SPOON-FED ADDICTION

by

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Based on the novella by Silvano Williams

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INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Moonlight cuts across the room.

A stuffed rabbit sits propped against the pillows. One ear is coming loose from the seam.

On the wall: a BEAUTY AND THE BEAST poster. Belle and the Beast mid-dance, her yellow dress swirling.

On the desk: a SKETCHBOOK lies closed, edges worn from use. Beside it, a stack of COLLEGE BROCHURES, University of Houston on top.

A desk CALENDAR shows December 1995. Its surface is furred with dust.

A purple diary sits CLOSED on the calendar.

The shadows in the corners darken and slide across the floor. They worm beneath the desk chair, then rise along its legs like strands of fabric reaching from the rug.

The shadows take the shape of a body sitting in the chair: SHADOW-ANGELA.

She hunches over the diary in Angela's chair, but her outline won't stay still. Her features soften and reform, a collage of photographs flashing in and out of focus within the shadow's form.

The diary OPENS on its own. The pages flutter, then settle on a water-stained entry.

Shadow-Angela traces the words already on the page.

INSERT - DIARY PAGE

Faded ink on a water-stained page: "December 20, 1995. Dear Diary,"

Her hand pauses.

It isn't remembering. It's summoning.

Angela's voice rises from the walls and echoes from the ceiling as it reads the diary.

ANGELA (V.O.)
I have found love, and his name is Adiran. Adiran, who told me he had heard God... that he deserved to die, and I didn't believe him until it was too late.

The diary pages turn backward, fluttering through the entries.

An earlier entry catches the light: "September 3rd, 1995. Sent off my application to U of H's art program today. Dad says it's not practical. Jessica says follow your heart. For once, I think she might be right!"

The shadow touches another page.

The diary projects the memory into the room:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL ART ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Late afternoon yellow light pours through tall windows.

ANGELA STERLING (18, small-framed, paint under her fingernails) stands before an easel, brush in hand.

She's SMILING as a half-finished painting of a bird in flight takes shape under her brush.

A FRIEND (17) leans over her shoulder, pointing at the canvas.

FRIEND
That's very good, Angie. For real!

Angela laughs, slightly embarrassed. She steps back and studies the painting.

Her smile settles into something genuine.

The memory flashes away into a yellow flare.

INT. STERLING KITCHEN - EVENING (FLASHBACK)

Another diary page: November 23, 1995.

A Christmas photo clings to the fridge: a much younger Sterling family. Mr. and Mrs. Sterling stand in the back row, holding each other. The two girls stand shoulder-to-shoulder in front. All smiles. Angela is missing some teeth.

SHERIFF STERLING (late 40s, thickset, carries his star like a weapon) paces the kitchen floor.

He slams a newspaper onto the kitchen table. The front page carries a grainy photo of Sheriff Sterling, his face frozen mid-yell at a crowd of reporters.

Shadows thicken the letters of "Corruption" and "Under Investigation".

The family portrait smiles from the fridge.

Sheriff Sterling looms over the table, grinding a piece of licorice candy between his teeth.

SHERIFF STERLING
You want to explain this?

Angela stands behind a kitchen chair opposite him. Hands tight on the backrest. Face blank.

JESSICA STERLING (early 20s, hair dyed unevenly, doesn't live here anymore) enters from the hallway, arms crossed, her denim coat folded over them.

JESSICA
Jesus Christ. She's still a kid. She doesn't know what she's doing!

Sterling turns toward Jessica, pointing. Voice rising.

SHERIFF STERLING
You brought that scumbag into our home. And look where we are!

He slaps the paper again. The table jolts. The room darkens.

Jessica's breath catches. But her stare doesn't drop.

JESSICA
Yeah, sure, Daddy. You've preached accountability your whole life. And now the world finally sees you like I do. Like the fucking hypocrite you are!

Unseen by anyone, shadows spill across the kitchen tile like black water, creeping toward Jessica's feet.

Sterling lunges toward Jessica. He grabs the nearest chair and shoves it out of his way. The shadow water on the floor parts as the legs screech across the tile.

Jessica stumbles back. Her shoulder hits the doorframe hard.

As she turns away, a tendril of shadow water reaches up and brushes her bare ankle. It recoils and vanishes with a hiss.

SHERIFF STERLING
Don't you walk away from me!

But Jessica already has. She stumbles away, sobbing.

JESSICA (O.S.)
Happy fucking Thanksgiving!

The front door opens. SLAMS shut.

The Christmas photo on the fridge flutters from the slam. It comes loose and drifts to the shadow water on the floor.

ANGELA (V.O.)
My sister escaped, leaving me behind while everyone turned against me for defending Adiran.

The photo shrivels, corners curling in, the colors bleeding out of it.

Sterling's fingers close around the photo. Black water seeps between his knuckles as he crushes it.

He turns to Angela. Slowly bends over the table into her space.

SHERIFF STERLING
(low)
This is ALL your fault!

He holds the crumpled ball inches from her face.

Flicks it at her chest. She flinches as it bounces off and falls to the floor.

Where it touched her, the darkness soaks into the fabric like water. By the time she looks down, it's gone.

Angela releases the chair.

She shouts at the top of her lungs.

ANGELA
Like I give a shit!

Sterling's hand comes up fast and practiced.

Angela is silenced.

At the kitchen counter, MRS. STERLING (late 40s, thin) methodically carves the turkey beside four waiting dishes.

Shadows cling to her like a second skin. They move when she moves. She keeps carving. She never turns toward Angela.

Shadows bleed in from the edges. The room goes dark.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Another diary page: November 27, 1995.

Angela strides past lockers.

Harsh fluorescent lights hum above her. They expose the bad makeup job covering the red on her cheek.

ANGELA (V.O.)
Back to school Monday... The weekend passed the way weekends always pass in our house... in silent fear of confrontation.

Kids line both sides of the school hallway. Some digging through their lockers. Others stare, point, and whisper behind her back.

Her footsteps echo down the hall. Dark prints linger on the tile behind her like mud. None of the kids notice.

STUDENTS (O.S.)
"That's her." "With him?" "Didn't he kill a bunch of people?"

Snickers ripple through the crowd. A guy mutters:

GUY (O.S.)
Fucking psycho bait!

The shadows spread outward from the footprints, engulfing the lockers and the kids on either side.

A locker door SLAMS.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shadow-Angela stills. The diary lies open as its pages settle on a new entry.

A glimpse on the page: "October 13, 1995. Maybe everyone has a beast inside them. Maybe love is what sets them free."

Her dark hand hovers over the lines. Lingers, absorbing the words.

The shadows on the ceiling blacken and stretch toward the window, draping over it until the glass disappears into total darkness.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Angela stands at the window.

A figure is outside, backlit by streetlight.

Angela opens the window. She steps back.

ADIRAN (20, towering, sharp-tongued dealer) silently climbs through the window. Only his outline is visible, eyes gleaming unnaturally.

ADIRAN
God does not want me alive, Angie, so I am going to make sure I go to Hell when I die.

Angela says nothing. His hand emerges from the dark and wipes a tear from her cheek. His other hand rests at her waist, then trails up her back.

Her breath catches. He tenderly pulls her closer.

He kisses her. She kisses him back.

ANGELA (V.O.)
For the first time, I felt like I was good enough for someone.

Adiran takes her shaking hands in his. Then pulls back from the kiss.

Hot breath on her cheek, then her ear.

ADIRAN
I love you.

Angela cries.

ANGELA (V.O.)
That was all I ever wanted.

He pulls away. She reaches after him. He slips out the window.

She falls to her knees, dragging her diary to the floor with her.

He looks back, almost obscured by the dark. Yet a tear sliding down his cheek catches the light.

ANGELA (V.O.)
I saw a tear, a glimmer of sadness, fall from his face and into the shadows that surrounded him...

As the memory fades, the diary pages flutter forward to the final entry: December 20, 1995.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Angela lies in bed. Diary clutched to her chest, pen loose in her hand.

The pen slips from her fingers. Falls to the floor.

ANGELA (V.O.)
Finally, I've understood what his god had said to him. It's been two months since Adiran was taken from me. It's been two months of wanting him more than anything else in my life.

The shadows above her begin to stir, unfolding downward from the ceiling and walls with each breath she takes.

ANGELA (V.O.)
But I know they can't ever stop my Adiran. On some nights, I hear him calling for me. I want to touch him again, so I whisper to him in the dark, hoping he sees me in his dreams. I've felt him, and I know he comes to me because I am the only one!

A woman's silhouette forms. Her arms spread. The edges of her arms trail off like wings drawn in smoke.

ANGELA (V.O.)
On those nights, he breathes into my ear, and sometimes around my neck and down my back. Warm, comforting whispers that assure me that when I die, I will be with him.

The shape swells as it takes a deep breath in. Then folds inward until it collapses.

The shadow reforms. This time with broader shoulders. Adiran's outline, but no facial features.

ANGELA (V.O.)
Because with Adiran's help, I know I'll be able to come back just as he does for me. Whether it'll be in Heaven or Hell, it doesn't matter anymore.

Angela doesn't move. The shadow takes the form of Adiran's face leaning down, just like their first kiss.

SHADOW-ADIRAN'S mouth moves past hers and brushes her ear.

SHADOW-ADIRAN
(distorted, reverberating)
Breathe.

Angela inhales. Sharp and deep.

Her eyes WIDEN. A bright yellow light reflects off them.

ANGELA (V.O.)
All that matters now is that I will escape this horrible, pointless life and finally be happy.

She tries to exhale. She can't. Her hands fly to her throat.

The shadows TIGHTEN around her neck.

Her back arches off the mattress. Fighting for air that won't come. Her fingers claw at the darkness. They pass through nothing.

Then, stillness. Her eyes stay open. Glassy. Gone.

A single tear slides down her temple.

The shadow pulls back from her face. It holds Adiran's shape for a moment.

It dissolves, sliding off the bed, its umbra retreating to the corners of her room.

The diary slips to the floor and falls open.

Her handwriting catches the moonlight:

ANGELA (V.O.)
(whispered)
No more tears. I have cried enough.
Goodbye, Angela Sterling.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Moonlight cuts across the room.

Total silence of an empty house.

The room has reset. The bed is made. The chair at the desk is empty. The only thing out of place is the open diary on the desk.

Shadows trace the letters, waiting.

The page holds.

Darkness surges off the page, through the room, and consumes the frame.

WATER ROARS: a ruptured pipe and a bathtub faucet, their sounds merging into white noise.

SHADOW-ADIRAN (V.O.)
(distorted, reverberating)
What she knew of me is what I fed her.
Because watching eyes widen with
fascination is easier than admitting I
have nothing real to give.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

SUPER: "OCTOBER 13, 1995"

Steam fogs the bathroom mirror.

A low HUM begins vibrating the glass.

Handwritten words form: "SPOON-FED ADDICTION"

Blood sweats from the mirror.

A handprint smears the blood from the other side.

The hum rises in pitch until the mirror shatters.

The bathroom is wrecked. Tiles are cracked.

The sink has been ripped from the wall. Pipes are exposed, water spraying across the bathroom.

Cabinet doors are splintered. A bullet hole in the drywall.

The water spray slows.

A police radio crackles faintly:

POLICE RADIO (O.S.)
Suspect may be armed... Request backup at location...

Adiran lies motionless in the tub.

Blood spreads across the tile beyond the tub, darkening the grout and pooling where the floor meets the walls. In the corners, the darkness absorbs it.

The scattered mirror shards on the floor catch the light. Each holds a fragment of Adiran's face. An eye. His jaw. His forehead.

Adiran slumps back against the tub.

His cracked lips part.

ADIRAN
(forcing it)
Whatever... is in me...

His throat closes. He swallows against dry nothing. His lips stop moving.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
...it dies with me tonight.

In one larger shard, his reflection stares straight out.

This reflection is muted, darker than the others, its edges lost in shadow. The eyes are Adiran's, but the expression isn't. It's Shadow-Adiran.

A conspiratorial smile spreads across his face, meant for whoever is watching.

Shadow-Adiran raises one finger to his lips.

Mouths: *Shhh.*

Adiran splashes water onto the mirror shard. The image ripples and snuffs out.

Other mirror pieces glint, one after another.

Faces flicker in the shards: MARY (early 20s, Asian/Black, meets people's eyes and holds them) and SETH (early 20s, watchful).

A small, nostalgic smile flashes across Adiran's face.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Let me make this clear... this isn't about my redemption. This is about the rot I fed. So... you must be wondering, what made me so damn special? Absolutely fucking nothing.

Their faces fade.

Adiran's fingers twitch beneath the water. Blood oozes from the vertical cut in his left forearm.

He lifts his cut arm out of the water. He tries to pull himself up. His arms tremble and fail.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Regardless, this is exactly how I deserve it to end.

He sinks back into the bathtub. Blood curls through the water and spills over the edge.

A flicker across another mirror shard: VERONICA (20, fiery-haired, electric-blue eyes) is laughing, lit bright in the glass.

Then she's gone.

Adiran closes his eyes.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
She was the last time I was human.

Water laps his mouth.

His head slips underwater. The world muffles.

His body jerks him back up on instinct.

He gasps. Ragged exhales. Eyes still closed.

Shadows obscure him. The mirror shards flare with memories.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
But it didn't start tonight.

The faint LAP of bathwater follows his voice into the memory.

INT. MOTHER'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Dim light. PRE-TEEN ADIRAN (12, thin, watches the room without moving) sits stiffly on a worn couch.

TV light flickers across his body.

The volume is low. The nightly news covers budget cuts and rising crime.

JOHN (early 40s, lean and wiry, still carries himself like a soldier) watches the TV without blinking.

ADIRAN'S MOTHER (late 30s, thin and twitchy) paces behind them, half-nodding to nothing.

A shadow clings to her body, stretching and contracting like her loose clothes.

She mutters, grabs at Adiran's arm.

The shadow stretches toward him with her reach, the edges straining like fingers.

JOHN
Hey.

John rises and places himself between them. One firm hand guides her away without force.

The darkness retracts with her, settling across her shoulders as she stumbles off, mumbling.

John sits beside Adiran and rests a hand on his shoulder. He studies the boy for a beat.

Adiran's eyes stay on the TV.

John turns back to the news.

INT. MOTHER'S BATHROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

TEEN ADIRAN (16, slim, athletic) kneels beside his mother as she vomits into a toilet. The bathroom is yellowed and crusty.

She wipes her mouth, shaking.

Her eyes snap to him, suddenly focused. Her voice drops.

ADIRAN'S MOTHER
Society is a filthy animal, kid. All they want is for people like us to die.

She leans back against the wall. The clarity leaves her face. Then she leans forward again, trembling.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Those were the last words my mother ever said to me that made any sense. Six months later, she was dead and I had nothing.

In the unlit corners, darkness deepens until the yellowed tile disappears.

Neither notices.

Then it swallows the bathroom whole.

The sound of retching returns, then fades.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Until I found her...

INT. DENNY'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: "ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO"

Fluorescent lights hum overhead. The restaurant is nearly empty.

Veronica sits across from Adiran in a vinyl booth.

Between them: an empty creamer container, a nearly empty carafe, torn sugar packets, and spilled granules.

A coffee cup steams between her hands. Even under the ugly fluorescent wash, she is radiant.

She lifts the cup to her lips, watching him over the rim.

A smile plays at the corners of her mouth, but her eyes hold steady. Waiting.

Adiran doesn't notice. His mouth moves, words swallowed by the diner noise.

She lowers the cup. Her stare sharpens.

Still nothing.

Veronica's hand moves beneath the table and up his leg. His eyes finally meet hers.

Her smile fades.

Her hand resurfaces and slides a PREGNANCY TEST across the table.

Two lines.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Adiran's eyes snap open. Water sloshes in the tub. His breathing is sharp and involuntary.

He squeezes his eyes shut.

ADIRAN
(barely a breath)
No... Not that.

His bloody hand drags across the glowing shard, smearing it with water and blood.

The memory goes dark.

Another shard catches the light: a rooftop against the night sky.

EXT. ABANDONED OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Boots crunch on broken ground. Adiran and Veronica crawl through a gap in the chain-link fence.

They climb the stairs and scaffolding.

She laughs, breathless.

VERONICA
First time for everything, right?

ADIRAN
You nervous?

She grins.

VERONICA
With you? Never!

They reach the rooftop and find their spot.

She pulls out the peyote bundle, holds it to the starlight.

VERONICA
To new experiences!

He hugs her from behind, pressing his face into her hair.

ADIRAN
To us. Forever, together.

