she got the keyring from - maybe the lovely till assistant can help her.

She enters the shop, and runs straight for the tills. The till assistant isn't there. As she turns to leave the shop, she sees the skinny man enter, and looks directly at Erin, a smile bearing his dirty teeth. She turns away, and retreats back to the changing rooms she was in before. Slamming the curtain shut, she leaps onto the stool, and tries to calm herself. Her hands cover her eyes, and she starts counting down from 10.

She opens her eyes, the stillness of the changing room doesn't comfort her anymore. Gingerly, she leaves the cubicle, and heads back out into the store.

It's empty.

She heads out of the shop into the mall - it's empty too.

She runs back over to the corridor she suspected mum went down, but as she turns the corner, the corridor doesn't look quite the same. As she heads down it, following the lonely winding corridors, the shop names start making less and less sense, the architecture seemingly looping back in on itself.

Out of breath, her run slows to a stumbling walk, as she approaches a T-junction in the mall. She steps out into it and looks right - the corridor stretches off seemingly for miles, into darkness. She looks left - the same infinite corridor. She turns to head back the way she came, but is startled by a shop front - this wasn't there before?

After consideration, she realises she has to go somewhere, and starts walking the infinite corridor.