

SPOON-FED ADDICTION

by

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Based on the novella by Silvano Williams

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INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Silver moonlight cuts through parted curtains. Dust motes drift in the beam.

A stuffed rabbit sits propped against the pillows—threadbare, well-loved.

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

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 furred with dust.

A purple diary sits CLOSED on the desk.

Then—movement.

Darkness bleeds from the corners. It slides across the floor, pools beneath the desk chair. Rises.

The darkness takes shape—shoulders forming, a neck, the curve of a head. SHADOW-ANGELA sits where the real Angela once sat. Same posture. Same stillness. But wrong—edges too soft, features suggested rather than defined.

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

Shadow-Angela's hand hovers over the page—miming the act of writing. No pen. No ink. Just the gesture.

She's not remembering. She's summoning.

INSERT - DIARY PAGE

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

Angela's voice emerges—not from the shadow's mouth, but from the walls. The air. The room itself remembering.

ANGELA (V.O.)

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

Shadow-Angela's hand pauses. Her dark form turns toward the

diary as if reading what she's written.

The pages turn backward-fluttering through entries, through time.

An earlier entry catches the light: "September 3rd. Got my acceptance letter 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."

Each entry reveals a memory-

INT. HIGH SCHOOL ART ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

ANGELA STERLING (17, innocent, reserved and introspective) stands before an easel, brush in hand. Late afternoon light pours through tall windows.

She's SMILING-genuinely, unguarded. A half-finished painting of a bird in flight takes shape under her brush.

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

FRIEND
That's good, Angie. For real.

Angela laughs-light, bashfully.

Angela steps back, studies her work. A wide smile spreads across her face.

The memory softens. Dissolves into light.

INT. STERLING KITCHEN - EVENING (FLASHBACK)

A diary page: November 23, 1995.

A Christmas photo clings to the fridge-the Sterling family; the two girls younger, shoulder-to-shoulder, all smiles.

SHERIFF STERLING (late 40s, authoritarian patriarch) paces the room, commanding, alive. Badge shimmers like a lighthouse.

A newspaper slams onto the kitchen table. Front page: grainy photo of Sheriff Sterling, face hard, mid-motion. "Corruption" and "Under investigation" leap from bold text.

The family portrait smiles from the fridge, untouched. Sheriff Sterling looms over the table, jaw locked.

SHERIFF STERLING
You want to explain this?

Angela stands behind a kitchen chair opposite Sheriff Sterling.

Hands tight on the backrest. Face unreadable.

JESSICA STERLING (early 20s, defiant rebel) enters from the hallway, arms crossed, 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.

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!

Shadows spill from the corners of the room. They slide across the tile like black water, pooling toward Jessica's feet.

Sterling lunges. Grabs the nearest chair and slams it out of his way. Legs screech across the tile.

Jessica steps back—shoulder hits the doorframe. Her foot shifts as she turns.

The shadow water brushes her ankle—that tendril recoils and hisses out of existence.

SHERIFF STERLING
Don't you walk away from me!

But Jessica already has. Turns away, sobbing.

JESSICA (O.S.)
Happy fucking Thanksgiving!

The front door opens. Slams shut. She's gone.

The Christmas photo on the fridge flutters from the slam, drifts to the shadow water on the floor.

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

Sterling's fingers close around the photo. Black water drips from his hand, seeping into the edges as his grip tightens.

The photo shrivels—corners curling inward, colors bleeding.

He turns to Angela.

Bends over the table, looming into her space—close enough that she flinches but doesn't move.

SHERIFF STERLING
(low)
This is ALL your fault!

He holds the crumpled ball inches from her face. Flicks it at her chest.

It bounces off, falls to the floor.

Where it touched her, darkness absorbs into the fabric like water into cloth—gone before she notices.

Angela releases the chair. Shouts at the top of her lungs.

ANGELA
Like I give a shit!

Sterling brings his hand up—immediate practiced accuracy.