EXT. ABANDONED OFFICE BUILDING - ROOFTOP - LATER

The unfinished rooftop is skeletal: exposed beams, jagged edges, wind blowing through empty window frames.

Adiran and Veronica lie side by side, faces to the sky. Layered jackets. Ripped jeans. Skin damp with sweat from the peyote.

Downtown glows in the distance below them.

A SERIES OF DISSOLVING MOMENTS:

-- They sit cross-legged, knees touching. Sage and crumpled clinic paperwork burn in a tin can between them.

Smoke rises to the scattered stars across the sky.

Veronica smiles, bright.

VERONICA
She would've been wild. Just like us.

Adiran nods, lips parted.

ADIRAN
She'll come back. When we're ready.

Veronica closes her eyes. Wind on her face.

VERONICA
Maybe this is us saying goodbye...

ADIRAN
Or maybe it's us making a promise.

-- They lie back, arms folded beneath their heads. Stars swirl above.

ADIRAN
I never pretended with you. Not once.

Adiran takes her hand. Veronica threads her fingers through his.

VERONICA
We were never scared of what we saw in each other.

-- They sit in silence. The city below glitters as the sage burns.

-- They burst into laughter, bodies curled inward, breathless.

-- The tin can smolders. Smoke disperses into the dark.

END SERIES

They dance barefoot, swaying slow, faces pressed together.

VERONICA
You ever think... maybe we did things backward?

ADIRAN
No. Maybe?

He slips behind her, chin resting on her shoulder.

VERONICA
We made a soul before we made a life.

Adiran turns her toward him. Starlight glitters in Veronica's eyes.

ADIRAN
You're my angel with wings!

She spins away, reaching for the sky.

VERONICA
Let's fly, then.

She turns and leans into him. Kisses him. Laughs in his mouth.

VERONICA
I want to do the lift.

ADIRAN
The what?

VERONICA
Like in Dirty Dancing. I feel like I can fly.

She backs up, arms wide. Adiran slips on his boots but leaves them unlaced. Two steps behind him, the roof ends in open air.

VERONICA
Catch me.

She runs at him. Adiran braces, catches her at the waist, and lifts her high overhead.

She stretches above him, laughing, her silhouette glowing against the stars. Her red hair streams in the wind. For one perfect moment, she is weightless.

His grip slips. He heaves her upward, trying to regain his hold.

Adiran steps back. His unlaced boot snags an exposed beam. He stumbles.

VERONICA
Adiran--

Veronica vanishes over the edge.

She plummets away from him. Her aura fades as the colors drain to gray. Wings flicker in and out, then die.

Veronica hits the pavement with a distorted, echoing THUD.

Below, darkness pools around her body. Something shifts within it, barely visible, then stills.

Adiran stands at the edge, frozen, staring down. Shallow, rapid breaths.

The wind threatens to push him over. He leans into it.

Something moves in the corner of his eye. Far below, red and blue lights streak past. An ambulance races down the road, siren faint, fading.

Adiran looks down at Veronica. Then back toward the ambulance as it disappears.

He backs away from the edge, turns, and heads for the scaffolding.

He scrambles down.

EXT. ABANDONED OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT

Adiran drops to the ground. Looks both ways. Slips into the shadows.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
I abandoned her, making the world outside of us believe she committed suicide... I destroyed the only person who should've been a part of me forever. And I can't blame the drugs for it.

The memory fades to black.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
It was me. All me. Because I was a fucking coward.

Wind howls through the building openings, then quiets.

INT. ADIRAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Flickering candles throw the apartment into half-light.

Movie posters and industrial band flyers cover the walls, some framed and aligned, others taped crooked. Stickers fill the gaps. Orange Christmas lights sag along the ceiling, held by tape and thumbtacks.

A sagging sofa faces a 19-inch TV on a cheap stand. A VCR and stereo stack beside it. Wall-mounted speakers trail tangled cords, untucked but functional.

From the stereo, "Something I Can Never Have" plays low. Reznor's voice is barely above a whisper.

Adiran sits shirtless on the floor, back against the wall.

On the coffee table: a lighter, a steak knife, and a row of candles burning low.

The candles' soft light makes shadowy figures dance on the walls.

He holds the steak knife blade over the flames. Heat shimmers along the blade's edge.

He presses the blade to his left inner forearm. No hesitation. The new burn picks up where a recent scab ends.

Skin hisses. He doesn't scream. He keeps his eyes on the wound.

He drags the blade down, extending the wound from mid-forearm to his wrist.

The shadows edge closer. They darken the wound.

He pulls the blade away. Lets it drop. The blade singes the carpet.

A beat. Just him and the shadows as he weeps.

The front door creeps open.

MARY
Are you decent? I'm coming in!

Mary stands in the doorway, keys in hand. A small handmade pendant hangs from her neck, threaded with beads and bone.

She takes in the scene.

The shadows freeze and pull back toward the walls, ordinary again. She doesn't gasp or cry out.

Mary crosses the room. Kneels beside him. Slowly takes the knife from the floor and sets it aside on the table.

Adiran breathes hard, eyes still on the burn.

MARY
(quiet)
Does it help?

ADIRAN
No.

MARY
Then why?

A long beat. His voice cracks.

ADIRAN
Because I can't fucking feel anything else!

Mary looks from the burn to his face.

She touches the skin just beside the burn. He flinches but doesn't pull away.

MARY
You're not going to find her in there.

He meets her eyes.

MARY
Pain doesn't bring people back. It just turns their memory into punishment.

She stands. Holds out her hand.

MARY
You're not doing this alone anymore.

He stares at her hand, then takes it.

INT. MARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Soft candlelight flickers over tapestries. Wind slips through an open window, disturbing only the flame.

Adiran sits on the rug, elbows on his knees, staring at nothing.

Mary sits on the floor across the small table between them, folding a piece of stiff paper.

Seth sits on the couch behind her, forearms on his thighs, fixed on Adiran like someone watching a fuse burn.

Mary doesn't look up.

MARY
You eat today?

ADIRAN
No.

MARY
Liar. I can smell the Whataburger on you.

Seth snorts. The corner of Adiran's mouth twitches.

ADIRAN
Fine. I ate. You happy?

She pauses and holds the half-formed crane to the candlelight.

MARY
Ecstatic.

She lowers it and continues folding.

ADIRAN
Seth, we're going to Utah next weekend. Mary and me.

Seth looks between them, waiting.

SETH
Jesus. This should be good. What for?

ADIRAN
Chris knows someone out there. Supposed to have something clean. Maybe it's bullshit. I don't care, we are gonna get good X and get rich.

Seth shakes his head. Leans in.

SETH
It's been three months, man. Are you two lunatics really going all the way to Utah for a cash grab?

MARY
Chris says he has good connections. Worth the trip.

SETH
So you're just road-tripping to the desert now? Like that's gonna fix the crater in your chest?

Adiran does not respond.

MARY
It's not about fixing anything. It's about seeing what's left once we stop pretending we're fine.

Seth rubs his face.

SETH
Man... you think we don't see it? You've been a ghost since she--

Seth swallows hard, stopping himself.

Mary's eyes flick sharply toward Seth, then back to Adiran. Her voice drops.

MARY
People think pain screams. But sometimes... it just goes really, really quiet. And you start mistaking the silence for truth.

She finishes the crane and sets it between them.

MARY
Take this gift.

Mary rises, circles the table, and kneels in front of Adiran, her face close to his.

Adiran freezes as she leans even closer. A low thrum rises beneath everything.

MARY
Know nothing. From this day forward, you will know nothing. And you will reveal nothing.

She presses her palm firmly to his forehead. Adiran's head tilts back under her hand.

Mary's hand lingers a beat longer, then drops.

MARY
To do otherwise will mean your death.

Adiran shudders. Catches a shaky breath. Stares at her, silent.

ADIRAN
Okay! We leave this Friday!

The thrum cuts out.

Seth sits forward, hands loose between his knees.

SETH
You haven't said her name once.

The candlelight flares. Shadows peel out of the corners, then settle again.

SETH
You think that makes you strong? You think if you bury her deep enough with bullshit, you'll stop blaming yourself?

Adiran gives Seth a hard look.

Seth's stare softens, but he doesn't look away.

Adiran clenches his fists and turns to the candle. He gives the smallest shake of his head.

Wind pushes harder through the open window, lifting the drapes.

A gust kills the candle and roars into black.

EXT. UTAH DESERT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The sound thins out into a faint, dry wind. Grains of sand skitter across unseen ground.

Adiran blinks against the gust.

Mary's house is gone, replaced by the pale dust of the desert.

Stars stretch over salt and silence.

The Jeep Cherokee is parked at a low ridge.

Beyond the weak headlights, mountains rise like a frozen tidal wave blotting out the stars.

JOE (late 20s, barely over five feet tall, always high) leans on the hood.

BULLET (mid-20s, wiry, fast hands) walks into the dark to piss. CHRIS (22, Black, built, ex-football player) tosses rocks into the distance.

Adiran stands farther out, staring into the desert's darkness.

Mary walks up beside Adiran.

MARY
You trust him?

ADIRAN
Who, Joe? Oh no. That guy's a perpetual fuck up. Chris warned us.

MARY
Yeah. That's a problem.

Adiran doesn't respond. Mary turns, walks back toward the Jeep.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
It was peaceful out there. But peace didn't come alone.

Mary reaches the Jeep and pulls open the rear door behind the driver's seat.

JOE (O.S.)
I bet your skin tastes like rain out here.

Mary gets in without a word. Chris's shoulders tighten.

JOE
(louder)
Gather around, everyone. Come on, Chris's high school amigos. Let's meet my buddies too!

Adiran stays behind.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
The shadows came with it. My grief planted the seed, and they watched me grow into the thing that deserved them.

INT. JEEP CHEROKEE - MOVING - NIGHT

Chris drives. Bullet up front. In the back: Mary behind Chris, Joe in the middle, Adiran behind Bullet.

Bullet lights the blunt and hits it.

BULLET
Let's warm this up right.

He passes to Chris. Chris to Mary. Mary, wearing an obviously unfriendly look, passes it to Joe.

Joe hits it, then licks the wrap where Mary's lips touched.

Adiran's eyes catch on Mary's exposed thigh, then on Joe staring. He looks away.

Joe glances forward. Chris watches the road. Bullet faces the window.

Joe smirks.

He flicks the blunt, lit end first, into Adiran's lap.

Adiran doesn't flinch.

He slides his palm under and catches it clean. Wipes the tip on his jacket and takes a hit. Exhales, passes it to Bullet.

JOE
Keep it flowing, keep it friendly. We're all friends here, right?

Joe reaches down and slaps Mary's and Adiran's knees with exaggerated enthusiasm.

Mary jerks her leg away with a sharp glare. Adiran slaps his hand away.

JOE
Relax, Texans! I got you the best X your shit-kicking friends are ever going to get! You'll see, I'm the fucking man!

Joe snickers, reaching over the console for a beat-up CD wallet.

He flips through it without looking. Pulls out a disc.

JOE
Yo Bullet, track two. Best live album ever. It'll make your sister-wives wet, temple boy.

Bullet hits the blunt again. Holding in the smoke, he snatches the CD from Joe's hand. He stares at the disc like he's debating whether to crack it across Joe's face.

Joe clocks the tension. Grins like he's joking.

JOE
Oh come on, Chris, has corporate neutered you already, my man?

Joe slaps the back of Chris's seat.

JOE
That fancy tech job got you in a tie and a stick up your ass? You used to ride looser than this. Should've dropped a few hits with me earlier. Get in the groove, pull that stick out!

Chris draws a slow breath, eyes on the off-road path.

CHRIS
(flat, to Bullet)
Still the best live album ever. Don't waste it on him.

Bullet slides the CD into the stereo. Clicks forward to track two.

Chris leans across and takes the blunt from Bullet.

He passes it to Mary. Mary takes a quick hit, then hands it behind Joe's head directly to Adiran.

Adiran takes a hit and passes the blunt to Bullet.

Adiran and Mary exchange a quiet look.

"Deity" by Ministry erupts from the speakers.

With the first guttural notes, shadows ripple out like spilled ink. Thin, dark lines spread across the floorboards and climb the vinyl seats.

Bullet hits the blunt and passes it to Chris.

The Jeep surges. Each drumbeat syncs with the revs, the engine hum thickening beneath the chaos.

Chris exhales smoke through his nose, eyes glassy but fixed on the path. Shadows coil around his ankle. His foot presses harder on the gas without him noticing.

The darkness moves with the drums. It wraps around Joe's legs, skirts around Mary's ankles, and works its way up Adiran's back to gather behind his shoulders.

Chris passes the blunt to Mary.

Joe appears lost in the music.

Mary hands the blunt behind Joe's head directly to Adiran.

JOE
Uh, yeah? I'm right here.

BULLET
Let her keep it. They're cooler company.

JOE
That's not fucking fair!

MARY
You know what's not fair?
(winks at Adiran)
Dogs don't understand physics.

JOE
The hell does that mean?

MARY
Or personal space.

Mary stares Joe down.

JOE
You're really pulling that shit? I'm the one making this happen. You assholes are going to fuck with me like that? I'm the reason we're out here. I'm the reason you're about to feel good. Show some fucking respect.

The shadows surge from Adiran's shoulders toward the blunt, loosening into smoke around his face.

He leans back and hits the blunt. The darkness curls into the burning tip and follows his inhale.

He French-inhales, smoke slipping from his lips and back up through his nose. He smiles.

He exhales a slow cloud of black smoke in Joe's direction. Passes the blunt directly in front of Joe's face to Mary.

JOE
Jesus, I was just playing--

Joe reaches across Mary, pressing deep into her space.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
I didn't want to hurt him because he touched her. I wanted to hurt him because it finally felt easy.

Adiran lunges, grabs Joe by the throat. Pulls him back. Hard.

The rear passenger-side tire EXPLODES with a deafening BOOM! The Jeep lurches off the path.

Shadows swallow the light. Everything goes black.

INT./EXT. JEEP CHEROKEE - CONTINUOUS

The Jeep sits off the road, tilted in the sand. Dash lights blink.

Chris slams his fists against the steering wheel.

CHRIS
Fuck!

He glances toward the back seat without meeting anyone's eyes.

CHRIS
Y'all okay?

Bullet steps out. Interior lights flare.

Adiran is white-knuckled on the *Oh Shit!* handle above his head, boots pressed into Joe's ribs. Joe is stuck between Chris's seat and the center console.

JOE
What the fuck, dude?!

Bullet's door slams. Darkness returns.

Joe shoves Adiran's legs off.

JOE
Get off me, freak!

Chris kills the engine. Steps out. The dome light comes on again.

Adiran releases the bar. On the floorboard: the blunt, still lit.

He picks it up, wipes the tip, inhales slow.

Chris slams his door shut. The interior of the Jeep goes dark again.

BULLET (O.S.)
Everybody, get the fuck out.

Joe reaches across Mary for the door handle, but Mary opens it first.

Light spills in. Joe flinches.

Adiran leans back and shoves Joe with his boot, sending him over Mary and out the open door.

Joe hits the sand hard.

JOE (O.S.)
What in the actual fuck?!

Mary pulls the door shut. Lights go out again.

Mary cackles.

MARY
You didn't freeze.

They sit in the silence. Adiran still holding the smoke in.

He settles in his seat. Exhales. A cloud of white smoke permeates the cabin.

Adiran offers the blunt to Mary. She glances at it, gives a small shake of her head.

She doesn't look at Adiran but her knee touches his.

At their feet, the last threads of shadow unravel, blending in.

ADIRAN
Hell of a start to our desert enlightenment, huh?

Chris yells something outside.

Adiran and Mary reach for their doors at the same time. They exchange a small smile, then step out.

EXT. UTAH DESERT - CONTINUOUS

Wind has picked up. The Jeep sits crooked in the sand.

Stars hang frozen overhead.

Chris crouches at the rear of the Jeep, adjusting the jack on a rock.

Adiran steps forward.

ADIRAN
Let me help with that.

Chris doesn't look up.

CHRIS
No. I got it. You're my guest.

Adiran leans down and grabs the jack.

ADIRAN
Come on. Let me take it.

Chris stands, grabs Adiran's arm. His voice stays level.

CHRIS
I said I got it.

Adiran backs off.

Chris kneels again to work on the tire and turns toward Joe.

CHRIS
Come here and help me, fool.

JOE
What? Help you? Why the fuck should I help you?

CHRIS
Because I'm gonna beat the shit out of you if you don't. Just shut up and help me with the tire.

