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2022

## ZUGZWANG

John Ross Thompson

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FINAL THESIS  
TELEVISION PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Student Name: John Ross Thompson

Thesis Logline: A man with sleep paralysis must return home to his mother to save her and himself when their lives are threatened by the Shadow Man, a sleep paralysis demon.

# ZUGZWANG

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Title

A teleplay written and produced and presented to the faculty of  
the Writing and Producing for Television MFA Program in the  
School of Film & Television at Loyola Marymount University of  
Los Angeles, California

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts

Writing and Producing for Television

By

John Ross Thompson

---

Student Name

*John Ross Thompson*  
John Ross Thompson (Apr 27, 2022 15:46 PDT)

---

Student Signature

## APPROVAL TO ADVANCE TO CANDIDACY

The following student has met all the criteria to advance to candidacy for an M.F.A. in Fine Arts with an emphasis in Writing and Producing for Television:

**John Ross Thompson**

Student Name

**Apr 27, 2022**

Date



SCWR 680 Instructor Signature



SCWR 681 Instructor Signature



Patricia K. Meyer (Apr 28, 2022 08:26 PDT)

Graduate Director Signature

**APPROVED**

*By Stephen V Duncan at 9:38 am, Nov 11, 2021*



*Please confirm you have properly numbered your script before submitting to HOPA - check here:*

FADE IN:

1 INT. IAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT 1

Darkness. IAN (30, Half-Black, Half-White), beyond exhausted, lays in bed, awake, but his body is asleep; paralyzed and stuck to the bed. His eyes scan the room.

In the corner watching him is a SHADOWY FIGURE: THE SHADOW MAN (looks 50s, Black), black from head to toe with glowing red eyes, wears a 1930s black fedora and black zoot suit.

The Shadow Man gives Ian a sinister white smile. The sound of CHOKING from strangulation rises in the background and--

IAN (V.O.)  
You said I wouldn't have to talk.

CUT TO:

2 INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - NIGHT 2

A sign with "Bereavement support group" on it. PEOPLE, including Ian, sit in a circle in the center of the room. There is an empty seat across from Ian.

TERESA (30), the group leader, looks at Ian, sympathetic.

TERESA  
Not if you don't want to.

Silence. Everyone's eyes are on Ian until he gives, stalls...

IAN  
Hi. I'm Ian.

GROUP  
Hi, Ian.

He hates that. He gulps, considers his words.

IAN  
I know what I'm about to say is going to sound crazy...

TERESA  
It's alright. Take your time.

Ian listens. Exhales.

**APPROVED**

By Stephen V Duncan at 9:38 am, Nov 11, 2021



3 *FLASH POP: INT. HOPE'S HOUSE - HOPE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT* 3

*VINCENT (40s, White) lies in bed beside a sleeping HOPE under the covers. While Hope's hidden body moves with each breath, Vincent is still. There are black handprints around his neck.*

IAN (V.O.)

My dad died twenty years ago. The doctors said he passed in his sleep.

4 BACK TO SCENE 4

Ian pauses, uncomfortable. The group waits.

He drops his head, rubs his eyes, SIGHS.

IAN

When I was little... I had bouts of sleep paralysis. It was hereditary. My dad had it, too. With it came a the Shadow Man, a demon. After you see him once, you can see him anywhere - awake or asleep. He likes to toy with you.

He takes a deep breath. Exhales.

IAN (CONT'D)

Before my dad died, I had nightmares of the Shadow Man.

5 *FLASH POP: INT. HOPE'S HOUSE - HOPE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT* 5

*Vincent lies paralyzed on the bed, CHOKING, as the Shadow Man strangles him, a smile across the demon's face. Vincent struggles to breathe as the Shadow Man presses down harder.*

IAN (V.O.)

I know it sounds insane, but my mom and I believe the Shadow Man killed him.

6 BACK TO SCENE 6

Ian gets a few skeptical looks, but no one seems perturbed.

IAN

After twenty years, I started seeing the Shadow Man again three nights ago.

