

UNLOCKED

Written by
Kaitlin Dugdale and Ja'Net Douglas

BLACK SCREEN / FADE IN:

1 EXT. TRACK - DAY

ETHAN, 17, runs at full speed, pounding the track. His breath is sharp, his pace relentless.

INTERCUT WITH:

- ETHAN wandering through the woods, lost, clutching his COMPASS.
- ETHAN journaling, scribbling, tearing out pages.
- ETHAN pacing his room, prepping for debate.
- ETHAN clashing with his mother, MISS JAMES.

ETHAN (V.O.)

I've always been a runner. I don't know why.
Maybe if I run fast enough... it won't catch me.
The truth. The memory. Whatever it is. I try
to write it down, make it make sense...
but it never does.
Even in my dreams, everything's jumbled — like
my brain's trying to tell me something without
using words I understand.
So I tear it up.
Start over.
But it always comes back to the same question:

ETHAN / JOURNEY (V.O)

Who am I?
I act like I know. But inside... I'm tired, I'm
angry, and I'm empty.

(beat)

JOURNEY (V.O)

Some people wear smiles like locks, thinking
if they stay quiet, the past won't hear them
breathing. But hiding isn't healing.
And over time, they forget what truth ever

looked like. Most days, they just run – from something, from someone...

(beat)

maybe even themselves.

2 INT. JAMES RESIDENCE - ETHAN'S ROOM - DAY

Ethan finishes journaling, blasting rock music through his headphones. He sets the journal on his desk, grabs his running gear.

The door creaks open. MISS JAMES enters, arms full of laundry. She says something – unheard under the music. She pulls off a headphone.

MISS JAMES

I said I thought you weren't feeling well.

ETHAN

(avoiding eye contact)

I'm going for a run.

Ethan stuffs the journal into a small BOX, slings it under his desk, and heads for the door. Miss James watches him, puzzled.

MISS JAMES

Okay...

(remembering)

Hey, don't forget your keys!

Ethan touches the KEY hanging from his neck. Checks his pocket – his keys are there. He bolts out the door.

Miss James sets the laundry basket down. Her eyes catch the BOX. She lifts the lid, finds the JOURNAL, and flips through a few pages. Concern tightens her face.

CUT TO:

3 EXT. SADIE'S FRONT YARD - AFTERNOON

A CAR is parked in the driveway. Boxes are scattered across the lawn. SADIE (16), energetic but thoughtful, carries a box toward the porch.

Ethan jogs past, sweat dripping, still catching his breath from his run. His foot snags the edge of the sidewalk - he TRIPS and tumbles to the ground.

Sadie drops her box and rushes over.

SADIE

Whoa—are you okay?

Ethan pushes himself up, brushing off dirt, embarrassed. He nods.

ETHAN

Yeah. I'm...

(their eyes connect; she seems all too familiar)

fine.

They study each other for a moment, then:

SADIE

Well, you might wanna put some ice on that.

(points to his red knee)

In the meantime, maybe this will help.

She picks up an ORANGE from a fruit box at her feet and tosses it to him.

SADIE (CONT'D)

(sarcastically)

They're free with every fall.

ETHAN

(catching it, flat)

I hate oranges.

SADIE

(quietly, almost to herself)

Of course, you do.

(catching herself)

I mean, good. Now I know two things about you: you hate oranges and your on the track team at school. Other than that, you're still a mystery.

ETHAN

How'd you know I was on the track team?

SADIE

Well, it's kind of obvious. And Cooper Smith told me that the guy who used to be his best friend was my neighbor. He really emphasized "used to be," and I'm curious to know what happened.

ETHAN

(losing patience)

None of your business, that's what. And how do you know Cooper anyway?

SADIE

I'm a cheerleader. He's a football player. That's how I met him.

(jokingly:)

You know, it's like in all the movies—we're just generically programmed to find each other.

Ethan stares at her blankly.

SADIE (CONT'D)

I'm kidding. We're just friends.

(beat. Picks up her box)

So, why haven't you been at school—

ETHAN

(abruptly)

This conversation is over.

Ethan storms off, leaving Sadie to stare after him.