At the counter, MRS. STERLING (late 40s, silenced and surrendered) methodically carves a turkey, serving dishes spread across the kitchen counter.

Shadows cling to her like a second skin—so settled they move when she moves. She doesn't notice. Nothing left to notice with.

The memory bleeds at the edges. Shadows reclaim it.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Another page; another diary entry.

Angela strides past lockers. Harsh fluorescent lights hum. They help hide the bad make up job covering the red on her

cheek.

Kids line both sides—some at lockers, others watching, whispering.

Footsteps echo behind her. Kids part as she passes.

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.

Each step leaves a shadow footprint behind her—lingering on the tile like mud. They spread outward, engulfing the lockers and the kids on either side.

A locker SLAMS—

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shadow-Angela stills. The diary lies open. Pages settle.

A glimpse: "Maybe everyone has a beast inside them. Maybe love is what sets them free."

Her dark hand hovers over the line. Lingers.

The shadows on the ceiling blacken. Stretch toward the window. Drape over it until they cover the window in total darkness.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Soft sound of pages turning. A fog-like memory:

Angela freezes at the window. Breath hitching. Opens it.

A figure outside, backlit by streetlight.

She steps back. He climbs through—silent, towering.

ADIRAN (20, sharp-tongued dealer). Only his outline visible, eyes gleaming.

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—wipes a tear from her cheek. Other hand rests at her waist, trails up her back.

Her breath catches.

He kisses her.

ANGELA (V.O.)
My insecurities disappeared, and I
finally felt like I was good enough
for someone.

He takes her shaking hands in his.

Moves his mouth from hers.

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. Drags her diary to the floor.

He looks back-face in shadow. A tear catches the light on his cheek.

ANGELA (V.O.)
Life itself has lost its meaning.
Before that day, before Adiran told me
he loved me, I had a purpose. Then
they took him, emptying my soul and my
heart.

Diary pages flutter to the last entry—what Angela is reading—as the memory fades.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Angela lies in bed. Staring at the ceiling with her diary held against her chest. Her pen falls from the bed to the floor.

ANGELA (V.O.)
Finally, I've understood what his god
(MORE)

ANGELA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
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.

Shadows above her begin to stir. Not falling. Not rushing.
Unfolding.

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 falls—arms spread, edges feathered, not
quite wings.

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

Reforms—broader shoulders, Adiran's outline. The shadow wears
what she wants to see.

No face.

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.

Shadows lower around Angela. Not enclosing. Not seizing.
Settling.

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. Shadows take form—Adiran's face leaning
down, just like their first kiss.

Its mouth brushes her ear.

ADIRAN
Breathe.

Angela inhales. Sharp. Deep.

Her eyes WIDEN. A bright light reflects off them—expectant, welcoming.

Then something is wrong.

She tries to exhale. Can't. Her hands fly to her throat—the shadows TIGHTEN. CRUSHING.

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

A single tear slides down her temple.

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

The diary slips from her fingers. Falls open on the floor. Pages flutter, then settle. Her handwriting catches the moonlight.

ANGELA (V.O.)

All that matters now is that I will escape this horrible, pointless life and finally be happy.

The shadow pulls back from her face. Holds his shape for a moment—then dissolves, sliding off the bed, pooling in the corner.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room holds the stillness of a place no one enters anymore. Put back together, then abandoned.

Shadow-Angela is gone. The chair at the desk sits empty.

But the diary remains open on the desk. Pages tear-stained. Ink smudged.

Shadows trace the letters—waiting.

ANGELA (V.O.)

(whispered)

No more tears. I have cried enough.
Goodbye, Angela Sterling.

A distant door slams. Empty house.

Total silence.

The page holds. As if waiting for a reader.

Darkness surges off the page—past the room—into the dark.
Attracted by trauma and morbid curiosity.

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.

WATER ROARS—a ruptured pipe and a bathtub faucet, bleeding
together into white noise.