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By Stephen V Duncan at 9:38 am, Nov 11, 2021

7 *FLASH POP: INT. IAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT* 7

*Darkness. Ian lays in bed, paralyzed. At the foot of his bed is the Shadow Man.*

*The Shadow Man crawls onto the bed on all fours, slithers his way up to Ian's face. Ian's body STRUGGLES to move, twitches, but stays put. The Shadow Man places his hands on Ian's neck.*

*The Shadow Man creepily smiles, whispers into Ian's ear:*

*SHADOW MAN*

*Fate must've been incorrect. You're much weaker than your father. Pity.*

8 *BACK TO SCENE* 8

*Ian looks up at Teresa.*

*IAN*

*I'm afraid for my mother, too.*

*Silence. Teresa looks sympathetically at Ian. Ian closes his eyes and tries to get out the next part. It's hard for him.*

*IAN (CONT'D)*

*He's finally come to kill us.*

9 *FLASH POP: INT. HOPE'S HOUSE - HOPE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT* 9

*The Shadow Man strangles a CHOKING HOPE (60s, Black), optimistic, in bed. The room is exactly the same as before, except there's now a picture of Vincent on Hope's nightstand.*

*Ian sits, paralyzed, in an overturned chair beside her.*

*IAN (V.O.)*

*I started having nightmares of her death two nights ago. Just like my dad's.*

*The Shadow Man fades away, and Hope lays dead on the bed, black handprints on her neck.*

10 *BACK TO SCENE* 10

*Ian holds back tears. It's quiet. Finally, Teresa speaks.*

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By Stephen V Duncan at 9:38 am, Nov 11, 2021



TERESA

That sounds like guilt. Maybe you should visit her? That helped Mary stop seeing her late son.

She motions to a solemn WOMAN who nods. Everyone looks to Ian, but his eyes are on the ground.

Then, the sound of CHOKING fills the air. Gets louder in Ian's ears. No one else hears it. The choking stops and...

He looks up. In the once empty chair across from him is the Shadow Man, smiling. No one looks at the Shadow Man, as if he's not even there.

IAN

And if that doesn't work?

There's no response, only pitiful looks. The Shadow Man just stares back at Ian with them. Ian looks down. Nods.

11

EXT. HOPE'S HOUSE - DAY

11

Two cars in the driveway. Ian stands outside of Hope's house. He hesitates to knock, then pulls out his phone. He checks his reflection, fixes his hair until he sees on the screen--

THE SHADOW MAN

Looking at him from right behind, barely any space between.

SHADOW MAN

You look drowsy.

The Shadow Man creepily smiles, reaches to touch Ian's shoulder when--

The front door FLIES open, scaring the shit out of Ian. The Shadow Man is gone, but instead, Ian faces his mother, Hope.

HOPE

My baby boy. I thought I heard a car pull up.

She hugs him. Looks at his face.

HOPE (CONT'D)

Oh my, you look exhausted.

IAN

Nice to see you, too, Mom.

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12

INT. HOPE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

12

Hope puts a kettle on the stove. Turns it on.

On the island is a beaten up chessboard:

White: King a1, pawns a2, a3, and e7, knight d1, rook e1.

Black: King e8, rook f7, queen b5, bishop d4, pawn f3.

Ian approaches the board.

IAN

Dad's game again? You really need to stop playing this...

(picks up board corner)

I gotta get you a new board.

HOPE

You're won't have time to do that.

Ian's a little confused by that. He focuses on the game.

IAN

Dad really had you cornered. Best move for you is pawn a-four.

He moves the white pawn forward.

HOPE

Which I did.

IAN

But there's no way you could win. No matter what you do, you're putting yourself at an even worse disadvantage by moving.

HOPE

It's embarrassing that this was our last game. And the only one he won. And he was sleep-deprived!

IAN

I remember. He hung up a picture of it and everything.

Hope turns, suddenly sad. Ian hesitates, before...

IAN (CONT'D)

Mom, I'm here because--

HOPE

--I know why you're here.