JOE
Hell no! I'm not your fucking slave, nigger.

Silence. Everything stops.

Chris reaches for the spare tire and rises slowly.

CHRIS
What the fuck did you just call me?

JOE
Yeah, whatever, dude. Come on, you big fucking ape.

Chris hurls the tire at Joe.

It slams into Joe's chest, knocking him flat.

JOE
What in the hell is your problem, you fucking limp dick?!

Joe claws his way upright. Chris charges before Joe finds his balance.

They collide in the dirt. Sand explodes. Punches fly.

Joe lands one. Chris snarls and pins him down.

A flash of silver in Joe's hand.

He twists free and drives the blade into Chris's stomach.

Chris gasps. Joe rips the knife free. Chris folds onto his side, hands clamped over the wound.

MARY
Chris!

Mary grabs Joe by the shoulders and yanks him back.

Joe twists toward her, snarling, knife still in hand.

Bullet draws. Steady hands, no hesitation.

BULLET
You motherfucker.

He fires once. Joe jerks, hit in the chest, then falls back thrashing in the sand, gasping for air.

Adiran steps between Bullet and Mary, body tense, eyes locked on the gun.

Bullet pivots, the smoking gun raised at Adiran.

BULLET
What're you waiting for?

Adiran halts but holds his ground.

Darkness gathers at his boots, winding up his legs. His breathing steadies.

Adiran reaches into his pocket and holds up the paper crane.

BULLET
Not good enough, asshole. What are you going to do?

Bullet keeps his eyes fixed on the crane. Then his gaze shifts to Mary, crouched over Chris with Chris's blood all over her hands.

A long beat.

Joe goes still.

Bullet lowers the gun and turns toward Mary and Chris.

BULLET
Fix the tire.

Adiran nods once.

He lifts the paper crane to his lips. He kisses it, then tosses it away.

Adiran doesn't watch it fall. He steps toward the spare tire beside Joe's body.

The crane lands in the sand.

Blood threads toward it.

A shadow peels away from Joe's body and follows the trail. It touches the crane.

The paper blackens. Its edges curl inward.

Adiran lifts the tire and carries it to the Jeep.

The tools lie where Chris left them.

Adiran kneels.

His hand shakes as he reaches for the wrench. He grips it until the tremor stops.

As he works, Bullet and Mary help Chris into the Jeep.

Adiran watches. Tightens the last lug nut.

Adiran stands and looks over the pale expanse.

Darkness gathers close around him, thicker than before.

Across the Jeep, Mary watches. Wind tugs at her hair. She doesn't smile this time.

Adiran looks past her.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - JOHN'S DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

SUPER: "OCTOBER 13, 1995"

Adiran's car pulls into a clearing. Property sprawls across three adjoining lots.

Fences sagging. Tall grass overtaking everything. Main house and shed visible.

The rest hidden in darkness.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
That was almost two years ago. The moment I stopped ignoring what I was.

Out front, John fights a push mower through the overgrown weeds. He kicks it, slamming its back wheels into the ground.

JOHN
This fuckin' thing, it ain't worth a penny of shit.

He spots Adiran's car and shoves the mower aside.

JOHN
Aw, fuck it. Let fall kill the grass.

He walks into the house.

Adiran unfolds a sheet of blotter paper, tears off three hits, and lays them on his tongue.

Dry swallow. Exhales.

The car door creaks open.

Adiran steps into the Houston October air. Gravel crunches under his boots, dust hanging around them.

He looks down, then toward the house, and starts for the porch.

EXT. JOHN'S PORCH - CONTINUOUS

He steps onto the porch. Pulls the storm glass door open.

Adiran studies his reflection in the streaked glass. Pale, eyes sunken.

The darkness behind his reflection shifts when he doesn't.

The glass brightens into a projection:

Adiran lifts Veronica from a wheelchair and carries her through a set of double glass doors. She is wrapped in a white blanket, clinic wristband visible.

Behind them: "PLANNED PARENTHOOD WOMEN'S HEALTH CENTER"

Protesters crowd the entrance. Picket signs raised. Hands reach through the glass.

CROWD
MURDERER!

Adiran doubles over, gripping his knee.

The storm door snaps shut, nearly clipping his face.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Wrong reasons. Right verdict.

Adiran straightens.

JOHN (O.S.)
Adiran! Dammit, boy, come in!

The reflection settles. Just him again. But the darkness behind him lingers a beat too long.

ADIRAN
It's too early for this shit.

He pulls the door open again without looking at the glass and forces himself inside.

INT. JOHN'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

John pats the cushion beside him, hacking through smoke.

Adiran sits. John offers the joint.

JOHN
This new shit will make you feel like a dropped baby.

ADIRAN
What's with all the coughing, geezer?

Adiran takes it and draws.

JOHN
Pro'bly cancer.

Adiran chokes.

ADIRAN
Don't mess around like that!

JOHN
Are ya afraid?

ADIRAN
Of you dying? Your time's coming alright! Just complete the deal with Happy before you kick it!

They both laugh.

JOHN
You seen the news?

ADIRAN
No. You know I don't watch the fucking news, John.

JOHN
You will today.

John clicks the remote. The TV flickers to life.

A live news broadcast: A reporter at a brightly lit intersection, affluent shopping centers behind.

REPORTER (ON TV)
A new city ordinance now makes it illegal for people to ask for money on the streets.

John shakes his head.

Adiran takes a long drag.

ADIRAN
You know what pisses me off? Why do we pay for food? It grows on trees for free.

John raises an eyebrow, amused. Lights another joint.

Adiran exhales, lazy grin spreading.

ADIRAN
Newton figured out gravity when he got smacked with an apple over his noggin'! Maybe we need apple trees over doorways so someone discovers common sense!

John lifts a metal mug to his lips and stalls there, breathing.

JOHN
An apple tree will make people discover common sense?

ADIRAN
I don't know, man! How about some pears and kiwis on the roadside, instead of stupid shit that pollinates and makes people sneeze all year? I just want to eat some fucking fruit while walking down the street!

JOHN
Common sense? You can't have fruits without pollination, dumbass.

ADIRAN
It's the weed talking! You're right, this is pretty fucking good weed!

John stands from the couch. Groans.

JOHN
You know, your idol went missing last night.

ADIRAN
My what?

John points to the TV as he walks away.

JOHN
You should watch the news more often.

John pauses to admire his joint, then disappears into the hallway.

ON TV: Outside The Galleria, a well-dressed man stands beside a NO PANHANDLING ZONE sign. Traffic glows behind him.

WELL-DRESSED MAN (ON TV)
...the sudden infestation of poor people asking for spare change on every corner of the city.

Numbers flash across the screen, then cut to a looping shot of police arresting a homeless man with a cardboard sign.

The reporter's voice stretches into a drone.

Adiran sinks into the couch.

ADIRAN
Shit happens...

The TV anchor returns, surrounded by blazing graphics and overproduced music. Smoke drifts from Adiran's lips.

TV ANCHOR (ON TV)
The search continues for Bayou City's famous personality, Vladimir Rodriguez, commonly known as V.R., who was reported missing last night. The enigmatic and often polarizing V.R. is known to many as an entertainer and influential entrepreneur, creator of the popular animated series *The CW Chronicles*. To others, his outbursts and claims of alien invasions make him seem eccentric and unhinged. We'll have more information as the story develops.

Adiran yells toward the hallway.

ADIRAN
John! Just saw what you were talking about. I think it's a publicity stunt!

The broadcast moves on to a different alien invasion: border footage, then a politician pounding a podium about it.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Nobody called him unhinged.

Adiran shuts the TV off.

ADIRAN
Shit, I'm supposed to be marathoning *The CW Chronicles* tonight at Mary's!
(shouts)
John!

Silence. Only the hum of the machines in the back rooms.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
But John was right. V.R. going missing should've been the warning that the night was already taking from me. I just wasn't paying attention.

Adiran frowns at the hallway.

ADIRAN
John?

Still nothing.

He stands slowly, unsteady. Each bootstep lands too loud on the floorboards as he heads toward the hall.

INT. JOHN'S HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The deeper he moves, the louder the hum.

Reverberating and synthetic.

The corners get darker. Walls give way to exposed framing.

INT. JOHN'S MAIN GROWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rows of tables stretch deep into what used to be the adjacent lots. Grow lights hang in long industrial strips. Fans and ballasts drone.

John's metal mug rests on the table at the front of the room.

Adiran walks past it, pacing between the rows.

Adiran kneels to check beneath the tables.

ADIRAN
John?

Nothing.

INT. JOHN'S HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He pushes the bathroom door open. Empty.

ADIRAN
Where in the fuck did you go?

He moves to the bedroom doorway. The door is open.

Adiran recoils from the stale sweat. The bedroom is filthy, but undisturbed.

INT. JOHN'S MAIN GROWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Adiran returns to the grow room, slower now.

John's mug sits where he left it at the front table. He never leaves it behind. Adiran stops.

He picks it up, turns it in his hand, then raises it above eye level to inspect the bottom.

A shotgun racks behind him.

He freezes.

Adiran turns slowly, one hand still holding the mug over his head, his free hand open at his side.

John stands behind him. Shotgun shouldered, barrel angled just above Adiran's head.

Adiran jerks back. His boots tangle and he falls.

The mug arcs into the wall, splashing its contents before it drops, dented.

John doesn't flinch. He stares down at Adiran, furious.

ADIRAN
What in the fuck is the matter with you?

John's pupils are pinpricks.

JOHN
What're you doin' in my house?

ADIRAN
What in the actual fuck? Are you fucking Houdini now? Are you gonna shoot me, or are you about to shit a grenade?

Adiran looks around him.

ADIRAN
Where in the fuck did you come from?

A beat.

John lowers the shotgun. Offers a hand. Adiran hesitates, then takes it. Their hands lock.

Adiran's hand is young and tight, tendons raised under the skin. John's is thin and veined, skin loose over bone.

Shadows unspool from Adiran's coat. Thin strands reach toward their joined hands.

The darkness loops around John's wrist.

Then hisses. The shadows recoil, draining back into the corners, leaving their grip in plain light.

John pulls him up.

Adiran brushes dust from his jeans, fighting a smile.

John retrieves his dented mug.

Adiran notices a freshly painted wall panel sitting slightly ajar.

ADIRAN
So, you built a panic room?

JOHN
A panic room? I ain't scared of nobody, boy.

ADIRAN
Yet you built a hole in the fucking wall to hide in, you survivalist freak.

John chuckles.

JOHN
I caught you, didn't I?

Adiran walks to the other side of the table.

John crouches. Pulls a bin from under the table. Scoops weed, slaps it on a scale. Adds more until the scale tips past a pound.

JOHN
You get a little extra this week. I'm not gonna penny pinch you over an ounce.

ADIRAN
Good news for me!

Adiran grabs baggies from a side bin. Portions the weed.

JOHN
Is this for you or the Filipino?

ADIRAN
Mostly, yes.

John grunts low.

ADIRAN
Happy called in for some today, okay? I'm splitting this one with him since I'll be staying in for the weekend and next week.

John mimes a sip from his empty mug. Inspects it.

JOHN
He's off schedule.

ADIRAN
Yeah, I'll talk to him. But I guess he's moving it quicker and quicker. Isn't that what you wanted?

John raises the mug. Points it at Adiran.

JOHN
He ain't the one I'm worried 'bout, boy!

ADIRAN
Fuck!

Adiran crumples the baggies in his hand.

ADIRAN
I said it's handled! I'm not gonna let Happy bring his gang bullshit here until I know he's got his shit under control too!

JOHN
Is he catchin' shit 'cause of some pussy?

ADIRAN
You could use some pussy, you old cunt. Why haven't you found yourself someone to fuck now and--

John laughs. The laugh breaks into another cough.

Adiran grabs another baggie, circles the table, and waits across from him.

ADIRAN
What about someone to take care of you? Someone who could help with what you grow here?

JOHN
Listen, kid... I already gave that shit a chance.

John coughs again, then points the dented mug at Adiran with mock disgust.

JOHN
I didn't drag your sorry ass out of that apartment after your mama died just so you could get sentimental on me.

ADIRAN
That's not what I'm asking.

JOHN
Hell it ain't.

John gathers the remaining weed into one bag, presses out the air, and forms it into a brick. The scale settles at exactly half a pound.

ADIRAN
What happens to this place when you're gone?

JOHN
You wanna know if I got a plan? The plan is you keep your head down, stay out of Sterling's crosshairs, and maybe -- maybe -- you outlive me long enough to figure out what you're gonna do with yourself.

ADIRAN
That's not a plan. That's pity.

JOHN
I don't even pity the dead, kid... They don't give a shit what I think anymore.

John's voice drops.

JOHN
You're the closest thing to a son I ever had. And that scares the shit out of me, 'cause this world is going to shit, and I know what you're capable of. I've seen it.

Adiran looks away.

JOHN
Didn't teach you to shoot so you could prove me right.

Adiran meets his eyes.

ADIRAN
That's not what I'm doing. I don't even have a gun.

JOHN
Just remember... pissin' in your own backyard ain't a good idea, boy.

ADIRAN
I know. The sheriff's goons are getting greedy and careless. It's being dealt with though.

JOHN
I'm not fuckin' around with your bullshit and the sheriff's daughter.

ADIRAN
I said I know. And it will be dealt with. I don't need a goddamn lecture.

JOHN
Good! Gettin' pissy, are we? Did I find the nerve?

A long beat.

Adiran pulls out a wad of cash, tosses it on the table. He shoves the smaller bags into his coat pockets.

The room pulses.

Adiran grins.

John laughs and hands Adiran the brick.

They shake hands. This time, John pulls him in, one arm around Adiran's shoulder.

ADIRAN
I gotta go!

But Adiran lets it happen. Eyes drift to the cash on the table.

ADIRAN
Goodbye, John!

Adiran reaches for the money.

John pushes Adiran's hand off the money.

JOHN
(low, sincere)
See you later, boy.

John shoves him toward the door.

Still smiling, Adiran tucks the brick under his arm and crosses the living room without looking back.

EXT. JOHN'S PORCH - NIGHT

John holds the front door open. Watches Adiran go.

JOHN
(shouts)
Be careful!

Adiran cuts across the field. Shrugs deeper into his coat.

INT. ADIRAN'S CAR - JOHN'S DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Adiran drops into the driver's seat. Sets the brick under the passenger seat.

He slides a CD in, turns it up, and cracks the window.

A cigarette lighter sparks. Smoke curls from a joint, lost in the draft.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - HOUSTON STREETS - NIGHT

Adiran drives past empty storefronts. Neon buzzes.

The faint sound of the bathtub's faucet rises beneath the engine.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
I'd distanced myself from him, but I respected him. He just handed me the scales and watched me rot.

Streetlights smear into streaks.

His pupils dilate. Dashboard lights bend at the edges.

Headlights flare, stretching across cracked asphalt.

The engine drone deepens into wind. The faucet swells into rain. The road ahead disappears into black.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT (NIGHTMARE)

Headlights barely light the road.

Rain hammers the car. Wipers lose against sheets of water. Reflections smear across the windows, dense and pulsing.

Inside, the rain swallows every other sound.

Adiran sits in the back seat. Seth drives. Mary rides beside him.

Mary talks to Seth, her words drowned by the rain. She laughs at something he says.

Mary turns around.

Eyes find Adiran's. A smile spreads across her face.

Then she faces forward again, stiff, as if strings pulled her into place.

Seth catches Adiran in the rearview mirror. His gaze lingers.

Adiran tries to speak. His mouth moves. No sound.

His breath quickens. He turns. Veronica sits beside him.

He reaches for her hand.

Her face holds the expression from her fall: eyes dull. Her red hair spills across her face, moving with unseen wind.

She doesn't take his hand. Just stares.

A baby crying. Sharp. Piercing.

Adiran jerks back.

Adiran snaps forward.

In the front seat: Adiran's mother and John fight over a crying infant, pulling him by the arms between them.

The baby's face blurs, then sharpens.

It's his own face. Looking back at him.

His mother's sobs, John's shouts, and the baby's screams circle him.

The screams distort the air. Ripples press into Adiran's chest, pinning him to the seat.

He turns back to Veronica. Empty seat.

He thrashes, clawing at the windows.

Shadows rise from the floor, swallowing his adult body.

He is the baby in the front seat, suspended between his mother and John, arms stretched, being pulled apart.

The baby's screams deepen into Adiran's adult screams.

The car drives off the edge of the road.

He looks frantically between John and his mother, wrenching at his trapped arms.