FADE IN:

Steam fogs a mirror surface.

A low HUM begins—vibrating the glass.

On the fogged mirror, handwritten words form: "SPOON-FED
ADDICTION".

Blood seeps out of the mirror. Then a handprint from the
other side smears it.

The hum hits a resonant frequency—

The mirror shatters.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

SUPER: "OCTOBER 13, 1995".

Wreckage. The mirror is obliterated. Tiles cracked. Sink
ripped from the wall.

Darkness gathers in the corners where the light doesn't
reach. Still. Patient.

Pipes exposed—water spraying across the bathroom. Blood
smearred along the edges. Cabinet doors splintered. A bullet
hole in the drywall.

Adiran lies motionless in the tub. Blood swirls in the water.

The spray softens. Hum fades.

A police radio crackles faintly:

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

Blood spreads across the linoleum. Darkening. Sticky.

Scattered mirror shards catch the light—each holding a fragment of Adiran's face. An eye. Jaw. Forehead.

Adiran slumps back against the tub.

His cracked lips part. A wet rasp—barely human.

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

His throat closes. Swallows against dry nothing. Jaw strains.

Nothing comes.

In one larger shard: his reflection stares out—direct. A faint conspiratorial smile.

Muted, darker, edged in shadows.

SHADOW ADIRAN's reflection raises one finger to its lips.

Eyes forward. Knowing.

Shhh.

His lips stop moving. His mind doesn't.

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

A nostalgic smile flashes across Adiran's face.

Faces flicker in the mirror shards. MARY (late teens, calm commanding presence) and SETH (late teens, loyal to a fault).

Friends. Ghosts.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
This isn't about my redemption; this
is about the rot I fed.

His fingers twitch beneath the water. Blood oozes from the vertical cut in his forearm.

Blood curls through the water, spreads—then spills over the edge.

Their faces fade away. Gone.

Adiran lifts his cut arm out of the water. Tries to pull

himself up. Looks down at his defeated body—gives up.

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

A flicker across a mirror shard—a woman laughing: VERONICA (20, fierce soul, the wound). Then nothing.

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

The darkness in the corner shifts. Settles closer.

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

Adiran closes his eyes. Head slips underwater, then jerks back up. Ragged exhales. Eyes closed. Still.

Then gasps—labored. Shadows obscure him.

BLACK SCREEN

FADE IN:

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

Dim light. PRE-TEEN ADIRAN (12, learning stillness for survival) sits stiffly on a worn couch.

Television flicker spills across his body.

Volume low—nightly news muttering about budget cuts and rising crime.

JOHN (early 40s, hard-edged Vietnam vet) watches the TV, unblinking. Hypnotized.

ADIRAN'S MOTHER (late 30s, thin and twitchy) paces behind them, half-nodding. Words slurred.

A shadow clings to her edges. Moves when she moves.

She mutters, grabs at Adiran's arm.

The shadow stretches toward him with her reach.

JOHN
Hey.

John rises. Places a firm hand between them. Guides her away without force.

The darkness pulls back with her. Stays on her shoulders as she stumbles off, mumbling.

John says nothing. Sits back down next to Adiran. Puts a hand on his shoulder. Returns his attention to the TV.

Adiran doesn't react. Stares straight ahead at the TV.

INT. JOHN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

TEEN ADIRAN (16, young caretaker) kneels beside his mother as she vomits into a toilet. Bathroom is yellowed, slick.

She wipes her mouth, shaking. Eyes snap clear-predatory.

She isn't high. She's aware.

Her voice drops-raw, unguarded.

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

In the corner of the bathroom, where the light doesn't reach, darkness gathers. Denser than it should be.

She doesn't notice. Neither does he.

She leans back against the wall. The moment's gone. Stare dulls. Then she leans forward again, trembling.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Six months later, she was dead and I
had nothing.

The sound of retching returns. Echoes. Fades.