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By Stephen V Duncan at 9:38 am, Nov 11, 2021



She faces Ian, who's terrified to hear her words.

HOPE (CONT'D)  
I started having nightmares.

What sounds like CHOKING quickly becomes the kettle's WHISTLES. Hope walks over to it, takes it off the fire.

She pours two cups of tea. Slyly, unseen by Ian, she slips a pill into each cup. She delivers Ian one of the cups.

HOPE (CONT'D)  
I'm in my bed.

13 DREAM SEQUENCE - INT. HOPE'S HOUSE - HOPE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 13

*Hope's in bed. There's a darkness beside the door. Is something there? The escalated sound of CHOKING cut off by--*

HOPE (V.O.)  
Your father said the Shadow Man  
used to stand right by the door.  
But, before I can see if he's even  
there... I'm in the hallway.

14 HALLWAY 14

*Hope stands, the hallway illuminated with a red night light.*

HOPE (V.O.)  
I hear you scream.

IAN (O.S.)  
*Mommy!*

*Hope walks to the room where the SCREAM came from.*

15 IAN'S BEDROOM 15

*Hope enters. Ian's in bed, the Shadow Man on him, his hands on Ian's neck. Both Ian and the Shadow Man face Hope. Chills.*

HOPE (V.O.)  
We're in your current bedroom.

*Something falls and CLATTERS on the ground from another room. Hope looks towards it, then back to Ian. Neither he nor the Shadow Man are there. She turns back to the sound.*

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16 INT. HOPE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY 16

Hope sits across from Ian, sips on her tea. Her eyes survey him as he picks up his cup, brings it to his lips, hesitates. Hope is tense until... He finally takes a sip. She relaxes.

HOPE

I'd walk in here and the chessboard would be set up just like this. My queen would be on the ground, shattered into pieces.

17 DREAM SEQUENCE - INT. HOPE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT 17

*Hope looks at a broken white queen piece as something dark moves behind her; a blurry shadow about to grab her and...*

18 INT. HOPE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY 18

Hope looks down at her tea.

HOPE

Then I'd wake up, paralyzed. The Shadow Man would be watching me from by the door. It's happened for four nights now.

She's very calm about it. Ian's worried, horrified. He sits back and rubs at his eyes. He's all of a sudden very tired.

HOPE (CONT'D)

You look like you need some sleep.

IAN

I can't, Ma. We can't. He's come to kill us. I won't let him--

HOPE

--We'll be fine. You need to rest. The faster you go to bed, the sooner we can all be happy.

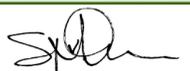
She smiles at him. Ian's uncomfortable. Hope pats his hand and motions for him to drink more tea. He does.

19 EXT. HOPE'S HOUSE - NIGHT 19

It's nighttime. The front lights are off, and...

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By Stephen V Duncan at 9:39 am, Nov 11, 2021



20

INT. HOPE'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

20

Ian washes his face, then looks in the mirror. His eyes close for a brief second. He struggles to stay awake. He opens his eyes and looks at himself.

IAN

(sotto)

Stay up. You can't fall asleep.

Something dark moves in the shower behind him, a pitch black hand grabs around the curtain, Ian hears CHOKING, when--

Hope enters in her pajamas. She gently touches Ian's arm. The black hand's gone.

HOPE

Honey, you need to go to sleep.

Ian shakes his head, slow and sluggish.

HOPE (CONT'D)

Well, I'm going to bed.

IAN

I'll watch over you. The second I see your eyes open, I'll try to wake up the rest of your body.

Hope grins at him, loving his protectiveness, but says:

HOPE

Don't.

21

INT. HOPE'S HOUSE - HOPE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

21

Hope lays in her bed as Ian sits in a chair beside her. He watches over her, but is barely able to keep his eyes open. Hope rolls around in bed, restless. Then stops, looks at Ian.

HOPE

I'm sorry. Ian... I have to tell you something. Your father...

Ian waits, but she's struggling with her words.

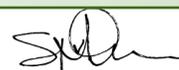
IAN

What?