SADIE

Well, it was nice to meet you.

She exhales, watching him leave, sympathy in her eyes.

4 INT. JAMES RESIDENCE - DINING ROOM - EVENING

The table is half set. Ethan slumps in a chair, scrolling on his phone. Miss James enters with silverware.

MISS JAMES

Set two more places. I invited the new neighbors to dinner.

Ethan looks up, thrown.

ETHAN

What? Why?

MISS JAMES

Because they just moved in, and it's the polite thing to do. Besides... it might be good for you.

ETHAN

Good for me? I don't need more people asking questions.

MISS JAMES

(sidelong glance)

Maybe answering a few wouldn't hurt. You keep so much locked inside... it's not healthy.

Ethan stiffens, wary.

ETHAN

What's that supposed to mean?

MISS JAMES

Well, what do you think it means?

ETHAN

(frustrated)

Come on, Ma. Why can't you just give me a straight answer? You never give me a straight answer—about anything.

MISS JAMES

Son, you keep asking me for keys to doors I can't unlock for you. That's what scares me—you're so angry at me, you don't see you've been holding the key this whole time.

ETHAN

(putting it together, anger rising)

I don't want to hear that anymore, Ma. What does that even mean?

MISS JAMES

It means the answers you're chasing are already written down — you just don't want to face them.

(beat)

Those scribbled out pages won't make the truth disappear.

Ethan freezes.

ETHAN

(low, dangerous)

How do you know that?

MISS JAMES

(beat, covering)

A mother just knows.

Ethan's breathing quickens.

ETHAN

You didn't—

(realizing)

You read it. You went through my journal.

MISS JAMES

I was worried. That's all. You're so angry,
so lost—

ETHAN

I'M NOT LOST. And I'm not a child anymore!

MISS JAMES

But you are still MY child..

Look, I'm sorry if you felt like—

He stands, shoving his chair under the table, then he storms out.

5 INT. JAMES RESIDENCE - ETHAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

ETHAN storms to his room. He stares at the box in his closet and makes sure to lock it this time before slamming the closet shut.

CUT TO:

6 INT. JAMES RESIDENCE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Ethan sits unhappily at the dining table, picking at his food. Miss James and SADIE'S MOM carry on a lively conversation, while Sadie glances back and forth between Ethan and her food. The tension between them is growing.

SADIE'S MOM

It's just us now, so this move felt right.
Fresh start, you know?

MISS JAMES

Yes, I completely understand. It's always
been just us too. You do what you have to.

SADIE'S MOM

Yes, indeed.

The mothers clink their glasses together. Ethan is still staring at his plate, then his gaze flicks up to Sadie. Their eyes meet in an unspoken duel. She sends him a sly smile. He rolls his eyes and continues eating his food.

MISS JAMES

So have you two gotten settled?

SADIE'S MOM

We're getting there. Sadie's already unpacked most of the boxes. Even the ones with sad memories.

Ethan shoots Sadie a look. She locks eyes with him. He's puzzled by her facial expression.

The moms keep talking - jobs, neighborhoods, etc. Their conversation fills the room. Sadie and Ethan remain silent, studying each other across the table.

Suddenly, Ethan grows uncomfortable, as he begins to *remember*. He abruptly pushes away from the table. The moms fall silent.

ETHAN

I'm done.

He storms out. The moms sit stunned, while Sadie stares after him, curious, knowing.

CUT TO:

7 EXT. TRACK - DAY

The next day, we see ETHAN running at a track meet. We see him run, and start hallucinating a GIRL (Journey). Because of this, he ends up getting bronze in the race. He bends down, breathing heavily in defeat.

We then see him enter the locker room.

8 INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

AUSTIN comes up to him and notices his attitude.

AUSTIN

Hey, man. Don't beat yourself up.
You did great.

ETHAN

No, I didn't. I lost. Respectfully, weren't
you there?

AUSTIN

Yeah, but you did win bronze, and that's a
huge accomplishment.

Ethan sees a flash of Journey. He looks at Austin, then looks
back and Journey isn't there.

ETHAN

Hey, who's that?