They let go.

A violent SPLASH. Darkness floods the interior of the car.

INT. DARKNESS - NIGHT (NIGHTMARE)

Not water. Shadow.

Adiran suspended in nothing. Bubbles escape his mouth, rising into black.

He kicks. Flails. There is no up or down.

The darkness thickens. Presses closer. Veronica's figure emerges from the black. Long black hair floats around her face.

Her smile holds too long. Nothing else in her face moves.

She drifts toward him without urgency. His kicking slows. He goes still.

She lifts her hand. He reaches with both of his arms, like a child asking to be picked up. She grabs his left arm and pulls him closer.

Her other hand rises to his forearm. Her sharp black fingernail finds the burn scar.

She drags it down, slow and deliberate.

The scar opens. Blood rises, diffusing like red smoke into the dark.

Her mouth finds his ear.

The shadows swirl around them like a typhoon.

VERONICA
(whisper)
Breathe.

Adiran obeys. He inhales sharply. The darkness floods his lungs. He chokes, body convulsing.

Adiran stops fighting. He lets himself sink into the black.

Then the nightmare shatters like the mirror.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - HAPPY'S MEETUP SPOT - NIGHT

Adiran's car idles beneath a flickering streetlight. The light trembles and doubles. Colors halo around passing headlights.

Adiran sits behind the wheel, sweaty and shivering but composed. Pupils wide. Music buzzes softly from the speakers.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Sometimes shit warns you. A feeling. A sign. A dream that keeps coming back to fuck with you.

His left sleeve has ridden up. He pulls it over the scar.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
But I knew this wasn't just a dream. It was my punishment.

Two figures approach from the sidewalk. They lean on his hood like they own it.

Adiran rolls his window halfway down. His lip curls before either man speaks.

ADIRAN
What in the fuck are you doing? Where in the fuck is Happy?

The two guys, VIET (early 20s, sharp clothes, hungry eyes) and the UNDERCOVER COP (early 30s, Asian, young-looking, a wannabe) glance at each other, smirking.

VIET
Chill, man. You got the stuff?

UNDERCOVER COP
How good is your product, bro?

Their faces stretch at the edges. Their voices echo.

Adiran rubs his thumb over the steering wheel's grooves, tracing them again and again.

ADIRAN
Listen fuckheads. I don't sell dope.

Viet steps closer to the window.

VIET
Dude, it's all good. I'm taking care of business now.

A buzz vibrates against Adiran's thigh. Light leaks through his jeans pocket.

He ignores it.

ADIRAN
I was looking for Happy. If he isn't around, then fuck him too. You two dumbasses want to roleplay being gangsters, then good for you, fucking nerds.

The beeper keeps buzzing against his thigh.

The undercover cop starts to answer.

ADIRAN
Don't you fucking answer me back, 'cause I don't give a fuck about what you think. I-do-not-give-a-shit!

Adiran slams the car into drive.

He peels out, forcing both men to jump back. His middle finger raised through the half-open window.

ADIRAN
(shouting)
When Happy finds out, he's gonna cook you two fuckers like that *balut* shit he likes to eat for breakfast!

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - HOUSTON STREETS - NIGHT

Adiran's car glides through empty intersections. Acid trails bleed across the traffic lights.

Adiran pulls the beeper from his jeans pocket and tilts the display toward him.

The screen glows: 713-555-5977*911*

ADIRAN (V.O.)
911 from Jessica. Why is it always an emergency when people run out of shit...

The beeper is pinned beneath one palm.

Psychedelic rock leaks from the speakers, stretched and uneven. Red and green halos pulse across the windshield.

The beeper buzzes again beneath his palm, its display flashing toward him.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
But why her? Why then? There was nothing left I wanted to care about, but she still knew how to pull me in.

He grunts and shoves the beeper into his coat pocket.

It buzzes again.

Happy's car zooms past in the opposite lane. Adiran clamps both hands around the wheel.

ADIRAN
Motherfu--

Adiran cranks the wheel into a tight U-turn. Loose junk slams around inside the glove compartment.

He floors it after Happy.

EXT. CORNER STORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

A single overhead light casts a dull circle across the lot.

Happy's car screeches into the light. The driver's door flies open.

HAPPY (early 20s, Filipino, stocky, tattoos wrap his forearms and climb his neck) jumps out, pistol in hand, scanning for a threat.

Adiran's car skids into place behind Happy's.

HAPPY
What's up, bitch?

Adiran steps out slowly, empty hands visible.

HAPPY
Oh shit, dawg! What you doin' riding up on a nigga like that?

ADIRAN
What?

HAPPY
Don't pull up on me like that. That shit gets niggas killed around here.

ADIRAN
Well, I ain't a "nigga."

Happy exhales and tucks the pistol into his waistband. They clasp hands hard.

ADIRAN
I don't have good news for you, buddy.

Happy scans the street.

HAPPY
Shit. What's up? You and John okay?

ADIRAN
Oh, all's good on our end. You, on the other hand... you have a shit fest to deal with. Get in the car.

Happy studies Adiran, then nods.

Happy opens the passenger door and gets in.

INT. ADIRAN'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Happy shifts in his seat and pulls the pistol from his waistband. He rests it across his thigh, muzzle toward the floor.

Adiran glances at the gun and keeps driving.

ADIRAN
You've got rats in your crew.

HAPPY
The fuck you talking 'bout, dawg?

ADIRAN
That fucking Viet friend of yours called in a deal tonight and had some other idiot questioning me about the shit.

Happy exhales hard, mutters under his breath.

HAPPY
That bitch...

ADIRAN
Don't bring this gangster pissing contest bullshit to me. John's already paranoid.

Happy leans back with a crooked grin and taps a fist against his chest.

Shadows stir along Adiran's side of the car. Thin streaks slide across the seat toward Happy's clenched fist and sink into the ink on his hand.

HAPPY
It'll be dealt with tonight.

His tattoos blacken. The ink sizzles like a fresh brand, then settles, darker than before.

ADIRAN
Like I said, just don't bring that backstabbing gook shit y'all have going on now to John, okay?

HAPPY
You don't have to be racist, dawg.

Adiran snaps a look at Happy and playfully backhands his arm.

ADIRAN
Racist? Motherfucker! Who's the one going around calling people niggers?

HAPPY
I didn't call you a nigger, dawg! Nigga! It's not the same.

ADIRAN
Remind me again, how many times did you call Chris a 'nigga'?

Happy touches the spot beneath his left eye. His grin disappears.

HAPPY
Once.

ADIRAN
Right... You fucking hypocrite. Should we call him and see if he's changed his mind?

HAPPY
(normal voice)
Fuck you, Adiran.

ADIRAN
No, sir. Fuck you and your Asian Yakuza gangster bullshit.

Adiran pulls out the beeper and clicks through to Happy's number and code.

ADIRAN
See? That asshead has your code and my fucking beeper number. He called in a deal for tonight.

Happy pushes the beeper away.

HAPPY
I don't need to see your shit.

ADIRAN
What you need to do is figure it the fuck out, Hap. John's already up my ass like a goddamn hemorrhoid over the shit that's going down with me. We can't afford stupid fuck ups like this too.

HAPPY
I promise you. Nothing will ever happen to John while I'm the king of these streets.

ADIRAN
I guess I'm shit out of luck then?

HAPPY
(smiling)
You are fucking the sheriff's daughter, dawg! You're a bro to me, but that shit's your own. I do promise you, if anything comes close to John in my turf, I'll drop it like a kiloton bomb.

ADIRAN
Shut the fuck up, Hap! You don't even know what that fucking means.

HAPPY
Kiloton bombs drop bitches, dawg. That's all I need to know!

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - HAPPY'S MEETUP SPOT - NIGHT

Adiran's car glides past the meetup spot. It's empty.

ADIRAN
Well, fuck! He's gone now. This is useless. We're just driving around like two ass wipes, and that motherfucker is gonna make me drive back to Alief with a brick.

HAPPY
Shit dawg, no way! I'll take it from you.

ADIRAN
You got the cash for it right now?

HAPPY
Dawg! Who are you talking to? Of course I got the money.

Happy pulls a wad of cash from his pocket, counts off the bills, and hands them over.

ADIRAN
You carry around all that fucking money? Why don't you ever buy acid from me?

Adiran pockets the cash, reaches under Happy's seat, and drops the brick into his lap.

HAPPY
Acid is nasty, dawg. That shit fucks with your brain.

Adiran glances at the rearview mirror.

ADIRAN
Sometimes the brain-fuck is the point.

Adiran smiles at his reflection. The reflection stays still. His smile fades. Then the reflection smiles.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - CORNER STORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Adiran's car coasts into the corner store parking lot.

ADIRAN
Alright then, shithead. Good luck cleaning your house. We'll come up with a different code next week or something. Let me think this shit through some other time when I am not about to be all fucked up.

They get out. Happy tucks the pistol into his waistband and carries the brick to his car.

Happy flashes a sideways peace sign as he burns out of the lot. Adiran flips him off, smiling.

ADIRAN
Enjoy your shit cake!

Adiran turns toward the payphones. Happy's cash bulges in his coat pocket.

EXT. CORNER STORE PAYPHONES - NIGHT

A row of glass-sided payphone booths glows beneath flickering lights.

He checks Jessica's number on the beeper, pockets it, then looks from his car to the phones.

Shadows stretch from Adiran's boots toward the payphones.

He sighs and follows them.

He lifts the first receiver. No dial tone.

He stares at it, then lets it drop. The receiver swings against the metal housing.

He taps the first phone's coin return twice. Empty.

The second phone is dead too. He lets the receiver clatter against the metal and leaves it hanging.

A dime sits in the coin return. He pockets it and finds a quarter in his jeans.

The third phone hums with a live tone. He drops the quarter into the slot.

Adiran dials Jessica's number. The phone rings.

One ring. Two. Three.

Adiran starts to lower the receiver.

JESSICA (ON PHONE)
Don't hang up, please!

He brings it back to his ear.

ADIRAN
Who died?

JESSICA (ON PHONE)
(quivering)
Come over, please. There's a man looking through my window!

The humor drains from Adiran's face. Shadows flash across it.

ADIRAN
Is he still there?

JESSICA (ON PHONE)
No... he ran off when I saw him, but I'm afraid he'll come back. Can you please come over?

Adiran straightens up.

ADIRAN
I'm on my way.

He hangs up, finds another quarter, and drops it into the slot.

Adiran dials Seth's beeper. At the tone, he keys in the payphone number, then two stars and 1473.

ADIRAN
(mutters)
It's gonna be a late night.

The glass panels around him darken. Storefront lights smear beyond them.

A shadow stains the floor at his feet.

Headlights sweep across the lot. The shadow slips beneath the phone booth.

A patrol car rolls into the lot at a crawl.

Adiran freezes, receiver still at his ear. He pretends to talk to someone.

The cruiser passes the payphones and turns toward the far side of the store until it disappears behind the building.

Adiran drops the receiver and heads for his car.

He gets in. The engine roars.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Adiran drives. In the rearview, his reflection stretches with each passing light. Darkness pulses around its edges.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
The only thing I believed in was what I could see with my own eyes, and all I ever saw proved to me that people were just shit. All I saw was the hypocrisy. And all I ever tried to do was to make sure everyone else saw it too.

Images flicker across the rearview mirror: fogged glass, hands passing a joint, Jessica laughing.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Like the good old "justice for all, everyone is equal" bullshit...

Jessica's face swims in the mirror, distorted by acid trails. Half a smile, half a blur.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Or Jessica, the sheriff's little girl. Smoking weed and giving me head while driving around town.

The image fractures. Flares of red and blue bleed into the glass.

A siren swells, swallowing her laughter.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The scene skips in jagged frames.

Two DEPUTIES (30s, Sterling's men) reach into Adiran's car, yank him out by the hair, and slam him face-down across the cruiser hood.

One pins his arms. The other holds his head against the hot metal.

Pure black spills from beneath the cruiser, flattening the normal shadows as it advances across the hood.

It wraps Adiran's cheek, forearms, and shoulders, pressing him harder into the metal than the deputies do.

His muscles tense to fight. Nothing moves. The shadows clamp down, holding him in place.

JESSICA
Leave him alone! He didn't do anything! Get off him, you fucking pigs!

DEPUTY
Stay in the car, ma'am!

JESSICA
I'll testify! You hear me?! You lay a hand on him, I'll get you all fired! My father will--

Another cruiser's door opens. Sterling steps out.

Jessica freezes. Then recovers. Steps out of Adiran's car.

JESSICA
Dad! Tell them to let him go!

Sterling walks to the cruiser's hood without looking at Jessica. His eyes stay on Adiran.

Pinned to the metal, Adiran keeps his eyes on Sterling.

Sterling leans closer, hand on his weapon.

SHERIFF STERLING
(low, to Adiran)
You think she protects you?

He waits for an answer. Spits a piece of licorice candy into Adiran's hair.

JESSICA
Dad! He didn't do anything!

Sterling straightens and jerks his chin toward the deputies.

SHERIFF STERLING
Take him to the drunk tank overnight.

JESSICA
Are you fucking kidding me?!

Sterling walks back to his cruiser. Doesn't acknowledge her.

Jessica lunges toward him. A deputy catches her arm.

JESSICA
You can't do this! We're not even drunk! Dad!

SHERIFF STERLING
Get her home.

JESSICA
Don't touch me! Dad! DAD! Fuck you all!

Red and blue strobes bleed together like wet paint.

Jessica's screams rise with the sirens, then collapse into a high static whine.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - JESSICA'S TOWNHOUSE ENTRANCE - NIGHT

The whine fades into the engine hum.

Adiran blinks hard, trying to focus.

A calico cat darts across the road.

Adiran slams the brakes. Tires screech. He pitches toward the wheel.

Adiran glares into the rearview. Makes eye contact with his reflection.

ADIRAN
What in the fuck?!

He digs into his coat's inner pocket. Pulls out a joint.

He lights it and inhales deeply.

ADIRAN
Fucking cat!

The car eases into a nearly empty visitor lot. The townhouse complex sleeps. TV light flickers behind closed blinds. The covered resident spaces are mostly full.

He parks three units from Jessica's place.

EXT. JESSICA'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

Adiran checks between parked cars and shrubs, pulling hard on the joint as he searches.

Jessica's bedroom window glows pale blue, clearly visible from the side of the street. The sidewalk and shrubs beneath it are empty.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
For a second, I wondered if her younger sister back home was just as reckless with her blinds. Then again, I'm a sick fuck for thinking it.

He peers inside Jessica's window.

A digital clock glows red: 10:08 PM.

ADIRAN
(mutters)
Maybe the fucker just wanted to know the time.

Tangled bed covers. Clothes strewn on the floor.

The bathroom light clicks on behind the cracked door. A strip of yellow cuts across the bedroom floor.

Adiran checks the lot again. Nothing.

Jessica turns off the bathroom light and slips into the bedroom. She closes the door without a sound.

Adiran watches her tiptoe, swallowing a laugh.

ADIRAN
Old habits...

Jessica wears an oversized pajama shirt. On the front, a brown bear with a red bow tie reaches out for a hug. The blue lamp light shines through the thin fabric.

She bends to gather clothes from the floor. Her butt peeks out beneath the hem.

She straightens and turns toward the window. For a blink, their faces meet in the glass.

She stumbles back, scattering the clothes. Her mouth opens to scream. She clamps it shut.

Adiran laughs. She composes herself and slides the window open. Cold air hits his face.

He takes another drag from his joint.

ADIRAN
(whispers)
So... where is he?

She whispers back, matching his sarcasm.

JESSICA
I don't know. He ran off right after I caught him looking, I think. I haven't seen him since. Why don't you come in?

ADIRAN
Should I climb the window, or do I use the door?

JESSICA
Come to the front, smartass.

She slams the window shut in his face.

EXT. JESSICA'S PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Adiran strolls toward her door, joint glowing. He stops checking the bushes.

Jessica waits in the doorway, smirk already loaded.

JESSICA
Hurry up and get inside!

INT. JESSICA'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A modest living room under the flat yellow light of a ceiling-fan bulb. Plain furniture. Botanical prints on the walls. Healthy potted plants line the windows.

Angela's finished bird painting hangs in the hallway between the living room and kitchen.

A broomstick leans against the wall by the door. Adiran points at it.

JESSICA
In case you need it. You want a cigarette?

Adiran raises the joint in answer.

ADIRAN
Mind if I finish this?

JESSICA
Of course not.