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

A burst of memory-

INT. DENNY'S - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Veronica sits across from him in a vinyl booth. Fluorescent light hums overhead, the restaurant nearly empty. A coffee cup steams between her hands. Two empties pushed to the edge of the table.

She's glowing. Something different about her-fuller.

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. Searching his face.

Waiting for him to notice.

Adiran doesn't. Mouth moving, words lost to static.

She sets the cup down. The smile stays, but her stare sharpens. Saying everything without saying it.

He still doesn't see.

Her hand moves beneath the table.

His eyes finally meet hers. The smile fades. Just the stare now—raw, vulnerable, terrified.

Her hand slides across the table.

A pregnancy test. Two lines.

Adiran's face—

The memory cuts.

INT. ADIRAN'S BATHROOM — NIGHT

Adiran's eyes snap open. Water sloshes in the tub. His breath catches—sharp, involuntary.

He squeezes his eyes shut. Forces it down.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
No. Not that.

His bloody hand drags across a mirror shard—smearing water and red.

The reflection in the shard goes blank.

Another shard catches light—

ROOFTOP. NIGHT. Veronica. Peyote in her hand.

EXT. ABANDONED OFFICE BUILDING — NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: "TWO YEARS AGO".

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

She laughs, breathless.

They climb stairs and scaffolding to the rooftop.

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. Heart cracked open.

ADIRAN
To us. Forever, together.

EXT. ABANDONED OFFICE BUILDING - ROOFTOP - LATER

Downtown glows. Stars scatter across the sky. The unfinished rooftop skeletal-exposed beams, jagged edges, wind through empty frames.

Adiran and Veronica lie side by side, staring up. Layered jackets, ripped jeans, drug-sweaty skin. High on peyote-first time shared.

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

Smoke rises into the stars.

A smile—not sad.

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.

Adiran takes her hand. No tension. No regrets.

ADIRAN
I never pretended with you. Not once.

VERONICA
That's why it worked. We were never
scared of what we saw in each other.

They sit in silence. City below glitters. Sage burns.

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

They burst into laughter, bodies curled inward, breathless.

They dance barefoot, swaying slow, faces pressed together.

He holds her from behind, chin on her shoulder. Then they sit
again. Cross-legged. Knees touching.

The tin can smolders. Smoke disperses into dark.

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

ADIRAN
No? Maybe?

VERONICA
We made a soul before we made a life.

Adiran turns his head. Veronica glows. Eyes glittering,
weightless smile.

ADIRAN
You're my angel with wings.

She leans in, kisses him. Laughs in his mouth.

VERONICA
Let's fly, then.

She rises.

VERONICA
I want to do the lift.

ADIRAN
The what?

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

She backs up a few steps, arms wide. Adiran stands and puts on his boots without lacing them.

VERONICA
Catch me.

She runs. Adiran braces, grabs her by the waist, lifts her high above his head.

She stretches above him. Laughing. Glowing with an aura. Silhouette against the stars. Adiran steps back to stabilize.

VERONICA
Adiran—

She slips from his hold. He pushes her up-hard—trying to catch her.

His boot catches a beam.

He stumbles. She vanishes over the edge.

Veronica plummets—the aura fades, colors draining to gray.

Wings flicker in and out, then vanish.

Veronica hits the pavement with a distorted, echoing thud.

Below, in the darkness pooling around her body, something shifts. Barely visible. Then still.

Adiran stands at the edge, frozen. Staring down.

Wind. Distant hum of the city below.

His breathing—shallow, rapid, panicked.

Then—MOVEMENT catches his eye.

Far below, red and blue lights streak past. An ambulance races down the road, siren faint, fading.

Adiran watches it disappear.

He looks down at Veronica's body. Then back at where the ambulance was.

Realization crosses his face.

He backs away from the edge.

Turns. Walks to the scaffolding.

He climbs down—faster now, purposeful.