AUSTIN

(looks in that direction)
What do you mean?

ETHAN

It was a girl.

AUSTIN

(stares at him blankly)
Uh, are you okay? I know it was hot today,
but it wasn't that hot. Maybe you should go
home and get some rest.

ETHAN

(huffs)
Fine. Whatever.

Ethan brushes past Austin, but Austin calls after him.

AUSTIN

Hey, that track didn't beat you—it introduced you to yourself.

Ethan rolls his eyes. He grabs his things and starts out to the parking lot.

CUT TO:

9 INT. JAMES RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Ethan walks into the house. Miss James is in the kitchen cooking.

MISS JAMES

Hey, baby. How'd it go?

Ethan throws down his stuff and sits in front of the TV. He turns it on, ignoring his mother's question.

ETHAN

What ya cooking, ma?

MISS JAMES

I'm making a roast...

Miss James's voice fades as Ethan sees Journey on the TV. He turns it off because he's sick of seeing her.

ETHAN

I'm gonna go clean up for dinner.

ETHAN gets up.

CUT TO:

10 INT. JAMES RESIDENCE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Ethan and Miss James are seated at the table. Ethan is still down in the dumps.

MISS JAMES

I owe you an apology... for going into your box.

ETHAN doesn't respond and plays with his food.

MISS JAMES

(Staring off in the distance with sad smile)

I remember when I first gave you that keepsake box... and the compass.

You told me you were scared of getting lost. The compass was so you'd always find your way home. The box... was so you'd always remember where you've been.

(beat)

But when I looked the other day and saw the lock-

ETHAN

Yeah well it's not a keepsake box anymore... it's a keep-out box.

MISS JAMES

(nods sadly, says silently)

Fair, but I don't deserve to be locked out-

ETHAN

(Standing up and slapping the table)

And I don't deserve to be left in the dark. You don't get to act hurt when you're the one who taught me to hide stuff in the first place!

MISS JAMES

(Stands at the same time face to face with Ethan)

Correction! What I TRIED to teach you was to live in truth, but somewhere along the way you decided truth was too heavy to carry, so YOU buried truth and piled anger, silence and things that aren't you on top of that truth!

ETHAN

Ma, please don't give me that bull-

MISS JAMES

(She slaps him)

Don't you ever confuse my silence for softness, or my love for permission.

I've been holding space for you- holding grace for you. But if you think you can raise your voice in my house, at my table, while eating off a plate I filled, then you've got another thing coming.

(beat)

This is still my house. And I'm still your mother. And I won't let you forget either one.

(beat)

Say what you want to me - but you gon' say it with respect.

ETHAN huffs and walks to the bathroom, staring at himself in the mirror.

MISS JAMES (O.S.)

You want the truth so badly? Then start with the one in the mirror-that's the man you keep hiding from.

By this time, ETHAN has gone into his room. We see Journey in the mirror, following behind him. He goes to slam the door, but then stops when his mother yells:

MISS JAMES (O.S.)

AND YOU BETTER NOT SLAM THAT DOOR!

ETHAN huffs and closes it slowly.

11 INT. JAMES RESIDENCE - ETHAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Montage of ETHAN pacing and exploring his room, hesitating about the box. He goes to the box, unlocks it and throws the bronze medal that he won from the race earlier.

ETHAN ends up in bed and goes to sleep.

12 INT. SMALL, DARK ROOM - COUNTINUOUS

We see nothing but BLACK. Then suddenly we see Ethan raise in the frame, panicked.

Ethan is alone in the room as takes in his surroundings.

He stands up, confused and disoriented.

JOURNEY

Hi.

Ethan whips around to see a GIRL emerging from the shadows in the room. He recognizes her.

ETHAN

It's you.

JOURNEY

In the flesh.

ETHAN

You've been following me.

JOURNEY

I guess you could call it that.

ETHAN

But why? Who are you? Where am I?

JOURNEY

Don't you recognize this place?
You're always here.

ETHAN

(looks around)
No. Why would I? And again, who are you?

JOURNEY

You don't recognize my voice? I'm offended.