ADIRAN
I didn't see anybody out there. Or anywhere in this old folks' place.

JESSICA
He must've gone home. But really, he was out there!

Adiran narrows his eyes and hands her the joint.

ADIRAN
You don't have to make up stories to make me come over. All you have to do is call.

JESSICA
Adiran! Don't be such a fucking asshole. There really was some guy looking at me!

Adiran looks away and sinks into the couch with an exhale.

Jessica stands over him. He reaches out, takes her hand.

ADIRAN
I'm sorry. I'm just peaking right now and not thinking straight. What do you want me to do?

Jessica settles beside him. They pass the joint back and forth. Adiran sinks deeper into the couch.

JESSICA
Can you stay for a little while? I'm scared he'll come back.

ADIRAN
(low)
Okay.

Jessica's lip balm leaves a faint sheen on the joint. Adiran takes it back and hits it, eyes on her.

JESSICA
Do you want a drink?

ADIRAN
That'd be nice. This acid has me running at a million miles an hour. Do you have any juice?

JESSICA
As a matter of fact, I do!

She slips away toward the kitchen.

Adiran picks up a handmade clay ashtray from the side table.

He turns it over. "Angie '94" is carved into the bottom.

ADIRAN
Cute.

He sets it down, rests the joint in it, and crosses to the broomstick. Adiran twirls the broomstick through a few lazy sword strokes.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
I'd known Jessica since high school. Since before the bullshit. She once claimed I was one of the reasons she was independent now. That I'd given her the balls to leave her parents' house.

He spins the stick slowly, watching the light catch on its surface.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
She thought I'd been a good influence. I fixed her problems and even listened to her, but neither of us expected me to stay.

He gently props the broomstick back where it was by the door.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
At least she stood by me when it mattered. Sometimes I wondered if we could make it work. But I wasn't a marriage-and-holidays kind of partner. And that was perfectly okay.

From the kitchen: the faint sounds of water running and glasses clinking.

Jessica's ordinary shadow crosses the wall. He watches it pass.

Adiran lowers himself onto the couch, elbows on his knees, eyes fixed on the kitchen doorway.

Jessica returns with a glass of orange juice and hands it to him.

Adiran takes a long drink, then sets the glass beside the ashtray.

She settles close.

Adiran's hand slides to her hip and down her thigh. She leans into him.

ADIRAN
Hello. Long time no see!

He presses his face to her hairline and breathes her in. Jessica closes her eyes.

His hand slips beneath her shirt. She pulls him into a kiss.

Slow at first, then hungrier, lips parting, breath quickening.

Jessica stands, flushed, and takes the ashtray. She reaches for Adiran's hand.

He grabs the glass with his free hand as she pulls him to his feet and leads him down the hall.

Her bedroom door closes behind them.

INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM - LATER

On the bedside table, the handmade ashtray holds the smoked joint beside the empty juice glass. Smoke hangs in the pale blue lamp light, making the walls seem submerged.

Beyond the table, Adiran and Jessica tumble onto the bed.

Blue light bends across their skin, stretching their shadows over the walls.

They strip each other without delicacy. Mouths hard. Teeth clash. Hands grip bare skin.

Every touch leaves a phosphorescent trail across Jessica. Their bodies shift through the sheets, above, beneath, tangled.

Jessica drags her hand across his chest. His body jerks a beat after her fingers pass.

Their rhythm slows. They collapse into the sheets, breath heavy, sweat shining blue.

Jessica presses her mouth to his ear.

JESSICA
Adiran...

A grin spreads across his face. Her nails dig into his back. He presses his forehead to hers. Jessica looks past him.

JESSICA
Adiran?

Her body goes rigid.

JESSICA
Adiran! Adiran, he's here!

The psychedelic colors snap away.

Adiran freezes.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Oh shit! The deadbeat boyfriend? The dad? Who?

He turns.

A STRANGE FACE fills the window.

ADIRAN
What in the fuck?

Adiran tears away from her, yanks on his pants, and jams his feet into unlaced boots.

The clock reads 10:45 PM. The red digits double, then snap back together.

ADIRAN
Yeah, the deadbeat boyfriend... Colby, right? Peeping like a champ. Bet your old man's out there too, coaching him from the bushes. "Go, cadet, go!"

His fingers miss the zipper twice as he mutters:

ADIRAN
Deadbeat Colby... yeah, that fits you. No, wait... Bootlicker Colby! Even better!

Jessica sits wrapped in the sheet, staring at him in disbelief.

JESSICA
He's gone, Adiran!

Adiran stops muttering and looks at her.

He bolts from the bedroom.

INT. JESSICA'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The broomstick leans beside the door. Adiran snatches it.

He grips the handle and pumps it like a handshake.

Shadows thread from Adiran's wrist into the grain of the wood.

ADIRAN
Mr. Stick, please shake my hand.
Pleasure to meet you!

His grin drops.

EXT. JESSICA'S TOWNHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

THE VOYEUR (40s) stumbles between the parked cars.

The front door bursts open. Adiran charges out.

ADIRAN
Hey, motherfucker!

Adiran tears after him, broomstick clenched in both hands.

The voyeur lumbers toward the far lot and looks back beneath a streetlamp.

Under the light: naked except for red sneakers. Patchy body hair covers his back. The sight of him briefly stops Adiran in his tracks.

Their bodies leave delayed doubles beneath the streetlights.

Adiran's shadow reaches across the pavement toward the voyeur.

ADIRAN
You stupid piece of shit! I'm gonna kick your nasty, sick motherfucking ass! You shitbag ass-fuck!

The gap between them stretches, then snaps shut. Adiran catches him and swings.

The broomstick SPLINTERS across the voyeur's back.

The blow knocks the voyeur down and carries Adiran forward. He trips over him and crashes onto the pavement, still clutching a jagged half of the stick.

Broken wood bites into his palm as he scrambles up.

Adiran swings again. The jagged wood hammers the voyeur's legs, ribs, and shoulders.

Shadows climb Adiran's boots, his legs, his torso.

The voyeur curls up, arms over his head, sobbing.

ADIRAN
How do you fucking like it? Are you horny now, you fuck?

Adiran keeps swinging until the remaining wood breaks apart in his hands. Each blow sends a tremor of darkness around them until it encloses Adiran.

Adiran throws the broken wood aside and kicks the voyeur again and again.

One unlaced boot flies off.

Adiran raises his bare foot for another kick. He looks down and jerks it back before it touches the man.

He stops, chest heaving.

The voyeur lies curled and bleeding in the street, sobbing in his red sneakers.

Adiran snatches up his fallen boot.

He limps toward Jessica's doorway. Porch light cuts across him. The shadows peel from his body and retreat across the pavement.

INT. JESSICA'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jessica stands framed in the doorway. One hand grips the frame. Her forearm trembles.

Her eyes are wide, but she doesn't step back. She leans forward a fraction.

Adiran approaches, taking deep breaths.

ADIRAN
Done.

He lets out a quick, hollow bark of laughter, then sucks air through his teeth.

ADIRAN
Happy-happy, joy-joy.

Jessica exhales.

JESSICA
(under her breath)
Thank you for taking care of that.

She kisses him on the cheek.

INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM - LATER

Adiran pulls off his remaining boot and drops both boots beside him. He pulls on his shirt, then sits on the floor to tug on his socks. Splinters jut from his palms.

Jessica sits curled against the headboard, watching him.

JESSICA
Come here. Let me see.

He sits on the edge of the bed. She takes his hand, examining his palm in the lamplight.

She picks at a splinter with her fingernail, focused. Pulls it free. Then another. He watches her work. She doesn't look up.

JESSICA
He's lucky. Better you than my dad. My dad would've just shot him.

Adiran looks at her but says nothing.

JESSICA
You got him good though.

ADIRAN
Yeah.

She pulls another splinter, drops it. Moves to his other hand.

He glances at the uncovered window, then back to her.

ADIRAN
How about we take a second and close these fucking blinds?

Jessica forces a smile.

JESSICA
Yeah. Or I could just start charging admission.

They laugh together.

She finishes with the last splinter. Holds his hand for a final inspection.

JESSICA
Can you stay?

ADIRAN
(softly)
I can't. Mary is waiting for me.

JESSICA
Just Mary?

ADIRAN
Mary and Seth. We're marathoning *The CW Chronicles* tonight. You're welcome to come.

JESSICA
I think I need to call the cops about that guy...

ADIRAN
Well, you know how to get a hold of me!

She releases his hand.

He finishes getting dressed, slips his boots back on, and walks out.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
And I guess that's how this type of love worked. We gave something to each other in exchange for a next time.

EXT. JESSICA'S TOWNHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Adiran walks to his car. TV light flickers behind closed blinds. No one looks out.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
None of her neighbors checked what in the hell was going on outside their perfect little community complex. What a fucking night... I couldn't wait to get back to Seth and Mary and tell them the story of the Incredibly Naked Man!

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - MOVING THROUGH ALIEF - NIGHT

Adiran drives through the dim backstreets.

His fingers tap the wheel in uneven bursts. No music plays.

His jaw works from side to side.

The road unfolds in fragments:

A man pushes a rattling shopping cart full of scrap.

A mother waits at a bus stop with two sleepy kids.

A street vendor shutters a small food truck.

A couple argues under a streetlight.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
This was Alief. This was home. Being afraid of these streets made as much sense as being afraid of being hit by lightning.

The woman at the bus stop turns toward him. A streetlight flares white-hot behind her.

The cart man freezes. His shadow stretches across the street toward Adiran's car.

The streetlights swell and dim with each THUD of Adiran's heartbeat.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - MARY'S STREET - NIGHT

Red and blue strobes wash the houses. Each flash hangs too long. The darkness between them lasts longer than it should.

Adiran's crooked smile is gone.

He brakes hard.

ADIRAN
What the fuck happened?

Crowd noise bends into a low hum beneath Adiran's shallow breathing.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - PARKED ON MARY'S STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Adiran's car idles at the curb, just beyond the crowd and police tape.

Through the windshield, paramedics load a stretcher. Neighbors crane for a look. Cops cut through the crowd.

He scans from a distance. No Seth. No Mary.

One hand drums against the wheel. The other rests on the bags bulging inside his coat.

A figure breaks away from the crowd: JAMES (early 20s, neighborhood hanger-on).

He spots the car and heads toward it, weaving through people, waving like he's greeting a celebrity.

Adiran's eyes narrow. He doesn't roll down the window all the way. Just enough for James' face to appear in the opening.

James talks fast, half-smiling.

JAMES
(garbled)
...uninvited guest... Scott...

The low hum swallows most of his words.

JAMES
(garbled)
...someone laughed... queer joke...
Scott got mad...

James leans closer, voice finally cutting through.

JAMES
Mary's dead. He shot her!

James keeps talking, the words dissolving again into static.

JAMES
(garbled)
...got away...

Adiran stops breathing.

JAMES
Hey, you got a dime I can buy off you?

Adiran exhales sharply through his nose, reaches into his coat, and flings a small bag of weed through the gap.

It bounces off James's face and drops. The loose twist comes open, scattering weed across the pavement.

James flinches. Then crouches, scooping the weed off the ground.

JAMES
How much for it?

ADIRAN
Stupid fucking asshole!

Behind him, a SIREN wails. A third ambulance rolls down the street, its lights swelling in the rearview.

Adiran looks past James. Across the street, a deputy notices them. Another follows his gaze toward the car.

Adiran drops the car into gear, pulls away, forcing James to stumble back as the bumper swings past.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - LEAVING MARY'S STREET - CONTINUOUS

The crowd and flashing lights shrink in the rearview.

Shadows of tree limbs and utility poles sweep across his arms and face as he passes beneath the streetlights.

One shadow lingers. It curls over his shoulder like fingers.

ADIRAN
I'll find him, Mary. Don't worry. I won't stop looking, even if I have to search every house in this city.

Another shadow slides across his jaw like a hand.

Adiran looks toward the empty passenger seat.

A faint profile forms beside him. It turns toward Adiran.

No face. No eyes. Only darkness.

ADIRAN
You're with me now. I can feel it.

The profile dissolves into ordinary shadows.

ADIRAN
(a whisper)
Please don't leave me, Mary. Guide me.

The car rolls into the dark. Shadows settle over Adiran's shoulders and blend into the seams of his coat.

EXT. ADIRAN'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Adiran turns into the lot and crawls past the parked cars, scanning between them.

He parks near his unit and kills the lights. The engine continues idling while he checks the lot again.

His palm finds the bags in his coat.

He kills the engine.

INT. ADIRAN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

He tosses the cash and keys into a side-table drawer.

A metal tray sits on the floor with several finished joints. Adiran drops the remaining bags beside them and kneels to roll another.

His fingers shake. Sweat beads across his forehead.

He abandons the half-rolled joint, tears off his trench coat and shirt, and heads for the bathroom.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

He turns on the tap and splashes water over his hands and face.

Dirt streaks and bits of grass cling to his skin. A scrape blooms red on his shoulder.

Water runs into the scrape. He doesn't react.

In the mirror, water runs down his face like tears.

Adiran pushes his wet hair back and meets his own eyes.

ADIRAN
You are more than human. You're plugged into something bigger now.
(MORE)

ADIRAN (CONT'D)
Something vengeful. You're going to blow up destiny because you won't stop. Not for fear, not for doubt or pain... not for anything! I give myself to you.

Behind his reflection, shadows ripple along the wall in time with his words.

INT. ADIRAN'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A pounding knock at the front door. The shadows vanish.

Adiran storms out of the bathroom toward the front door.

ADIRAN
Who is it? Hold the fuck on!

Adiran yanks the door open while dragging a clean shirt over his head.

Seth stands there, helmet in hand. He pushes past Adiran without a word and goes straight to the window, peering out at the lot.

ADIRAN
Oh shit, Seth. Come in.

Seth sets his helmet on the TV, shoulders tight.

ADIRAN
What the fuck, Seth?

SETH
They're after you, man. You're gonna have company real soon.

Adiran pockets the finished joints, shoves the loose weed into a larger baggie, and slides the tray beneath the couch.

ADIRAN
Bad company?

SETH
Yeah, man, pretty fucking bad.

Adiran searches for his keys, muttering:

ADIRAN
Where did I put my keys?

Seth flicks open a switchblade and presses the edge into his

palm until the skin dimples.

ADIRAN
Damn, must've tossed them in with the cash.

Adiran yanks open the drawer, spots the keys, grabs them.

SETH
(quiet)
The cops saw James talkin' to you.

Adiran freezes. Eyes on Seth.

He slams the drawer, throws his trench coat on.

SETH
They grabbed him after you left. Found some weed in his pockets. I came here as soon as I could.

ADIRAN
James is a fucking idiot. He doesn't even know where I live. They don't know shit about where to find me, unless they followed you.

Seth doesn't argue. He looks down. The blade presses deeper into his palm.

SETH
I know where we need to go. We need to go to The Heights. We need to take the 17th Street exit.

ADIRAN
(skeptical)
Yeah? What makes you say that?

SETH
I talked to the fuckhead earlier tonight.

Adiran stops short.

ADIRAN
What?

SETH
Yeah, he was giving me shit about how cool his buddies were. He was upset because Sean had brought him over. We were too lame for him, you know, just sitting around getting high and watching TV. Said some shit about snorting coke all night long and throwing beer bottles into the street at his parties. Bragged that no one would ever give them shit about it where he lived, so I asked him where it was, and he told me.

ADIRAN
Sounds like a real cool motherfucker.

SETH
I don't know for sure, but it sounded like bullshit to me. He bragged about everyone in the neighborhood being scared of his crew.

Seth snaps the switchblade shut.

SETH
Let's get out of here, man.

They head for the door.

EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - APARTMENT PARKING LOT - NIGHT

They hurry to the car. Adiran opens the trunk. A wave of gasoline fumes makes Seth recoil.

Adiran checks the gas can, tightens its cap, and slams the trunk.

Adiran hands Seth a bundle of joints.

ADIRAN
Hold these. I need to grab something else.

Adiran taps the top of the car as he jogs back upstairs.

INT. ADIRAN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Adiran opens the cabinet next to the refrigerator.

The whiskey bottle stands behind two mismatched glasses.

ADIRAN
This'll calm me down.

He takes the bottle, then grabs both glasses, distracted.

He turns toward the door, stops, and looks down at them.

ADIRAN
For fuck's sake!

He shoves the glasses back into the cabinet and hurries out with the bottle.

EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - APARTMENT PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Adiran drops into the driver's seat.

ADIRAN
All set. Let's go.