EXT. ABANDONED BUILDING — NIGHT

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

ADIRAN (V.O.)
I destroyed the only person who
should've been a part of me forever.
And I can't blame the drugs for it.

He disappears into darkness.

ADIRAN (V.O.)
Then I abandoned her.

The memory fades to black.

Wind howls through the building openings. Softens, almost silent again.

INT. ADIRAN'S APARTMENT — NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Half-light. Candles flicker.

Walls covered with movie posters and industrial band flyers—some framed and aligned, others taped crooked. Stickers fill the gaps between them. Orange Christmas lights sag along the ceiling, held up by tape and thumbtacks, barely trying.

A sagging sofa against one wall. Small coffee table in front of it. Across the room, a 19-inch TV on a cheap stand—VCR and stereo stacked beside it, two speakers mounted above. Cords tangle down the wall, untucked, functional.

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

Adiran sits on the floor, back against the wall. Shirtless. Gutted.

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

Shadows pool in the corners—where the light doesn't reach.
Watching. Waiting.

He holds the blade over the flames. Waits. Metal glows orange at the edges.

His breath steadies. Not panic. Ritual.

He presses the blade to his inner forearm.

Skin hisses. He doesn't scream—jaw locked, eyes fixed on the wound. Watching himself burn.

He drags the blade down. Slow. Deliberate. A vertical line from wrist to elbow.

The shadows creep forward. Drinking it in.

He pulls the blade away. Lets it drop. The wound throbs—raw, complete.

A beat. Just him and the shadows.

The door creeps open.

MARY
Are you decent? I'm coming in!

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

She takes in the scene—candles, knife on the floor, the burn carved into his arm—still weeping.

The shadows freeze. Pull back toward the walls.

She doesn't gasp. Doesn't cry out.

Crosses the room. Kneels beside him. Takes the knife from the floor—sets it aside on the table.

He's breathing hard. Holding in the pain. Fighting to stay conscious.

He doesn't look at her. 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 at the wound. Looks at him. Something shifts in her expression—not pity. Recognition.

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.

His eyes finally meet hers. Wet. Broken.

MARY
Pain doesn't bring people back. It just makes you forget why you wanted them.

She stands. Holds out her hand.

The shadows in the corners stay pressed against the walls—held there by her presence.

MARY
You're not doing this alone anymore.

He stares at her hand. The burn throbs.

He takes it.

The mirror shard fades. Then lights up again—

INT. MARY'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Soft candlelight flickers over tapestries. Wind stirs through an open window.

Nothing moves except the flame.

Adiran sits on the rug, elbows on his knees, haunted. Mary folds a piece of stiff paper with quiet focus.

Seth leans back on the couch behind her, arms resting on his thighs, watching 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—the first crack in his mask.

ADIRAN
Fine. I ate. You happy?

MARY
Ecstatic.

She stops folding. Holds up the paper crane, examining it in the candlelight. Then continues.

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

Seth eyes them both expecting more information.

SETH
Jesus. 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 in disagreement. Leans in.

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

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

Seth half-laughed.

SETH
So you're just road-tripping to the
desert now? Like that's gonna fix the
(MORE)

SETH (CONT'D)
crater in your chest?

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

Adiran says nothing. Seth rubs his face.

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

Seth swallows hard to stop himself.

Mary's eyes flick toward Seth, then back to Adiran. Voice drops, quieter.

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

She finishes folding the paper crane and sets it down between her and Adiran like a fragile amulet.

MARY
Take this gift.

She stands slowly, gaze never leaving Adiran. Steps forward and leans in.

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

She presses her palm to his forehead—firm, ceremonial.

MARY
To do otherwise will mean your death.

A low thrum beneath everything—not music, something older. Adiran feels it in his teeth, his spine.

The candlelight flares. The shadows in the corners pull back.

Then settle again. Waiting.

Adiran's breath catches. Her hand lingers a beat longer, then drops. Stares at her, shaken but silent.