ETHAN

(frustration rising)
No, I don't. WHO ARE YOU?

JOURNEY

I'm Journey.
(Circling around him flirtatiously.
Whispers:)
You know, that little voice in your head.

ETHAN

(backing away from her, giving
her a once-over)
But you're... and I'm...

JOURNEY

Not important. Don't think about it too much.
What is important though, is who are you?

ETHAN

I'm not sure... It's hard for me to remember.

JOURNEY

Oh, that's too bad. But hey, memories are
like shadows. Ignore them long enough, and
they start chasing you.

ETHAN

(beat. Looks around)
Are we trapped here? Is there a way out?

JOURNEY

Your mind is the only prison, especially when you keep locking the door from the inside.

ETHAN

Who are you, Shakespere? Do you only speak in riddles?

JOURNEY

(smugly)

Riddles are a learned language—I am, however, fluent in sarcasm.

ETHAN

Obviously.

ETHAN spins around, and is suddenly blinded by a bright light.

13 INT. THEATRE - STAGE - COUNTINUOUS

Ethan realizes he's on a stage, with a single spotlight shining on him. A MICROPHONE on a stand is waiting for him in the center.

A door slams shut behind him. Journey smirks, pushing him up to the microphone.

JOURNEY

(with dry sarcasm)

Go ahead. Tell them who you are.

Oh, wait. You don't remember.

Ethan panics, then bolts off the stage and up the aisles. When he reaches the exit, Journey is blocking his way.

JOURNEY

(touching the key around his neck)

I see you still have that key, huh? Around your neck like a souvenir you never open.

ETHAN
(ignoring her, frustrated)
Get out of my way.

JOURNEY
(moving aside)
Gladly.

ETHAN storms through the door, and is dropped into a different location.

14 INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Ethan steps into a MEMORY, where a long hallway opens up before him. He's still confused, and what's happening.

ETHAN
Where am I?

JOURNEY
(nods toward end of the hallway)
See for yourself.

Ethan steps closer, where he watches himself coming out of the principal's office. COOPER walks to him, but Ethan brushes past him.

COOPER
Hey, man. We're bound to talk again sometime.
Why can't we work things out, like we used to?

ETHAN
I don't wanna hear it, man. Just leave me
alone.

COOPER
I'm just trying to help you, man. Why do you
act like you're the only one who has problems?

ETHAN
(unraveling)

Because I am! Your life is perfect, Cooper. You have everything—perfect grades, perfect family. Everyone likes you because you're the star of the football team. The teachers like you. Your future's all laid out for you, while mine—

(gestures toward the principal's office)
That's my reality because of people like you.

COOPER

I went to the principal because I care. You've been shutting people out, and snapping at everyone—your mother, your teachers—what was I supposed to do—just watch you crash and burn?

ETHAN

(voice rising)
You went behind my back! You made me look like some broken project that needs fixing.

COOPER

Look, man, I was just trying to help you!

ETHAN

(steps in close, almost shaking)
You don't get it! You'll never get it. You've never had to. Everything comes easy for you. You don't have to wake up and wonder who you even are, or if today's the day people finally give up on you.

COOPER

(shaken, frustrated)
You think my life's perfect? You don't know half of it—

ETHAN

(cutting him off, shouting)
Don't lie! Don't act like you're some tortured soul just to make me feel better.

And STOP acting like you care, because I think you're just like everyone else—you'll leave too.

ETHAN turns, storming off down the hall.

COOPER stays frozen, fists clenched, then throws his hands up in frustration and defeat.

Ethan, who was watching, is tired of watching. He runs away through another door, tripping and falling into a different location.

15 INT. PUBLIC OFFICE - DAY

Ethan walks into a small office, lit by daylight. A small child, YOUNG ETHAN, sits alone in a chair. Two people, a JUDGE and ETHAN'S DAD, argue in the distance. Then, Miss James comes up to him, kneeling.

MISS JAMES

Hey, baby. You ready?

She offers Young Ethan her hand. He hesitantly takes it.

Ethan can't take it anymore. So he runs away, through a door that transports him to another location.