The car tears out of the lot and through the neighboring streets. No sign of the cops.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Streetlights flicker through the windshield, cutting the cabin into bands of light and shadow.

ADIRAN
So, what's the deal?
(beat)
Light one up, would you?

Seth turns the joint between his fingers, then lights it. His eyes stay on the flame.

ADIRAN
What the fuck is it, Seth?

Adiran takes a swig of whiskey. He winces, then takes another.

Seth hands Adiran the joint, then takes the bottle and gulps some down.

SETH
I'm glad we're drinking, 'cause I couldn't handle this shit sober right now.
(a beat)
I saw the whole thing, man.

Adiran's eyes stay on the road.

ADIRAN
Oh man, don't start with that.

Seth stares through the windshield and keeps talking.

Shadows rearrange themselves across the glass, pulling broken images into view with his words.

SETH
We were sitting around, waiting for you to get there, talking and shit, you know, like always. People were coming in and out of the house, but this motherfucker just sat there, so I got curious and went over to see what his deal was. Sean was out in the backyard arguing with his girlfriend about stupid shit, so this guy was just lurking there, all weird and shit.

ADIRAN
What? Hell yeah, he must've looked weird. That motherfucker killed Mary in her own fucking house. And how in the fuck did he leave if Sean was the one who brought him there?

SETH
He was just fucking weird, man. His legs were shaking and shit. And he talked funny, you know... fast, like he was on speed or something. I just figured more power to him and shit. That's when he told me where he lived.
(a beat)
Then Mary came up and asked me if I had heard from you. I told her you'd be late. He looked at her like, I don't know, man, like she bothered him. Mary picked up on it right away and looked straight back at him. Then she asked him who he was and shit. You know what he fucking said?

ADIRAN
No...

SETH
No, of course not. He told her it was none of her fucking business! Can you believe it?

ADIRAN
That was bold of him.

SETH
I was shocked, man. So, Mary looks up and down at him and stares into his eyes for a second or two, then she laughs. She starts laughing at him! You know how she'd sometimes let out that hysterical laugh? Just like that.

Mary's shadow doubles over on the windshield, mouth wide in laughter.

The sound echoes in the cabin.

Adiran takes the bottle back and gulps whiskey without taking his eyes off the road.

SETH
He looked back at her, and he almost seemed hurt. But he knew her, man! Or she knew him! I don't fucking know, but it was weird. Like... like she had dirt on him. Like she saw right through his bullshit. I couldn't do anything to fix things, you know? Shit, Mary ate me for breakfast anytime I tried to argue with her. You know how it is... She had him cornered.

Seth clears his throat, then blurts:

SETH
Then Mary got all pissed off, and bends down to his level and says: "So, you're the faggot Sean is dumping his girlfriend for?" Can you believe that?

Adiran crushes the roach into the car's ashtray.

ADIRAN
No, that's all fucked up. What the fuck is happening?

SETH
I know it all sounds fucked up, but that's how it happened, man! When Mary said that to him, he stood up and got in her face. That's when I got up. But before I could do anything else, the fucker tripped me and pushed me down to the ground.

Adiran shoves the whiskey bottle against Seth's chest.

ADIRAN
Here. Take a swig.

Seth gulps, turns to the window, glassy-eyed.

SETH
Next thing I know, Mary's fallen down beside me, but she's got a bloody nose.

ADIRAN
What?

SETH
Fuck, man. That bastard punched Mary!

Seth starts crying. He pushes through the sobs.

SETH
She was bleeding, man. I couldn't believe it, but it was real.
(beat)
She was hurting, so I turned over to get up and put an end to his shitty existence... but he's got a fucking metal finger pointed at me! What could I do with a gun pointed at my head? I was fucking helpless, man. Fucking helpless!

On the windshield, Scott's shadow turns from Seth toward Adiran. Its eyes meet his through the glass.

SETH
Then he shot her, man! He fucking shot her in the fucking face, man... in the fucking face!

A shadow gun rises on the windshield.

Adiran rubs his wet eyes and forces them open. He jerks the wheel toward the highway ramp. The car veers.

ADIRAN
Don't worry, Seth. When we get our hands on him, we'll fuck him up so bad he'll hurt for the rest of his goddamned existence. I'll get Happy to pay me back a couple of favors.

But Seth continues, ignoring him.

SETH
Then he stands over her and shoots her again. Everyone started screaming and running out of the house, man. Then he's about to shoot me when Sean barges in yelling, asking what was going on. And he gets the bullet with my name on it!

Shadows strobe across the windshield: people running, Sean falling, Scott standing over Mary.

Adiran checks the rearview, then locks both hands at ten-and-two.

ADIRAN
Sean got shot too?

SETH
Yeah, he got it in the leg, man. As soon as he turned on Sean, I ran outside. Scott left just a few seconds later. He must've gotten nervous after everyone started screaming and shit. He took off in Sean's car. The fucking bastard!

ADIRAN
This is bad, Seth. This is really fucking bad. What about Mary's mom? Did she wake up?

SETH
No, man... She was on those stupid sleeping pills. Slept through the whole thing... The cops were dealing with her when I left. They had to get the paramedics to wake her up.

Seth thrashes in his seat.

SETH
I'm having heart spasms every time I take a breath, man! I don't think I can take this shit any longer. I feel worthless. I could have saved her, man, but I was afraid for my own fucking self!

ADIRAN
Don't worry. It's alright now. Don't worry about a thing. It's all right.

Seth slams his fist against the dash.

SETH
Bullshit, man! It's not all fucking right! I should've saved her! I should've fucking saved her!

He screams. The car interior darkens.

ADIRAN
You're right, Seth. But we'll make it better. We'll make sure Mary smiles again when we get him.

Adiran puts a hand on Seth's shoulder.

SETH
She was like a bridge for us, man. I felt like I was complete around her, you know?

Seth slumps back, staring at nothing. He lifts his hand, resting it over Adiran's.

ADIRAN
Yeah...

Adiran looks at their joined hands.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Mary was, after all, the love of his life. Not mine. So yeah... I knew.

Adiran turns his eyes back to the road.

Darkness closes in around Seth's eyes.

A shadow passes from Adiran's hand, wraps around Seth's hand, and sinks into his skin.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
(distorted, reverberating)
I fucking knew.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Adiran drives with the nearly empty whiskey bottle in one hand. He takes a swallow and passes it to Seth.

Seth doesn't look at him. He drinks without changing his expression.

A green overhead sign flashes past: EXIT 15TH ST.

Adiran glances at Seth.

ADIRAN
(low and measured)
There are times when you follow a rite of passage to evolve into something new, Seth. In primitive tribes, you hunt a beast. In civilized places, you grow a beard, buy a suit, and get a job.

Seth just stares out the window.

A second green sign: EXIT 16TH ST.

ADIRAN
The point is we act to become 'better than before.' And sometimes it just happens. The change is left behind as silent proof.

No reaction from Seth.

A third green sign: EXIT 17TH ST.

ADIRAN
(barely audible)
This is your Utah, Seth...

The car slips off onto the feeder road, threading into the neighborhood streets.

INT./EXT. ADIRAN'S CAR - 17TH STREET - NIGHT

Streetlights cast orange pools across the cracked asphalt. An October wind skitters leaves down the street. Half-finished Halloween decorations sag in several yards.

Adiran's car crawls past a light blue Toyota parked on the side of the road.

A couple of houses away, a small group of people sit in the front yard. Some wear Halloween masks. Others hide under hoodies or face paint.

ADIRAN
11:46 PM. Sean's piece of shit Toyota. A group of junkie morons. Gee, I wonder where assfuck could be?

Adiran taps the brakes, slowing almost to a stop.

ADIRAN
People exhibiting themselves like store displays. Inviting strangers to buy a piece of their life.

Adiran presents the giant living room window with an exaggerated showroom flourish.

ADIRAN
Ta-da!

Seth scans the yard, windows, and parked cars.

The faint LAP of bathwater returns. Then fades.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Fuck it, it didn't matter. We were looking for the bonus prize in the shooting gallery.

Adiran feathers the gas and rolls past.

In the rearview: three figures sprint for the front door, masks bobbing into the dim porch.

Adiran makes a U-turn at the block's end and drifts back.

Headlights rake the lawn as he creeps past.

The shadows curl over every face, in the yard and behind the glass, hollowing eyes, blurring mouths. All faceless, except for one.

Seth lunges forward and points.

SETH
There he is! He's inside the fucking house!

Adiran locks on and opens the throttle.

The car climbs the curb, glides onto the grass. Front tires bump, scrabble on wet lawn, then bite.

Adiran's face is unreadable. Just engine and glare.

The house fills the windshield.

The giant window swallows the view. Inside, figures crowd the glass.

Bodies thud, roll, slide off the hood. The car keeps moving.

The front end smashes through the window sill. Studs crack. Glass avalanches. Furniture kicks back as the wall gives.

The undercarriage slams into a foot-high brick flower bed beneath the window. The car jolts to a dead stop, halfway into the living room.

IMPACT. Flash of white. Silence.

INT. SCOTT'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The car's front end juts through the shattered wall. Smoke and dust drift in the headlights' glow.

Adiran blinks as glass from his door window slides off his coat. Seth hunches low in the passenger seat, breathing fast.

A bullet cracks the windshield. Spiderwebs bloom across the glass.

Adiran stares at the new star.

ADIRAN
(low, to himself)
I knew someday I would need a fucking gun. Every asshole in this state packs a gun but me.

Another shot rips into the car's side panel.

ADIRAN
Shit!

Adiran leans toward Seth.

ADIRAN
Seth, are you okay?

Seth is already pressed under the dash.

SETH
Great!

Another shot. The windshield glass shatters. The passenger window explodes outward. Shots keep coming. Four. Five. Six.

ADIRAN
Goddamnit!

SETH
(whispering)
Are they out?

ADIRAN
How the fuck should I know?

SETH
You're the fucking gun expert!

A microwave sails through what's left of the windshield and slams between them.

Glass rains over Adiran and the dash.

ADIRAN
Yeah. They're out, let's go!

Adiran reaches for the whiskey bottle rolling on the floor.

Seth's door swings open. He's already moving, blade in hand.

Behind him, Adiran's shadow stretches toward Seth. Its arm extends over Seth's body, darkening him as its hand overlaps his grip on the knife.

A figure charges past; Seth lunges, stabbing him in the throat in one swift, furious motion.

Adiran's shadow swells with Seth's violence.

Adiran climbs out of the car. Slower, more deliberate. His boot lands on a hand jutting from beneath the wreck.

ADIRAN
(loud, to the room)
I hope this isn't Scott!

The hand doesn't move.

INT. SCOTT'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Smoke drifts from the wrecked wall into the kitchen. Three teenage junkies huddle by the stove.

JUNKIE #1 (late teens, skinny, shaking hands) struggles with a heavy revolver.

JUNKIE #2 and JUNKIE #3 (late teens, pupils blown) stare at Seth.

Adiran turns toward Junkie #1. Slow steps. Shoulders pushed forward.

He reaches into his coat pocket and grips his beeper.

Junkie #1 swings the revolver toward Adiran's chest.

JUNKIE #1
(stammering)
Stay where you are! Get back... or I'll shoot you!

Adiran hurls the beeper at the kid's face. It bounces off his nose. His head snaps back.

Adiran charges and swings the whiskey bottle into the revolver, knocking the gun aside.

He smashes the bottle across the kid's face. Glass breaks against his cheek.

As the kid drops to his knees, Adiran grabs him by the hair, slams him against the stove, and drives the bottle's jagged neck into his eye.

The kid crumples to the floor, screaming.

ADIRAN
You're out of bullets, you dolt. Jesus fucking Christ, you inner-loop hood rats are fucking morons!

Junkie #3 backs into the refrigerator.

Seth cuts off Junkie #2's attempted escape, switchblade flashing. He stands next to Junkie #3.

Junkie #1 wails on the floor.

Adiran's shadow mirrors Seth's movements exactly.

Seth grabs the back of the stove and yanks it loose, tilting it forward. Its metal edge CRACKS into Junkie #1's head. The wailing stops.

A high, urgent HISS builds from the torn gas line.

Adiran pulls Junkie #3 back to him by the hair.

ADIRAN
Alright, you fuck, who and where is fucking Scott?

JUNKIE #2
Wait! Stop! Stop! He doesn't know who Scottie is!

Adiran releases Junkie #3. The kid crumples to the floor.

ADIRAN AND SETH
Scottie?!

JUNKIE #2
Yeah, Scottie's here!

ADIRAN
Where is this Scottie fuck?

The kid points toward a shattered coffee table in the living room chaos.

INT. SCOTT'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Adiran shoves him ahead. Seth stalks past.

ADIRAN
Do you see him?

Junkie #2 shakes his head.

Seth moves deeper into the wreckage, grabbing two limp teens and tossing them aside. His eyes lock on a moaning figure wedged between the table and the couch.

SETH
I found him!

Seth yanks the table away, revealing SCOTT (early 20s, junkie gangster, AKA Scottie) bloody, misshapen, barely conscious.

Seth rips the gun from his hand and presses it to Scott's face, pulling the trigger again and again.

Click. Click. Click.

Seth raises the gun to bash Scott's head in.

ADIRAN
Wait, Seth! Don't kill him yet, I have an idea!

Adiran pulls Seth back and shoves Junkie #2 toward Scott.

SCOTT
Help me... it... it hurts! Please, help me. Don't let them take me. Help me, please!

ADIRAN
(to Junkie #2)
Pick him up and help him out. Tell him everything is fine. And take his keys.
(to Seth)
Hold on to the gun. Come on.

Junkie #2 ducks under Scott's arm and hauls him up. Seth points the gun at them and leads them out.

EXT. SCOTT'S FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Junkie #2 hauls Scott toward the street. Scott's left leg hangs wrong. His right shoulder and arm look broken. He groans and pleads.

As Junkie #2 staggers forward with Scott, he dangles Sean's keys in his hand.

Adiran steps in, yanks the keys from Junkie #2, and moves to Scott's other side.

Together, they drag Scott across the street.

They force him into the trunk of Sean's car.

Adiran jogs back to his car, pops the trunk, and pulls out the gas can.

He flips open his car's fuel door and removes the cap. Splashes gasoline over the exposed filler and rear quarter panel.

Adiran pours the remaining gas in a trail from the car across the front yard until the can runs dry.

He pulls his lighter from his pocket and sparks it. The trail catches.

EXT. SCOTT'S NEIGHBOR'S YARD - NIGHT

Adiran sprints to the neighbor's yard, dropping flat into the grass.

The blue-orange flame races across the yard toward the car. It reaches the tire, then dies.

Adiran watches, cheek pressed into damp earth. He raises his head for a better view.

The flame flares back to life and climbs the tire. Gasoline around the open fuel door catches.

EXT. SCOTT'S FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

A tongue of flame licks through the broken window and catches the gas-heavy air inside.

The entire house erupts in a furious ball of fire.

The roar shakes the ground. Heat blasts over Adiran.

Seth takes cover behind Sean's car as burning debris lands across the street.

Adiran jumps to his feet and runs toward Seth. Screams at the top of his lungs:

ADIRAN
This is what kiloton bombs look like!
Happy, you fuck!

The firelight around Adiran warps. Seth catches a glimpse of shadows twisting and crawling over Adiran's body, swallowing his face, turning him into a solid black silhouette against the blaze.

Seth flinches and steps back. He blinks hard.

Adiran is there again, grinning in the heat, but darkness clings to his edges, slow to let go.

Seth tears his eyes from Adiran and looks at the burning house.

SETH
What the fuck was that, man?

Adiran lets out a broken laugh, still half-deaf from the blast.

ADIRAN
Guilty by association, Seth. Shit happens!

SETH
I'm driving.

Seth backhands Junkie #2 and shoves him into the street. The kid crawls away.

Adiran gets into the passenger seat.

INT./EXT. SEAN'S CAR - HIGHWAY - NIGHT

They speed away. Seth hands Adiran a joint. Adiran lights it and takes a hit. His stomach turns.

ADIRAN
Pull over, quick!

Seth pulls onto the shoulder.

Adiran throws the door open and pukes hard onto the asphalt, retching until he shakes.

ADIRAN
(spitting)
Fucking gross. That's not any better...

He slams his door shut. Seth pulls the car back onto the highway.

The car merges into late night traffic. Headlights streak past in the darkness.

Adiran and Seth stare straight ahead, faces lit in passing flashes. The road hums beneath them.

A beat.