Hope looks into her son's tired eyes. She's... happy.

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HOPE  
(whispers)  
Your father's alive.

Ian's shocked at first, then confused.

IAN  
We buried him.

HOPE  
He's just sleeping.

Ian blinks, heavily, shakes his head. Hope is concerned.

HOPE (CONT'D)  
Don't you want to sleep with us?

Ian's head drifts as he tries to comprehend her.

HOPE (CONT'D)  
The Shadow Man told me everything.  
He wanted you here with me at the  
end. We can all live together... in  
a Hell beyond Hell...

Ian is barely staying conscious as she speaks.

IAN  
Mom... what did you do?

HOPE  
I freed us.

She grabs his hand.

HOPE (CONT'D)  
We'll be together soon... You can't  
escape the Shadow Man.

She pushes his chair backwards. Ian's chair tips, his head  
falls back, and...

Darkness.

22

INT. IAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

22

Ian opens his eyes. He's in bed, the Shadow Man mounting him.  
The Shadow Man whispers into his ear:

SHADOW MAN  
Go ahead, yell for your mammy.

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By Stephen V Duncan at 9:39 am, Nov 11, 2021



He wraps his hands over Ian's neck. His handprints BURN. Ian labors to open his mouth, but once he can:

IAN

Mommy!

23 INT. HOPE'S HOUSE - HOPE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 23

Hope's dead on the bed, her hands about her neck. Her hands drop to their sides and reveal BLACK HANDPRINTS beneath. An overturned chair lies beside her bed, no Ian.

24 INT. IAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT 24

Ian struggles to speak.

IAN

Why?

The Shadow Man CHUCKLES. He strangles Ian.

SHADOW MAN

I must follow Fate's orders.

25 SUDDENLY 25

It's just Ian, fighting to breathe as he chokes himself and writhes on the bed - a wide awake night terror.

26 THE SHADOW MAN 26

Reappears, strangling Ian as he MANIACALLY LAUGHS, Ian's hands to the side again.

Ian grabs the Shadow Man's wrists and tries to fight back. His hands BURN the Shadow Man. The Shadow Man SQUEALS, but...

Ian's eyes flutter closed. He's motionless. The Shadow Man gives one last push, then backs off. He steps back and disappears into the dark ether around him.

Ian lies dead, his own hands around his neck, his eyes closed. His hands fall, black handprints left behind.

Everything goes quiet. The room settles. Silence. Stillness. The handprints fade away, and--

**APPROVED**

By Stephen V Duncan at 9:39 am, Nov 11, 2021



Eyes closed, Ian's body jolts up. He GASPS for air, breathes heavily, feels his neck. And he opens his eyes. Red.

CUT TO BLACK.

AFTER CREDITS:

27 GINNY GALL - THE IN-BETWEEN 27

Darkness, and nothing but it. In the middle stands the Shadow Man, somehow illuminated in it all, looking more human than ever before with an ugly, twisted, dark, and vascular face.

Handprints matching his true skin color are on his wrists. He shakes his wrists, he's obviously never seen this before.

Hope appears in the darkness and walks to the Shadow Man. She places a hand on his shoulder and points ahead. He looks up and sees Ian leaned up in his bed and--

28 INT. IAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT 28

The Shadow Man is back in his regular form in Ian's room at the foot of his bed - just the two of them.

He stares at Ian. At first he's angry, but then he starts smiling. CHUCKLING. Outright LAUGHING.

SHADOW MAN

Fate was correct. The night has chosen you, Ian. Welcome, my first child.

The two wickedly smile at each other. The sound of CHOKING fills the room, and--

29 OVER BLACK. 29

SUPER: "ALL HAIL THE SHADOW MEN OF SUGAR HILL. KEEPERS OF THE NIGHT. CHILDREN OF FATE. MAY THERE BE MANY MORE TO COME."

TITLE CARD: ZUGZWANG

CUT TO BLACK.

**APPROVED**

By Stephen V Duncan at 9:39 am, Nov 11, 2021