16 INT. JAMES RESIDENCE - DAY

He's now in his home. He watches Miss James as she puts items in the box including a compass. Then Miss James gives Young Ethan the box.

MISS JAMES

I can't promise the road will be easy, but I packed a compass just in case. When you don't know where you're going.

(beat)

Maybe this will help remind you where you came

from.

Miss James hugs Young Ethan, then he takes the box and hides it in his closet, continuing to suppress the truth of who he is.

Ethan gets frustrated and runs from the scene to the outdoors.

17 EXT. ETHAN'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Ethan jogs outside along the sidewalk. He's distracted as he runs past the house where Sadie now lives in the present. Suddenly, he trips and falls, transporting him to another location.

18 EXT. HIGH SCHOOL TRACK - DAY

Ethan has fallen onto the grass, but when he gets up, he realizes he's at the track his dad would always take him to.

Journey is already there, standing over him with a smug expression.

JOURNEY

About time you made it here.

Ethan is startled by her. He takes in his surroundings. Something about it seems eerily familiar.

ETHAN

Where am I now?

JOURNEY

You're still in the same place.

ETHAN

What does that even mean?

JOURNEY

(Nods toward two kids sitting under the bleachers)

You'll see.

Ethan looks in that direction. He slowly approaches the two children, one of which is him at 10, then the other is a LITTLE GIRL he doesn't recognize.

They are both giggling. The little girl peels an orange and gives it to Ethan at 10.

LITTLE GIRL

Eat an orange when you're sad. It'll taste like sunshine.

Ethan at 10 smiles and takes the orange.

Ethan turns away; he can't watch anymore. He starts to run again, but Journey stops him. He cringes as he suddenly begins to experience painful flashes.

ETHAN

What is this? What are you doing to me?

JOURNEY

I'm not doing anything to you. You're doing it to yourself, because you're still running.

(approaching him. Whispers:)

So stop running.

Ethan begins to experience a very vivid memory, causing him to fall into a different place. It's very chaotic because he's still trying to block it out.

19 EXT. BEHIND THE TRACK - DAY

Ethan falls into THE PLACE. It's very blurry because he's still trying to not see it.

Ethan's Father is on the cellphone, while two children are venturing off. They venture into a fenced area near the track.

Suddenly, we hear a little girl screaming.

We see Ethan at 10 running away from her.

LITTLE GIRL

Ethan!

The little girl's voice fades into Journey's as Ethan is chaotically transported back to the stands.

20 EXT. HIGH SCHOOL TRACK - DAY

JOURNEY

Ethan!

(overlapping with Miss James,
Sadie, and Cooper's voices)

Ethan! Ethan!

Ethan comes out of the flashback, confused and disoriented. He's just fallen back onto the grass. Journey crouches beside him.

JOURNEY

Well, what did you see this time?

ETHAN

(realizing)

What did you just say to me?

JOURNEY

I asked you what you saw.

ETHAN

No, before that—that name you said. It's my name, isn't it? Ethan's MY NAME. How did you know that?

JOURNEY is speechless, she steps back. Ethan realizes what's going on.

ETHAN

You know my name because you're the one who put me here.

JOURNEY

No, Ethan. I didn't put you here.
You came here to hide – from the truth, from
the pain, from yourself.

ETHAN

(angry, unraveling)
How am I supposed to face the truth when
everyone around me keeps playing games?!
You've known this whole time – who I am,
what this place is. You let me run in circles...
like it was some kind of test.

(beat, voice rising)
You could've just told me. But no – you just
stood there and watched.
Just like everybody else.

JOURNEY

(quiet, firm)
Because it doesn't matter who I say you are,
Ethan. You've spent your whole life placing
your identity in someone else...
But until you can face the truth and say it
yourself – you'll never believe it.

Ethan is suddenly overwhelmed with a very vivid memory – the
full version of what happened to the little girl.

We hear her screaming again as Ethan at 10 runs away.

Ethan watches this, heartbroken. Journey comes up behind him.

JOURNEY

I wonder what would have happened... if you
hadn't run away.

Ethan turns around, and she's gone. Then he's spiraled back into
reality somehow.