ADIRAN AND SETH
What are we gonna do with--

They glance at each other, both a little surprised at the overlap. One corner of Seth's mouth lifts, then drops.

ADIRAN
Could get Happy involved...

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Happy would've killed him on the spot for Mary. No games, no waiting. But I didn't want it quick.

Adiran pauses, then shakes his head.

ADIRAN
Nah. He's got rat issues right now. Last thing he needs is this mess.

Seth keeps his eyes on the road, voice flat, worn out.

SETH
Let's drown him. Drop him in the deep end of a pool and see how long shit floats.

Adiran gives a small nod.

ADIRAN
Hmm.

From the trunk: kicking, pounding, muffled shouting.

ADIRAN
Maybe we need to beat the shit out of him first so he sinks faster.

Adiran cranks the radio to full blast. A twangy country song blares.

ADIRAN
Are you fucking kidding me?

Adiran slams the eject button and flings the tape out the window. He digs through the glove compartment.

ADIRAN
Thank God... Nine Inch Nails!

Seth reaches over with Scottie's gun, hands it to Adiran.

SETH
Do something with this. It doesn't fucking work.

Adiran drops the magazine into his palm. It's full. He holds it up for Seth.

ADIRAN
It didn't shoot because you have to chamber a round first.

Seth glances at the magazine, then back to the road.

ADIRAN
(muttering to himself)
Fucking Scottie reloaded his gun after he got home.

Adiran puts the magazine back in and chambers a round.

CLICK.

Shadows snap around the gun. They race up Adiran's arm and sink behind his eyes.

INT. MARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Images strike Adiran in muzzle-flash bursts:

Mary beside Seth on the floor, blood running from her nose.

Scott raises the gun toward her.

A deafening GUNSHOT. The muzzle flash freezes the room white.

INT./EXT. SEAN'S CAR - HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Adiran gasps.

His hand shakes on the grip of the gun.

Adiran twists toward the back seat. For a blink, his own shadow sits there, watching Seth drive.

Then the seat is empty.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Maybe it was just me, with the acid, the booze, the emotions or whatever. But I had seen this all before.

Seth's face flickers in the windshield reflection, shifting too fast to read.

Ahead, the highway stretches black beneath the steady rhythm of streetlights. A lone police cruiser sits on the shoulder.

ADIRAN
He's just looking for speedsters. Just watch your speed, and we'll be fine.

Seth doesn't glance at him. He squeezes the wheel.

SETH
Are you fucking nuts? We are in a hot fucking car, involved in multiple murders, with a fucking idiot screaming in the trunk. If he pulls us over, we're gonna get fist fucked for the rest of our miserable lives, man. I'm not up for that!

Hazard lights from a construction sign ahead strobe amber across their faces. The glow catches the sweat on Seth's brow.

Adiran flicks his joint out the window, ember tracing a brief orange arc into the night.

They pass the cruiser's position.

WHOOMPH. The cruiser comes alive. Headlights flare on.

The light bar ignites in a violent strobe of red and blue, flooding the inside of their car.

Seth's grip climbs higher on the wheel. His shoulders hunch.

SETH
Any suggestions?

Adiran meets Seth's side-eye. No reply.

The cruiser's lights blaze closer through the rear glass, filling the back window like a predator's eyes.

Adiran's hand finds Scottie's gun low in his lap.

SETH
I'll fake him out, you shoot. And please, don't miss!

ADIRAN
What?

The SIREN SCREAMS: a piercing, mechanical wail.

Seth signals to pull over, guiding the car toward the shoulder.

ADIRAN
Just Yes, sir, No, sir him. Go with the flow. The important thing is not to get arrested. Act natural, it's probably a routine stop.

The siren swells louder, closer.

SETH
Bullshit! Get ready!

Adiran reaches over and turns off the radio.

The cruiser's SPOTLIGHT explodes with blinding white light.

ADIRAN AND SETH
Shit!

ADIRAN
Damn! You know what you're doing, right?

ADIRAN (V.O.)
I was trying to convince myself.

SETH
Don't you fucking miss!

They sit frozen in the flood of white light.

ADIRAN
Seth, he's just checking the plates. Chill out!

Adiran flicks the pistol's safety off. Seth looks at his side mirror.

SETH
He's standing by his fucking car, man. It's bullshit, he's probably calling for backup. They know this car was stolen! We have to go now! We gotta do it now, or we're fucked, man!

ADIRAN
I hate cops you know that... but a shootout is a whole different game, Seth! We can't fucking win!

SETH
Says the guy John tried turning into Rambo?

Adiran turns fully toward Seth.

ADIRAN
Shooting paper and shooting cops aren't the same fucking thing, Seth!

The cruiser's driver-side door is cracked open. The officer behind it is only a silhouette.

SETH
I'm not gonna let you down, Adiran. Mary's dead because of me. Because I was afraid. It won't happen again.

ADIRAN
Wait, wait, wait a fucking second!

Adiran watches him. Seth doesn't look away from the side mirror.

SETH
Go motherfucker! Shoot the first chance you get!

Seth pulls on the trunk release lever. Kicks his door wide and LAUNCHES himself out, hitting the pavement hard and rolling to one knee. He points at the officer with one hand, switchblade raised in the other.

Scottie immediately screams for help from the trunk.

SETH
Gung-ho! Do or die, motherfucker!

Adiran flings his door open and moves low toward the rear of Sean's car.

The DRIVER COP (late 40s, heavy-set) shields himself behind his open door, sidearm trained on Seth. He studies the situation for a beat: a screaming kid in the trunk, a guy with a knife, and a shadowy figure moving low.

Adiran rounds the back corner of Sean's car just as the driver cop fires a single shot.

Seth drops, knife clattering on the asphalt.

Adiran's gun comes up. He fires. The round sparks off the cruiser's frame.

The driver cop hesitates, shifts his aim away from the trunk, then fires. The round grazes Adiran's left side. A searing, white-hot burn.

Adiran stumbles. He clutches his side, but keeps moving, leaning past the raised trunk lid to get a better angle.

He shoots again. The driver cop jerks back and collapses.

The FEMALE OFFICER (30s, blonde hair pinned in a tight bun) drops the radio mic and claws for her sidearm. Her other hand reaches for the door handle and misses.

ADIRAN
Oh shit!

Adiran pivots and empties the magazine through the windshield.

GLASS SHATTERS.

Red-blue strobes rake the shards as she slumps and goes still.

Scottie's gun slips from Adiran's grip, clattering to the pavement. He slams the trunk shut HARD.

He drops to one knee and presses his side. His palm comes away slick with blood.

ADIRAN
Seth?

Adiran stumbles toward Seth, his voice rising.

ADIRAN
Seth!

He reaches him. Seth lies sprawled on the asphalt, the wound in his chest dark and spreading.

ADIRAN
You're still alive! Hang in there, man.

SETH
(slurred)
Don't leave me!

ADIRAN
I'm taking you with me, Seth.

Seth coughs violently, choking on blood. Adiran tries to haul him up but collapses, pulling him into his lap instead.

ADIRAN
I'll take you to a hospital. Don't you die on me, Seth! Don't you fucking die!

Adiran hugs him, eyes shut.

Their breath suddenly fogs in the air.

The shadows ooze from Adiran's coat. They thread into Seth's wound, into his mouth, behind his eyes.

Seth's eyes stop searching.

The shadows draw back into Adiran, denser than before. The umbra lodges in his scar.

Red and blue strobes wash over Seth's still face.

ADIRAN
(distorted, reverberating)
Thank you.

Adiran cries, clutching him.

ADIRAN
Goddamnit, Seth! Why? Why, Seth, why?

Adiran forces himself up, his gaze fixing on the cruiser. He staggers toward it, one hand clamped to his side.

He reaches the driver cop, sprawled behind his open door, blood spreading beneath his head.

ADIRAN
You motherfucker...

Adiran stoops and takes the cop's sidearm. He climbs into the cruiser's driver's seat, wincing in pain.

INT./EXT. POLICE CRUISER - NIGHT

Adiran braces one knee on the driver's seat and leans across the console. The female officer slumps over the passenger side, motionless.

ADIRAN
(re: the MDT screen)
What in the fuck is this?

The MDT has taken a bullet. Spiderweb cracks cover its dead screen. The police radio squawks for the cruiser's location.

He returns his attention to the woman. A loose blonde strand has fallen across her cheek in the red-blue strobe.

He leans closer, holds his breath, and checks her pulse.

Nothing. She's gone. He brushes the loose strand from her cheek.

Shadows seep over her features. Her blonde bun unravels into long black hair. The lines of her face soften. She becomes younger in the red-blue strobe.

The shadows close in, swallowing the cruiser until there's nothing but Veronica's face. Her face holds the terror of her fall.

Her head snaps up. Her eyes lock onto his.

Her hand clamps around his forearm. Black nails dig into the skin surrounding his scar and pull him closer.

Adiran slumps, his head dipping as if pulled under.

Her breath burns against his ear:

VERONICA
(whisper)
Breathe...

Adiran jerks back with the same sharp, involuntary gasp from his nightmare.

The shadows flood him. A rushing, water-like roar fills his ears. Waves from a black ocean crash over him, pulling him under.

A flash: Adiran in the bathtub, sinking beneath the bathwater.

Adiran swings the gun up and smashes her with the butt.

The shadows recoil.

Blonde hair pinned in a bun. Pale skin.

He stumbles backward out of the cruiser and falls hard onto the pavement, breath ragged.

Adiran grips his forearm. Four fresh crescent marks redden the skin around his scar, then fade away.

His shadow pools around him on the asphalt. The highway glare stops at its edge.

It moves a half-second behind him, as if dragging something heavy.

He looks one last time at the driver cop beside him. Then at Seth. Adiran hauls himself up and limps to Sean's car.

Sirens echo in the distance. Blue and red flashes light up the horizon on the opposite side of the highway.

INT./EXT. SEAN'S CAR - HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Sean's car lurches forward. It speeds down the shoulder, merges into the slow lane, and takes the first exit ramp.

It disappears into light traffic.

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. RAILROAD DITCH / TRAIN TRACKS - NIGHT

Adiran sits perched on a low berm beside the tracks, eyes fixed downrange along the rails.

Scottie is sprawled on the tracks, his legs positioned over the steel rails.

In the far distance, a faint headlight blooms. The tracks begin to hum.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
I was trying out a little experiment. What if the train just took his legs instead? A better punishment than death, if he survived.

Adiran slumps, eyes glazing over. Memory bleeds in.

EXT. RAILROAD DITCH / TRAIN TRACKS - NIGHT (EARLIER)

Sean's car sits near the ditch, its trunk open.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
I got the idea when he tried to fight me.

Adiran yanks Scottie from the trunk. Scottie thrashes weakly.

SCOTT
I'm not a faggot!

Adiran crushes Scottie's right ankle under his boot. Scottie screams.

SCOTT
(choking, voice breaking)
Please, I didn't mean to!

Adiran pulls Scottie's broken right arm behind his back.

Scottie coughs and cries out, gasping.

SCOTT
I swear, Sean's friends were teasing us, calling us homos. I just got mad. It was an accident!

Adiran yanks Scottie's head back by the hair and punches him in the throat.

SCOTT
(hoarse)
Please... please... please don't kill me! I am so sorry!

Adiran hauls him upright by his clothes. Hugs him close to help him stay up.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
All I had left was pity. For him. For myself. The same self-pity I swore would never take me down.

Adiran drags Scottie across the ditch and drops him onto the tracks, positioning his legs over the steel rails.

Adiran kneels over Scottie, one knee pressing into his chest.

ADIRAN
Did you know I went to that high school back there, you fuck?

Scottie stirs weakly, barely lifting his head.

ADIRAN
I bet you didn't.

SCOTT
(mumbling, broken)
Please... I'm sorry...

Adiran pulls Scottie's head up to eye level.

ADIRAN
My friends went there too, you piece of shit.

Adiran's face remains fixed as his arm rises and falls.

Wet thuds and muffled pleas continue below frame. Each plea is smothered by another hit. Each hit darkens the shadows around them.

At last: silence.

ADIRAN
(gasping for air)
My dear friends went there with me. We grew up together in these streets. Even played football... Did you ever think of that? Did you know we used to pick mushrooms in the fields right in front of us? Do you know how much I laughed with those friends?

Adiran staggers up the ditch bank and drops into a crouch on a low berm beside the tracks. He wipes blood from his knuckles.

ADIRAN
My only friends are now dead because of you, you shitbag motherfucker. And I'm just about to piss on myself waiting for the fucking train.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
I blamed him, but the truth is that everyone is dead because of me.

In the far distance, a faint headlight blooms. The tracks begin to hum.

Adiran's hands tremble. He scrubs his palms against his jeans. Blood and dirt remain in their creases.

Shadows writhe up from the dirt, curling over his arms and back like ropes holding him in place.

His face twists between grief and a strange smile.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
I finally understood... The shadows dug the graves, but I chose how to fill them.

Adiran looks down the tracks.

The train's headlight cuts through the darkness.

Its blinding glow washes over him, driving the shadows back into the earth for a fleeting instant.

Metallic thunder runs through the rails.

Adiran grips his side, grimacing.

The train bears down impossibly fast.

Adiran forces himself upright, swaying. Blood spreads across his shirt.

On the tracks, Scottie lies still. His chest barely rises.

The shadows gather over the rails and Scottie. They darken his body until he is a flat silhouette pinned across the steel.

The train's light swallows the silhouette.

The roar swells.

The TRAIN STRIKES. DEAFENING. CHAINS WHIP. METAL HOWLS.

Shadows explode outward from the impact and bleed into the dark sky.

Adiran stands alone. The headlight passes, leaving a mass of boxcars, tankers, and flatbeds thundering through the night.

The clatter blurs, smoothing into a low, rhythmic wash of white noise that becomes the rush of the bathtub faucet.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
I saw every detail. The train devoured him like he was nothing but a fleshy worm. Shredding him, spreading what was left across the rusty tracks. Never slowing.

The shadows linger, twisting until they ripple like water.

They settle into a mirror shard.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

A blood-stained hand breaks the surface of the tub. The water swirls red.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
That train was what I pretended to be. The unstoppable force.

Adiran sinks deeper, eyes closed.

A police radio crackles faintly outside. The same words, the same static:

POLICE RADIO (O.S.)
Suspect may be armed... Request backup at location...

No time has passed.

Shadows gather in the steam, forming the outline of Veronica. She flickers, then fades with the mist.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Is she waiting for me to die? Is she here with me now?

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. ALIEF STREET - PAYPHONE BOOTH - NIGHT

Adiran steps into a flickering phone booth on a deserted corner.

Distant sirens wail, echoing through the neighborhood and drawing closer.

The train's hum still rings in his head as he digs for change.

He slams a coin into the slot.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
I was hoping to hear something to live for.

The phone rings. Adiran grips the receiver tightly and presses his forehead against the glass.

The line clicks alive. COLBY (mid-20s, Jessica's ex, smug police cadet) answers.

COLBY (ON PHONE)
Hello?

Adiran freezes.

ADIRAN
I'm calling for Jessica.

COLBY (ON PHONE)
Is this Adiran?

ADIRAN
Forget it.

He pulls the phone away from his ear. A muffled argument filters through.

JESSICA (ON PHONE)
(crying)
Hang up the fucking phone! Get out!

COLBY (ON PHONE)
Listen, asshole, your dumbass is dead. Either the cops get you, or I will!

ADIRAN
(sighs)
The irony.

Adiran's grip tightens on the receiver.

COLBY (ON PHONE)
Go fuck yourself! You left your car at a crime scene. Your idiot ass is going to fry for what you've done tonight. You're lucky you used a fake address for the registration, but I'll help them find you as soon as Jessica tells me where you live.

JESSICA (ON PHONE)
(muffled)
Stop! All of you need to get the fuck out of my house!

The receiver clatters on the other end. Jessica and Colby shout over each other, struggling for the phone.

The line goes dead.

Adiran slams the receiver. The cradle shatters. The booth shudders. Neon buzzes overhead.

Adiran stands there for a moment, then turns back toward Sean's car.

EXT. STERLING NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - NIGHT

Adiran pulls up a block from the Sterling house. The quiet suburban street is dim and still.

He kills the engine, his breath ragged, the wound hidden beneath his coat.

He places the cop's gun in the glove compartment and shuts it.

A distant helicopter chops the air. Its searchlight sweeps several blocks away.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Jessica wasn't available for me to say my final goodbye to, so I decided on the next best thing... Her little sister.

The windshield holds his hollow reflection before he pushes the door open.

