

As Grass

by

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SEQUENCE: SLOW MOTION

INT. NURSERY - DAWN

A NEWBORN with a dark head of hair traces his hand through shafts of light and suspended dust. His fingers glow red, almost translucent.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Chubby hands make painstaking progress across carpet as the OLDER BABY learns how to crawl.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

The TODDLER squats, grabbing handfuls of grass. He stops to observe a trail of ants pick their way across the yard.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The BOY (7) snuggles up to his MOM in his pajamas. He watches her eyes crinkle as she smiles at him in the warm light.

EXT. PARK - DAY

His FATHER points out a cicada exuviae clinging to a twig. Gently, the BOY (9) breaks off the twig to bring it with him. He holds it up, watching how light filters through its delicate structure.

END SEQUENCE

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Life jolts to REAL TIME as the BOY (12) finds his FATHER sobbing on the edge of the bed. He hesitates at the doorway, then backs away.

EXT. BACKYARD - LATER

He pulls himself up into a tree, settling on a sturdy branch to survey the stillness. Wind rustles through leaves. He shivers, pulling his jacket closer. He weeps in silence.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

He struggles with packing tape as he attempts to close a cardboard moving box.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

His father shuts off the lights and locks the door to their empty house, leaving the key under the mat.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

They drive off.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The TEENAGER stretches out on his bed, twirling the perfectly preserved cicada exuviae.

EXT. PATIO - DAY

A FRIEND waves him over to where some other CLASSMATES are drinking bubble tea at a picnic table.

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

His friend smirks over his shoulder at him as they jog. He takes off, daring him to catch up.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

They sit at the top of a deserted play set. A GIRL climbs up, smiling with a secret. She opens her hand to reveal a cluster of tiny pills. His friend takes it without hesitation.

She offers him one. A beat. He slaps her hand away, spilling them everywhere.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

He slouches over his homework at the kitchen table. He looks up briefly when his father places a reassuring hand on his shoulder as he passes by.

EXT. COLLEGE DORM - DAY

His father hands him his backpack. He gives his son a rare hug before walking off.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

His college years speed by, a series of pulsing, indistinct moments. Professors droning. Bodies moving to music. Filling in Scantron bubbles. Late night drives. Hitting snooze. Chasing friends across campus.

END MONTAGE

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Returning to REAL TIME, he steals a glance at the GIRL across from him in study group. She tries not to smile.

INT. CAR - DAY

Everyone is jammed into the car for a long road trip. She's asleep against his shoulder. He memorizes the way her hair falls across her face. Her fingers twitch as she sleeps.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAWN

He crawls out of his tent, hair sticking up everywhere. He catches a glimpse of her through the trees as she wanders off to explore. He runs after her.

SEQUENCE: SLOW MOTION

EXT. OVERLOOK - DAWN

He finds her watching the sunrise. She greets him with a shy smile and they share the view in silence.

After a few moments, he finds her fingers. Time almost stops as she squeezes back. She turns to face him.

INT. WEDDING VENUE - DAY

They lock eyes as he slips a ring on her finger. She's crowned in white gauze and golden light. Smiling through tears.

They kiss. Time doesn't exist.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

She chops fresh spring onions with precision on a broad bamboo cutting board. He watches her through the steam rising from the wok as he stir-fries.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

He wakes up to his wife sneaking a kiss before she leaves for her shift. He pulls her back into bed, scrubs and all.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Pain vanishes from her face and anxiety from his the moment they see their BABY. The NURSE places him in their arms, and suddenly everyone is crying.

INT. NURSERY - NIGHT

He cradles his sleeping son wrapped in soft blankets. His AGING FATHER places an arm around him as they gaze at him.

END SEQUENCE

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

Time passes quickly as he falls into a contented rhythm. Changing diapers. Dressing for work. Making dinner. Inching through traffic. Calling clients. Switching off the light. Stepping on Legos. Typing. Tousling his KID'S hair. Shaking hands. Running. Fluorescent lights flickering.

END MONTAGE

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

He sinks onto the couch in wrinkled work clothes. His SON (9) is playing with a small army of Bionicles on the carpet in the middle of the room. He smiles as he opens his laptop.

A moment later, he glances up again. Freezes. His SON (16) is sprawled across the floor, scrolling on his iPhone.

The color drains from his face. He slides the computer from his lap. He stands up, shaking, and leaves the room.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - NIGHT

He watches his WIFE shut the lid of the washing machine. She's still beautiful, but time has taken its toll. Unfamiliar lines mark her face. Her expression betrays fatigue. She turns the knob to SHORT CYCLE.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

He bursts into the bathroom and sees himself in the mirror: a MIDDLE AGED MAN.

Wrinkled and graying. Disintegrating in panic.

He touches his face, then his reflection, struggling to connect the two in his mind. He stares into his tired eyes, trying to find himself there.

SEQUENCE: FAST MOTION

He has no time to recover before backgrounds begin morphing rapidly behind him as he experiences time at warp speed. Offices and living rooms, crowds and empty streets.

He rotates through collared shirts and suits, a laptop bag slung over his shoulder. Alternating pairs of rumpled sleepwear. Breezy vacation clothing lingers for a moment, a brief relief. Back to repetitive office days.

The growing panic in his expression has given way to desperation. The pace is unbearable. He cries out and starts sprinting. He squeezes his eyes shut.

Just before the breaking point, his surroundings soften to green. His face relaxes as he slows to REAL TIME.

END SEQUENCE

EXT. NATIONAL PARK - DAY

His eyes open. He's on a solo backpacking trip. He soaks in the silence as he hikes. He crouches down to run his hands through a brook, splashing his face and the back of his neck. He squints up at the sun filtering through the foliage.

EXT. TREE - DUSK

He shrugs off his pack and pulls himself up into a tree. He listens to the wind in the leaves.

Something catches his eye. He leans forward to examine it. A cicada exuviae. Breaking off the twig, he spins it slowly in the sunlight.

He leans his head back against the trunk, searching the sky through the branches.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

He returns home to find his wife still in her scrubs. The TV is playing, but she's not really watching. It's obvious she's been crying. He joins her on the couch. She leans into him.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

He nudges her shoulder as they wash dishes together. She laughs and flicks some water at him. He feigns shock.

EXT. TRAIL - EARLY MORNING

He and his sleepy-eyed son warm up for a run. He rumples his bedhead, then takes off without warning. His son laughs and chases after him.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

He and his wife sip wine with his father on a cool summer night. Conversation dwindles to a comfortable silence.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A phone call wakes him up in the middle of the night. His wife listens in, eyes wide. He drops the phone into his lap and collapses into sobs. She pulls him close.

FLASHBACK: SLOW MOTION

EXT. RESTAURANT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

His father shares one last smile, then turns and walks away.

END FLASHBACK

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

His son hesitates at the doorway, then sinks down beside them on the bed. He reaches for his son.

EXT. NATURE TRAIL - DUSK

The OLD COUPLE meanders down a closely wooded path with some difficulty. They reach an outlook just as it starts to glow with golden hour light.

He finds her wrinkled fingers, and she squeezes back.

Time slows to a crawl.

A moment passes. She's gone the next.

He flexes his fingers.

Tears stream rapidly down his timeworn face, but they are soon washed away by a complex series of expressions. The sun fades fast, leaving him in darkness.

He searches the sky and its little points of light. Whatever he finds there seems to put him at ease. Time slows.

He stretches his hand toward the gold of dawn.

Time stops altogether.

FADE TO BLACK