JOURNEY (V.O.)

(whispering as Ethan wakes up)

That's why you're here. To finally stop running... and unlock it.

21 INT. JAMES RESIDENCE - ETHAN'S ROOM - DAY

He sits up in bed, back in reality. He's a little confused and breathing heavily. Then he gets up, and goes to the mirror.

He contemplates his reflection, then pulls the key out of his shirt. He rips the key off his neck.

He opens his closet, and pulls out the box.

He opens it, and begins pulling out the items inside it.

He pulls out baby items, pictures, and drawings until he comes to a picture of him and the little girl together. Underneath the picture is a paper with an article about a missing little girl named KAYLEE BAXTER.

Then he remembers her fully, getting emotional.

ETHAN

(breaking)

I was scared. I was just a kid. I didn't know what to do.

JOURNEY (V.O.)

(whispers)

Now you do.

Underneath the picture, he finds the certificate of adoption. It all comes to full circle, and now he feels bad for mistreating the people in his life.

ETHAN

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Then the doorbell rings.

ETHAN sniffs, sets the papers and the box down, then goes to the door.

22 EXT. JAMES RESIDENCE - FRONT DOOR - DAY

He opens it. As the camera is still facing Ethan, he opens the door with shock on his face. He remembers.

ETHAN

What are you doing here?

JOURNEY / KAYLEE

Did you really think you could get rid of me that easily?

(beat)

I've been here since the day you started running—even running with you through this journey you call life, that's why you named me this. I've always been the voice you've tried to bury and drown out with more noise.

ETHAN

(shocked)

Why are you here now?

She walks closer and looks at him. There's something different in her eyes now. Softer. Sadder.

JOURNEY

Because you're finally ready.

(beat)

And because you remembered me.

Ethan looks confused.

ETHAN

What do you mean?

She smiles — not the usual playful smirk, but something warm. Real.

JOURNEY

My name's not Journey.

(beat)

JOURNEY / KAYLEE

It's Kaylee.

Ethan's breath catches. He takes a step back, staring at her like he's seeing her for the first time. The world around them is collapsing, shifting, unlocking.

ETHAN

Kaylee...

KAYLEE

You were just a kid, Ethan.

You couldn't save me.

But maybe now... you can save yourself.

CUT TO:

23 EXT. TRACK - DAY

Ethan runs full speed around the curve, sweat flying, feet pounding. His breath sharpens as he pushes harder, faster.

ETHAN (V.O.)

What if the person I was supposed to be—
died the day I ran?

He surges forward, overtaking the last runner.

ETHAN (V.O.)

People say time heals.

But time doesn't change anything if you won't
face it.

And I've spent years looking away.

From the truth.

From her.

From myself.

He crosses the finish line—first. The CROWD ERUPTS.

At the end of the track, Kaylee stands, smiling. For a fleeting moment, their eyes meet. Then, in a blink—she's gone.

Ethan's chest heaves. He scans the stands. This time, it's Sadie watching him. Still. Knowing.

ETHAN (V.O.)

I thought locking it away would protect me.
But all it did was chain me to a lie.
I ran from the pain.
I ran from the past.
I ran from who I was.

24 EXT. PARKING LOT - EVENING

The sun dips low. ETHAN exits the school, still damp with sweat but victorious.

Miss James waves proudly, holding a handmade banner. Cooper is there too, waiting.

Cooper steps forward. They share a solid dap—old friendship not fully mended, but alive.

Miss James beams, pulling him into a tight hug.

ETHAN (V.O.)

And maybe that need to run...
maybe it was inherited.
Maybe it's in my blood.

Over her shoulder, ETHAN sees him—HIS FATHER. Standing at the far edge of the lot. Watching.

ETHAN (V.O.)

But today...
I saw myself.

Their eyes lock. The FATHER shifts, torn, wanting to step closer—then, almost instinctively, he turns, climbs into his car, and drives away.

ETHAN (V.O.)

And regardless of where it came from—

(beat. Quiet, but certain:)

I'm done running.

CUT TO:

BLACK SCREEN / FADE OUT

THE JOURNEY WILL CONTINUE...