EXT. STERLING HOUSE - NIGHT

Adiran unlatches the back gate. Two large dogs rush forward, bodies tense at first.

One jams its snout against his coat, nosing at the hidden wound. Adiran stiffens and drops to one knee.

He offers both palms. The dogs lick them eagerly, tails thudding against the fence.

Adiran scratches behind one ear, hugs the other. They lick at his neck and cheeks.

Adiran stands and raises a hand. The dogs hesitate. He signals again, firmer this time. The dogs back off and disappear into the yard.

He presses a hand to his wound and starts to limp across the grass. The glow of Angela's window is just ahead.

A faint laugh, Jessica's, ripples across the yard.

Ghostly figures shimmer into view: Jessica and Adiran stumbling through the back gate. Her arm is draped over him as he helps her inside the yard. The dogs bounce around them, tails wagging against their legs.

Jessica pulls free, laughing. She yanks the screen loose from Angela's window and pushes it aside.

Behind the curtain, Angela's ghost-self, almost two years younger, peers out. Her eyes are wide. Her fingers tighten on the curtain, but she doesn't call out.

Adiran's ghost-self glances up. A crooked grin flashes. He raises one finger to his lips.

He mouths: *Shhh.*

Angela's ghost-self trembles. She releases the curtain, but then gives him a shy smile.

Adiran and Jessica's ghost figures dissolve into the night.

A BLANK POLAROID PHOTOGRAPH fills the window frame.

Angela's ghost-self fades, her hand pushed against the glass.

The image begins to develop.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
From the very moment we met, she had been my unwilling victim. I told myself I was doing it in her best interest, but in truth I was just unloading my pain and calling it a lesson.

In the photograph, Jessica lies across the bed, holding the camera toward Angela's dresser mirror and catching all three of them in the reflection. Angela sits at her desk over an open science book. Adiran sits on the edge of the bed beside her, pointing at the page.

All three are caught mid-laugh. Angela and Jessica are clear. Adiran's reflection is a solid black silhouette.

The Polaroid fades.

The yard falls dark and silent.

Adiran slowly limps across the grass. His shadow reaches Angela's window first, climbing the wall beneath it and tracing the frame.

Adiran lingers at the window, watching Angela sleep.

His eyes drift to the half-drawn curtain. The gap shows him the whole room. A familiar habit.

Adiran eases the screen free and leans it against the wall.

He presses a hand gently to the window, purposely smudging his handprint on the glass.

His breath fogs the pane. He steadies himself.

He taps lightly.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Angela stirs and blinks, eyelids heavy. She squints at the window.

She recognizes Adiran, smiles, and crosses to the window.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
For a few delusional minutes, I thought I could make her dreams come true.

She pushes the curtain aside and slides the window open.

ADIRAN
Hey, Angie.

ANGELA
Adiran! Hi, what are you doing here?

ADIRAN
I'm here to see you because I have to tell you something very important.

She pauses, but then relaxes.

ANGELA
Do you want to come inside?

He struggles through the window, his body stiff with pain.

The lamplight spills across his frame. He turns slightly to angle his wounded side away from her.

The shadows slide unnaturally. They layer on his coat, hiding his wound in darkness.

ANGELA
You're lucky my dad had to leave on an emergency call. If he found you here, he'd probably kill you.

ADIRAN
I'm in big trouble, Angie!

Adiran takes a deep exaggerated breath.

ADIRAN
I've been dreaming of my death lately.

He holds her gaze.

ADIRAN
Angie, I've been having these dreams that I need to die. When I sleep, I hear God asking me why I should keep on living. He's told me the reasons why I shouldn't, and I'm running out of time, so I'm gonna do something about it.

ANGELA
What do you mean?

His shadow surges up the wall. It obscures the crucifix above her bed.

ADIRAN
God wants me dead, Angie. God's out to kill me.

She hesitates and searches his face.

Angela's eyes flick to the Beauty and the Beast poster on her wall. Back to him.

ANGELA
Adiran, God doesn't wish for people to die.

She steps closer and places a hand on his chest, just over his heart.

ADIRAN
I'm not gonna let that happen. I can't let God have the satisfaction of killing me. He's not gonna judge me, and I'm not gonna give Him the pleasure. I'm gonna make sure I go to Hell when I die, and there's only one way I know how to do that!

A tear slips down Angela's cheek.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
I wanted to tell her everything. I just needed her to doubt me once, so I'd be forced to give this up.

The tear glistens there for a moment. Adiran brushes it away with his thumb.

He pulls Angela closer, her body trembling against his.

The shadows pull away from the walls and his coat, reaching for Angela. Adiran's eyes follow the shadows.

He kisses her anyway. The shadows sink into her.

Angela's diary sits open on the desk. The lamplight flickers as Adiran's shadow crawls across the page.

Dark lines trace words she has yet to write:

ANGELA (V.O.)
We kissed with such passion that I fell in love. I wanted him close to me for the rest of my life.

He leans toward her ear, breath ragged with exhaustion.

ADIRAN
I love you.

Adiran steps back. Angela's eyes cling to him.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
That was all I was there for.

EXT. STERLING HOUSE - NIGHT

Adiran climbs out. He lands heavily, knees buckling as a muffled groan escapes. Adiran looks up.

ANGELA (V.O.)
Anguish, disappointment, unanswered anticipation... I don't know what I felt, but seeing him climb out of my window and into the night broke my heart.

A single tear slides down his cheek.

ANGELA (V.O.)
I saw a tear, a glimmer of sadness, fall from his face and into the shadows that surrounded him...

Angela stands at the window, tears gathering in her eyes. He puts the screen back into place, turns and staggers toward the gate.

He shuts it quietly behind him. The latch CLICKS. Adiran collapses to his knees.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Angela crumples beneath the window, pulling the diary from the desk.

The diary lands open beside her, ink blurring beneath her tears. She clutches it to her chest.

EXT. STERLING HOUSE - NIGHT

Adiran drags himself upright. He forces one foot forward, then another. Just a little farther.

He clutches his side. Fresh crimson spreads beneath his coat.

INT./EXT. SEAN'S CAR - NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - NIGHT

Adiran finally reaches Sean's car and collapses into the driver's seat.

He pulls the cop's gun from the glove compartment and sets it on his lap.

He clamps both hands around the wheel, but they keep trembling.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
I thought I had planted a seed of remembrance in her. Something I hoped would keep me alive in her dreams after I died.

He starts the car and pulls away.

The car creeps through back roads.

INT. ADIRAN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Adiran staggers inside and drops onto the couch, the cop's gun clutched to his chest. Sweat beads across his face.

Adiran leans over and reaches beneath the sofa. His fingers brush the burn mark on the carpet.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Seth was not afraid when he died for me. Mary was not afraid when she was murdered. Ver--

Adiran reaches farther and pulls the tray from beneath the sofa. He picks at the buds, but his hands shake too badly to roll a joint.

He hurls the tray across the room. Weed scatters over the floor.

He slumps back and closes his eyes. Every breath he takes dims the orange lights that hang on the wall above him.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Adiran stands in front of the bathroom mirror and leans closer to study his face.

His reflection is bordered in shadows. It sneers back at him.

Adiran sets the cop's gun on the tile beside him.

SMASH. His fist shatters the mirror. His knuckles split, and blood spatters across the broken shards on the tile.

He thrashes, slamming the walls and ripping down the towel rack.

He kicks the cabinet doors until they splinter. He claws at the sink, straining to rip it free.

The sink support cracks. A fitting splits, spraying water across the room.

Adiran yanks harder. The line holds. He slips and crashes to the floor.

He grabs the cop's gun off the tile. FIRES.

The sink's porcelain EXPLODES. A shard slices his face. His ears ring.

Screaming, Adiran grabs the broken sink and yanks until the waterline tears from the wall.

The room floods.

INT. ADIRAN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Drenched and trembling, Adiran drags the jagged sink fragment into the living room, the gun tucked into his waistband.

The sink fragment clips the TV stand. Seth's helmet tips from the set.

Adiran drops the fragment and reaches for the helmet. Too slow.

From the dark television, Seth's voice cuts through the room:

SETH (ON TV)
Don't fuck with my helmet, man! You drop it, you buy it!

Adiran snaps toward the TV screen, expectant, almost smiling.

The screen is off.

He snatches the helmet from the floor, shaking as tears stream down his face.

ADIRAN
Motherfucker!

He flings the helmet at the TV.

ON TV: *The CW Chronicles* flickers alive. A cartoon monologue about order and chaos echoes through the wreckage.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
We were supposed to be watching this right now. Weed, acid, and Seth talking shit.

Adiran smashes the screen with the sink fragment. A cobweb crack spreads across the glass.

He rips the television from its stand. Tangled cords yank the wall-mounted speakers loose. They crash to the floor, tearing the orange Christmas lights down with them. Bulbs pop.

Adiran drags the heavy TV to his front door.

He lets it drop, fumbles the door open, then hauls it onto the balcony.

EXT. ADIRAN'S APARTMENT BALCONY - NIGHT

Adiran heaves the television set onto the balcony railing.

He lets go.

A FLASH: Veronica slipping from his grasp on the rooftop. Arms wide. Plummeting into the dark.

The TV tumbles over the edge.

NO CRASH. NO SHATTERING GLASS. A distorted, echoing THUD.

Adiran pulls the gun from his waistband and empties it into the television's remains. Muzzle flashes tear through the darkness.

He drops the gun and stumbles backward into his apartment.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Steam rises as hot water pours from the bathtub faucet.

Adiran strips off his soaked clothes, trembling with exhaustion.

He retrieves a long mirror shard from the flooded floor and lowers himself into the tub.

Adiran presses the jagged edge into the scar on his left forearm. He draws it down to the wrist, screaming. Blood beads along the cut, then runs into the water.

Shaking, he grips the shard in his crippled left hand and tries to cut his right arm. It won't bite deep enough. The shard slips from his fingers and shatters on the flooded floor.

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

Flooded floor. Steam saturates the air. Adiran slumps in the tub, barely upright.

The water spray slows.

POLICE RADIO (O.S.)
Suspect may be armed... Request backup at location...

SHERIFF'S DEPUTIES (20s-40s, weapons raised) fill the doorway.

A deputy levels his weapon at Adiran.

DEPUTY
Don't fucking move.

Boots splash on the flooded floor. Radios hiss.

Adiran tries to speak.

ADIRAN
Don't--
(swallows)
--don't yell. I'm right here.

Adiran barely lifts one hand, indicating the few feet between them. His arm drops. Blood drips freely from his fingertips.

Figures sharpen through the spraying water. Sheriff Sterling leads them.

The Undercover Cop from Viet's meetup suddenly shoulders past the deputies and steps chest-to-chest with Sterling.

UNDERCOVER COP
Sterling, your hillbilly assholes blew my cover! We're taking over.

Sterling's eyes stay on Adiran.

SHERIFF STERLING
No. You city assholes had your chance and blew it. Fix the Filipino gang war you just started, and get the hell out of my crime scene.

Adiran smiles weakly.

ADIRAN
(under his breath)
Kiloton bombs... boom!

Sterling hears him but doesn't react. He steps between the Undercover Cop and Adiran.

SHERIFF STERLING
My boys and I will take out this trash.

The Undercover Cop shoves Sterling to get closer.

UNDERCOVER COP
Who is your supplier? Please tell me who your supplier is!

Sterling's men muscle him back.

SHERIFF STERLING
He's all of it, you idiot! You city numbnuts came into my county and didn't have the decency to ask me what I knew?

Sheriff Sterling puts his palm on the Undercover Cop's chest. Shoves him back hard.

SHERIFF STERLING
You best remember what this shit stain did after you let him go earlier tonight. Write down the names of those who died because of your bullshit undercover investigation.

Adiran looks through the hazy silhouettes and finds the Undercover Cop's eyes as Sterling's men hold him back. He opens his mouth. Nothing comes out.

He tries again.

ADIRAN
Hey...

Adiran coughs and clears his throat.

ADIRAN
(whisper)
My alibi... I was with her tonight.

Everyone goes still.

UNDERCOVER COP
Where? With who?

ADIRAN
(barely audible)
Angela Sterling.

Adiran raises his index and middle fingers to his nose and sniffs deeply, his eyes fixed on Sterling.

Sterling's face reddens.

SHERIFF STERLING
Don't fucking talk, scum. You are fucking dead!

Sterling fills Adiran's view, veins standing out along his neck.

DEPUTY (O.S.)
Goddamned liar! Cop killer!

Sterling's gloved fist closes around a handful of Adiran's hair. He DRIVES Adiran's head UNDERWATER.

UNDERCOVER COP (O.S.)
No. Stop!

The Undercover Cop grabs Sterling by the shoulders. Sterling doesn't budge.

Two deputies seize the Undercover Cop and drag him out.

Shadows spill from the bathtub and race across every bathroom surface.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM - BATHTUB - UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

SUBMERGED. SOUND GOES COTTONY. Everything slows.

Adiran fights to keep his eyes open. He reaches for Sterling's arm above him but is too weak to grab it.

Above: Sterling's arm trembles with the effort. The white of the tiles fades.

Shadows creep down the bathroom walls, pour over the rim of the tub, and slide across Adiran's body.

Bubbles escape Adiran's mouth and rise into black.

It's not water anymore. It is nothing. No up. No down.

Adiran stops fighting. Just floats.

The shadows gather in the water before Adiran's face. They knot into a writhing mass.

Electric-blue eyes lock onto his.

The mass pulses and takes shape: a nose, a mouth. Veronica's pale face emerges, inches from his. Wavy black hair like smoke.

A bubble of pale yellow light blooms around them.

Her smile is still wrong. Her eyes remain calm.

Veronica leans in for a kiss. Stops just before they touch.

She lifts a hand. Adiran reaches for her with his left hand. Her fingers close around his wrist.

Her other hand rises to his forearm. Her sharp black fingernail finds the cut on his arm. She traces it slowly, deliberately.

The cut opens wider. Blood rises, diffusing like red smoke into the dark.

The bathwater churns red. Above the surface, Sheriff Sterling bears down harder.

Veronica's mouth drifts to Adiran's ear.

Her lips never move. Her voice detonates through the submerged world.

VERONICA (V.O.)
(distorted, reverberating)
Breathe.

Adiran's body arches. He takes an involuntary GASP.

Water floods his lungs. His chest convulses as bubbles burst from his mouth.

Darkness closes around the edges of Adiran's vision. He blinks hard.

The bubble of light around him fades.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Tonight, I realized... I thought she was my grief. That she was me, punishing myself. I was wrong. I just let the shadows wear her face so they could end me without a fight.

The shadows tighten around him. Their tendrils sharpen into talons.

Above the water, Sterling's arm stops trembling. A tendril of shadow pulls free from Adiran and crawls up Sterling's arm.

A LOW HUM. The same frequency that shattered the blood-sweating mirror.

ADIRAN AND VERONICA (V.O.)
(overlapping)
Tonight...

Adiran's voice fades while hers emerges again from everywhere: the water, the tiles, from inside his skull.

VERONICA (V.O.)
(distorted, reverberating)
...I ripped your love from you. Everything you fed me.

The pitch rises inside Adiran, vibrating through bone and blood. Hairline fractures of yellow light spread across his submerged silhouette.

VERONICA (V.O.)
(distorted, reverberating)
Everything... except for the pain of your regrets, your seed of remembrance. Which, unlike you, will never be forgotten.

The HUM peaks. Adiran's submerged silhouette SHATTERS like glass.

In the bathtub, his body goes slack beneath Sterling's hand.

In the void, the fractured pieces drift downward. The shadows remain.

ANGELA (V.O.)
Then they took him, emptying my soul and my heart.

The shadows gather around the fragments, twisting together into the outline of a young woman. Angela's hair. Angela's silhouette, forming from darkness and fractured light into: SHADOW-ANGELA.

ANGELA (V.O.)
Life itself has lost its meaning.
Before that day, before Adiran told me
he loved me, I had a purpose.

Shadow-Angela's outline flickers. Images from Angela's life flash within her: the painting, the Sterling family photograph, Adiran at the window.

The flickering stops. Angela's features sharpen within the darkness.

The void folds into Angela's bedroom. Moonlight cuts across the room. The desk calendar shows December 1995, furred with dust. Shadow-Angela sits in Angela's chair.

ANGELA (V.O.)
(distorted, reverberating)
Now I am the emptiness he left behind.

Shadow-Angela looks straight at us. Her lips barely move.

SHADOW-ANGELA
(a whisper)
Breathe...

The room FLASHES YELLOW.